



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1235 Vienna, 11 July 2019

#### **EU Statement in Response to the Address by the Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, H.E Gent Cakaj**

The European Union warmly welcomes Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, H.E Gent Cakaj, to the Permanent Council. We thank you for presenting the priorities of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship in 2020.

We greatly appreciate Albania's readiness to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE at a critical time when the region is facing issues of the greatest concern, notably the violation of international law and of fundamental OSCE principles. The principles and commitments we agreed in Helsinki and Paris remain the foundation for sustainable peace in Europe. Respect for such principles and commitments must be restored. We believe that this strongly aligns with "the vision of implementing our commitments together", which you indicated will inspire your work.

We agree with your assessment that "the current international and regional security situation is grave". Today we meet against the backdrop of a serious security crisis in Europe caused by Russia's acts of aggression against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which we strongly condemn and do not recognize. The conflict poses a severe challenge to European security and has demonstrated the dangerous consequences that follow when fundamental OSCE principles and commitments are violated. As you rightly say, this conflict "remains the most pressing security challenge in Europe" and we welcome that the resolution of this conflict is at the top of your agenda. A sustainable, political solution is needed to this conflict. Such a solution must restore respect for

Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Regrettably, as we have repeatedly stated, we have seen continuing negative actions by Russia, in violation of international law and in contradiction to the spirit and the objectives of the Minsk agreements. The full implementation of the Minsk Agreements is paramount in this regard, as well as unconditional respect of the ceasefire and full, safe, unconditional and unhindered access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission throughout Ukraine. We strongly support the efforts in the Normandy format as well as the work in the Trilateral Contact Group.

Protracted conflicts pose a very serious threat to the security of the entire OSCE area. The status quo is detrimental to security. The resolution of the existing conflicts in the OSCE area remains a priority for the EU and our position is well known. The EU remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all OSCE participating States. The EU supports the existing formats of negotiations and calls on all actors involved to demonstrate commitment to conflict settlement. The EU will continue to promote and support confidence building measures to assist the resolution of these conflicts, in co-operation with the OSCE and other relevant interlocutors.

Most of the OSCE staff as well as resources are deployed on the ground. We fully agree with your assessment on the importance of the work of the OSCE Field Operations which we consider to be very valuable tools in contributing to security as well as in supporting the host countries to implement OSCE commitments in all three dimensions.

We remain concerned about ongoing and increasing restrictions on civil society, crackdowns on human rights and fundamental freedoms, growing pressure on human rights defenders, attacks on journalists and other media actors as well as increasing intolerance in many parts of the OSCE region. These worrying trends represent serious challenges to our common security. Lasting security cannot be sustained without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. We thus underline the importance we attach to the third

dimension in the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. Our OSCE commitments are therefore more relevant than ever and we call on all participating States to redouble the focus on their implementation. We fully agree with you regarding the autonomous institutions, as they play an indispensable role in the implementation of commitments across the OSCE area and we must indeed ensure that they remain able to fulfil it. We also believe civil society is an essential partner for the implementation of our commitments and therefore safeguarding the open and inclusive character of the OSCE in relation to civil society organizations is of key importance to us.

Nearly two decades after the adoption of the landmark UNSCR 1325, women remain under represented in efforts to meaningfully participate in, influence and negotiate peaceful political processes to resolve conflicts. We agree with you that increased attention should be paid to the empowerment of women through promoting their participation in the conflict resolution and peace processes, as well as in the security sector. We should use the upcoming 20th anniversary of the resolution as an opportunity to reaffirm our commitments to the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and pledge further specific actions within the OSCE. We strongly call for the adoption of an OSCE-Wide Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security as our common effort.

Gender mainstreaming throughout all our activities should remain a priority. We agree with you that the findings of the OSCE-led survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women in the OSCE area are shocking and that we now need to follow-up on its recommendations.

We welcome your commitment to prioritize the revitalization of dialogue within the Organization, to promote existing CSBMs and arms control regimes and to use the Structured Dialogue to its full potential to increase trust and lay the ground for further OSCE achievements. We highly value the Structured Dialogue, which we are ready to develop further in accordance with the Hamburg Declaration, as a transparent, inclusive process, owned and driven by participating States, without a predetermined outcome and of high relevance for the European Union. We once again emphasize the obligation of all participating States to fully implement the existing commitments

in the politico-military area in letter and spirit as well as the need to work towards creating an environment conducive to reinvigorating Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs. We remain committed to the substantial modernization of the Vienna Document, as well as the further development of Conventional Arms Control, CSBMs and other instruments in the politico-military area.

We are convinced that our efforts to prevent and counter transnational threats will only be effective if we uphold human rights and the rule of law. Particularly our work to prevent VERLT will benefit from a solid human rights-based approach. In our collective efforts, we must avoid addressing threats in silos and pursue a comprehensive approach to security. Developing effective State institutions, rule of law mechanisms, functioning police, borders, customs as well as fair judiciaries will lead to multiple benefits in preventing and countering transnational threats such as terrorism and, as you rightly indicate, organized crime and all sorts of trafficking. In other words, a well-functioning security sector with democratic oversight is key.

We concur with you that the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families requires particular attention. The OSCE makes a valuable contribution in offering capacity building to address some of these challenges within a rule of law framework and in line with UNSCR 2396. We encourage states to make use of the OSCE - not only as a platform for the exchange of best practice and to enhance our regional commitments - but also in operational and programmatic terms.

Regarding the Economic and Environmental Dimension, we support your intention to work on good governance and anti-corruption with a focus on the environment, ensuring a balance between economic and environmental activities. In this last regard we believe that in the context of global efforts to foster sustainable development and combat climate change, in particular in the context of the 2030 Agenda and after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, it is important to address the issue of transnational organised crime which damages the environment.

We also appreciate that your Chairmanship will pay particular attention to youth in peace and security across all three dimensions. The EU has long been a leading

force for youth empowerment and for partnerships with young people and we therefore welcome your approach. Albania has played an important role during the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), and has thus demonstrated its willingness to improve the situation of youth and human connectivity throughout the Western Balkans.

As you know, we are working for peace, stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans. The EU remains committed to the European perspective of the region and is determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation, including through increased assistance, based on tangible progress, on the rule of law, corruption, organized crime and money laundering, as well as on socio-economic reforms, by the Western Balkans.

The challenges we face go beyond the borders of our Organization and we concur with you that the security of the OSCE area is inextricably linked to that of the Mediterranean region, as recently reaffirmed by Ministers in Milan. We underline the importance of following a comprehensive approach, including through strengthened cooperation with Mediterranean and Asian partner countries, which should remain a priority. We look forward to the Mediterranean Conference this autumn in Tirana, which, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mediterranean Partnership, provides an opportunity to reinvigorate the OSCE's engagement and cooperation with the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation.

We cannot but agree with you on the need of a timely adoption of the 2020 unified budget as the functioning of the OSCE needs to be ensured. In addition, an agreement on new scales of contributions would be an important step to reinforce the governance and credibility of our Organisation. We are supportive of the efforts of the Slovak Chairmanship and we call upon the sense of responsibility of all participating States to reach consensus as soon as possible.

Mr. Minister, your Chairmanship will coincide with the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Rebuilding trust by regaining respect for the principles enshrined in these founding

undertakings now seems to be the most crucial task at hand. For this you can count on the full support of the EU.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA\* and MONTENEGRO\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.