

STATEMENT BY MR. MATTI ANTTONEN
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AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
Bratislava, 5 December 2019

Mr Chairperson, Your Excellencies,

I would like to thank you, Minister Lajčák, and your whole team for your excellent OSCE Chairmanship this year.

The security situation in Europe has unfortunately worsened in recent years. Our work in the OSCE continues to be overshadowed by the on-going conflict in Ukraine.

Last month my Minister visited Kyiv and the contact line in Stanytsia Luhanska in eastern Ukraine, and witnessed the completed disengagement. We welcome positive steps, but more is needed, and we stress Russia's responsibility.

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol as well as actions in and around Ukraine are not acceptable. We are concerned about the human rights situation in Crimea.

We must continue to work towards the solution of protracted conflicts in the OSCE area, in Republic of Moldova, in Georgia, and in Nagorno-Karabakh. That is the core mandate of the OSCE.

Recently, we have witnessed deterioration of the security situation along the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia region of Georgia. We urge all relevant actors to refrain from actions that could escalate the situation. We call on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 of August 2008.

Despite our differences – or actually also because of them – the relevance of the OSCE is evident. Both as a *valuable actor*, like the SMM in Ukraine, in solving and preventing conflicts, as well as *normatively*. The OSCE commitments and principles are part of the rules based international order. We are all to respect and to implement our existing mutual commitments starting from the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris.

The OSCE needs to address those issues that most affect our security. I wish that the Structured Dialogue will continue producing small but necessary steps towards common understanding.

OSCE's confidence building measures are valuable. However, they must respond to the present day needs, stemming from changes in security environment as well as in technology. This is why the Vienna Document modernization is important and justified. I hope that the participating States can start negotiations on the modernization, based on the proposal that Finland, among others, has put forward.

The Open Skies Treaty ensures transparency and predictability, helps verification and enhances trust between all the participants. We have to make sure that Open Skies flights will continue.

The OSCE has progressed in developing its conflict prevention and mediation tools. Finland has invested in this field and consistently supported the OSCE's work. For conflict prevention and mediation efforts to bear fruit, the entire society needs to be engaged: that is why inclusion of women and youth is crucial. I encourage everyone within the OSCE to support this notion, including in our declarations and policy documents.

OSCE's work on human rights is essential and must go on. In too many countries the situation of human rights defenders is getting worse – especially those defending women and minority human rights. Every participating State has a duty to ensure a safe environment for the civil society, journalists and human rights defenders.

Freedom of expression, assembly and association are key building blocks of democracy. For this reason, free and active participation of civil society in the OSCE events is our priority.

Intensified technological change and digitalization continue to change the world faster than we realize. To harness the opportunities and to tackle the challenges these new technologies will bring, we need cooperation to craft new, commonly agreed rules, which respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Finland continues to lend her steady support for the important work of the OSCE autonomous institutions and their strong and independent mandates. Furthermore, OSCE Field Operations continue to be crucial assets of the Organization, with clear added value.

To conclude, I would like to wish all the best to Albania for its OSCE Chairmanship in 2020. We also warmly welcome the future Chairmanships of Sweden and Poland.

And now I will pass the floor to the High Representative Josep Borrell to speak on behalf of the EU.