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Statement by
H. E. IVICA DAČIĆ, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
AT THE 24TH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE OSCE
Vienna, 7 December 2017

Distinguished Chairperson-in-Office Minister Kurz,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

Allow me to begin by expressing our appreciation to the Austrian Chairmanship and the Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Sebastian Kurz, for their tireless efforts over the past year and for hosting us here in the wonderful city of Vienna.

Throughout the history of this Organization, we have been working hard in our endeavors to overcome the differences and to jointly face both the existing and emerging threats to our collective security. Despite the fact that those threats have become more serious in the past few years, we are regrettably witnessing rising mistrust and a lack of dialogue among participating States.

It is unfortunate, at least in my personal view, that there is little true dialogue and co-operation left in our Organization, though the challenges we are facing require both urgent and thoughtful responses. At a time when it is difficult to anticipate the future, it is clear that political will is necessary to strengthen dialogue and mutual engagement as the only path to restoring trust and seeking solutions to de-escalate current tensions. The OSCE can fulfil its purpose only if the participating States feel that our Organization contributes to the security of the region for the benefit of all our citizens. This can be achieved only by respecting the intergovernmental and consensus-based nature of the OSCE. In order for the OSCE to perform better, we need to clearly commit to strengthening the Organization and its capacities on the basis of mutual respect of all participating States. Preserving the ability and visibility of the OSCE will be crucial in these efforts. If this is our shared aim, consensus over this approach should not be difficult to reach. Let me assure you that Serbia remains firmly committed to work with other participating States to ensure achievement of this goal.

Mr. Chairperson,

Being fully aware of the security risks and challenges in the OSCE region, Serbia is fully committed to its active and meaningful FSC Chairmanship in the last Trimester of this year, since the Forum continues to present valuable opportunities for dialogue and discussion on the most pressing security issues and on our political and military commitments. Therefore, we focused on strengthening the debate on politico-military security by providing a forum for negotiations and consultations on military security and stability in the OSCE area.

I would like to emphasize that the Structured Dialogue has already proven to be a useful tool for productive multilateral discussions on enhanced security. Through its well selected topics it has shown a potential for de-escalation of tensions and confidence building per se, which could in turn bring real and measurable contribution to security of the OSCE area. We thank the German Chairmanship of the Working Group for steering us successfully through the Structured Dialogue this year and we support the incoming Italian Chairmanship priorities on this important issue.

Mr. Chairperson,

The crisis in and around Ukraine is continuing in spite of all our efforts aimed at putting an end to it. At the same time, we are deeply concerned about continuous impediments to the freedom of movement, frequent intimidation and attacks on the monitors and property of the OSCE, which resulted *inter alia* in the tragic death of the SMM paramedic on 23 April. All sides are called upon to fully and unconditionally respect the cease-fire, end all hostilities and implement the provisions of the Minsk Agreements, including a verifiable and lasting withdrawal of heavy weapons.

Serbia continues to support the work of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine which is the most visible element of the OSCE response to this crisis, as well as all other constructive efforts aimed at finding a peaceful resolution of the crisis with full respect of OSCE principles.

Fighting terrorism remains at the top of our agenda. The participating States have on various occasions resolutely and unconditionally condemned acts of terrorism and reaffirmed their determination to combat it in all its forms and manifestations. Serbia strongly supports the OSCE counter-terrorism efforts, including the priority of the Austrian Chairmanship to engage and empower the youth in countering VERLT, especially having in mind that we see this as a confirmation of the Serbian Chairmanship priorities in 2015.

Apart from combating terrorism and VERLT, we all need to work together against rising racism and xenophobia. Suppressing terrorism and extremism cannot be used as a pretext for dissemination of fear and hatred against migrants and minority groups in our societies.

We should not forget either that, in the last three years, we have been faced with unprecedented challenges posed by the migrant/refugee crisis, even though they appear to be slowly diminishing. Still, many of our countries are facing the challenges resulting from the migration crisis. Over the past two years more than 900.000 refugees and migrants transited through Serbia. We have demonstrated our

solidarity and humanity, in line with the highest international standards. Having that in mind, we fully support the intentions of the incoming Italian Chairmanship to tackle the issue of migration, its potential solutions as well as security risks.

Mr. Chairperson,

We have supported the priorities of the Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE throughout this year and we hope that we will reach consensus on the proposed MC Decisions and Declarations. These documents represent the core of the OSCE and they reflect the current state of affairs in the region, which is why we all need to join forces to show that important agreements are reachable. Serbia's goal is to become a long-term positive contributor to security in Europe, and we are ready to work together on advancing the overall goals of security and cooperation among individuals, communities, peoples and participating States of the OSCE and our partners. We are truly committed to the continuation of our European path, good neighborly relations and improvement of regional stability, as well as further strengthening of our economies. We are fully devoted to the EU-led dialogue with Priština and to the implementation of all agreements reached so far, in particular on the long awaited establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities. We believe that an open and honest dialogue is the only way to improve the everyday lives of the people living in Kosovo and Metohija. In this context, upholding the status neutral position of the OSCE is absolutely necessary.

In conclusion, allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the Austrian Chairmanship and particularly to the Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Sebastian Kurz, for their able guidance over this year. I would also like to warmly welcome and pledge our full support to the incoming Italian Chairmanship.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.