



EUROPEAN UNION

27th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council Tirana

3-4 December 2020

EU Opening Statement

Speech of EU HRVP

Ministers, Dear Friends,

Let me start by extending warm thanks to the Albanian Chairperson-in-Office, **Prime Minister Edi Rama**, and his team for the excellent work done throughout an extremely challenging year for the OSCE, especially in the pandemic context. My best wishes to the **incoming Swedish Chairperson-in-Office**.

I **congratulate Poland**, who will assume the **Chairmanship in 2022**. I am also glad that the Republic of North Macedonia and Estonia have put forward their candidatures for Chairmanships in 2023 and 2024.

I am very happy that after six months of discussion, tomorrow we are to appoint a **new Secretary General and heads of the three OSCE autonomous institutions**. I am confident that with a new highly competent and experienced leadership, the OSCE can focus on the challenges ahead.

Now, the work of the Organization must be taken forward with renewed

energy and determination. The EU supports the intention of the **Swedish CiO** to focus in 2021 on “*the fundamental tasks of the OSCE: to defend the European security order and to uphold the OSCE comprehensive concept of security*”. This is unfortunately particularly relevant today, when the OSCE area is facing a number of crises, many of which erupted in 2020.

Let me recall the **EU’s unwavering commitment to multilateralism**. Going it alone is not an option – for any one. The more we work together, the better the solution. The global challenges we are facing today – be it the corona pandemic or climate change – recognise no borders and can only be addressed effectively through multilateral cooperation and structures based on respect for human rights and rule of law.

Forty-five years ago, we established the *Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (CSCE), during the Cold War. **This was a tremendous victory of multilateralism and cooperation over unilateral and antagonistic approaches**. Fifteen years later, the Paris Charter stated the end of the Cold War and open great hopes for the OSCE region.

Many of them became reality, but unfortunately, thirty years later, the atmosphere within the OSCE is more and more one of confrontation. The spirit of Helsinki and Paris seems far away, and we observe more crises erupting than being solved.

Today, the **EU is confident that the OSCE remains the key forum and instrument to address security challenges in the region**. I refer here to both specific conflicts in our region but also emerging and transnational threats that impact us all.

What was valid 45 years ago still holds today: the **European security architecture can be defended only by respecting international law and**

OSCE principles and commitments, namely the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter.

In that context, I welcome the recent positive developments in **Ukraine**. The renewed ceasefire is largely holding since the end of July. It spares lives and this matters greatly to the EU. At the same time, we cannot forget that Russia's violations of international law and of the OSCE principles have not ceased. **Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are still illegally annexed by Russia. The EU reiterates its unwavering support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.**

We need **a long-term political solution to achieve a lasting peace in the eastern Ukraine**. This requires political will by all parties to the conflict. The full implementation of the Minsk agreements is a key condition in this regard.

The work of the OSCE **Special Monitoring Mission** is invaluable. **EU Member States contribute to more than two thirds in personnel and budget**. It must enjoy full, safe, unconditional and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, in accordance with its mandate, and no pretext should limit this.

Let me mention also a few words about Belarus. I regret to say that 4 months after the elections the **Belarusian authorities still continue to employ violence against peaceful protesters**, against ordinary Belarusian citizens. **We welcome the report drafted under the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism**. We call on Belarusian authorities to fully implement its recommendations.

We also urge Belarus to **accept the mediation proposal** of the Albanian Chairmanship-in-Office, the incoming Swedish one and the OSCE Secretariat.

In and around **Nagorno-Karabakh**, we welcome the cessation of hostilities. The ceasefire brokered in Moscow on 9 November between Armenia and Azerbaijan will hopefully be a first step towards a comprehensive settlement. But a cease-fire is not peace, as we Europeans know all too well.

Lasting peace, including the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, still needs to be negotiated. The EU reiterates its **full support to the only established format: the OSCE Minsk Group led by its Co-Chairs**, to pursue this objective. The EU also stands ready to contribute to these efforts and to the implementation of agreements leading to sustainable peace and prosperous development of the entire South Caucasus region.

We reiterate our conviction that **the protracted conflicts in our area can be resolved only if participating States agree to solve them in line with the OSCE principles.** This is the case for Nagorno-Karabakh but also **Georgia**, through the Geneva international discussions, and **Moldova**. We therefore welcome the adoption of the **Ministerial Statement on the negotiations on the Transnistrian settlement process** in the “5+2” format.

Stability in the OSCE area is a strategic priority for the European Union. We will continue to mobilize our instruments and policies towards achieving this goal:

In the **Western Balkans**, EU integration and enlargement perspective are strong tools for pushing forward positive change in line with our shared interests, from security and stability to economy and efforts against climate change.

In our Eastern neighbourhood, we are now shaping our future **Eastern**

Partnership agenda, which for eleven years has been delivering tangible results for the people.

In **Central Asia**, the EU remains committed to supporting reform, democracy, regional cooperation and economic development, in line with our 2019 “Strategy on Central Asia”. We wish to support concretely green and sustainable post-Covid recovery in the region.

Together with its Member States, the European Union continues to believe that it is vital to modernize the **OSCE politico-military toolbox**, most notably the Vienna Document, in order to increase military stability, transparency and predictability.

Mr Chairperson, dear friends, **the OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization**. It provides us with a unique platform for dialogue and normative framework, and we all prefer that frank words are exchanged in Vienna, rather than bullets and shells on the ground.

Let me reiterate once again that the **EU fully supports OSCE comprehensive approach to security, encompassing the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimensions**. There is indeed neither lasting peace nor security if those challenges are not addressed altogether.

Thank you.