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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXEY POLISHCHUK,
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DEPARTMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE
TWENTY-THIRD MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Hamburg, 9 December 2016

Mr. Chairperson,
Esteemed colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to thank the German OSCE Chairmanship, the Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, personally and the Hamburg city authorities for their hospitality and the commendable organization of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting.

We believe that the number of decisions is not a measure for judging the success of a Ministerial Council meeting. The Hamburg meeting has confirmed the OSCE's role as the leading pan-European forum for political dialogue.

We are pleased that we have managed to openly discuss the worrying situation in the politico-military sphere. Constructive discussion is particularly called for in view of NATO's policy of moving its military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders, which is undermining stability. We hope that the launch of structured dialogue on security challenges set out in the declaration adopted today "From Lisbon to Hamburg" will help to restore trust and advance our common goal – building a community of equal and indivisible security. We welcome the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision on small arms and light weapons.

We regret that the politicized position of a number of countries has prevented the adoption of a document on the OSCE's contribution to resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We note that during the Ministerial Council meeting none of the ministers have called into question the Minsk agreements, the work of the Trilateral Contact Group, the Normandy format or the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. We hope that the authorities in Kyiv will finally be able to proceed with responsible implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, above all its political aspects – the special status of Donbas, constitutional reform and an amnesty.

We regret that differences on regional issues have prevented the adoption of a general political declaration. However, we believe that there has been a frank exchange of views on conflicts. We welcome the document on the Transdniestrian settlement and the statement by the Troika of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict. Although it proved impossible to agree on a decision on the Geneva Discussions on Security in the Trans-Caucasus, we trust that work in this format will continue. Reaching agreements on the non-use of force between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia is a matter of priority.

We do not wish to dramatize the absence of a decision on the crisis-response role of the OSCE. The most important thing is that this year the Chairmanship has succeeded in taking stock of the OSCE's capabilities in this area and confirmed that our Organization has sufficient crisis-response tools. We believe that the way to improve the effectiveness of the OSCE is through the elaboration of a Charter and rules for the work of the executive structures.

We are pleased at the adoption of important documents on countering terrorism – on OSCE efforts to combat terrorism and on the exchange of airline passenger information. These documents confirm the OSCE's role in global counter-terrorism efforts. The approval at the Ministerial Council of new confidence-building measures in the use of information and communication technologies demonstrates the OSCE's capacity for dealing with incidents concerning information security.

Mr. Chairperson,

The decision agreed upon by the ministers on economic connectivity is a logical continuation of the German Chairmanship's efforts. We hope that the development of this topic next year will enable us to unlock the OSCE's potential in terms of harmonizing integration processes.

We support the dialogue launched in the OSCE on migration. The Ministerial Council decision agreed upon is an important practical step in the OSCE's contribution to overcoming the migration crisis in Europe. We trust that our Organization will be able to find an effective niche for itself in the international efforts in this area.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unfortunately, the Ministerial Council meeting has confirmed that the human dimension is one of the most problematic areas and requires radical reform. When we set off for Hamburg, we were hoping for the adoption of a number of important decisions, but no agreement was reached. We trust that the future Austrian Chairmanship will structure its work in this dimension on a pragmatic basis and with account taken of the interests of all the participating States.

The inability of the OSCE to respond adequately to the rise in discrimination and religious intolerance is a cause of great disappointment. For the second year in a row, the adoption of declarations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians and Muslims is being obstructed. We hope that in 2017 it will prove possible to carry out the Basel Ministerial Council's instructions and elaborate such declarations.

We are convinced that combating anti-Semitism, anti-Christian sentiment and Islamophobia should be addressed comprehensively and on an equal basis. We supported the Chairmanship's initiative regarding the use at the OSCE of the working definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. We did so in

spite of the fact that a number of respected Jewish organizations in Russia called for further refinement of this definition. For reasons we do not understand, some delegations were unwilling for the OSCE to take this definition as a basis for working towards a global consensus on this issue together with the United Nations and other multilateral organizations.

We attach great significance to combating hate crimes, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism. We regret that the decision on this question was not adopted. The refusal of a number of delegations to include in the text reference to the rulings of the Nuremberg Tribunal, particularly in its 70th anniversary year, is puzzling.

Also striking is the cynicism of some OSCE States that talk loudly about the rights of persons with disabilities but refuse to grant them equal opportunities to take part in sporting events, including the Paralympic Games.

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like once again to repeat that the number of decisions is not a measure for judging the success of a Ministerial Council meeting. The meeting in Hamburg has confirmed the high demand for the OSCE as a platform for dialogue and an instrument for restoring trust and bringing our States closer together. We hope that this function of the OSCE will be strengthened and wish Austria every success in chairing the OSCE in 2017.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.