

**Statement by H.E. Linas LINKEVIČIUS,
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ENGLISH only

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I highly appreciate your hospitality here in Vienna, which today – yet again – stands at the centre of European diplomacy, and provides us with space to reflect upon challenges to European security and stability.

As a matter of fact, European security is marked by a continued disregard of rules-based international order, instigated by Russia's aggression in eastern Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea. It is with resolve that Kremlin keeps sponsoring this conflict, employing both military and hybrid forces, whereas on the ground we are obliged to cope with deteriorating political and security situation, as well as growing number of civilian casualties. This *status quo* is detrimental and needs to be resolved.

Illegal actions have serious implications for the stability and security of the entire region. We cannot remain ignorant. It is therefore high time to rethink, whether the OSCE consensus decision-making principle should keep providing coverage to countries, responsible for military aggression, hybrid warfare and grave human rights violations. We should eventually start this fundamental debate here at the OSCE, along with similar discussions at the UN.

In the meantime, we call on the OSCE and its participating States to redouble efforts and further explore ways to restore respect for our shared principles. We stand ready to consider any international initiative directed at a peaceful restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, provided it respects letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements, which remain the only credible path to this end.

Lack of progress around resolution of protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and over Nagorno-Karabakh is continuously undermining the security of the OSCE region.

Complex security environment has also had a detrimental impact on the protection of human rights. This is exactly where the OSCE and its Institutions, in close cooperation with civil society, are obliged to step in and provide their firm response, whenever faced with crackdown on fundamental freedoms, including restrictions on freedom of expression and free media, disinformation campaigns, growing pressure on human rights defenders by using "foreign agents' law", or any assault against civil society. We also remain deeply concerned about human rights situation in Crimea, which "has significantly deteriorated under Russian occupation", as recently evidenced by the UN. We call on Russia to end its repressive action and to provide unrestricted access for international human rights monitoring in Crimea.

This year was also marked by vigorous discussions in the framework of the Structured Dialogue. Nevertheless, under current circumstances, we remain convinced that the OSCE should primarily focus on ways to enhance implementation, modernization, and full adherence to the existing politico-military commitments, based on commonly agreed principles.

Mr. Chairperson, let me conclude by welcoming the incoming Italian Chairmanship and wish every success in tackling these important challenges over the next year.

Thank you!