

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Linas Linkevičius
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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship for leading this Organisation throughout these troublesome times, as well as for your hospitality.

This has been another extremely difficult year for the entire OSCE region. As we stand together in solidarity with people of France in remembering recent tragedy in Paris, we also share the sorrow and grief of all those affected by the slaughter perpetrated by ISIL and their likes. Nothing can ever justify terrorism.

Mr. Chair,

It is already the second year that we continue to face a most serious security challenge Europe has not seen for decades. Ongoing Russian military aggression in Ukraine is not just another crisis in the OSCE area – this is a continued onslaught on European peace, cooperative security and our shared values, which nevertheless have not lost a slightest bit of their validity and must be defended. There is no need for new rules. There is, however, a pressing need to fix what was broken. Only once it's fixed, we could engage in a discussion on opening up a new page of dialogue and shutting the one of confrontation.

Resolution of the conflict in and around Ukraine faces serious difficulties – implementation of the Minsk agreements is still pending, Russia's military personnel and weaponry are still on the Ukrainian soil, and the SMM is constantly reporting on increased ceasefire violations, causing further casualties. An honest dialogue is much needed, but not at the expense of our shared values and

commitments, and without compromising on the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson,

An unhindered monitoring by the OSCE of the entire Ukrainian-Russian border is an important precondition, which should eventually lead to the re-establishment of full Ukrainian control over its internationally recognised borders.

Let me share few further elements on the way forward.

Firstly, on SMM. It is our primary instrument designed to cope with this conflict. While strongly supporting its activities, we also see considerable scope for improvement. In order to enhance mission's contribution to the resolution of the conflict, further efforts should be aimed at ensuring that OSCE observers have full, safe and unhindered access throughout the zone of conflict, including Crimea and uncontrolled Ukrainian-Russian border, and strengthening SMM's mandate by providing a robust verification and reporting.

Secondly, on Crimea. Enhanced OSCE involvement in Crimea is another important and necessary step. Recent joint ODIHR and HCNM report on human rights' situation in the Russian annexed peninsula has exposed the dire situation of national minorities, and Tatar community in particular. Their rights are being under constant vicious assault, including discrimination, torture, forced disappearances and even murders of those who do not comply with the policies of the occupying power. Report's findings and recommendations urge for concrete follow-up, including on the possible OSCE presence in Crimea. If we are serious about alleviating human rights situation there, we must provide the ODIHR and HCNM with an unhindered access to the peninsula.

Thirdly, on ODIHR's role in relation to elections in Donetsk and Luhansk. It's for the ODIHR to make a final decision on whether there are sufficient conditions to conduct the legitimate elections in the Eastern Ukraine, in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by the

ODIHR. Even more so, the ODIHR's conclusion must be a decisive benchmark for our assessments pertaining to the implementation of Minsk agreements. Elections must be observed by reputable international monitors, and not by foreign armed forces.

And last, but not least – we should lend our full support to Ukraine and its people in their determination to pursue freedom, democratic reforms and progressive transformation. In a nutshell, this fight for the right to choose their destiny is the essence of this conflict.

Seriousness of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine should not overshadow no less worrisome trends in other parts of the OSCE region. Situation with regard to protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and over Nagorno-Karabakh is further deteriorating. Stalled negotiation processes, which one participating State uses as a tool for leverage against its neighbors, do not contribute to the security and stability. If we continue to turn a blind eye to these dangerous wounds, they might soon start bleeding again. A destructive potential, which these conflicts have accumulated over the last decades, might explode with a new force, putting the European security in even greater danger.

Political atmosphere in different parts of the OSCE is rather bad, and continues to be poisoned by unnecessary acts of hostility and provocation. Unprecedented military activities at our air and sea borders do not contribute to the confidence building.

Let me conclude by saying that we look forward to working with the incoming German Chairmanship. Your task is difficult. And stakes are high. If we fail to find a sustainable solution for the conflict in Ukraine, we will lose the OSCE – everything that was jointly built over the last 40 years can be ruined at once. The sole way forward is restoration of confidence, which is only possible by recommitting ourselves to the constitutional foundations of this Organisation.

Thank you.