

Lithuania

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement at the OSCE Ministerial Council Plenary Session

5th December 2024, Malta

Honourable Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by **thanking Malta** for hosting this year's Ministerial Council and for its chairmanship of the Organization during this challenging year.

33 years ago, OSCE was the **first international organization Lithuania joined** after regaining our independence after 50 years of occupation and repressions by the Soviet totalitarian regime. We saw the principles of this organization at the core of our country's desired direction.

Today, however, we observe how these **principles are being openly mocked by the aggressor state Russia** that continues to wage the unjustified, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine for over than 1000 days - and 4000 days since the beginning of Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine.

Days marked by **horrible war crimes** and crimes against humanity, including the **deliberate targeting of civilians**, the **destruction of critical infrastructure** at the face of winter, **forced deportation of Ukrainian children**, **firing experimental missiles** with capability of carrying nuclear warheads and ruthless **execution of prisoners of war**.

Yet, we continue to choose diplomacy and dialogue and **allow the representative of the aggressor state to sit at the same table** with us **when the only language** Kremlin's regime understands in reality **is that of steel**. Let us have no illusions about Russia and its real terrorist and genocidal intentions. **Lithuania continues to maintain** that the **participation of representatives from the aggressor country** in this meeting **discredits the**

organisation. Russia does not use the OSCE as a platform for genuine dialogue but as a stage to spread lies, propaganda, and disinformation.

Therefore, **due to the invitation** to Mr **Lavrov** to come to Valletta, **Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania is not participating** at today's meeting. **Inviting Lavrov was a mistake.** The **place to speak to him**, as well as to many in the Kremlin, is in **The Hague**.

Atrocities committed by Russia and its accomplice Belarus demand justice and accountability. If we allow Russia to bend the rules to its liking, if we redraw our own red lines to avoid confrontation and tolerate the aggressor's blatant disregard for international law and norms, **we risk betraying the very same founding principles of the OSCE.**

The key question remains open - **how can we discuss Europe's security with Russia, country that pursues its neocolonial and imperial ambitions?** Europe needs security from Russia in the first place.

Excellencies,

Allow me to also highlight **a few other pressing concerns** on the European continent.

We **deplore the involvement and complicity by Belarus in Russia's** unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal **war of aggression against Ukraine.**

Lukashenka's regime continues **instrumentalizing illegal migration** against neighbouring countries, weaponizing vulnerable people.

We also remain deeply concerned about the continuously **deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus** including of the many **prisoners that are being held incommunicado.**

An ongoing **brutal crackdown** on its' own citizens has **already led to international condemnation** through the multiple reports **under OSCE's Moscow Mechanism.** For all this, illegal Lukashenka's regime must be held accountable.

We **condemn** in the strongest terms the **use of force** and the **violence against peaceful Georgian people**, politicians and media representatives and their arbitrary detentions, including those that have been reported since November 28 following the decision by the government of Georgia not to pursue the opening of EU accession negotiations, which led to

unprecedented mass protest of Georgian people throughout the country. We are deeply **disappointed with** such **decision** and **reiterate our support for the Georgian people** on their European path. We **call on the Georgian authorities to respect the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression**, to conduct free and fair elections and to reverse course of action, which runs counter to the values and principles upon which the European Union is founded.

We also **stand in solidarity with** the Republic of **Moldova** and **deplore the meddling by Russia** at the unprecedented scale into Moldova's elections and other internal affairs.

Looking ahead, if the OSCE is to remain relevant, it has to adapt:

- 1) Firstly, **institutional reforms are needed to streamline decision making and overcome political paralysis** caused by aggressor state Russia abusing the Rules of Procedure of the organization. The **OSCE should be creative in amending the Consensus Rule and using its mechanisms to circumvent blockages**. Consensus shall not become a "non-sensus".
- 2) Secondly, the **OSCE must adopt a stronger and more unified approach to exert pressure on Russia**. More **decisive actions**, such as **pushing for restriction on Russia's participation** in OSCE decision-making processes until it ceases its aggression are needed. OSCE has lots of tools but lacks political will to use them.
- 3) Thirdly, the OSCE must **prioritize the creation of a permanent, independent international investigative mechanism to hold individuals accountable** for the atrocities being committed by Russian forces. Through the findings of the **Moscow Mechanism missions and other tools**, the OSCE can **play a key role by supporting and complementing the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other judicial bodies** to ensure justice for the victims of Russia's aggression.

The very **future of this organization depends on our ability to stand with Ukraine and isolate the aggressor, Russia**. If we fail in this mission, the OSCE risks becoming irrelevant in the face of aggression, a shadow of the institution it was meant to be.

Excellencies,

To conclude, Lithuania extends **best wishes to Finland** as the incoming Chair-in-Office. We have no doubt that Finland, with its deep commitment to the OSCE's principles, will do an excellent job in this critical role. We also **hope** that the **new leadership** of the organization will **act with conviction** - the credibility of the OSCE and the security of Europe is in our hands.

Thank you.