

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Giedrius Čekuolis, Head of Delegation for
Lithuania**

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Mr. Chairperson, let me congratulate the German Chairmanship for your endless efforts in steering this organization in troubled times.

Yet another troublesome year is behind. It's been marked by further weakening of European security order. To say the least, the reality is grim. And Russia's aggression against Ukraine is of particular concern. After 3 years of ongoing conflict we are still in a deadlock. One could conclude that we were quite good at managing, but not solving this staggering crisis. Efforts to implement the Minsk agreements, and Russia's responsibility in this regard, have been marked by detrimental gap between words and deeds. As a result, a lack of progress in finding political solution continues to translate into degrading security situation on the ground.

In order to reverse this trend, we have a moral obligation to act immediately and address it with political determination. We need a serious impetus to the stalled implementation of Minsk agreements, which can be achieved only when Russia withdraws its troops from the Ukrainian territory, and when full control over Ukrainian state border is reestablished. We have to rethink the OSCE's role and engagement in Ukraine, including through possible OSCE security mission for the local elections. There is also scope for better linkages between conflict resolution process and the OSCE's tools on the ground. Forthcoming agreements should not adopt new security realities, but aim at a sustainable political solution, based on restored respects for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Failure to do so would take us another step closer to the new reality of yet another protracted conflict.

Mr. Chairperson, current challenges require a strong OSCE toolbox. It is for this reason that we stand behind the Chairmanship's efforts to strengthen the OSCE's role in early action and conflict prevention, thus enhancing OSCE capacities along the conflict cycle. We value the OSCE's engagement in Ukraine, particularly through SMM. While strongly supporting Mission's activities, we deplore the remaining

impediments that prevent from fulfilling its mandate. We will spare no effort to call for unrestricted SMM's access in the whole territory of Ukraine, including along the border, as well as in disengagement areas. The SMM should also be better involved in monitoring of situation in Russia's illegally seized Crimea, where human suffering is our growing concern. And where Russia is yet to provide international human rights access.

As to the OSCE toolbox in the politico-military dimension, we are determined to preserve, strengthen and modernize conventional arms control in Europe, and stand ready to engage in further discussions on how to improve functioning and implementation of existing OSCE instruments, in order to regain trust and enhance military stability in the OSCE area.

While resolution of protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and over Nagorno-Karabakh is stagnating, security and human rights situation is in constant decline. There is a growing need for a resolute action to revive negotiation processes, while making full use of existing OSCE tools and institutions.

Human rights is a cornerstone of the OSCE. Yet their protection has become a challenging task. Aggressive propaganda, shrinking space for civil society and manipulation of history are only few threats that constitute obstacles for the protection of human rights and freedoms, and must be addressed without delay. An enhanced dialogue with our civil society is much needed to this end.

Europe whole, free, and at peace is not yet a reality. But it remains our flagship. In order to succeed, we need to share the same aspirations and recommit to the principles on which European security is built. This is, by far, the most challenging task for the incoming Austrian Chairmanship, which we warmly welcome. Thank you.