



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

TIRANA

2020

**Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the
Ministerial Council
3 and 4 December 2020**

Statements and declarations by the Ministerial Council

Decisions of the Ministerial Council

Statements by the Chairperson and delegations

Reports to the Ministerial Council

Tirana 2020

4 December 2020

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I. STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS BY THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

**DECLARATION ON
STRENGTHENING CO-OPERATION IN COUNTERING
TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME**
(MC.DOC/1/20 of 4 December 2020)

1. We, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, recall the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), which marks its twentieth anniversary this year, and its protocols thereto.
2. We recall further all relevant OSCE documents adopted on transnational organized crime, in particular Ministerial Council Decisions No. 3/05 on combatting transnational organized crime and No. 5/06 on organized crime, and we reiterate the commitments and role of the OSCE expressed in these documents.
3. We reiterate our grave concern about the negative effects of transnational organized crime on stability and security, including the exploitation of globalized economies and open societies, the undermining of democratic values and governance and the threatening of the safety and security of citizens, directly or indirectly, as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms.
4. We reaffirm participating States' primary role in combatting transnational organized crime and underscore that it can best be fought by ensuring respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and by upholding the rule of law, and emphasise the key role played by an effective, trusted, professional, independent and accountable criminal justice system in upholding public safety and security.
5. We acknowledge the central role of the United Nations in countering transnational organized crime, as well as the importance of the work done by relevant international organizations. We reaffirm that the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security complements global efforts to counter the complex threat of transnational organized crime.
6. We underline that countering transnational organized crime, and its root causes, requires effective and democratic institutions accountable to citizens, criminal justice systems based on the rule of law, and the application of a holistic, comprehensive and coherent approach, in order to prevent and reduce opportunities for organized criminal groups to operate in, or infiltrate the fabric of, our societies, licit economies, and institutions, or to benefit from the proceeds of their crimes.
7. We recall the relevant international tools and mechanisms available to assist participating States in undertaking self-assessments and, where necessary, enhancing their criminal justice systems.
8. We recognize that transnational organized crime can have a differential impact on diverse groups within society. We encourage co-operation between all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, in order to help build resilient communities, and to develop comprehensive responses to, and preventive measures against, transnational organized crime which take into account the needs, concerns and interests of all groups within society, protect the victims of crime and provide them access to appropriate remedies, while promoting the

full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the efforts to counter transnational organized crime.

9. We underline the importance of strengthening national co-ordination and international co-operation in countering transnational organized crime, including, where appropriate, through direct contact and engagement between relevant authorities, and by exchange of information and best practices, as well as by using the tools provided by the OSCE, the UNODC, and other relevant international organizations.

10. We recommit to maintaining the countering of transnational organized crime among the priorities of the OSCE by enhancing implementation of the respective international obligations and the OSCE's existing commitments. We reaffirm the tasking of the relevant OSCE executive structures to brief the participating States regularly on OSCE activities related to the implementation of existing OSCE commitments to address transnational organized crime, and encourage continued discussions on this topic among participating States.

11. We invite the OSCE Partners for Co-operation to join us in affirming this declaration

**DECLARATION ON
CO-OPERATION WITH THE OSCE ASIAN PARTNERS**
(MC.DOC/2/20 of 4 December 2020)

1. We, the ministers for foreign affairs of the OSCE participating States, welcome the engaged participation of the Asian Partners for Co-operation in the OSCE. Considering that security in the OSCE area is strongly interlinked with that of the Asian region, we welcome that the partnership has been steadily strengthened over the years and note its demonstrated importance and efficiency. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation, we renew our commitment to deepen and expand dialogue and co-operation, on the basis of the Ministerial Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners (MC.DOC/10/14) and Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/11, having in mind the interests and concerns shared by the OSCE participating States and the Asian Partners.
2. We note with appreciation the active engagement of the Asian Partners in OSCE events and activities, including through high-level and expert representatives, as well as the generous contributions of Asian Partners to OSCE extrabudgetary projects. We encourage the Asian Partners to continue to make use of existing OSCE mechanisms, including the Partnership Fund. We take positive note of the continued high interest by the Asian Partners in the OSCE agenda, and we value the opportunity to strengthen our partnership through participation in the joint annual OSCE Asian Conferences, as well as other Asian Partner-promoted initiatives, which address topics covering the politico-military, the economic and environmental and the human dimensions of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. We call for a more proactive use by participating States and Partners for Co-operation of these events to promote an outcome-oriented dialogue. We further welcome the adaptability of the Republic of Korea to host the 2020 OSCE Asian Conference online due to the unprecedented, extraordinary and unpredictable circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. We are committed to advancing an open and frank exchange of information within the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, which serves as the main forum for regular dialogue between OSCE participating States and Asian Partners for Co-operation. We welcome the Ministerial Council Decision No. 2/19 on renaming the Contact Group to OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group. We also welcome the decision by the 2020 OSCE Albanian Chairmanship to dedicate a Permanent Council meeting to reviewing our co-operation with the Asian Partners for Co-operation, and invite future Chairmanships to consider the possibility to continue this practice.
4. We reaffirm our readiness to share OSCE experience and best practices through various existing formats, and thereby further promote OSCE principles and commitments among the Asian Partners for Co-operation in all three dimensions, and further enhance their partnership with the OSCE and its participating States. We take note that initiatives by academia, non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society may provide additional channels to support and expand the existing dialogue and co-operation between the OSCE and the Asian Partners for Co-operation.
5. We reaffirm our long-term commitment to further strengthen the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan across all three dimensions of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, as expressed in the Ministerial Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners

(MC.DOC/10/14) and Ministerial Council Decisions No. 4/07 and No. 4/11. We call for continued efforts in implementing those decisions. We highlight the role the OSCE has played in supporting Afghanistan in combating transnational threats through border and customs management training, with a particular focus on countering terrorism, trafficking in drugs and illicit trafficking in cultural property. We affirm the importance of supporting efforts to ease barriers to trade between Afghanistan and its neighbours, which will boost economic growth in Afghanistan and the broader region. We take positive note of the continued and constant admission of Afghan students to the graduate programmes offered by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. We encourage leveraging partnerships with other relevant international organisations which promote regional co-operation, security and peace building in Afghanistan.

6. We encourage the Asian Partners for Co-operation to voluntarily adopt and implement OSCE principles and commitments across the OSCE's politico-military, economic and environmental and human dimensions, and invite future collaboration with the Asian Partners on related challenges that transcend international borders in the three dimensions.

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON THE
NEGOTIATIONS ON THE TRANSDNIESTRIAN SETTLEMENT
PROCESS IN THE “5+2” FORMAT**

(MC.DOC/3/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe:

1. Recall the past ministerial statements on the work of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transdnistrian Settlement in the “5+2” format;
2. Reiterate their strong resolve to attain a comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders with a special status for Transdnistria that fully guarantees the human, political, economic and social rights of its population;
3. Underline the need to continue the result-oriented settlement process reaffirmed by the Hamburg, Vienna, Milan and Bratislava ministerial statements. In this regard, we call upon the Sides to continue to engage accordingly in the negotiation process in 2021 when Sweden will be chairing the OSCE;
4. Encourage the Sides to enhance their co-ordination and interaction in addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, stress the importance of ensuring continued interconnectivity between both banks of the Dniester/Nistru River in times of the pandemic and in this context call for constructive work towards rapid restoration of freedom of movement;
5. Urge the Sides to further consolidate the achievements reached since the Vienna Ministerial meeting on priority issues and to work towards the full and continuous implementation of all agreements expressed in the protocols of the “5+2” meetings in Rome 2018, Vienna 2017 and Berlin 2016 thus contributing to building a solid basis for further advancing the settlement process;
6. Encourage the Sides to develop joint proposals on further confidence-building measures, based on the progress achieved in the implementation of the Berlin-plus package, and to intensify their dialogue on and efforts with regard to the protection of human rights;
7. Call upon the Sides to continue to work at all levels of the negotiation process in a rhythmical manner to achieve tangible progress on all three baskets of the agreed agenda for the negotiation process: socio-economic issues, general legal and humanitarian issues and human rights, and a comprehensive settlement, including institutional, political and security issues;
8. Underline the importance of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transdnistrian Settlement in the “5+2” format as the only mechanism to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable settlement, call for the

organization of a result-oriented meeting in this format as soon as possible in 2021 and reaffirm the important role the OSCE plays in supporting this process;

9. Applaud the unified and active approach by the mediators and observers of the OSCE, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the European Union and the United States of America in the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transnistrian Settlement in the “5+2” format and encourage them to continue to co-ordinate their efforts and to make full use of their collective potential to promote progress in all dimensions towards achieving a comprehensive resolution of the Transnistrian conflict.

II. DECISIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

DECISION No. 1/20
APPOINTMENT OF THE OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL
(MC.DEC/1/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the decision of the Ministerial Council taken at its third meeting in Stockholm in 1992 to establish the post of Secretary General, Ministerial Council Decision No. 15/04 of 7 December 2004 on the role of the OSCE Secretary General, Ministerial Council Decision No. 18/06 of 5 December 2006 on further strengthening the effectiveness of OSCE executive structures and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/08 of 22 October 2008 on the periods of service of the OSCE Secretary General,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE Secretary General carries out her functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE Secretary General,

Decides to appoint Ms. Helga Schmid as Secretary General of the OSCE for a period of three years with effect from 4 December 2020.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/1/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Helga Schmid. We support the work of the Secretary General and the OSCE Secretariat.

We recall that the Secretary General derives his/her authority from the collective decisions of the participating States and acts under the guidance of the Chairperson-in-Office. He or she is the Chief Administrative Officer of the OSCE, and is tasked, among other things, to act as the representative of the Chairperson-in-Office and support him or her in all activities aimed at fulfilling the goals of the OSCE. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to alter the mandate of the Secretary General or restrict the work of the Secretary General in the exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments, and decisions, and it is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson."

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/1/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

"Having joined the consensus on the decision of the OSCE Foreign Ministers to appoint Ms. Helga Schmid as the Secretary General of the OSCE, we should like to state the following.

The Russian Federation agreed to this decision on the basis of Ms. Schmid's professional qualifications. In her position, we firmly expect her to act impartially in the interests of all and not of individual OSCE participating States or their groups, and not to follow national or bloc-based policies and priorities.

We are pleased that, for the first time in the history of the Organization, the participating States have adopted decisions that lead to a more balanced geographical representation in the leadership of the OSCE executive structures, in accordance with the fundamental principles of our Organization's work and its procedural norms establishing the equality of all participating States. The movement towards achieving a fair geographical balance in the staffing structure of the Organization must continue.

We call on Ms. Schmid to pursue non-confrontational, consensus-based approaches in her activities, to promote a unifying agenda, and to strengthen the OSCE's effectiveness in all three dimensions of security.

We draw attention to the need for the Secretary General and all Secretariat staff to strictly comply with Permanent Council Decision No. 485 of 28 June 2002 on OSCE statements and public information. In particular, it follows from the decision that formal positions of the Organization are expressed in decisions, statements and documents adopted by the decision-making bodies on the basis of consensus. Statements and public outreach activities by the heads of the OSCE field operations and institutions are to be made in line with their mandates and should not be inconsistent with OSCE consensus positions.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of the day of the Ministerial Council meeting."

DECISION No. 2/20
APPOINTMENT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
(MC.DEC/2/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the 1990 Charter of Paris and the decision of the Ministerial Council taken at its second meeting in Prague in 1992 concerning the development of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR),

Reaffirming the necessity that the Director of the ODIHR carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the ODIHR,

Decides to appoint Mr. Matteo Mecacci as Director of the ODIHR for a period of three years with effect from 4 December 2020.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/2/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Spain:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

The delegation of Spain would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE in connection with the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of a new Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Spain joins the consensus on the proposed appointments agreed at this Ministerial Council meeting of the persons who are to head the Secretariat and the autonomous institutions over the next three years and wishes them every success in carrying out their duties.

Spain firmly believes that the autonomous institutions of the OSCE are common assets of the 57 OSCE participating States and their heads must be appointed and act in full compliance with the mutually agreed principles, commitments and decisions of the OSCE.

With regard to the ODIHR, we note that the fundamental principles governing the appointment of the ODIHR Director are set out in Section I, “Institutional Arrangements”, subsection H, paragraph 1, of the [Supplementary document to give effect to certain

provisions contained in the] Charter of Paris for a New Europe, in conjunction with relevant provisions of the decision adopted by the Ministerial Council at its second meeting in Prague in 1992.

Greater diversity among the countries whose nationals hold senior positions can only be in the interest of the Organization and strengthen the sense of ownership and recognition by all. Spain will continue to work to promote this diversity.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/2/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Matteo Mecacci. We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the ODIHR.

Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the Director of the ODIHR in the exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE’s principles, commitments and decisions and it is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.”

Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/2/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus on the decision of the OSCE Foreign Ministers to appoint Mr. Matteo Mecacci as the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), we should like to state the following.

We are pleased that, for the first time in the history of the Organization, the participating States have adopted decisions that lead to a more balanced geographical representation in the leadership of the OSCE executive structures. This is fully in line with the fundamental principles of our Organization’s work and its procedural norms establishing the equality of all participating States and their equal opportunity to be involved in the leadership of the Secretariat, its departments and the institutions. We see this as a first step towards achieving a fair geographical balance in the staffing structure of the Organization.

We expect the ODIHR, under the leadership of Mr. Mecacci, to adhere to its mandate strictly, fully and effectively within the framework of the instructions given by the participating States. It is our understanding that such work will be conducted in line with consensus-based and depoliticized approaches.

We hope that the Office, headed by Mr. Mecacci, will pay due attention to promoting social and economic rights; preventing the falsification of history and the glorification of Nazism; countering racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism and intolerance against Christians and Muslims; protecting children’s rights and combating trafficking in human beings; the situation of migrants; equality between women and men; eliminating mass statelessness and ending discrimination in sport.

We call on the new Director to correct the geographical imbalances in the Office’s election monitoring activities, develop a uniform and consensus-based election observation methodology and follow an impartial approach in election monitoring.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of the day of the Ministerial Council meeting.”

DECISION No. 3/20
APPOINTMENT OF THE OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON
NATIONAL MINORITIES
(MC.DEC/3/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the decision of the CSCE Helsinki Summit 1992 to establish a High Commissioner on National Minorities,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,

Decides to appoint Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities for a period of three years with effect from 4 December 2020.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/3/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov. We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the HCNM.

Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in the exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE’s principles, commitments and decisions and it is first and foremost the responsibility of participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/3/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus on the decision of the OSCE Foreign Ministers to appoint Kairat Kudaybergenovich Abdurakhmanov as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, we should like to state the following.

We are pleased that, for the first time in the history of the Organization, the participating States have adopted decisions that lead to a more balanced geographical representation in the leadership of the OSCE executive structures. This is fully in line with the fundamental principles of our Organization’s work and its procedural norms establishing the equality of all participating States and their equal opportunity to be involved in the leadership of the Secretariat, its departments and the institutions. We see this as a first step towards achieving a fair geographical balance in the staffing structure of the Organization.

We look forward to the effective and constructive work of the new High Commissioner in strict compliance with the established mandate and with equal consideration of the views of all OSCE participating States. We hope that the work of the High Commissioner and his office will continue to focus on protecting the linguistic, educational and other rights of national minorities, eliminating mass statelessness, combating racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism, ethnic and religious intolerance, and preserving historical truth.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of the day of the Ministerial Council meeting.”

DECISION No. 4/20
APPOINTMENT OF THE OSCE REPRESENTATIVE ON
FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA
(MC.DEC/4/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling Permanent Council Decision No. 193 of 5 November 1997 on establishing an OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,

Reaffirming the necessity that the Representative on Freedom of the Media carries out her functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media,

Decides to appoint Ms. Teresa Ribeiro as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for a period of three years with effect from 4 December 2020.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/4/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Maria Teresa Ribeiro. We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in the exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE’s principles, commitments and decisions and it is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/4/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus on the decision of the OSCE Foreign Ministers to appoint Ms. Maria Teresa Ribeiro as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, we should like to state the following.

We are pleased that, for the first time in the history of the Organization, the participating States have adopted decisions that lead to a more balanced geographical representation in the leadership of the OSCE executive structures. This is fully in line with the fundamental principles of our Organization’s work and its procedural norms establishing the equality of all participating States and their equal opportunity to be involved in the leadership of the Secretariat, its departments and the institutions. We see this as a first step towards achieving a fair geographical balance in the staffing structure of the Organization.

We expect the new Representative on Freedom of the Media to be guided by the protection of the interests of the entire professional media community in the OSCE area in a balanced and impartial manner, in accordance with the existing mandate.

We call on Ms. Ribeiro to promote press freedom and pluralism, to respond equally to infringements on press freedom in all OSCE participating States, to make special efforts to ensure safe working conditions for journalists, and to pay due attention to combating censorship, including on the Internet. It is our understanding that the Representative’s focus will remain on the current topic of access to information, especially in the light of the systematic attempts to limit this access under the pretext of combating propaganda. We expect her to establish the necessary contacts with the media and professional associations of journalists.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of the day of the Ministerial Council meeting.”

DECISION No. 5/20
OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP IN THE YEAR 2023
(MC.DEC/5/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Decides that North Macedonia will exercise the function of the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2023.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/5/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Bulgaria:

“The Republic of Bulgaria would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure in connection with the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2023:

Mr. Chairperson,

The Republic of Bulgaria has joined the consensus on adopting this decision mindful of the stated, strong commitment of the Republic of North Macedonia to exercise the Chairmanship of the OSCE for the year 2023. We should expect that in this capacity the Republic of North Macedonia will truly engage in implementing the principles, values and the mandate of our Organization.

On this occasion we would like to reconfirm our position that we will use the new constitutional name ‘Republic of North Macedonia’ *erga omnes* and as the only name of the country in official documents requiring the consent of the Republic of Bulgaria. This position has been detailed in a Note Verbale No. 453 (7 May 2019) of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the United Nations in New York, copied to all UN Member States, issued in response to the official announcement on the change of the then constitutional name ‘Republic of Macedonia’.

In that context, we proceed with the understanding that whenever the term ‘North Macedonia’ is used in OSCE documents, it should be taken to refer only and exclusively to the State whose full constitutional name is the Republic of North Macedonia, and has no geographic meaning other than the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.

We would like to use this opportunity to recall again the importance we attach to full, consistent and in good faith implementation of the spirit and the letter of the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations between our two States.

It is important to stress that by joining the consensus today Bulgaria provides its support to its neighbour and that is being done to no prejudice to the outcome of the ongoing bilateral talks including on this particular issue.

Mr. Chairperson,

We request this interpretative statement be attached to the decision adopted, and included in the journal of the meeting.

Thank you.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/5/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of North Macedonia:

“Mr. Chairperson,

With reference to the statement of the delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria, the delegation of the Republic of North Macedonia would like to make the following interpretative statement.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank all the participating States for reaching consensus on the decision North Macedonia to assume the function of OSCE Chairmanship in 2023.

On our part, let me assure you of our firm determination to engage and actively co-operate with all the participating States in line with the principles and commitments of our Organization.

We are committed to principled and constructive approach in all three dimensions – politico-military, economic and environmental and human dimension, promoting peace and prosperity through dialogue and co-operation.

Furthermore, we believe that enhancing co-operation through dialogue build upon the Helsinki Final Act and continuing development of friendly relations is essential among the OSCE participating States.

On this note, I would like to state that based on the principle of equality and sovereign rights of States both names of my country the full – Republic of North Macedonia and the short – North Macedonia are equally valid and should be used in line with the established rules and practice of all international organizations, including the OSCE.

The full and the short name of my country are not and cannot be interpreted as a reference to any geographical region.

The Republic of North Macedonia and North Macedonia are the full and the short form of the name of a sovereign State as a political entity in the international relations.

We would also like to use this opportunity to recall the importance we attach to full, consistent and in good faith implementation of the spirit and the letter of the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations between our two States.

Mr. Chairperson, I would like this statement to be attached to the journal of the day.”

DECISION No. 6/20
PREVENTING AND COMBATING CORRUPTION THROUGH
DIGITALIZATION AND INCREASED TRANSPARENCY
(MC.DEC/6/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the importance of promoting good governance, including through increased transparency, and preventing and combating corruption in enhancing security, stability and economic growth and reaffirming the respective OSCE commitments, which contribute to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and co-operation, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act,

Recalling also the Ministerial Council Declaration on the Digital Economy as a Driver for Promoting Co-operation, Security and Growth (MC.DOC/2/18), and acknowledging the opportunities offered by digital transformation to prevent and combat corruption, and address new challenges in this field,

Welcoming the fact that almost all participating States have ratified or acceded to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and are working towards fulfilling the obligations deriving from the Convention,

Acknowledging the important work on anti-corruption done by other international organizations, in particular by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),

Recognizing the risks posed by corruption to security, stability, democracy, effective governance and economic and social development and the need to prevent and combat corruption at international and national levels in a comprehensive way, including by addressing the links between corruption and money laundering, and through the effective implementation of asset recovery measures and improved international and regional co-operation in this regard,

Acknowledging the need to increase efforts to effectively prevent and combat corruption, including through digitalization, while upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights,

Recognizing the role of the OSCE in supporting the efforts of the participating States to prevent and combat corruption,

Acknowledging that a public sector based on integrity, openness, transparency, accountability, responsiveness and the rule of law, is crucial to prevent and combat corruption, and achieve sustainable economic growth and development, improve the business and investment climate and help facilitate participating States' efforts to promote social integration and opportunities for all, including for women as well as youth,

Recognizing the importance of the participation of the private sector, civil society and media, as well as academia, in efforts to prevent and combat corruption and enhance good governance, including the realization of the principles of transparency and accountability,

Acknowledging that accessible, secure and reliable e-government services that are user-centric can play a key role in increasing the efficiency and transparency of, and promoting trust in, public administration,

Recognizing the importance of open government data as a tool that can help to prevent and combat corruption by increasing accountability and transparency, allowing citizens, in accordance with domestic law, to better monitor the use of public funds and the policy-making process,

Recognizing the importance of developing and using methodologies and objective indicators and disaggregated data to measure corruption and the concrete impact of anti-corruption measures, in accordance with domestic law, and to adopt better evidence-based anti-corruption policies,

Being mindful of the Parliamentary Assembly's contribution to promoting dialogue among OSCE parliamentarians with a view to strengthening legislation essential in preventing and combating corruption,

Building on the substantial discussions held in the framework of the 28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum on "Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization" and of the OSCE Chairmanship High-Level Conference on "Good Governance and the Fight against Corruption in the Digital Era", as well as in the work of the Economic and Environmental Committee,

1. Calls upon participating States to prevent and combat corruption by:
 - (a) Enhancing good governance, including the principles of transparency and accountability, and promoting integrity and oversight;
 - (b) Employing digital tools to strengthen integrity and accountability of public service providers with the view to help prevent and combat corruption as well as to achieve sustainable economic growth and development, improve the business and investment climate and to facilitate participating States' efforts to contribute to the social inclusion and equitable economic participation of women as well as young people;
 - (c) Enhancing transparency in public administration through digitalizing paper-based and other analogue systems, particularly in public procurement as well as, where appropriate, in existing mechanisms for income and asset declarations of public officials and politically exposed persons, to the extent permitted by domestic law, with due respect to classified and personal data;
 - (d) Promoting the use of digital tools for early detection and prevention of corruption through enhancing national and international secure electronic identification processes consistent with applicable domestic law;

- (e) Introducing digital tools, where appropriate, to reduce administrative barriers and burdens, and facilitating interaction between citizens, businesses, enterprises and public administration;
 - (f) Promoting more transparent, accountable, reliable and accessible e-government portals with the aim to facilitate open access to information and effective delivery of public services;
 - (g) Promoting and using digital technologies to strengthen and extend anti-corruption training in co-operation, where appropriate, with relevant international organizations in this field;
 - (h) Encouraging the establishment and improvement of mechanisms aimed at ensuring transparency of beneficial ownership information, in accordance with domestic law;
 - (i) Supporting the education of youth, in accordance with domestic education systems, on the importance of good governance, including transparency, and preventing and combating corruption as well as through fostering digital skills, and strengthening awareness-raising measures, including promoting collective action and collaboration between public and private sectors and civil society;
 - (j) Reducing existing digital divides by promoting and supporting digital literacy and improving the accessibility of public administration online resources and applications;
 - (k) Taking appropriate measures to ensure that easily accessible and safe reporting channels are available to whistle-blowers, to put in place and implement legal mechanisms for the effective protection of whistle-blowers against retaliation, and to encourage relevant organizations to establish and implement necessary protections, in accordance with domestic law;
 - (l) Adopting, in accordance with domestic law, a holistic multi-stakeholder approach to increase effectiveness and improve co-ordination of anti-corruption measures and initiatives, including promoting the implementation of corporate social responsibility;
 - (m) Promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the development and implementation of relevant anti-corruption activities, with the view to achieving gender equality, and taking into account that corruption disproportionately affects women and the vulnerable;
 - (n) Enhancing interaction and international co-operation among relevant authorities and stakeholders in the anti-corruption field, with the aim to foster the exchange of information, experiences, best practices and lessons learnt;
2. Encourages those OSCE participating States that have not yet done so to become States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and to effectively implement it;
 3. Encourages participating States to make the best use of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue, co-operation, exchange of information and sharing of best practices in the area of preventing and combating corruption through digitalization and increased transparency;

4. Tasks relevant OSCE executive structures, including field operations, within their mandates and available resources, to assist participating States, upon their request, in implementing the provisions of this decision, including by co-operating with relevant regional and international organizations;
5. Encourages the OSCE Partners for Co-operation to voluntarily implement the provisions of this decision.

DECISION No. 7/20
PREVENTION AND ERADICATION OF TORTURE AND OTHER
CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR
PUNISHMENT

(MC.DEC/7/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Strongly condemning all forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as one of the most flagrant violations of human rights and human dignity, and reaffirming that torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever,

Reaffirming that freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is a non-derogable right under international law and that no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency may be invoked as justification of torture,

Emphasizing that the prohibition of torture is a peremptory norm of international law without territorial limitation, which applies at all times and in all places,

Deeply concerned by the persistence of cases of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in many parts of the world, including in the OSCE area, that prevail as a consequence of, *inter alia*, the incomplete implementation of relevant obligations under international law and OSCE commitments and ongoing impunity for the perpetrators that often exists due to a lack of prompt, independent and effective investigation and prosecution of such crimes,

Deeply concerned about acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment committed against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Deeply concerned that torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is used to obtain information or a confession,

Recalling that all OSCE participating States are parties to the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT),

Deeply concerned that enforced disappearances still occur in the OSCE area, which is a serious human rights violation, and recalling in this regard the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, while noting the importance of the implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (ICPPED) by its States Parties,

Recognizing that during conflict situations, including armed conflict, as well as civil unrest and mass protests, particular attention should be paid to preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

Reaffirming that all participating States must comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law,

Emphasizing that, under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, acts of torture or inhuman treatment are grave breaches of these conventions, that acts of torture and cruel treatment in armed conflict are serious violations of international humanitarian law and in this regard constitute war crimes, that acts of torture can constitute crimes against humanity and that the perpetrators of all acts of torture must be prosecuted and punished in accordance with a court conviction,

Reminding all participating States that prolonged incommunicado detention or detention in secret places can facilitate the perpetration of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and can in itself constitute a form of such treatment,

Recognizing that the prevalence of corruption, including in law enforcement and justice systems, can have a negative impact on the fight against torture and other, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including by eroding fundamental safeguards and preventing victims of torture and other, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment from effectively seeking justice, redress and compensation through the justice system,

Stressing the importance of effective legal and procedural safeguards throughout all stages of detention, including early stages of police custody, as effective measures for the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

Acknowledging that women and girls are at a particular risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment when deprived of liberty, and recognizing the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive approach in the fight against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, that takes into account such particular risk and specific needs of women and girls, including by paying special attention to sexual violence against women and girls, as well as gender-based violence against women and girls, and taking into consideration the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules),

Recognizing the importance of adopting a victim-centred approach in the fight against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, paying special attention to the views and specific needs of victims and their immediate family members in policy development and other activities relating to rehabilitation, prevention and accountability for torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

Recognizing that effectively combating torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment requires an integrated and victim-centred approach encompassing prevention, access to justice, accountability, redress and the enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible,

Recognizing that participating States must safeguard the rights, and protect the human rights, of all persons deprived of their liberty, including those facing the death penalty, in accordance with their international obligations,

Reaffirming that all persons deprived of their liberty will be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person and recognizing the importance of participating States continuously taking appropriate measures to improve conditions in detention to better respect the human rights and dignity of those persons, including by taking into consideration the implementation of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) or similar standards,

Stressing the UNCAT requirements that all acts of torture, attempts to commit torture, and acts of complicity or participation in torture must be made offences under domestic criminal law, punishable by appropriate penalties reflecting their grave nature, and that no information or a confession that is established to have been obtained as a result of torture shall be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, under any circumstances, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that this offence took place,

Recognizing the role that international, regional and national preventive mechanisms or other relevant bodies, including national human rights institutions, can play in effectively preventing acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as the importance of collaborating with international experts mandated to assist participating States in their efforts to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

Emphasizing the need to ensure that no authority or official orders, applies, permits or tolerates any sanction, reprisal or intimidation against any person, group or association for contacting, seeking to contact or having been in contact with any competent national or international body or mechanism active in the prevention and combating of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

Stressing that national legal systems must ensure that victims of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment have effective access to justice, including prompt impartial and effective investigation, without suffering any retribution for bringing complaints or giving evidence and that such victims obtain redress and have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible,

Commending the persistent efforts of civil society at national and international level working to effectively prevent and combat torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and alleviate the suffering of victims,

Underlining the importance of co-operation between the OSCE and other international and regional organizations and mechanisms so as to promote multilateral co-operation and to achieve effective synergies, avoiding unnecessary overlapping, which can contribute to effectively preventing and combating torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,

Recalling the notification and access obligations of participating States under the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and relevant bilateral agreements,

Noting the work of the global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade and the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on Torture-Free Trade,

Calls on the participating States to:

1. Uphold the absolute prohibition of all forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as set forth in the UNCAT, implement fully and in good faith its provisions and act in full conformity with all its principles;
2. Fully implement their obligations under the UNCAT's Optional Protocol (OPCAT), if applicable, and give early consideration to becoming parties to OPCAT, if they have not yet done so;
3. Fully implement their obligations under the ICPPED, if applicable;
4. Fully implement their obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions with respect to the prohibition of torture, cruel, inhuman, humiliating and degrading treatment in the context of armed conflict;
5. Abandon and refrain from the use of interrogation techniques that constitute torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including to obtain information or a confession;
6. Implement effective legal and procedural safeguards throughout all stages of detention, including early stages of police custody;
7. Respect the safeguards concerning the liberty, security and dignity of the person and ensure that prolonged incommunicado detention and secret places of detention and interrogation are abolished, with the understanding that such detention can facilitate the perpetration of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and can in itself constitute a form of such treatment;
8. Make all acts of torture, attempts to commit torture, and acts of complicity or participation in torture offences under domestic criminal law, incorporating the definition of torture pursuant to Article 1 of UNCAT and providing for appropriate penalties reflecting their grave nature, and prohibit the use of information or a confession obtained through torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as evidence in any proceedings except against a person accused of torture as evidence that this offence took place;
9. Ensure that any detained or imprisoned person or their counsel have the right to make a request or complaint regarding the detained or imprisoned person's treatment to relevant authorities, in particular when torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment may have been applied, and that such request or complaint will be promptly dealt with and replied to without undue delay, and that neither the detained or imprisoned person nor any complainant or witness will suffer any prejudice or reprisal as a consequence of their request, complaint or any evidence given;
10. Incorporate education and information regarding the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the training of law enforcement personnel, civil, military and medical personnel, public officials and other persons who may be involved in the custody, interrogation or treatment of any individual subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment, including, as appropriate, on the proportionate use of

force, all available modern scientific methods for the investigation of crimes and the critical importance of reporting instances of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment to superior authorities;

11. Support the efforts of relevant national actors, such as national preventive mechanisms, national human rights institutions or other national bodies or mechanisms, active in preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and, for those who have ratified the OPCAT, to fulfil their obligation to designate or establish national preventive mechanisms that are independent, adequately resourced and effective;

12. Ensure full and ongoing government co-operation, in line with their respective obligations under international law, with applicable international preventive bodies or mechanisms, such as the United Nations Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and with relevant national bodies, such as national human rights institutions, including by allowing unrestricted access to places of detention if such access is an obligation for a participating State under the international law;

13. Fully co-operate with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in conformity with the participating States' obligations under international humanitarian law;

14. Ensure that all allegations of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as wherever there are reasonable grounds to believe that such an act has been committed, are investigated promptly, effectively, thoroughly, and impartially by competent and independent national authorities and ensure that complainants and witnesses are protected against ill-treatment and intimidation as a consequence of their complaint or evidence given;

15. Ensure that those who encourage, instigate, order, tolerate, acquiesce in, consent to or perpetrate acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are held responsible, brought to justice and punished in a manner commensurate with the severity of the offence, including the officials in charge of any place of detention or other place in which persons are deprived of their liberty where the prohibited act is found to have been committed;

16. Provide redress for the victims of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, encompassing effective remedy and adequate, effective and prompt reparation, which should include restitution, fair and adequate compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition, taking into full account the specific needs of the victim;

17. Ensure that appropriate rehabilitation services are promptly available without discrimination to all victims and take effective measures for ensuring a safe and enabling environment for accessing and providing rehabilitation services to victims of torture;

18. Consider developing measures to support all persons affected by torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including victims' children and other immediate family members;

19. Promote dissemination of information for victims about the availability of rehabilitation services and ensure that the procedures for obtaining rehabilitation are transparent;
20. Support the efforts of civil society organizations working to prevent and combat torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enable their active contribution, as appropriate, and make use of information provided by them in alleged cases of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
21. Take appropriate effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to prevent and prohibit the production, trade, export, import and use of equipment that has no practical use other than for the purpose of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
22. Continue to make use of, or consider drawing on, ODIHR's advice, expertise and technical assistance in the field of preventing and combating of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/7/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“The United States is pleased to join consensus on this decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited under international humanitarian law and States Parties to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment have obligations to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment are an affront to human dignity and our values. This decision wisely recognizes that the prohibition of torture is a peremptory norm of general international law for the purposes of the rules articulated in Article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

The United States places great importance on complying with its legal obligations related to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and is deeply committed to preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; to pursuing justice on behalf of victims; and to denying perpetrators safe haven in our country. In joining consensus on this decision, we refer to our obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, taking into account our reservations, understandings and declarations thereto. Further, the decision should be understood in the context of international humanitarian law, such as the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which is the *lex specialis* with respect to armed

conflict and occupation, and, as such, is the controlling body of law with respect to the conduct of hostilities and the protection of war victims. The United States also wishes to underscore that OSCE decisions do not create or alter rights or obligations under international law, and we understand this resolution to be consistent with our current practices and policies, which effectively implement US obligations related to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

We further reiterate our view, expressed in the United Nations General Assembly and elsewhere, that trade matters belong before the World Trade Organization, not other multilateral bodies. The United States encourages other States to take all appropriate measures to prevent torture and to consider current US policies and practices as best practices for the implementation of their obligations regarding the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishments.

I request that the text of this statement be attached to the Ministerial Council decision adopted and included in the journal of today's meeting."

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/7/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America (also on behalf of the United Kingdom):

"In connection with the adoption of the decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, I would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure. I am making this statement on behalf of the United States as well as the United Kingdom.

We welcome the adoption of this decision. It is an important decision, in which we are jointly reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the OSCE area.

Regarding the paragraph on the full co-operation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), we would have hoped for a more detailed call to provide access to the ICRC to places of deprivation of liberty and detainees, in a manner consistent with its own working modalities and international humanitarian law.

Providing such access is addressed in the Geneva Conventions, specifically in Article 126 of Geneva Convention III and Articles 76 and 143 of Geneva Convention IV. Furthermore, impartial humanitarian organizations like the ICRC may offer their services to parties to an armed conflict, as notably provided in Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions. Moreover, the working modalities of the ICRC have been standard practice and

can be crucial, *inter alia*, to ascertain the true situation in places of detention and to ensure the confidentiality of these visits.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this statement be attached to the decision and the journal of the day.”

Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/7/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Switzerland (also on behalf of Andorra, Canada, Germany-European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and San Marino):

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the adoption of the decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, I would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure. I am making this statement on behalf of Andorra, Canada, the European Union and its Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, San Marino and Switzerland.

We welcome the adoption of this decision. It is an important decision, in which we are jointly reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the OSCE area.

Regarding the paragraph on the full co-operation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), we would have hoped for a stronger call to provide full access to the ICRC to all places of deprivation of liberty and detainees, in accordance with its own working modalities and international humanitarian law. Providing such access is a specific obligation under the Geneva Conventions, specifically in accordance with Article 126 of Geneva Convention III and Articles 76 and 143 of Geneva Convention IV. Furthermore, impartial humanitarian organizations like the ICRC have a right to offer their services to conduct their humanitarian activities, as notably provided in Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions. Moreover, the working modalities of the ICRC have been standard practice and are crucial, *inter alia*, to establish the true situation in places of detention and to ensure the confidentiality of these visits.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this statement be attached to the decision and the journal of the day.”

Attachment 4 to MC.DEC/7/20

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

The delegation of Germany, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

“In connection with the adoption of this decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, I would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, Albania in its national capacity, Canada, Georgia, Iceland, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States of America.

We welcome the adoption of this important decision, which we believe will reinforce the efforts of the OSCE and all participating States on the pressing issue of the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the OSCE area.

We would like to stress that the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is a peremptory norm of international law without territorial limitation, which applies at all times, in all places and under any circumstances, including situations of occupation.

We express our grave concern over the persistence of cases of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the OSCE area, including areas under occupation as well as in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol illegally annexed by Russia and in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine currently not under Ukrainian Government control due to acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014.

We believe that the decision would have benefited from having explicit language that underlined the need to provide access to places of deprivation of liberty and to detainees by international human rights monitors, within their mandates, which is an important safeguard and a crucial element to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This remains the position of the European Union and aligning participating States.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this statement be attached to the decision and the journal of the day.”

DECISION No. 8/20
TIME AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OSCE
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
(MC.DEC/8/20 of 4 December 2020)

The Ministerial Council,

Decides that the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council will be held in Stockholm on 2 and 3 December 2021.

III. STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIRPERSON AND DELEGATIONS

**STATEMENT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON (ALSO ON BEHALF OF NORTH MACEDONIA,
POLAND, SLOVAKIA AND SWEDEN)**
(Annex 23 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

We, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Albania, Sweden, Poland, and North Macedonia, representing the previous, current, incoming, and future Chairmanships of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), reaffirm that our commonly agreed OSCE commitments and the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security must be upheld by the Organization's participating States – every day and in every undertaking.

In this regard, we particularly thank the OSCE Secretariat, the OSCE institutions, the special and personal representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office and the various OSCE field operations for their valuable continued support and contributions. We welcome the new Secretary General and heads of institutions; strong management of our institutions is critical to our ability to meet the tasks before us.

Our shared principles date back to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the Paris Charter of 1990, and it is high time that all OSCE participating States live up to these shared commitments.

The most serious challenge to security and stability in Europe is the conflict with respect to Ukraine, and its continued, devastating humanitarian impact. While we welcome the improved situation on the ground in eastern Ukraine in the second half of 2020, a sustainable political solution to the conflict must be found that upholds OSCE principles and commitments, in line with the Minsk agreements, and in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We continue to support the ongoing, active efforts undertaken in the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group, and note the OSCE's continued and valuable engagement through the work of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). We state again that the SMM needs to be able to fully implement its mandate without restrictions throughout all of Ukraine.

We similarly reiterate our support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We underline our concern about the continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We express our unwavering support for the Geneva International Discussions in facilitating a peaceful resolution of this conflict; the Geneva International Discussions remains the key international platform in this regard and the OSCE is ready to continue its leadership of this format, together with the European Union and the United Nations.

We cannot let this Ministerial Council close without referencing the recent military escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context, where thousands of lives were lost and the humanitarian situation remains worrying. We welcome the cessation of fighting and the efforts that made this possible, and express our full support for initiatives under the auspices of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group to relaunch the negotiation process; substantive

negotiations must be continued in good faith in order to reach agreement on the steps for a comprehensive, peaceful and lasting resolution to the conflict.

The OSCE remains a vital instrument for preventing and settling other conflicts in the OSCE area in a peaceful and negotiated manner, and continues to facilitate the Transdnisterian settlement process. We welcome the Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdnisterian Settlement Process in the “5+2” Format. And we reiterate the strong resolve to attain a comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable settlement of the Transdnisterian conflict based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders with a special status for Transdnisteria that fully guarantees the human, political, economic and social rights of its population.

With regards to arms control and security co-operation, we support initiatives aimed at strengthening and modernizing the Vienna Document. We call on all participating States to fully implement their commitments under the relevant instruments of conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building measures – both to their letter and spirit – in order to make practical contribution to enhancement of military transparency and risk reduction.

We value and support the Structured Dialogue on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area. We will continue this informal, open-ended, and State-driven dialogue in order to promote greater understanding of these issues in the wider politico-military context, including in the areas of threat perception, transparency, risk reduction, and incident prevention.

We also reaffirm the importance of the economic and environmental dimension as an integral part of the OSCE’s approach to security and its potential for confidence building. We recognize that, while new and emerging digital technologies have the potential to enhance security and co-operation, they also have the potential to create new risks and challenges across all aspects of comprehensive security.

Across the world and in our region we see democratic values, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law being challenged and eroded. It is in the OSCE’s third dimension that our comprehensive concept of security is at its most powerful. We deeply regret the inability to hold the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) this year due to the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and look forward to an even more vibrant HDIM in Warsaw in 2021.

We underline our continued concern about the situation in Belarus. OSCE commitments must be fully complied with and we invite Belarus to avail itself of the tools at the OSCE’s disposal to monitor the implementation of the commitments that the participating States have undertaken in the field of human rights and democracy. We are deeply worried by reports of grave human rights violations in the wake of August presidential elections, including excessive use of force against peaceful protestors, widespread detentions and arbitrary arrests, including of journalists, and reports of violence against protestors and those in detention. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained, and for a complete and transparent investigation into all allegations of human rights violations and to hold those responsible accountable. We encourage efforts to find a way out of the situation through an end to violence through an inclusive, open, and constructive

national dialogue. We regret that the offer by the current and incoming Chairpersons-in-Office to support and facilitate communication and co-operation in Belarus was not yet accepted; it could be an opportunity to move from confrontation to dialogue.

With challenges to our principles threatening our comprehensive security, it is through dialogue, inclusivity, and respect for our commitments that we have the best chance to make a positive difference for the people we serve. We believe the OSCE can still make that difference. To do so, we must keep dialogue open even when the odds are against us. We therefore urge the full and continued use of the OSCE's existing forums for dialogue and decision-making, in order to foster better implementation of commitments, peacefully manage relations between States, and rebuild trust and confidence.

We also need to continue to implement the women, peace and security agenda. It is essential that we include and secure the meaningful participation of women and men in all phases of the conflict cycle.

We also acknowledge that security in the OSCE area is strongly interlinked with that of the neighbouring regions and commend that our partnership with the OSCE Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation has been steadily strengthened over the years. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation, we renew our commitment to deepen and expand dialogue and co-operation with Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, Korea and Thailand, the Asian Partners for Co-operation in the OSCE.

The OSCE's strength lies in its participating States being firmly grounded upon, and steadfast in their respect for, our principles and commitments. We must always be committed to them; there can be no retreat. These are our principles, and they must be upheld.

**STATEMENT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON (ALSO ON BEHALF OF NORTH MACEDONIA,
POLAND, SLOVAKIA AND SWEDEN)**
(Annex 24 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

We, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Albania, Sweden, Slovakia, Poland, and North Macedonia, representing the previous, current, incoming, and future Chairmanships of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), remain deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict with respect to Ukraine. While we welcome the improved situation on the ground in eastern Ukraine in the second half of 2020, much remains to be done for a comprehensive and peaceful resolution of the conflict. Bearing in mind our commonly agreed principles and commitments, we remain troubled by the situation and by the conflict's wider impact on security and stability in Europe and beyond. The conflict made clear that adherence to international law, as well as to our principles and commitments, cannot be taken for granted and that respect for such principles and commitments needs to be restored.

We would have strongly wished to have seen consensus emerge on a ministerial declaration that would focus on the OSCE's efforts towards peace with respect to Ukraine. This could serve as an impetus for the conflict settlement process. Unfortunately, continued disagreement, in particular over reference to the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, to the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, to the maritime areas surrounding the Crimean peninsula, as well as related challenges with respect to the human rights and fundamental freedoms, made it impossible to reach consensus on the text. However, we welcome that during the negotiations, almost all participating States clearly reaffirmed their respect and support for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

The OSCE will work towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict, fully committed to upholding the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and all other OSCE principles and commitments, to which all participating States have agreed.

Like all the other participating States, we deplore the devastating humanitarian impact of the conflict, which in its seventh year is continuing to cause casualties and further suffering for civilians. We recall the obligations related to the respect for and the protection of civilians. We underline the need to address the serious socio-economic implications of the conflict. We emphasize the need to ensure safe access, delivery, storage, and distribution of humanitarian assistance to those in need, on the basis of an international mechanism and with respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, in line with international humanitarian principles and standards.

We underline the importance of the respect for and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, within the whole territory of Ukraine.

We reaffirm the importance of achieving full and comprehensive implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We support the efforts undertaken in the Normandy format, welcome the summit meeting held in Paris on 9 December 2019, and call on the sides to fully implement the

Common Agreed Conclusions of the Paris “Normandy” Summit in their entirety as soon as possible. It is our hope that we will see the continuation of the Normandy format efforts at the highest level.

We recognize the crucial role of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We commend and reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group and of the co-ordinators of its working groups on economic, humanitarian, political and security issues. We appreciate the good offices that have been provided by Belarus in hosting the meetings. We call on the sides to engage in the TCG discussions constructively, in good faith, and focusing on the substance of the Minsk agreements.

We welcome the considerable level of commitment to the ceasefire since the measures to strengthen the ceasefire took effect on 27 July 2020. This demonstrates that positive steps are possible when there is political will. We note that the months since 27 July 2020 have marked the longest period with a significantly low number of ceasefire violations, including many days with no ceasefire violations recorded by the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). No civilian casualty due to shelling or fire from small arms and light weapons was corroborated by the SMM for close to four months. Ongoing ceasefire violations, including the first confirmed incident involving civilian casualties directly caused by the use of weapons since 27 July, are however worrying. We reaffirm the importance of adhering to the full and comprehensive ceasefire and ensuring the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

We call upon the sides to build on this improved situation on the ground and to make progress in other aspects of the settlement of the conflict. While we commend the common understanding achieved in the TCG on identifying additional areas for demining and for disengagement of forces and hardware, we call upon the sides to engage constructively to reach the final decisions on these issues and to implement them. We also call upon the sides to proceed with other aspects of the Common Agreed Conclusions of the Paris “Normandy” Summit, regarding the immediate measures to stabilize the situation in the conflict area and the measures to implement the political provisions of the Minsk agreements.

We welcome that, during the negotiations, all participating States commended the essential work of the SMM in contributing to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security. We express our sincere appreciation of the dedication of the women and men working in the Mission.

We strongly reaffirm that the SMM is mandated to have safe and secure access throughout Ukraine, including in areas adjacent to the internationally recognized borders. We remain concerned by the continuing restrictions on its freedom of movement and recall that there can be no justification for any form of interference in the Mission’s work and that the SMM must be provided with the conditions necessary for it to implement its mandate. We commend the SMM for the efforts it is making to this end, while taking into account duty-of-care considerations amidst the extraordinary circumstances of 2020. The Mission must have free access across the line of contact and within non-government controlled areas. We condemn any threat to the safety and security of SMM staff and the targeting of SMM assets, including its unmanned aerial vehicles. These incidents should be prevented and remedial action should be taken.

We recall the obligations relating to the protection of civilian infrastructure that is critical for women, men, girls and boys on both sides of the line of contact and commend the valuable efforts of the SMM in facilitating the functioning of such infrastructure, as well as in reporting on other human dimension issues.

We denounce the indiscriminate use of mines and other explosive objects, which continue to cause casualties among civilians, including children, and pose a constant life threatening risk to the population and the SMM staff, even in the improved security situation observed since 27 July 2020. We underline the urgent need to proceed with demining, to refrain from laying additional mines, increase mine awareness and fulfil all commitments on mine action.

We welcome the mutual release and exchange of conflict-related detainees, including the most recent ones on 29 December 2019 and 16 April 2020, and call for the release and exchange of all hostages and unlawfully detained persons, based on the principle of “all for all”, starting with “all identified for all identified”. We stress the importance of the full and unconditional access to all detained persons by international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

We welcome the plan to open new crossing points near the settlements of Zolote and Shchastia and urge their full opening as soon as possible. More efforts are required to improve the freedom of movement of civilians and we encourage the re-opening of existing crossing points and the further opening of new ones along the line of contact, based primarily on humanitarian criteria, in line with the Common Agreed Conclusions of the Paris “Normandy” Summit.

We welcome the role played by the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk.

We call for enhanced transparency in the areas adjacent to the Ukrainian-Russian border, through monitoring activities as provided for in the Minsk agreements, until the reinstatement of full control of the State border by the Government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area.

We express our gratitude to the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine and the other relevant OSCE executive structures, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media; as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for their contributions to the efforts in addressing the consequences of the conflict, and encourage them to continue their result oriented work.

We also need to continue to implement the women, peace and security agenda. It is essential that we include and secure the meaningful participation of women and men in all conflict resolution efforts.

We underline the OSCE’s valuable efforts regarding developments with respect to Ukraine, which demonstrate its added value as a regional arrangement for the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations.

STATEMENT BY

**THE CHAIRPERSON (ALSO ON BEHALF OF ANDORRA, AUSTRIA,
AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, BELGIUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA,
BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, THE CZECH REPUBLIC,
DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY,
GREECE, THE HOLY SEE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY,
KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN,
LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONACO,
MONGOLIA, MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH
MACEDONIA, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, SAN MARINO, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA,
SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND, TAJIKISTAN,
TURKEY, TURKMENISTAN, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM,
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND UZBEKISTAN)**

(Annex 25 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

We recognize that COVID-19 constitutes an unprecedented global challenge, including to all participating States and Partners for Co-operation, and acknowledge the diverse ways in which the pandemic has had an impact on comprehensive security across the entire OSCE area, in the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions.

We express our condolences to the families of the victims of COVID-19 and our sympathy to those whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by the pandemic. We pay tribute to the efforts made by health and other essential and front line workers in addressing the pandemic through measures to protect the health, safety and well-being of our citizens.

We underscore the need for solidarity, unity, transparency and intensified effective international and multilateral co-operation in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, and call upon participating States and other relevant stakeholders to advance, with determination, bold and concerted actions to address its immediate and long term impacts, in line with the norms and principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and in subsequent OSCE commitments, and Purposes and Principles of the United Nations Charter. We express our support for the role of the OSCE in identifying and facilitating action by participating States to address the impact of the pandemic on our comprehensive security and in assisting international efforts towards peace, including by the United Nations.

We recognize that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic can affect individuals differently and have a disproportionate impact on the elderly, women, caregivers, youth and children, as well as on persons belonging to national minorities in our States. We acknowledge the need for our responses to the pandemic to take into account instances of discrimination, poverty, exclusion and inequalities, as well as domestic violence, which affects in particular women, children and those more vulnerable to such instances. We acknowledge that emergency measures can have a distinct impact on persons belonging to religious or belief communities, as well as the positive role those communities play in responding to the pandemic.

We applaud the essential contribution of women in COVID-19 response efforts and reaffirm our commitment to promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in our response efforts with the view to achieving gender equality.

We call upon participating States to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected and protected while combating the COVID-19 pandemic, and that responses to the pandemic comply fully with participating States' obligations under international human rights law and OSCE commitments.

We recognize the primary responsibility of participating States in adopting and implementing responses to the pandemic specific to their domestic context. We underscore that states of emergency or other emergency measures, policies and strategies put in place to address the pandemic should be targeted, strictly necessary, transparent, non-discriminatory, proportionate, time-bound and constantly reviewed, and in accordance with participating States' obligations under applicable international human rights law and relevant OSCE commitments.

We express deep concern about rising instances of racist, xenophobic, and discriminatory public discourse and acts that appeared in the context of the pandemic, also on the Internet, and in line with relevant OSCE commitments, remain committed to addressing and combating them, including as part of the COVID-19 response.

We note with concern reports of some representatives of civil society organizations being threatened and attacked due to their work during, or in relation to, the pandemic. We reaffirm relevant OSCE commitments pertaining to the role and importance of national human rights institutions, where applicable, as well as civil society organizations, and recognize their role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize the importance of the free and transparent flow of information and knowledge in our response to the pandemic and encourage the dissemination of accurate, clear and evidence- and science-based information, bearing in mind the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers and through any media. We underline the need to take steps to counter the spread of disinformation, noting with concern that it can mislead, including on the origins and outcomes of the pandemic, cast doubts on the effectiveness of democratic governance, lead to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and incite to violence, hatred, discrimination or hostility. We acknowledge the important contribution of independent, free and pluralistic media in disseminating accurate information and countering the spread of disinformation during the pandemic.

We note that COVID-19 has caused widespread economic disruption, leading to a severe global economic recession and adversely impacting livelihoods and humanitarian needs across the OSCE area. We acknowledge that the pandemic has had an adverse impact on employment, including that of women and youth, as well as on the realization of social and economic rights. We recognize that participating States dependent on commodities, remittances or tourism have been particularly affected by the measures to contain the pandemic and we underscore the importance of promoting sustainable tourism to support our recovery. We encourage actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that can contribute to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We

strongly encourage that economic recovery measures focus on rebuilding stronger and more resilient economies.

We emphasize the importance of environmental protection, including through, *inter alia*, disaster risk reduction and the sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the importance of collaborating across the environment and public health sectors.

We are determined to promote digitalization in our recovery, noting how it has already reduced the impact of the pandemic, and acknowledging the importance of the digital economy as a driver for innovation and growth in the OSCE area.

We encourage participating States to put in place safeguards where new technologies are used for public health surveillance in response to COVID-19, including purpose limitations and adequate privacy and data protections.

We underscore the importance of scientific and technological co-operation in responding to the pandemic, particularly in the health sector, as well as co-operation to prevent, prepare for and respond to zoonotic infections, including those originating from wildlife, with pandemic potential. We note with satisfaction the significant progress on the development and supply of COVID-19 vaccines, vital for human health and security.

We recognize that corruption, including in the health sector, can reduce the available resources for responding to COVID-19 and we are determined to address it. We underscore the importance of promoting good governance and transparency, to help strengthen trust and accountability in addressing the pandemic.

We remain committed to preventing and addressing the increasing risks and challenges in the fight against transnational organized crime, including from the use of ICTs by transnational organized crime groups, stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic implications.

We recognize the considerable impact of the pandemic on border security and management in the OSCE area, and the importance of co-ordinating border services with wider government efforts to protect health, including by ensuring the flow and availability of vital medical and food supplies and other essential goods and services, to combat the pandemic. We will continue to co-operate to enhance our preparedness, in line with relevant OSCE commitments on border security and management.

We note the pause on the conduct of verification activities, including under the auspices of the Vienna Document 2011, due to the unprecedented conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This affects military stability, predictability and transparency in the OSCE area. We encourage work towards their earliest possible resumption, taking into account the public health situation.

We recognize the significant impact of the pandemic on OSCE activities. We acknowledge that in response to the public health situation in the OSCE area, executive structures have had to adapt or suspend temporarily their monitoring and observation activities, where applicable, which affected in particular those executive structures which could not perform fully their activities by working remotely. We underscore that the safety and security of OSCE staff and duty of care are of utmost importance.

We welcome and encourage the adaptability of the OSCE in using digital platforms to maintain and promote dialogue, ensure timely decision-making and continue implementation of all mandates. We value sustained efforts by the OSCE executive structures to respond to requests for assistance by participating States to support them in combating the pandemic, including by facilitating co-operation, sharing of best practices, and assisting in the implementation of OSCE commitments in these extraordinary circumstances.

We encourage continued co-operation among the participating States, Partners for Co-operation, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE executive structures, and all relevant stakeholders, to help further support the development and implementation of our responses to the pandemic.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF AZERBAIJAN
(Annex 2 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate H.E. Mr. Edi Rama, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania for excellent organization of the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. I also wish every success to our distinguished colleague, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden H. E. Ms. Ann Linde, as the incoming OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

In my capacity representing the Chairman-in-Office of the Turkic Council, I would like to express our gratitude to the Albanian Chairmanship for inviting the Cooperation Council and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking States to the Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, as guests. We firmly believe that their active participation in the work of the OSCE, will contribute to the attainment of common goals shared by these organizations.

Dear colleagues,

This year we commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which form a common foundation of security for all participating States. The principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and reconfirmed in the Charter of Paris, in particular those related to sovereign equality, territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers, remain valid as ever before and form the basis for our relations.

Non-compliance with international law and with OSCE principles lie behind the immediate causes of violent conflicts, which continue to pose a serious threat to regional peace and security. On this solemn occasion, the participating States must reaffirm their commitment to ensure unconditional respect for, and implementation of, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, without any exception, double standards, geographic or any other preferences.

The trilateral statement signed on 10 November 2020 between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia has created a ground for putting an end to the almost three-decades-long armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

I am pleased to inform the Ministerial Council that implementation of this agreement ensured cessation of all military activities and return of Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachyn districts to Azerbaijan.

The 10 November statement also contains an important provision related to the return of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their homes under the supervision of the UNHCR.

The agreement also envisages removal of obstacles to all economic and transport links in the region and guarantees for safe movement of persons, vehicles and cargo between

Armenia and Azerbaijan in both directions, including connection between the mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Under the trilateral statement, the Joint Monitoring Centre of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey will be established to monitor the implementation of agreements by Armenia and Azerbaijan.

I would like to thank the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey for their respective contributions to make this agreement a reality. These neighbouring States play an important role as guarantors of the above-mentioned agreement, implementation of which will ensure long-overdue peace and stability in the South Caucasus region.

Sustaining peace, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, providing humanitarian assistance to those in need, including returning IDPs and refugees, should be absolute priority. To this end, Azerbaijan is ready to work with relevant international partners, including the ICRC, the UNHCR and other UN agencies as well as individual States, which are willing to contribute to peace and stability in the region, in full compliance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on humanitarian assistance of 1991.

Azerbaijan is resolute to re-integrate its citizens of Armenian origin residing in the territories of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan into its political, social, economic space, guaranteeing the same rights and freedoms with all the citizens of Azerbaijan regardless of their ethnic, religious affiliation on an equal and non-discriminatory basis. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides the solid legal framework in this regard.

Peaceful co-existence of Azerbaijani and Armenian residents of the conflict-affected territories based on respect to each other's security, ethnic and religious identity within the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan must and shall be finally ensured.

We are entering a new post-conflict stage, a stage of reconstruction and rehabilitation, a stage of restoration of peaceful co-existence. New opportunities for development and co-operation are emerging. We call upon our colleagues and partners to assess and take advantage of the new promising realities.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA
(Annex 3 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Madam Chairperson,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to join colleagues and thank the Albanian Chairmanship, your team for tireless efforts and leadership of this Organization throughout the year.

The year 2020 has been marked and profoundly affected by the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet for the people of Artsakh and Armenia the large-scale war unleashed by Azerbaijan with the direct involvement of its allies – Turkey and foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists – added another dimension to the already dire situation.

During the 44 days of war Azerbaijan and Turkey, in a clear defiance of their international obligations and in violations of their commitments towards the OSCE, despite numerous calls made by OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, despite three agreements to cease hostilities, despite persistent calls of international community, continued the offensive. The aggression was accompanied by numerous gross violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts, by war crimes including deliberate targeting of civilian population and critical infrastructure, executions, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners of war and civilian captives, beheadings, mutilation of dead bodies and other well-documented crimes with the ultimate purpose of ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population from their ancestral lands.

In this context, we welcome the consensus reached on the draft Ministerial Council decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, which we consider as the most important outcome of this ministerial.

Today we should acknowledge the efforts of the Russian Federation and personal engagement of President Vladimir Putin in establishing a ceasefire and stopping war also through providing peacekeeping forces on the ground. We are also grateful to France and the United States for their efforts and engagement to achieve a ceasefire.

The actions of Azerbaijan and its allies created new dangerous precedent for addressing conflict situations in the area of responsibility of the OSCE.

First, it is the recruitment, transfer and deployment of foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists from Syria and Libya in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone by Turkey which flagrantly violates the international obligations and OSCE commitments on combating the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. This is the first time ever that two OSCE participating States have deployed terrorist fighters and jihadists in support of their armed forces in the context of conflict in the OSCE area of responsibility, a fact that was acknowledged not only by a number of the OSCE participating States, but the relevant United Nations body.

Second, Azerbaijan's aggression against Artsakh was greatly instigated and supported politically and militarily by the Turkish leadership in its pursuit of expansionist power projection into the South Caucasus and beyond.

Third, Azerbaijan and its allies unleashed the war against Artsakh falsely claiming the legitimate right to use force, which is a clear breach of international law. Furthermore, Azerbaijan and Turkey now insist that the situation resulting from the use of force, aggression and war, large-scale violations of international law, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, should be considered as resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We strongly condemn the use of force against the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination and we will not accept any attempt to deprive the people of Nagorno-Karabakh of their rights.

Despite assurances that have been voiced out today as well, Armenians have been ethnically cleansed from the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh recently occupied by Azerbaijan, those few who stayed were killed or tortured and expelled by Azerbaijani armed forces from their ancestral homeland. This reality clearly attests to the fact that Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be placed under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan.

The comprehensive resolution of the conflict aimed at achieving lasting and sustainable peace in the region include:

- Status of Artsakh based on realization of the right of self-determination, security of its people;
- De-occupation by Azerbaijan of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Safe and dignified return to their homes of the recently displaced population of Artsakh;
- Preservation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage on the territories that fell under the control of Azerbaijan;
- Immediate and unconditional exchange of prisoners of war and hostages based on principle all for all, repatriation of remains should be implemented without any further delay.

The trilateral statement of 9 November should be considered without prejudice to the final political and durable settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Only a political, negotiated settlement that will respect rights of all may bring peace and reconciliation to the South Caucasus region.

At the same time, to achieve this, Turkey, whose genocidal record against Armenians is well known, should abandon its destabilizing policy and refrain from any actions which could further fuel tensions. In this context we call on all OSCE participating States to continue exerting pressure on Turkey to withdraw its military personnel from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, from the South Caucasus, together with its affiliated terrorist fighters. So far there is no sign that foreign terrorist fighters are being withdrawn from the conflict area. Quite opposite, there are persistent reports on further spread of

terrorist fighters and mercenaries and plans to resettle them in areas of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is currently occupied by Azerbaijan.

The lasting and sustainable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be achieved through the negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship, which is the only internationally mandated mechanism to deal with settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this context we took positive note of the statement of heads of delegations of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries issued earlier today, which once again showed the unity and determination of the Co-Chair countries in pursuing a negotiated, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

We also concur that all the foreign mercenaries, brought in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone by Turkey and Azerbaijan, should be withdrawn fully and promptly from the region.

In conclusion, I would like to welcome Sweden as incoming Chairmanship and wish them every success.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF AZERBAIJAN**
(Annex 4 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Madam Chairperson,

Since, a number of delegations referred in their statements to the conflict that had been raging on the territory of Azerbaijan for the last 28 years, I would like to exercise the right of reply. For the first time in the OSCE history we witness such an extremely high interest to the conflict by those delegations, which have never before articulated their respective positions on the continued occupation of territories of Azerbaijan, which was condemned by relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

We would have welcomed such an active, yet belated engagement by the OSCE participating States, if the conflict had been ongoing. Over the past three decades Azerbaijan had consistently stated that it was the most interested party in finding a soonest, durable solution to the conflict. We had been emphatically calling the OSCE participating States to actively engage in the conflict resolution. Regretfully, our numerous calls remained unanswered due to the lack of interest by the OSCE to restore its ownership of the peace process, which remained dormant, if not paralyzed. Right now, the timing, rationale and similarity of views expressed by these delegations raise certain questions in Azerbaijan. Let me stress that no one has the authority to impose on the side to the conflict its views or to force through old ideas and proposals, which do not enjoy consensus.

After three decades of failed OSCE-led negotiations, the trilateral statement signed on 10 November 2020 finally put an end to the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The President of Azerbaijan in his yesterday statement at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in Response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) stressed that “the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was resolved by military-political means”. We expect the OSCE participating States to extend their support to the trilateral agreement and encourage the parties to honour their obligations under it.

As Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan underlined in his statement at Tirana Ministerial Council, we are entering a new post-conflict stage, a stage of reconstruction and rehabilitation, a stage of restoration of peaceful co-existence. New opportunities for development and co-operation are emerging. We call upon our colleagues and partners to assess and take advantage of the new promising realities. To this end, Azerbaijan is ready to work with international partners, which are supportive to the implementation of the above-mentioned trilateral statement and contribute to building peace and stability in the South Caucasus region based on the OSCE principles and commitments.

In closing, I would recommend to newly appointed Foreign Minister of Armenia to abandon reciting obsolete, falsified and distorted conflict narrative and follow their Prime Minister in accepting and reconciling with new realities on the ground and implementing obligations under the trilateral agreement, which is imperative for sustainable ceasefire and peace in the region.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF TURKEY
(Annex 5 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

Yesterday, in his speech here at the Ministerial Council, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu emphasized that with the recent agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, there is real chance for peace after three decades. He stressed that this will certainly have positive implications on regional stability as well as Azerbaijani-Armenian and Turkish-Armenian relations.

On the other hand, given the significant developments, it is disappointing and it is sad that the Armenian delegation chose to continue its smear campaign.

We totally reject the allegations which were brought yesterday afternoon. They are baseless.

Such an ill-conceived approach will benefit neither the region nor the respective country itself.

Frankly, it is time to turn the page and try to be a part of the solution. It is difficult given the hard feelings on both sides, but it is doable. We all need it; the OSCE needs it; and we must all help realize it.

Turkey believes that the way for sustainable peace and stability can be paved together. New opportunities will arise and the whole region will benefit from this process. We sincerely believe that the Armenian people will ultimately also be winners in the peace. For that, we need the Government of Armenia to change course.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA**
(Annex 6 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Madam Chairperson,

I asked for the floor to exercise my right of reply.

We consider the statement delivered by the Azerbaijani delegation as another futile attempt to cover up and even to justify Azerbaijan's gross violations of the OSCE commitments during its large-scale and unprovoked war against Artsakh, in a clear defiance of international humanitarian law.

I would like to reiterate the statement delivered yesterday by Foreign Minister of Armenia, wherein he stated that during the 44 days of the war, Azerbaijan and Turkey, in clear defiance of their international obligations and in violation of their commitments towards the OSCE, despite numerous calls made by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, despite three agreements to cease hostilities, despite persistent calls of the international community, continued the aggression against Artsakh which was accompanied by numerous gross violations of laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts and by war crimes including the deliberate targeting of the civilian population and critical infrastructure, executions, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners of war and civilian captives, beheadings, mutilation of dead bodies and other well-documented heinous crimes with the ultimate purpose of the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population from their ancestral lands.

We call on Azerbaijan and its authorities to stop fuelling anti-Armenian sentiments in Azerbaijani society.

On the one hand, the Azerbaijani representatives in various international forums state their readiness to ensure the peaceful co-existence of Azerbaijanis and Armenians, on the other hand, the anti-Armenian rhetoric which amounts to instigating hatred and intolerance towards all Armenians is a daily routine in Azerbaijan. As a consequence of that hate propaganda, on a daily basis we are witnessing cases of brutal murder, torture and humiliation of Armenian civilians and prisoners of war by the Azerbaijani armed forces, which are filmed and widely disseminated and praised in the Azerbaijani segment of social media.

This is the reality that one cannot deny and those responsible for war crimes, acts of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment should be brought to justice.

Madam Chairperson,

As stated by my Minister yesterday, the comprehensive resolution of the conflict with the aim of achieving a lasting and sustainable peace in the region should absolutely include the issue of the status of Artsakh to be determined through the realization of the right of self-determination, the issue of security of the people of Artsakh, de-occupation by Azerbaijan of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, safe and dignified return to their homes of

the recently displaced population of Artsakh and the preservation of the Armenian cultural and religious heritage on the territories that fell under the control of Azerbaijan.

One cannot expect to have a lasting and durable solution and at the same time advocate a so-called “military-political” resolution of conflict in the OSCE area, which is a clear violation of the OSCE commitments.

We resolutely reject all groundless allegations and accusations against Armenia contained in the statement of the Azerbaijani-Turkish delegations.

And last, but not least, the Azerbaijani Ambassador should know his limits before advising any delegation, let alone a foreign minister.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ITALY (ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA,
BELGIUM, BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, THE CZECH
REPUBLIC, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FRANCE, GERMANY, GREECE,
HUNGARY, ICELAND, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG,
MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH MACEDONIA,
NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA,
SLOVENIA, SPAIN, TURKEY, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 7 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

This statement is delivered on behalf of the following participating States: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America as well as my own country, Italy.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges affecting all of our nations and societies, and all areas of life, imposing a huge cost in lives lost, as well as a sudden and severe shock to our economies. The proliferation of disinformation, propaganda and misinformation has brought additional challenges in responding to the pandemic. It is apparent that no country can tackle a challenge of such magnitude on its own without consulting and co-ordinating with others. Transparent and honest multilateral approaches have once again proven to be more effective, from sharing information and exchanging data to co-ordinating necessary measures, especially on health-related matters. We have been supporting the response to the pandemic and have cancelled or downscaled military exercises.

Security challenges have not diminished because of COVID-19 and 2020 has seen new fault lines emerging. Key principles and commitments continue to be contravened. The only way to tackle these challenges is for all OSCE participating States to engage in sincere dialogue and multilateral co-operation, based on respect for fundamental principles that lie at the heart of this Organization.

Conflicts in the OSCE area, human rights violations in Belarus, and the poisoning of the leading Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny by a nerve agent from the Novichok group accentuate our concern. We are united in our call on Russia, as a matter of urgency, to be fully transparent and to bring those who ordered and carried out the poisoning to justice, bearing in mind Russia's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We are still facing a dangerous, unpredictable, and fluid security environment, with enduring challenges and threats from all strategic directions; from State and non-State actors; from military forces; and from terrorist and hybrid attacks, including disinformation campaigns and malicious cyber activities. Within the OSCE area, Russia's aggressive actions,

including to attain political goals, challenge Euro-Atlantic security and the rules-based international order.

We continue to respond to the deteriorating security environment by enhancing our resilience, deterrence and defence posture. We remain open to a meaningful dialogue with Russia on the basis of reciprocity, with a view to avoiding misunderstanding, miscalculation, and unintended escalation, and increasing transparency and predictability. We also remain open to a constructive relationship with Russia when Russia's actions make that possible.

The Euro-Atlantic security environment has become less stable and predictable as a result of Russia's illegal and illegitimate attempted annexation of Crimea, which we do not and will not recognize, as well as by Russia's ongoing acts of aggression in eastern Ukraine. We reiterate our full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters. We call on Russia to return control of Crimea to Ukraine. We condemn Russia's ongoing and wide-ranging military build-up on the peninsula, which continues to impact the security situation near the Kerch Strait, Sea of Azov and the Black Sea region. We call on Russia to comply with its international obligations and refrain from hindering access to Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov or otherwise obstructing navigational rights and freedoms. We are deeply concerned by the human rights abuses being carried out by the Russian *de facto* authorities in Crimea against Ukrainian citizens, including Crimean Tatars, and members of other local communities. We call on Russia to immediately release all Ukrainian citizens who remain unjustly detained in Crimea and Russia.

We commend Ukraine for its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and call on Russia to act likewise. We reaffirm our support to a settlement by diplomatic means by implementing the Minsk agreements. Russia, as a signatory to the Minsk agreements bears significant responsibility in this regard. The Normandy Summit in Paris on 9 December 2019 represented an important step towards the reengagement of all sides to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Its conclusions must now be fully implemented. We welcome the fact that following agreement in the Trilateral Contact Group in July on additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire which is largely holding, the number of violations remain at an unprecedentedly low level. We reiterate that the recent improvement in security conditions must be used to overcome the stalemate in the negotiations. We call on Russia to join and not to block efforts to improve humanitarian conditions in eastern Ukraine. We urge Russia to cease all political, financial and military support to militant groups and to stop intervening militarily in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and to withdraw troops, equipment, and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine, and to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination. We reiterate our full support to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. We stress the importance of ensuring its safety and its full and unhindered access throughout the entire territory of Ukraine including Crimea and the Russia-Ukraine border in accordance with its mandate.

Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation instruments have made and should continue to make an essential contribution to achieving our security objectives and to ensuring strategic stability and our collective security. The effectiveness of arms control and confidence- and security-building measures is reliant on political will. We call on all OSCE participating States to fully adhere to their arms control commitments and obligations. We are determined to preserve, strengthen, and modernize conventional arms control in Europe, based on key principles and commitments, including respect for sovereignty and territorial

integrity, refraining from the threat or use of force, reciprocity, transparency, and host nation consent.

Russia's ongoing selective implementation of the Vienna Document and the Treaty on Open Skies, and its long-standing non-implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, combined with its aggressive military posture, have undermined our security. We call on Russia to return to full implementation of and compliance with the letter and spirit of all of its international obligations and commitments, which is essential to rebuild military transparency and increase predictability in the Euro-Atlantic region.

Enhancing military transparency and confidence in the entire OSCE area is, and will remain, a top priority in the Forum for Security Co-operation. We consider that full implementation and modernization of the Vienna Document is the most critical step that OSCE participating States can take in that regard. We appeal to Russia to abide by its commitments, fully and in good faith, and to be open and transparent about its no-notice snap exercises and large-scale exercises. OSCE participating States should continue to address effective risk reduction and incident prevention and how to increase military transparency, including in the informal discussions within the Structured Dialogue in accordance with the Hamburg mandate. The OSCE remains an important and inclusive platform for rebuilding trust and confidence through multilateral military dialogue amongst 57 participating States.

We welcome the broad support for modernizing the Vienna Document and look forward to intensified discussions in the Forum for Security Co-operation leading to consensus on an updated Vienna Document at the 2021 ministerial. We regret the fact that the ministerial draft declaration on the implementation and modernization of the Vienna Document 2011 was not adopted. We, therefore, call on all the participating States to constructively engage without precondition in negotiations on the joint Vienna Document modernization proposal supported by the majority of participating States as a sound basis for such an ambitious negotiation. We believe that a resumption of active and collaborative negotiations by all participating States on the mutually beneficial and long-overdue modernization of the Vienna Document is essential to demonstrate the necessary political will to address widely shared security concerns about the European security environment and ask Russia to reconsider its position.

The Treaty on Open Skies is an important legally binding instrument and a recognized element of the confidence-building framework in the Euro-Atlantic area, intended to provide a level of transparency and thus contributes to the promotion of confidence, stability and security in Europe. In this regard, we welcome the decision on the distribution of active quotas that enables flights to continue in 2021. However, only the full and correct implementation of the Treaty's provisions will guarantee its intended contribution to security, to the benefit of all States Parties to the Treaty. We call on the Russian Federation to return to full compliance with the Treaty.

At the same time, we value the Structured Dialogue on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area as an opportunity to renew a meaningful exchange of ideas among all of the stakeholders to rebuild trust. We commend the Spanish Chairperson of the Informal Working Group and his team for the significant and valuable work done this year in the Structured Dialogue addressing risk reduction and threat perceptions. We actively support the continuation of the Structured Dialogue as a transparent, inclusive process owned and driven by participating States, and without a predetermined

outcome. We acknowledge that this is a long-term process, which will take more time. We encourage all participating States to engage constructively in these efforts in Vienna.

We stand firm in our commitment to the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and are taking stronger action together to prevent and counter it.

We regret the fact that the ministerial draft decision on the normative aspects of small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SALW/SCA) was not adopted.

This year we mark the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. In this regard, we reiterate our strong commitment to its full implementation. We regret the fact that the ministerial draft decision on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 in the areas of work of the Forum for Security Co-operation was not adopted.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, participating States need, without further delay, to rebuild the co-operative security environment, return to real dialogue and strengthen the international rules-based order.

The participating States subscribing to this statement request its inclusion in the journal of this ministerial meeting.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
(Annex 8 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson, thank you for the opportunity to do this closing statement.

While each of the OSCE's 45 years has seen its share of difficulties, 2020 has been one of the most challenging. As we collectively grappled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the OSCE also faced a significant leadership gap as the four senior positions of this Organization stood vacant for nearly six months.

Yet we have managed to reach consensus on an outstanding leadership slate. We congratulate the Albanian Chairmanship for its success in shepherding this process, and for guiding the OSCE through this most difficult year. The accomplishments that you have achieved already in this ministerial, particularly with the Big Four, I think make a very nice birthday present for you, dear Igli. So congratulations, both on your day and for the achievement that we are seeing today. Under the Chairmanship's principled leadership, we maintained our course, ensured that the important work of this Organization continued in all three dimensions of security, and positioned the OSCE for enduring relevancy and for future successes.

Significant security challenges remain. The only way to meet them and achieve lasting peace, prosperity and the full enjoyment of human rights in this region is for all participating States to implement the OSCE commitments that every one of us has freely adopted. Even as the circumstances have changed over the years, no country has revoked or backed out of its membership commitments. We are still all committed to the same goal.

We are grateful that the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia is holding after weeks of bloody conflict that cost far too many lives. The OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs must continue to play a key role in efforts to bring the sides toward a lasting peace based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The existence of the Minsk Group over the years and even active through this year, we believe, has made a contribution to the ceasefire and to the ongoing discussions that are underway right now, which must continue to proceed. And the OSCE Minsk Group is the only and best option to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

We remain seized with the situation in Belarus, as my colleague from the United Kingdom has just discussed. We encourage the Government in Minsk to accept the OSCE Chairmanship's offer to facilitate dialogue with civil society and the opposition. This presents the best opportunity to resolve this crisis in a manner that respects the rights and will of the people of Belarus and upholds the democratic principles of free and fair elections.

Mr. Chairperson, with the respect to the United States' position with regard to Belarus, it should be perfectly clear and perfectly obvious that the United States and Belarus have begun to enter into a partnership regarding trafficking in persons. While we are unhappy with Belarus in many ways and look for a more positive future for Belarus, nevertheless, we have begun to try to work together on an important joint programme on trafficking in persons. That negotiation has now been going on for months and in fact continuously for hours during this Ministerial and at this point it seems that the parties cannot come together to

support the statement against trafficking in persons proposed by the United States and Belarus.

We will see whether in the end it is not successful, but I wish to say that the United States is very seized of this issue. We care a great deal about it, we care a great deal about many of these issues. I want to point out that the United States has financially supported many of the programmes and goals that are under discussion both peripherally and directly through this proposal that combat trafficking in human beings. The United States has contributed toward several OSCE programmes on this issue, such as WIN – Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality 1.2 million US dollars; promoting human rights and gender response to security 250,000 US dollars; supporting and strengthening the women's resources centre in Tajikistan almost 200,000 US dollars; and now we are under discussion to perhaps have a major trafficking in persons programme in the multimillion dollars in partnership with Belarus.

I mention this money not to be arrogant or bragging, but instead to point out to fellow participating States that the United States cares about these issues and also we need to recognize that these finances are the money of the American taxpayers. If these are not programmes that give result in a ministerial decision that support a major trafficking programme like this, it becomes more difficult to explain to the American taxpayers what we are doing, by offering to finance this. The answer of course is, that we care about the women and children that are subject to these kinds of abuses in the OSCE area and we call on our fellow participating States to care as much as we do and to help us bring about a ministerial decision.

Now, on another matter, Moscow's aggression toward its neighbours continues to rank among our highest concerns. We greatly value the work of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), which was mandated by this Organization to monitor and report on the conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's occupation of Crimea. The SMM should have full access to Crimea. Moreover, the United States joined with other delegations here in calling for the SMM to be given safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the areas along the internationally recognized border between Russia and Ukraine. We are encouraged by lower levels of ceasefire violations and civilian casualties since the implementation of additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire in July. But make no mistake, there can be no real solution to this conflict until Russia changes its behaviour and takes concrete steps to meet Ukraine's commitment to a peaceful and diplomatic solution.

By its manufactured conflict in eastern Ukraine, its seizure of Crimea by force, and the mounting human rights abuses it perpetrates in the process, Russia has shown its contempt for the ten foundational principles of the Helsinki Final Act. This is a perilous path that can lead to conflict in the wider OSCE area and beyond, as other countries observe this behaviour and might seek to mimic it, until finally conflict after conflict becomes something much more serious. Every one of our countries has been down this road before, with devastating consequences in the twentieth century.

The Helsinki Final Act's foundational principles guiding relations among States were adopted to prevent such conflict and we all committed to abide by them. The problem is not that OSCE or its institutions and principles are outdated, as Minister Lavrov suggested, that is not true. The problem is that Russia has chosen not to abide by these core tenets.

It is unfortunate that we were unable to reach consensus on either of the Ukraine texts. It is, however, illustrative of the great divergence between the positions of Russia and those of the vast majority of the participating States. Crimea, which is part of Ukraine – and saying something different or trying to change it by force, does not change this fact – lies at the heart of these differences, and the United States remains unwavering in our position: we do not nor will we ever recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. It should be considered whether this type of conduct has much wider consequences for the security, structure, and rules, and common thought in the OSCE area. It is one of the fundamental problems that this Organization faces today.

My government welcomes agreement of all 57 participating States on a Ministerial Council statement regarding the “5+2” talks on settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. We recall as well the need for fulfilment of OSCE Summit commitments regarding the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Moldova, as the foreign ministers discussed in detail in this Ministerial Council.

The United States is pleased to join the Friends of Georgia in expressing unwavering support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reach consensus on a statement on the Russia-Georgia conflict. We would welcome discussion of opportunities for an increased OSCE role in Georgia.

We regret that we were unable to reach consensus in the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) on the anniversary declaration of the Vienna Document and a decision to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325. We are among the 45 participating States that subscribed to a joint statement calling for substantial progress on Vienna Document modernization in 2021. We are proud to join the overwhelming majority of participating States in calling for implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 in the FSC. We regret a significant decision on small arms and light weapons has not been agreed to by one participating State, and as a result, no FSC decisions were adopted in the Ministerial Council this year, despite the able leadership of the Federal Republic of Germany. Nevertheless, rest assured that these important initiatives will figure prominently in our upcoming Chairmanship of the FSC.

We must redouble our creative work in the second dimension. The 57 OSCE participating States need to set an example by our response to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, and by our leadership on environmental challenges, like wildlife trafficking. It is easy to speak in broad language about environmental issues, but here at OSCE, we have experience in shaping a common approach on specific issues. That is worth doing.

The environmental text for consideration for this Ministerial Council is still under discussion. A great deal of thinking and work has gone into this as the United States has vigorously supported this environmental declaration. In fact, in the importance that we have attached to the wildlife discussion we had a dispute with our friend Turkey and we were able to negotiate that and to settle that and to resolve it. Now it is our hope that any discussions regarding natural resources can likewise be accommodated so that we can have this declaration.

I am pleased that we are dealing with these issues in the way that we are. After three years of work on this issue in the second dimension, it is a statement of our ability to make compromises for the greater good to see this decision reached today.

Finally, Mr. Chairperson, while we strive for a common approach to shared security challenges, we also must confront reality. We cannot build comprehensive security if we allow the very principles that form the foundation of that security to be weakened by blatant violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and the inherent human rights of the people in this region. The United States will always engage in good faith efforts with fellow participating States to find consensus on practical ways forward, but we will not compromise the foundational principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The OSCE must remain the premier place for honest dialogue among participating States and with civil society in a common effort to fulfil the promise of Helsinki.

We delivered a decision on the prohibition of torture. That shows that all 57 can find consensus on hard problems. Now we must put our words into action and eradicate torture in our region. We need to live up to all of our commitments, those that are longstanding and the ones we have adopted during this ministerial.

I know the Swedish Chairmanship will take the lead, and I echo Deputy Secretary Biegun, who spoke on behalf of the United States at this ministerial: we must have a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in 2021 to give a voice to civil society and to hold each other to account for our actions. The HDIM is an essential contribution to strengthening the security of our region and its suspension this year was solely due the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has been a challenging year. We commend the Albanian Chairmanship, under the able leadership of Albanian Prime Minister Rama, for its resolute leadership and for its innovative flexibility in addressing a constantly changing environment. We look forward to working closely with Sweden as they take up the Chairmanship in 2021. Finally, we offer our congratulations to North Macedonia as they prepare for their Chairmanship in 2023. We also look forward to the coming Chairmanship of Poland.

The United States continues to place great value on this Organization, its principles and commitments, and its independent institutions. As the United States transitions to a new administration in the United States in January 2021, you can be assured of our country's continued commitment to the OSCE and the goal of building a peaceful and prosperous region, where all people are free to exercise their human rights.

Mr. Chairperson, we request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
(Annex 9 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

I have already had an opportunity to do a closing statement that was quite thorough as you listeners are I am sure aware. During the time of that statement, however, a Preparatory Committee was held that, in fact, disallowed moving the environmental statement forward to the Ministerial Council.

I want to take the floor here to point out that one country, Azerbaijan, decided to block this environmental statement and speak about it for just one moment. The wildlife trafficking discussion in that statement was originally objected to by another country, Turkey. But nonetheless, after some discussions we were able to resolve their objections and move forward with the environmental text.

In addition to that, the wildlife part was important because we have seen a pandemic that may have been either caused or exacerbated by the situation with wet markets and illegal wildlife trafficking, resulting in the death of 1.5 million people worldwide to date, and millions of others who have been infected. And yet, we have also not been able to agree on a COVID-19 statement either.

But to bring us back to the statement on the environment, in that statement there was a discussion about climate issues, which the United States disagreed with at first. However, we ultimately agreed to the discussion of climate in order to make sure that this statement on wildlife trafficking and trafficking in natural resources could go forward.

The draft decision had been under debate and discussion for quite a long time, but then at the last minute Azerbaijan came in trying to add an additional list of natural resources within the statement. The initial list in the draft statement mirrors what we have seen in other international agreements, namely including wildlife and wildlife products, timber and timber products, and precious metals. This had been agreed to by consensus between the United States and other participating States, including the Russian Federation, in order to move this issue forward. Unfortunately, this language was blocked at the last minute, and I would like to call on Azerbaijan to state their reasons why the good that could have come from this environmental statement could not go forward.

I believe that this veto of this statement opens the door to further discussion of this issue and other issues within the second dimension. Every country has the right to stop or block a statement, but the exercise of that right does not mean that it is doing the right thing.

I once again say to you, Mr. Chairperson, congratulations on your Chairmanship this year and your successes. My comment here today is in no way meant to diminish the successes you and Prime Minister Rama have enjoyed during this very challenging year. Congratulations.

I would ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

STATEMENT BY
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
(Annex 10 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

The delegation of Germany, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

We express our deep gratitude to Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Edi Rama and to the Albanian Chairmanship for the well-organized Ministerial Council and for the positive outcomes we have collectively achieved. Prime Minister Rama, you can be very proud of Ambassador Igli Hasani and his excellent team for their tireless efforts throughout this very challenging year.

We warmly welcome the incoming Swedish Chairmanship and wish them every success in 2021. We are grateful to the Republic of North Macedonia for taking on the responsibility of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2023. It is reassuring for all of us that our Organization has a far-stretching leadership horizon. In fact, the European Union would have preferred to define the horizon even further. We appreciate the readiness expressed by Estonia to chair the OSCE in 2024, which we fully support.

We are pleased that an agreement was reached on the new leadership of the Organization. We welcome the appointment of Helga Schmid as the Secretary General, Maria Teresa Ribeiro as the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Kairat Abdrakhmanov as the High Commissioner for National Minorities and Matteo Mecacci as the Director for the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). We look forward to working with all of you in your new capacities.

Still, we deeply regret that a small number of participating States, and in many cases just one, blocked consensus on issues that we deem very important. Whether because they continue to view almost all issues on the table through the prism of a conflict or whether because they could not find common language on issues such as gender equality which we consider to be a fundamental value for all of us. We therefore reject all attempts to put the blame on the European Union, which represents half the participating States and which is always participating in negotiations without hidden agendas.

In addition, we cannot deny that we had a higher level of ambition regarding the outcome in other areas where consensus could not be found. Let us be clear: when common principles that we have all committed to are violated, then we must work until respect for those principles is restored. In this vein, we regret that we could not agree on a substantial political declaration in the context of this year's celebration of the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris and the 30th anniversary of the Copenhagen Document, or on a declaration on the "OSCE's efforts towards peace with respect to Ukraine".

The conflict in eastern Ukraine caused by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces, and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation which we strongly condemn and do not recognize, continue to pose a severe challenge to European security and have demonstrated the dangerous consequences that follow when international law and fundamental principles of the

OSCE are violated. We reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. The European Union supports the continued efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group and calls on the sides to fully implement the Minsk agreements. In this context, we once again commend Ukraine for its constructiveness, and we call on Russia to act likewise. We reiterate our unequivocal support for the essential role of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and call for the full, safe and unhindered access of the SMM to the whole territory of Ukraine. We regret that there was no agreement on a decision regarding OSCE permanent monitoring and verification of the areas adjacent to the Ukraine-Russia State border due to the unconstructive positions of one OSCE participating State.

The resolution of the protracted conflicts in the Republic of Moldova and in Georgia as well as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remain a top priority for the European Union. In this context, we welcome the joint statement by the heads of delegations of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries. The European Union continues to support the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs in finding a negotiated and lasting settlement. We also stand ready to further support their initiatives as well as those of the Permanent Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office. The European Union stands ready to effectively contribute in the shaping of a durable and comprehensive settlement of the conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. We also welcome the Ministerial Council declaration underlining the importance of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transnistrian Settlement in the “5+2” format as the only mechanism to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable settlement. We call for the organization of a result-oriented meeting in this format as soon as possible in 2021 and reaffirm the important role the OSCE plays in supporting this process. We regret that it was not possible to adopt a statement on the conflict in Georgia. Nevertheless, we look forward to the next Geneva International Discussions meeting on 9 and 10 December, which will be the first Geneva International Discussions meeting after the break of one year.

At this meeting, many ministers addressed the serious and ongoing violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Belarusian authorities since the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020 which clearly violate commitments about respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to democratic principles of government, which are well-documented by the Moscow Mechanism rapporteur Wolfgang Benedek. We reiterate our call on the Belarusian authorities to release all detainees and political prisoners, respect media freedom and civil society, and start an inclusive national dialogue. We fully support the offer made by current and incoming OSCE Chairpersons to facilitate a national dialogue in Belarus by a joint visit and encourage Belarusian authorities to accept this proposal. We urge Belarus to implement the recommendations made by the rapporteur of the Moscow Mechanism in this regard.

In a year marked by the pandemic, it is highly regrettable that the OSCE participating States were not able to reach consensus on a declaration on COVID-19. In our view, it would have been important to underscore the need for solidarity, unity and international co-operation and call on the participating States to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected and protected while combating the pandemic. We also wished to jointly applaud the contributions of all those working in exposed professions, taking into account the critical contribution of women in COVID-19 response efforts, not least as

front line health and social workers, as well as to acknowledge the disproportionate weight of the pandemic upon them and to commit to promoting gender equality in our response efforts.

Gender equality remains a priority for the European Union within the OSCE, across all dimensions. We regret, in this year when we celebrate 20 years of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, no consensus could be reached on the text regarding women, peace and security or the draft decision on the promotion of gender balance among speakers at OSCE meetings.

In light of recent events and the ongoing terrorist threat, we had hoped to agree on texts that build on our commitments and speak out strongly against the continued threat posed by terrorism. The European Union supported the two texts presented by the Chairmanship on terrorist financing and public-private partnerships against terrorism, which would have reinforced participating States' joint commitments to address the pressing challenge of terrorism and violent extremism across the OSCE area. The draft decision on public-private partnerships enjoyed broad consensus, however its adoption was regrettably blocked by one participating State, which prevented once again collective progress on counterterrorism issues.

On a more positive note, we welcome the adoption of the declaration on transnational organized crime as a recognition that organized crime represents one of the most serious transnational threats to security and stability across the OSCE area. We commend the high priority placed on this topic by the Chairmanship and the Chairperson of the Security Committee. A renewed commitment on fighting organized crime signals our determination to tackle this destabilizing phenomenon collectively, drawing on the OSCE tools and expertise.

We are disappointed that there was no agreement on the decision on the normative aspects of small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition due to the unconstructive position of one participating State. This decision would have provided the necessary impetus to our ongoing work in this indisputably important area in which the European Union and its Member States invest considerable resources. We also regret that consensus on the declaration marking the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Document could not be reached. We are determined to continue supporting the process of its modernization constructively and hope to achieve substantial progress next year. We reiterate our expectation, that existing conventional arms control commitments and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) should be implemented in full by all participating States and we call for full adherence to the provisions of the relevant instruments. We also reiterate the need to work towards a conducive environment to reinvigorating conventional arms control and CSBMs. We highly value and actively support the Structured Dialogue as a meaningful, transparent, inclusive, State-owned and State-driven process for in-depth exchanges on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area.

We welcome that this year we managed to adopt a decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Still, we regret that we could not find agreements on a decision on access to information, a decision on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the OSCE area or a declaration on enhancing efforts to address intolerance and discrimination based on thought, conscience, religion or belief. These are important issues, and deserving of our close attention.

We welcome the adoption of the comprehensive and well-balanced decision on preventing and combating corruption through digitalization and increased transparency. The degradation of the environment poses a serious threat to the security in the OSCE area and it has been seven years since the last adoption of an environmental text by the participating States. We deeply regret that, despite considerable efforts of the Chairperson, we were not able to adopt the decision on the protection of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources. We hope that these efforts will serve as an encouragement for all participating States to continue our work and dialogue on the environmental issues in the next year.

The European Union welcomes the adoption of the Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners. As we celebrate this year the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership, this text signals our commitment to deepen and expand co-operation with the Asian Partners across the three dimensions.

We regret that the decision on combating trafficking in human beings was not adopted. The decision had been relevant and valid, in particular in the current pandemic circumstances, as it would have reaffirmed that our efforts in combating this heinous crime have to continue even in emergency situations.

The European Union reiterates its firm support for the OSCE autonomous institutions, the field missions and the Secretariat. We recall our deep appreciation for the work of the ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner for National Minorities and our unwavering support for their mandates. We also look forward to our continued fruitful co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In closing, we thank the Albanian Chairmanship for a well-conducted Ministerial Council and for its successful leadership of this Organization through a challenging time. You have steered us through the pandemic and ensured, along with the structures of this Organization, that our work could continue, albeit mostly by digital means, and kept dialogue open. We would also like to extend a special gratitude to those that have provided technical support to this virtual meeting, and so many others since last March. Finally, we wish the incoming Swedish Chairmanship every success and we assure you of our full support.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of today's meeting.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹ and Montenegro¹ and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

STATEMENT BY
**THE DELEGATION OF SWEDEN (ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA,
ANDORRA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA,
BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, THE CZECH REPUBLIC,
DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY,
GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY, LATVIA,
LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA,
MOLDOVA, MONACO, MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS,
NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA,
SAN MARINO, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWITZERLAND,
TURKEY, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 11 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

The statement is read on behalf of Albania, in its national capacity, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

In this year, we celebrate thirty years of Vienna Document implementation in the OSCE area (ever since the adoption of the original version in 1990), and commend the confidence- and security-building measures that have been established so far.

Deeply concerned that the security environment in Europe has deteriorated in recent years and in order to reverse this negative trend, we are determined to contribute to efforts aimed at restoring trust and increasing mutual confidence among the participating States and, in particular, at enhancing reciprocal military transparency and predictability and reducing risk by updating the Vienna Document.

We recall the OSCE documents and commitments that are relevant to the Vienna Document, to its implementation and further development, notably Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) Decision No. 1/10 on establishing a procedure for incorporating relevant FSC decisions into the Vienna Document (adopted on 19 May 2010), the Astana Commemorative Declaration: Towards a Security Community (adopted on 3 December 2010) and the Hamburg Declaration on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the OSCE framework for arms control in 2016.

As a key confidence- and security-building measure and a reference point for the Security Dialogues within the FSC, the Vienna Document plays an essential role in promoting military transparency and political stability within the OSCE area.

We welcome the steps already taken and encourage discussions on the measures proposed for improving implementation of the Vienna Document and, in particular, enhancing military-to-military contacts among the participating States at the OSCE, including

the High-Level Military Doctrine Seminar that is due to take place on 9 and 10 February 2021.

We also recall the proposals for updating the Vienna Document and encourage all participating States to engage in constructive discussions focused on the Vienna Document's role in reducing the risks of conflict in the OSCE area by promoting transparency, predictability and stability.

We reaffirm our strong commitment to the Vienna Document and its full implementation in letter and spirit, and are determined to support constructively the process of its modernization with a view to achieving substantial progress towards updating the Vienna Document by the OSCE Ministerial Council 2021.

Mr. Chairperson, please attach this statement to the journal of the day.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF LATVIA (ALSO ON BEHALF OF
BULGARIA, CANADA, THE CZECH REPUBLIC, ESTONIA,
FINLAND, IRELAND, LITHUANIA, NORWAY, POLAND, ROMANIA,
SWEDEN, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 12 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

This statement is delivered on behalf of Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

We reaffirm our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Twelve years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of parts of the territory of Georgia and underline the need for the peaceful resolution of the conflict based on full respect for the Helsinki Final Act and international law, including the Charter of the United Nations.

We call upon the Russian Federation to fulfil immediately its clear obligation under the European Union-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, as well as its commitments to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and not to impede creation of international security arrangements on the ground. We also call in Russia to reverse its recognition of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions as independent States. We condemn the recent approval of the "programme" on creation of common socio-economic space between the Russian Federation and the Abkhazia region of Georgia as another step towards de facto annexation of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetian regions.

We are concerned by the ongoing provocations by the Russian Federation and the regimes in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali that have continued unabated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We are particularly concerned over the installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and the lengthy closure of so-called crossing points in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions along the ABLs. These actions have destabilized the situation on the ground and severely impacted the security, safety, well-being, and humanitarian conditions of civilians in conflict-affected areas, particularly in the Akhalgori and Gali districts. The deaths of those people who were deprived of the possibility of getting prompt and adequate medical care, due to the closures of the so-called crossing points since September 2019, is another tragic illustration of the grave consequences of the continuing restrictions on the freedom of movement for the local population. We are deeply concerned by ongoing arbitrary detentions along the South Ossetia ABL including the shooting and wounding of Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze on 11 July 2020. We call for humanitarian organizations to be provided prompt access to all detainees and we call for immediate release of Mr. Gakheladze and those under illegal custody.

We support the Geneva International Discussions as a critical format to address the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved Russia-Georgia conflict. We regret that to date no round has taken place this year and call for resumption of the meetings on dates established by the Co-Chairs. We underline the necessity of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including on the non-use of force, establishing international security arrangements in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and ensuring the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in accordance with international law.

We express our support for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Ergneti and Gali and emphasize the important role they can have in preventing the escalation of the conflict and in helping protect the safety and security of people on the ground. We express our great concern over the lengthy suspension of the Gali IPRM. Acknowledging the resumption of the Ergneti IPRM in July 2020, as a positive step, we stress the necessity for resuming the meetings in Gali without further delay or pre-conditions, and underscore the importance of managing the functioning in full respect of the founding principles and ground rules.

We reaffirm our unwavering support to the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and call upon the Russian Federation to allow the EUMM to implement its mandate in full, including by enabling the EUMM's access on both sides of the ABLs. We call on Russia to refrain from politicizing or spreading propaganda about the work of the EUMM, which has continued to fulfil a critical role throughout the pandemic.

We reiterate our deep concerns over the increased Russian military exercises and build up in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, including the "Kavkaz-2020" exercises held partially on occupied Georgian territory in violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We remain deeply concerned over the ethnic discrimination against Georgians residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and about human rights abuses, including the reported use of torture, destruction of the houses of IDPs, and severe violations of rights related to freedom of movement, residence and property. We support the voluntary return of IDPs and refugees to the places of their origin in safety and dignity. We call on those in effective control to enable full and unhindered access by international human rights organizations to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We condemn the death of Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia in detention at the Russian military base in Georgia's Abkhazia region, and the killing of Georgian citizens Archil Taturashvili, Giga Otkhozoria, and Davit Basharuli, and urge the Russian Federation, as the State exercising effective control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we reiterate our support for Georgia's preventive steps aimed at eradication of the sense of impunity for crimes committed in its territory under the Russian Federation's control and note the adoption of the Otkhozoria-Taturashvili List by the Government of Georgia.

The cyberattacks on Georgia in October 2019 were another clear example of Russia's long-running campaign of hostile and destabilizing activity against Georgia.

We welcome Georgia's compliance with the European Union-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement and Georgia's unilateral commitment not to use force, and we call on the Russian Federation to reciprocate, and to affirm and implement a commitment not to use force against Georgia.

We support the Georgian Government's "A Step to a Better Future" peace initiative, aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and at fostering confidence-building among divided communities. We applaud the programme's initial successes, including the launch of its education programmes and the "Enterprise for a Better Future" grants programme, which already garnered interest and engagement of communities on all sides of the ABLs. We also welcome the establishment of the "Peace Fund for a Better Future", and we look forward to supporting its continued implementation. We encourage Georgia to work further with the OSCE and other multilateral organizations to promote confidence-building measures on the ground.

We also encourage Georgia to keep the Permanent Council informed of its progress in further strengthening its democratic institutions and processes.

We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Georgia. We regret the closure of the OSCE Mission to Georgia in 2009 and encourage the OSCE participating States to decide on the reopening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the ABLs. The re-opening of the mission would strengthen considerably the OSCE's engagement in the Geneva International Discussions and IPRMs, and in implementation of confidence-building measures.

The Group of Friends of Georgia will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and of developments on the ground, hold Russia accountable for its obligations and commitments, and advocate for the conflict's peaceful resolution.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**
(Annex 13 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,
Esteemed colleagues,

Allow me to begin with words of gratitude to the Albanian Chairmanship, which has done everything possible to successfully hold the Ministerial Council meeting under extremely difficult conditions.

The crisis of confidence in relations among the OSCE participating States has also made itself felt directly during the discussion of the final documents of the Ministerial Council. Sadly, last year's Bratislava Appeal by the Chairperson-in-Office to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us has not been heeded by everyone. It has not been possible to realize the OSCE's full potential this year either. Once again, no agreement has been reached on a political declaration, although an encouraging signal is exactly what is needed right now: despite the differences in the approaches to crisis situations and the different perception of security threats, we do have common goals and a willingness to work together on issues that unite us.

An opportunity has been missed to reflect in the final documents of the Ministerial Council important milestones for the OSCE and the modern European security architecture, namely the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the 10th anniversary of the Astana declaration. And yet this was an excellent occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the OSCE's basic principles, above all, the task of strengthening comprehensive and indivisible security.

The 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the most terrible conflict in the history of humanity, has not been given due attention.

Differences in opinion among the participating States prevented them from agreeing on a draft ministerial declaration on COVID-19. Its approval could have demonstrated that we are able to take joint action in the face of a global threat, abandoning narrow national priorities for the common good.

The confrontational approaches by a number of countries wrecked efforts to draw up a document on Ukraine, which was intended to guide the endeavours of the OSCE participating States to facilitate the settlement of the conflict in Donbas.

We regret that the decision on access to information – one of the most pressing problems – was not adopted. This is all the more important today, at a time when in some participating States, notably in Ukraine and Latvia, there is a crackdown on Russian-speaking journalists.

For our part, we took a constructive approach, focusing on the unifying agenda. The Russian delegation worked in good faith on all of the drafts submitted by the Chairmanship and gave serious consideration to the other documents as well.

The many years of stagnation in the OSCE, expressed in its inability to produce a truly important “political product” from the point of view of ensuring European security, can be overcome only by joint efforts. There needs to be an honest discussion of the entire spectrum of the Organization’s problems, ranging from geographical and thematic imbalances to the questions of legal status. The draft Ministerial Council decision proposed by the Russian Federation on strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE had precisely that objective. It is important to return to this topic next year, and we call on the future Swedish Chairmanship to address this issue.

The meddlesome attempts by some States to anchor the theme of “gender equality” in almost every OSCE document in all three security dimensions are cause for concern. This goes against the natural principle of inter-State relations, that of not endeavouring to impose one’s own specific social model or some kind of neoliberal “values” on others. This “gender extremism” does not lead to anything useful and merely complicates work within the Organization on the really important issues. The experience of the recent Ministerial Council meetings has confirmed this in full measure. We would ask the future Swedish Chairmanship to bear this in mind too.

A positive outcome of the Ministerial Council meeting was the appointment of the Secretary General, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. For the first time in the history of the Organization, decisions have been adopted that lead to a more balanced geographical representation in the leadership of the OSCE executive structures. The movement towards eliminating imbalances in the staffing of our Organization must continue. This is a requirement of the times, and not of the Russian Federation.

We joined the consensus on the candidature of Ms. Helga Schmid for the responsible position of Secretary General. We are familiar with her professional approach and extensive diplomatic experience. We supported her in her personal capacity and not as a representative of Germany or the European Union. In her new position, we expect Ms. Schmid to put aside national and bloc-based policies and to work without bias in the interests of all OSCE participating States, as stipulated by her mandate.

We are pleased with the “package” of thematic documents of the Ministerial Council: on countering transnational organized crime; on combating corruption through digitalization and increased transparency; on the prevention and eradication of torture; and on co-operation with the Asian Partners. We welcome the ministerial statement in support of the Transdnestrian settlement process in the “5+2” format. An important event on the margins of this Ministerial Council meeting was the statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group on Nagorno-Karabakh. We wish North Macedonia every success for its Chairmanship in 2023.

Expanding co-operation in countering transnational challenges, particularly terrorism, remains as relevant as ever. The OSCE must maintain a high profile in combating the spread of terrorist ideology, in particular via the Internet, social media and the mass media, and make more effective use of the potential of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council in priority areas concerned with counter-terrorism. The time has come to give impetus to combating drug trafficking. The issue of information and communication technologies requires particular attention.

In the second dimension, it is necessary to look closely at the unhealthy situation in the trade and economic sphere and address the issues of economic connectivity and the alignment of integration processes in order to build a Greater Eurasian Partnership. As tourism is the sector that has suffered most as a result of COVID-19, we need to promote its development.

The social and economic rights of citizens are at the forefront of humanitarian considerations. Respect for different development models of civilization and society offers significant potential for enhancing the effectiveness of co-operation in the human dimension. We can also achieve consensus in that area by not trying to impose our own standards on others. It is time to ensure adequate protection of the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities. The glorification of Nazism and the falsification of history need to be combated resolutely. We must finally carry out the instruction issued by the Basel Ministerial Council in 2014 on the preparation of ministerial declarations against intolerance towards Christians, Muslims and members of other religions.

In conclusion, I should like once again to thank our Albanian colleagues for their conscientious work and wish every success to the Swedish Chairmanship, which is taking over the Chairmanship baton from Albania.

Thank you for your attention.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF NORWAY
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BULGARIA,
CANADA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, THE CZECH REPUBLIC, DENMARK,
ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY, GREECE,
HUNGARY, IRELAND, ITALY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA,
LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONTENEGRO,
THE NETHERLANDS, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA,
SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, UKRAINE,
THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 14 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

This statement is delivered on behalf of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America as co-sponsors of the OSCE Ministerial Council draft decision on the OSCE permanent monitoring and verification of the areas adjacent to the Ukrainian-Russian State border which are temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian Government.

We reaffirm our strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

We also reaffirm our unwavering support for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (hereinafter, the SMM) and its respective mandate, which provides for the safe and secure access of the SMM throughout Ukraine. This includes all areas adjacent to the Ukrainian-Russian State border, which encompasses those areas temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian Government.

We recall that the SMM mandate was adopted on 21 March 2014 by OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 1117, unanimously supported by all 57 participating States, including the Russian Federation.

We also recall the Commonly Agreed Conclusions of the Normandy Summit (Paris, 9 December 2019) by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, in which they underlined that the SMM should be able to use all possibilities of the 21 March 2014 mandate and have safe and secure access throughout Ukraine in order to fully implement its mandate.

We express our deep concern about the ongoing restrictions to the SMM's movement in areas adjacent to the Ukrainian-Russian State border which are temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian Government.

We also express our deep concern at regular reports by the OSCE border Observer Mission, at two Russian checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian State border, about persons in military-style outfits and vehicles regularly crossing the Russian-Ukrainian State border in both directions.

We recall that paragraph 4 of the Minsk Protocol of 5 September 2014, signed by the Russian Federation and Ukraine with facilitation by the OSCE, envisages permanent monitoring of the Ukrainian-Russian State border and verification by the OSCE with the establishment of security zones in the border areas of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

We underline the importance of comprehensive OSCE monitoring along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. In this regard, we emphasize the urgent need to increase transparency along the segment of the border which is temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian Government. We call for the SMM to be given safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the areas along the State border between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and for the strengthening of OSCE monitoring capacities.

We call on the Russian Federation to demonstrate a constructive approach in response to OSCE participating States' efforts aiming to remove the limitations of activities and to expand the OSCE border Observer Mission operation, currently at the Russian checkpoints "Gukovo" and "Donetsk", to other Russian border checkpoints and areas between them along the segment of the State border between Ukraine and Russia, which are temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian Government, as envisaged by our joint proposal for the OSCE Ministerial Council draft decision that did not reach consensus due to the unconstructive position of one OSCE participating State.

We emphasize that the establishment of OSCE permanent monitoring and verification of the areas adjacent to the Ukrainian-Russian State border, which are temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian Government, needs to remain on the OSCE's agenda. This includes the SMM's presence in these areas, opening additional forward patrol bases and patrol hubs, placing monitors near formerly existing and now temporarily closed border checkpoints, more comprehensive use of the SMM's technical assets, including the unmanned aerial vehicles and cameras, and assigning SMM mobile patrols to conduct robust monitoring along the border.

We are strongly determined to continue working in this regard, so that the draft decision as presented by our countries this year is adopted and subsequently implemented.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF SWITZERLAND
(Annex 15 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis emphasized in his statement yesterday that the smooth functioning of the OSCE and the strengthening of its capacity for action are essential for our common security.

The fact that the OSCE as an organization remains capable of action and resilient even in difficult circumstances is something that you, Mr. Chairperson, and your team in Tirana and Vienna have demonstrated with the organization of the first “virtual” OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. This was an impressive achievement, and we should like to thank you for the smooth execution of this “OSCE-wide premiere”. We should like explicitly to thank the technical staff, Christian Ruehrig and his colleagues, who with infinite patience have “logged in” hundreds of people via Zoom to the most diverse meetings – a masterly nine-month performance.

Mr. Chairperson,

Switzerland would like to congratulate the Albanian Chairmanship on the decision on the four leadership positions, which we were able to adopt today.

We also congratulate the new Secretary General, Helga Schmid; the new Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Matteo Mecacci; the new OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro; and the new High Commissioner on National Minorities, Kairat Abdrakhmanov. We look forward to working together with them and wish them all the best.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the previous incumbents, Ms. Gísladóttir, Mr. Zannier and Mr. Désir, and to our former OSCE Secretary General, Thomas Greminger, for their commitment to the OSCE.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite major political and conceptual differences, we must continue to do all we can to re-establish trust and to make the Organization more effective again as a platform for dialogue. A renewed assurance by all of us of the full implementation of OSCE principles and commitments would make a significant contribution to restoring and strengthening security and confidence in the OSCE. With that in mind, it is gratifying that this Ministerial Council meeting has succeeded in adopting important decisions and declarations.

Switzerland is particularly pleased about the decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This is the first decision on this topic in the OSCE in 11 years.

At the same time, we regret that no consensus could be reached on the COVID-19 text, and that in the Forum for Security Co-operation no text could be adopted at all.

I should like to express once again my gratitude to the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship for having led the OSCE throughout this year confidently and competently through many difficult situations and also through this virtual Ministerial Council meeting in Tirana.

We wish Sweden every success in assuming the Chairmanship in 2021. You can continue to count on Switzerland's full support.

Mr. Chair, dear Igli. I wish you a happy birthday and thank you for all your tireless efforts, day and night, in the last 339 days in 2020.

I request that this statement be attached to the decision and the journal of the day.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF CANADA
(Annex 16 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada would also like to make a closing statement, in addition to the joint statements that included Canada.

Against all odds and in the face of the acute challenges posed by COVID-19 and the increased tensions and conflict in our region, the Ministerial Council just adopted a number of substantive decisions across all three dimensions, including the nominations of the heads of executive institutions. This is a highly commendable and important achievement. It generates positive momentum, and we believe it represents hope that the OSCE remains an organization where dialogue and agreement can take place, leading to positive progress.

As Minister Champagne said yesterday, Canada's commitment to basic human rights and democracy is a cornerstone of our foreign policy, notably in promoting and protecting gender equality, online freedoms, civil society, diversity and inclusion. Unfortunately, our fundamental principles are being threatened, and the deliberate and thoughtful leadership of the OSCE is even more crucially important than ever.

These threats to our core values manifest themselves when we fail to agree on issues that are of crucial importance, not only to the OSCE as an organization, but to our region and its security. We regret that consensus could not be reached on texts commemorating the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Document, the normative aspects of small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition, or the recognition that COVID-19 has impacted us all, texts that enjoyed most participating States' support. We are also disappointed that other texts, such as those on tolerance and non-discrimination, the environment, gender, counter-terrorism and combating human trafficking, were not able to receive all of our support.

Also, once again, consensus could not be reached on a text addressing the tragic situation in Ukraine, fuelled by Russia, and expressing our collective support for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). Therefore, Canada wishes to reiterate here our full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea, as well as our deep appreciation for the work of the SMM as it continues to face access restrictions primarily imposed by Russian-backed illegal armed groups, while facing increased risks and challenges due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

These issues all remain key in our pursuit of a more stable European security environment. Canada remains committed to further contributing to a constructive dialogue on these key topics in coming year with the hope of achieving some tangible progress in 2021.

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada will continue to work constructively within the Helsinki Final Act principles for the protection of human rights and the promotion of respect for diversity, which remain at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. The well-established OSCE commitments and principles we have all agreed on must continue to guide our collective action. We salute the contribution made by the OSCE Secretariat and our OSCE autonomous institutions in this regard, despite the challenges faced this year, and we very much look forward to continuing to work with them under their newly appointed leaders: Helga Schmid, Teresa Ribeiro, Matteo Mecacci, and Kairat Abdrakhmanov. Congratulations to you all. You can count on Canada's support in your work.

Mr. Chairperson,

In closing, Canada would like to sincerely thank and highlight the tremendous work of the Albanian Chairpersonship and its entire team in a year that has confronted the OSCE with more challenges than we might normally face in a decade. Under your stewardship we have finally been able to nominate new heads of executive institutions, against all odds, and you have managed to deftly adapt the work of the Organization to the unforeseen consequences of a global pandemic. We also congratulate the Albanian team for its formidable efforts in achieving so many landmark decisions and declarations on torture, anti-corruption and transnational organized crime, and also for those important efforts that did not come to fruition, in gender panels and many others. And if I may agree with Prime Minister Rama, you have done this all with fire, with perseverance and a great deal of charm. Our only regret is not being in Tirana for this closing session. Canada looks forward to working closely with Sweden as it takes over the Chairmanship of our Organization in 2021.

I would ask that this statement be reflected in the journal of the day.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA
(Annex 17 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to start by commending you and your team for your tireless efforts to lead the Organization during these challenging times of pandemic, conflicts and instability in the OSCE area.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary General and all three heads of the OSCE institutions on their appointments and wish them every success in all their future endeavours. At this particular time of crisis the OSCE Secretariat and institutions need leadership to closely follow, adapt and react to the constantly changing environment that our Organization is operating in. Our delegation stands ready to contribute to that end.

Mr. Chairperson,

The COVID-19 pandemic became a global, multilayered and multifaceted challenge affecting and disrupting all aspects of our life – from politics to economy, to health care and to the social sphere. However, in our region of the OSCE area, the impact of the pandemic was further exacerbated by the resumption of Azerbaijan's large-scale aggression against Artsakh and Armenia despite the call of the United Nations Secretary-General for a global ceasefire during the pandemic. We also regret that despite the efforts of the Armenian delegation and others, the Ministerial Council failed to address the issue of the impact of conflict and its consequences on people residing in conflict-affected areas during the COVID-19 pandemic in an inclusive manner and in line with the OSCE concept of comprehensive and indivisible security.

On 27 September, Azerbaijan, with the instigation and support of Turkey and the direct involvement of Turkish-backed foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists from Syria and Libya, committed an aggression against the Republic of Artsakh and its people. This aggression, unprecedented in scale and scope, has been a serious blow to the concept of comprehensive security, which is the fundamental building block of the OSCE.

The 44 days of war revealed the weaknesses of our Organization, especially with regard to its capacities of early warning and conflict prevention. Failure to properly assess the many signals and to respond quickly and decisively have resulted in thousands of casualties and enormous damage, including to the prospects for peace and security in the region.

This year marked the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. At the same time, the OSCE's response to the flagrant violation of the principles enshrined in this fundamental document, namely the peaceful settlement of disputes and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples was restrained or even hushed up, which called into question the Organization's ability to deliver on its mandate.

In 2020, we have seen horrific terrorist attacks in OSCE participating States, and we once again express our solidarity with and condolences to the people affected by these acts of terror.

At the same time, the OSCE failed to react properly when Turkey and Azerbaijan recruited, transferred and deployed foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, which is in the OSCE area of responsibility, and used them as a proxy army during the hostilities against Artsakh. This is an unprecedented situation, but we can already expect that if we fail to address this issue properly and decisively, we will be having more and more cases of the use of foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists as a tool for projecting power and promoting political goals in the OSCE area.

The OSCE, by virtue of its mandate as an organization dealing with security and peace in Europe, should have been well placed to address the issues of terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters. Moreover, in 2011, the OSCE Ministerial Council made a decision to create a new department to strengthen co-ordination and coherence within the OSCE to address transnational threats, including terrorism.

Since then, the OSCE participating States adopted a number of important commitments to prevent and combat terrorism. In 2016, the OSCE participating States adopted a declaration condemning indiscriminate killing, atrocities and persecution by ISIS/Da'esh, Al-Qaeda, ANF/Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and other associated groups on the basis of religion or belief. At the same time, since 2017, the OSCE has failed to reach consensus on ministerial documents\deliverables on terrorism due to Turkey's objection to condemn the actions of terrorist organizations, in particular ISIS/Da'esh, Al-Qaeda, ANF/Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and their affiliates.

Armenia was among the first States to strongly condemn the persecution of civilians by ISIS, Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda and their affiliates in Syria and Iraq. We drew the OSCE's attention to torture, beheading, bodily mutilation, destruction of cultural heritage that were replicated by the Azerbaijani armed forces during the 2016 war against Artsakh.

And it is regrettable that the OSCE, as the world's largest security organization under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, was unable to respond to the outrageous terrorist acts committed against the people of Artsakh by translating existing commitments into effective actions. Rather than firmly and unequivocally condemning the actions of Azerbaijan and Turkey as unacceptable, the OSCE remained silent, thereby severely damaging the credibility of the Organization and further undermining the concept of comprehensive and indivisible security and multilateralism.

This failure or inability of the OSCE executive structures to react and to adapt their activities to the concerns of the OSCE participating States is a logical consequence of the policy of appeasement with regard to flagrant violations of OSCE commitments in all three dimensions by a participating State.

Therefore, we must carefully examine the effectiveness and result-orientation of the relevant OSCE structures, and we must consider ways to improve their performance. We must examine our terrorist financing toolkit, taking into account the new phenomena of State financing and sponsoring of terrorism, recruitment and use of terrorists in conflict zones in the OSCE area of responsibility.

Mr. Chairperson,

This year also marked the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Documents on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Recognizing the importance of OSCE activities in the field of SALW and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SCA), the Republic of Armenia has always been a staunch supporter of strengthening OSCE efforts in this field as an important component of the OSCE's concept of common, comprehensive and indivisible security. Based on this concept, the participating States have developed norms, principles and measures to combat illicit trafficking in SALW and SCA and contribute to the reduction and prevention of excessive and destabilizing accumulations. The practical assistance mechanism and assistance projects in the management of stockpiles of small arms and ammunition make a specific contribution to this end and remain key in implementation of our commitments.

The Armenian Government is taking seriously its commitments in this area. And we regret that the co-operation between Armenia and the OSCE in this area has been seriously hampered by the actions and position of one participating State, namely Azerbaijan. It is also regrettable that the OSCE did not want to reject such practice and succumbed to the blackmail by this country.

We are always open to co-operation and forthcoming in our efforts to uphold our commitments. The Republic of Armenia has always engaged constructively in addressing challenges and issues guided by the best interests of the Organization.

Our current position on the issue of adopting new commitments in the field of SALW and SCA is also guided by the best interests of this Organization. We cannot move forward without addressing violations by a participating State of its commitments. We must not turn a blind eye to this. Otherwise, we will send the wrong signal of encouraging further violations and will therefore further undermine the credibility of our Organization. The current crisis requires action, not words.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA
(Annex 18 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

I believe, with his last statement, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan just proved his own concept of “poisonous mindset”. When a delegation, a diplomat having lost the sense of reality celebrates the triumph of the use of force in international relations, thus, celebrates also the accompanying war crimes, then one should at least question the role and place of the said delegation in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY
**THE DELEGATION OF FINLAND (ALSO ON BEHALF OF AUSTRIA,
BELGIUM, BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, THE CZECH
REPUBLIC, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FRANCE, GERMANY,
GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY, LATVIA,
LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA,
MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH MACEDONIA,
NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SERBIA,
SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND,
UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 19 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following participating States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as my own country Finland.

For the past several months, we have witnessed serious and ongoing violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus since the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020. Moscow Mechanism rapporteur Wolfgang Benedek's report provided us with a large number of evidence-based accounts of peaceful protesters who were violently attacked and tortured by the authorities, simply for insisting on free and fair elections and a better, democratic future for their country.

According to credible reports, the number of arrests of peaceful protesters, journalists and human rights defenders is estimated at 30,000 since the presidential election. The number of politically motivated criminal cases is reaching 900. The list of political prisoners continues to grow and contains more than 100 names. There is no indication that the authorities are investigating the thousands of well-documented reports of police brutality and torture filed since mid-August or the killings of protesters. We condemn the use of force against Belarusians exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As the report by the OSCE rapporteur States, it appears that no professional or social group in Belarus has been spared by the Belarusian authorities' efforts to suppress peaceful dissent. Pressure on the medical, academic, and media communities has been especially harsh. Critics of the government and opposition figures have faced forced expulsion.

Respect for human rights and human dignity have been at the heart of this Organization since the Helsinki Final Act was signed 45 years ago. At this meeting, many ministers have addressed the situation in Belarus, which is in clear violation of OSCE principles and commitments on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and democratic principles of government. The OSCE's comprehensive concept of security recognizes that respect for human rights within States is essential to lasting peace, prosperity and co-operation among States. Upholding respect for human rights in the OSCE area is the

responsibility of all participating States. As reaffirmed at the 2010 Astana Summit, commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.

For the sake of the people of Belarus, we highlight as particularly noteworthy the following recommendations from the Moscow Mechanism report. The report recommends that Belarusian authorities should:

- Cancel the results of the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 due to irregularities at all stages of the process;
- Organize new genuine presidential elections based on international standards, inviting observation by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), as well as other international and domestic observers;
- Bring the electoral law into conformity with international standards as recommended by the ODIHR and the United Nations;
- Immediately cease all violence, in particular torture and ill-treatment against peaceful protestors and opponents;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners held for political reasons;
- Ensure that the standards of fair trial are respected;
- Ensure the freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international standards;
- Ensure the safety of all journalists and provide an enabling environment for the work of journalists and the media;
- Refrain from interference with the access to the Internet, and terminate censorship and blocking of webpages;
- Ensure that an independent and impartial body promptly investigates all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces.

We urge Belarus to engage in dialogue within the OSCE and lend our full support to the current and incoming OSCE Chairmanships and their efforts to facilitate a national dialogue in Belarus. We stand ready to support and facilitate an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the present crisis in a sustainable way, safeguarding Belarus's sovereignty and independence, as well as its safe, democratic and prosperous future.

Mr. Chairperson, I would be grateful if you could attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF DENMARK (ALSO ON BEHALF OF
ALBANIA, ANDORRA, ARMENIA, AUSTRIA, AZERBAIJAN,
BELGIUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CANADA,
CROATIA, CYPRUS, THE CZECH REPUBLIC, ESTONIA, FINLAND,
FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND,
IRELAND, ITALY, LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA,
LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONACO, MONTENEGRO,
THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, POLAND,
PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SAN MARINO, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA,
SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND, UKRAINE, THE
UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 20 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 47 participating States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and my own country Denmark.

This year, we mark the 30th anniversary of the landmark Copenhagen Document, which contributed to shaping the democratic principles of the OSCE area as we know them today. This document not only captured the hopeful spirit of the time, the end of a divisive and oppressive era and the advent of freedom for tens of millions in our region. It also proved a steadfast commitment from all participating States to democracy based on the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We have made great strides in advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms over the past 30 years. And yet, still today, we see that the fight for freedom, justice and democracy is not over. The space for civil society and independent media is rapidly shrinking. Discrimination excludes too many from full participation in our societies. And the headlines feature threats and violence against peaceful protesters.

At the same time, the world has never been more interconnected. People exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms online as well as off. Human rights violations and abuses in one part of our region can have a serious impact in another. As the OSCE's comprehensive security concept provides, respect for human rights within States remains essential to lasting security and prosperity among States.

Mr. Chairperson,

We will continue to speak out when democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated or abused with impunity. Whether it is human rights defenders facing reprisals for their brave work, or violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters

aspiring for democratic change. We will continue to defend free and fair elections. We will challenge stereotypes and prejudice, combat myths with facts, and promote a world where no individual is being targeted for who they are, for whom they love, for what they look like, or for what they believe or say.

Civil society is the conscience of our countries. It provides a source of ideas and is a key component of an open, inclusive and thriving democracy, where no one is above the law. We are therefore committed to a world where all are free to associate and peacefully assemble, speak their mind, believe or not believe and hold their governments to account without retribution. We pay tribute to the individuals and civil society organizations who work tirelessly to defend our shared dedication to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms. They deserve our recognition, protection and support.

We commend the work of the OSCE autonomous institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner for National Minorities – for their efforts to promote and protect human rights, as core components of peaceful, inclusive and democratic societies. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential to the promotion and advancement of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms in our region.

Thirty years on, the Copenhagen Document remains a powerful source of inspiration and a guide in our efforts to advocate for and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all who call the OSCE area their home. We will continue to fight to ensure that the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments is at the forefront of our work in this Organization.

In closing, we also would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Albanian Chairmanship and the Czech Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee for their principled and tireless efforts to strengthen the human dimension throughout the past year.

I would be grateful if you could attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF AZERBAIJAN**
(Annex 21 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

The delegation of Azerbaijan congratulates the Albanian Chairmanship on the impressive achievements during the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. Azerbaijan also would like to express its congratulation to the representatives newly appointed to the top four OSCE positions – OSCE Secretary General and heads of institutions. We believe that these appointments and consensus achieved on this issue opened a new page in OSCE history.

For small countries like Azerbaijan which attaches particular importance to the OSCE, the criteria and diversity of the appointed candidates are much appreciated. We wish to share the sentiments voiced by previous colleagues who also commended the efforts of the Albanian Chairmanship in the times of restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and impact it had on our societies and life, and added a new layer of challenges in the OSCE.

Azerbaijan – both individually and as Chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – has initiated several ideas and proposals in relation to the pandemic. One of them was the special session of the UN General Assembly on the response to the COVID-19. It was supported by the overwhelming majority of the UN Members States and held on 3 and 4 December 2020. A number of heads of States and governments joined the special session and expressed their views and positions on how the international community can effectively contribute to the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We would like to stress that the only country in the world that objected to this initiative was the Republic of Armenia – a country which in fact was severely impacted by the pandemic. But, because it was the initiative by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Government of Armenia tirelessly tried to prevent it from succeeding. It objected to the statement of Azerbaijan delivered in our capacity as the Chairmanship of the NAM at the opening of the special session of the UN General Assembly as well as to the initiative as a whole. Thus, one can imagine the poisonous mindset of the Government of Armenia, with whom we are dealing in the region.

This has not happened in a day. It is a result of the inefficient mediation process of the last nearly 30 years. Of course, there were some suggestions and results as well as the basis prepared by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. Yet, have they prevented the poisonous mindset of the Armenian Government, which is opposing to anything coming from Azerbaijan just because it is my country's proposal? Have the mediators informed the international organizations about such attitude existing in the Armenian society against Azerbaijan? Azerbaijan doubts it, and we have never heard about it.

Nevertheless, the year 2020 was specifically important and historic for Azerbaijan, because after 44 days of military counter-offensive operation Azerbaijan and its proud armed forces have managed to put an end to one of the most protracted conflicts in the OSCE history. Since the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s Azerbaijan had been facing military aggression and continued occupation of its territories by Armenia. The suffering of my country has been recognized by many multilateral institutions, including the UN Security Council, OSCE, Council of Europe and others. Azerbaijan for almost 30 years had been

pleading the international community, in particular OSCE participating States, to convince Armenia to behave within international law and try to alleviate the sufferings of one million Azerbaijanis, who became refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Can you imagine that every tenth person in Azerbaijan is a refugee or IDP? This was a taboo topic in the OSCE, because Armenia blocked any discussion on this issue within the Organization.

Within 44 days Azerbaijani armed forces realized a heroic mission and restored historical justice. Azerbaijan restored its infringed territorial integrity and sovereignty. Azerbaijan put an end to the conflict by politico-military means, because it was forced to do so. Armenia's protagonists, who are still in place, claimed that the principles of the OSCE on the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders could be applied to other conflicts but not to the case of Azerbaijan. We have enforced the UN Security Council resolutions by ourselves and restored justice – this is a triumph of international law and supremacy of the UN Security Council resolutions and OSCE decisions.

Azerbaijan has been approached with requests and appeals by some countries willing to help with post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. Azerbaijan is ready to co-operate on that, but first – the trilateral agreement must be implemented. It is not only a ceasefire. The trilateral agreement was agreed by both sides to the conflict. Armenia and Azerbaijan have undertaken a set of commitments and obligations on a wide spectrum of issues, which have to be implemented. Therefore, help us by supporting implementation of the agreement. Unfortunately, what we heard during this Ministerial Council is absolutely different. OSCE participating States must realize the alternative to non-implementation of the trilateral agreement and understand what could happen in case Armenia does not implement its commitments. That would be a suicide for this country. Within 44 days, we have destroyed almost 90 per cent of the entire military hardware of the Armenian armed forces illegally deployed in the territories of Azerbaijan. One can imagine what a heavy blow Azerbaijan has dealt to this country. Yet we were not the one who started it all, we responded to it.

Azerbaijan expects that OSCE participating States will support and encourage the implementation of obligations under trilateral agreement. It is imperative that OSCE participating States communicate clear messages to Armenia that such obsolete, falsified and poisonous statements as we heard by the delegation of Armenia today should be intolerable, because they do not bring positive dynamic nor serve the interests of the OSCE security. Azerbaijan believes that the war is over, while some others still encourage Armenia to behave like the war goes on, thereby suggesting thoughts of revanchism, which could jeopardize the implementation of trilateral agreement.

We would like to stress that Azerbaijan is ready to discuss what OSCE can do on this issue, but we will not accept pressure and imposition of obsolete concepts that still exist in some minds. OSCE needs to look at the situation on the ground and accept the new reality. Azerbaijan concluded and passed the military stage of the conflict. Now we have to focus on how to build peace. Thus, we encourage the OSCE participating States to provide support and help to this end.

Finally, I would like to respond to the delegations of the United States of America on the allegation that Azerbaijan blocked one of the two decisions in the second dimension. Distinguished Ambassador Gilmore may be does not know this due to his recent arrival to the OSCE, but his delegation to OSCE shall be aware of the fact that the United States of

America – alongside some other delegations – was the one who blocked decisions on environment in 2018 and 2019. The OSCE is organization that consists of 57 participating States and we all have to take mutual steps towards each other for the sake of consensus. Compromise cannot be unilateral.

During discussions of the mentioned draft decision Azerbaijan exhibited constructive attitude. We understand that explicitly mentioning wildlife in this text may be of particular importance to the United States of America, but Azerbaijan also has its strong interests reflecting the situation on environment in our country. In view of this we suggested four alternative options aimed at finding consensus. We proposed to enumerate broader range of natural resources or refer to them generally without mentioning anything in specific. However, none of our suggestions got accepted. Thus, the delegation of Azerbaijan cannot be blamed for the lack of flexibility and constructiveness. However, we believe that the next year this discussion can continue and OSCE participating States will be able to finally reach consensus on this matter.

In conclusion, Azerbaijan believes that this would be one of the last mentioning of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship, and we can move on from confrontation to co-operation in terms of the post-conflict situation in Azerbaijan. We would like to congratulate once again Albanian Chairmanship for such impressive results at the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF BELGIUM
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, ANDORRA, ARMENIA,
AUSTRIA, AZERBAIJAN, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA,
BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, THE CZECH REPUBLIC,
DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY,
GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY, KAZAKHSTAN,
KYRGYZSTAN, LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA,
LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONACO, MONGOLIA,
MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH MACEDONIA,
NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SAN MARINO,
SERBIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND,
TURKEY, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM, THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND UZBEKISTAN)**

(Annex 22 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 52 participating States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uzbekistan.

This year, we mark 20 years since the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The resolution stresses the importance of women's full, equal and meaningful participation, including at all levels of decision-making and leadership, in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security as well as promoting the safety of women and girls from violence in conflict and crises. This landmark resolution and all its subsequent reviews, all in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, are essential in furthering the critical role of women in matters of peace and security at all levels.

As the world's largest regional security organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) must lead the way. With its field missions, Secretariat and autonomous institutions, the OSCE offers participating States a unique network. The OSCE's concept of comprehensive security covers all different elements of the women, peace and security agenda. This provides a very suitable setting for full implementation of the women, peace and security commitments on a range of levels, from the political to the very practical.

The implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions has advanced within the OSCE, as several initiatives illustrate. Voluntary information exchange on women, peace and security happens through the OSCE

Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and through the inclusion of gender in discussions on small arms light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SCA). Furthermore, the voluntary national action plans on women, peace and security have proven to be a useful tool to implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 for a majority of participating States.

Women mediators and the 2019 OSCE toolkit “Inclusion of women and effective peace processes” demonstrate that inclusion is not only right; it is also the most effective way to achieve stability and peace. Including and empowering women not only to the armed forces but also to peace processes, including peace operations and mediation, is equally important and must become a standard practice. The full implementation of the women, peace and security agenda requires everyone, including boys and men to be engaged as positive agents for change.

Achieving sustainable peace is not possible without the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. However, women and their efforts remain too often invisible. For this to change, the women peace and security agenda needs to be inclusive of young and diverse voices, and requires responsive approaches to evolving concepts of security and needs on the ground. The OSCE Scholarship for Peace and Security contributes hereto. Co-operation with civil society remains of utmost relevance in this regard and should be reinforced, as civil society drives the women peace and security agenda implementation through their crucial contribution, important views and essential perspectives.

Nonetheless, Mr. Chairperson, obstacles and challenges still persist. The 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 is thus a moment to call for action in areas where the OSCE is both at the forefront and one of the best equipped organizations. We need to step up our efforts to empower women’s equal, full and meaningful participation and leadership and women professionals in conflict prevention and crisis management, mediation, peace processes, policing, border management, arms control and disarmament, and in the security sector, including armed forces. To achieve this, we have to act upon our promises, which requires both political will and resources.

In order to do so, the OSCE needs to continue improving its existing commitments. Two decades after subscribing to United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, we should remain ambitious and make full use of the potential for further advancing the women, peace and security agenda, in particular within the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC). We regret that the efforts for an FSC decision on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 did not reach consensus. As the women, peace and security agenda cuts across the FSC’s work, the FSC has a key part to play in delivering the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and related resolutions in the OSCE area. We already committed to this during the OSCE ministerial in 2011. These resolutions are highly relevant. Concrete additional efforts in the OSCE, including the FSC, could include the following:

- Set up a plan of action for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, in all aspects of the FSC’s areas of work, including at all levels of decision-making and leadership;

- Consider establishing a directory of national focal points on gender equality in order to facilitate the development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review of the plan of action;
- Promote the information exchange on issues pertaining to women, peace and security through the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security;
- Facilitate gender mainstreaming, also in SALW and SCA controls and in practical assistance work;
- Encourage and support the sharing of experiences and best practices as regards the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation;
- Compile national practices in the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions, with a focus on participating States' promotion of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in their armed and security forces;
- Encourage the active use of the 2019 toolkit "Inclusion of women and effective peace processes" as practical tool for increasing the role of women in the security sector;
- Encourage the development of voluntary national action plans on women, peace and security and, for those States who already have these plans in place, continue to improve them, monitor and evaluate their implementation as well as provide sufficient budget to do so.

Although gaps remain to be bridged in order to meet the commitments we made in 2004 through the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and all related commitments, we stand ready to live up to our promises to strive for full implementation of the women, peace and security agenda that arose from United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and thus to turning our words into action.

In closing, we also would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to the Albanian Chairmanship and the three FSC Chairmanships for their tireless efforts to focus on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 the past year.

I would be grateful if you could attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

Thank you.

IV. REPORTS TO THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

REPORT BY
THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE/SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE
TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
(MC.GAL/5/20 of 3 December 2020)

Mr. Chairperson,
Prime Minister Rama,

Allow me to begin by expressing sincere gratitude on behalf of the Secretariat and all OSCE staff for your personal commitment and active leadership of the OSCE during this year of what have been unprecedented challenges.

I would also like to wholeheartedly thank the Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Igli Hasani, for his tireless efforts to steer our Organization through these difficult times. And of course your excellent teams in Vienna and Tirana also deserve our gratitude for their admirable work this year.

Esteemed ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This has truly been an exceptional year, not only for the OSCE, but for all of humanity.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a blunt reminder that our security is interconnected and interdependent, and that the best way to protect ourselves is by working together to protect each other. This is the fundamental tenet of co-operative security – and the essence of the OSCE.

We should all take pride in how quickly, flexibly and successfully our Organization responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis.

Due to the resolute leadership of the Chairmanship and Troika and the steadfast support of participating States, effective management by former Secretary General Greminger, and the flexibility and commitment of all OSCE executive structures, we rapidly adapted our working methods to maintain our platform for dialogue and to continue to fulfil our mandates – all the while protecting the health and safety of OSCE staff.

So how have we adapted on the ground?

Our Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine continues its regular monitoring and reporting, though relying more heavily on unmanned aerial vehicles and cameras.

All the other field operations have adjusted to the new circumstances and continue to operate. They provide assistance to their host communities, and together with our institutions and the Secretariat, they are exploring ways to address the longer-term consequences of the pandemic.

These include, for example, increased support for preventing gender-based violence; combating human trafficking and corruption; promoting digital governance, democratic institutions and media freedom; support for vulnerable groups; and strengthening crisis management capacities.

We can be proud of the fact that the OSCE also became one of the first international organizations to move its decision-making bodies online.

Maintaining dialogue remains critical to building trust, to preventing and resolving conflicts, and to promoting co-operation to tackle shared security challenges.

As this Ministerial Council demonstrates, COVID-19 has not prevented our unique regional platform from fostering an inclusive security dialogue where all participating States have an equal voice.

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the pandemic is having profound and long-lasting effects on our societies and economies, with serious consequences for peace and stability.

Our security environment has become more volatile and unpredictable. There are signs that the pandemic is accelerating existing trends, including growing distrust and polarization between and within States. It is also having a heavy impact on conflict-affected populations, who were already enduring difficult conditions, and it is making conflict prevention and conflict management efforts more challenging.

Unfortunately the United Nations Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and co-operation across conflict lines to address the pandemic has largely gone unheeded.

Instead, the pandemic has hindered contacts and dialogue, and mediation processes, and diverted attention from conflict resolution efforts. In some cases, we have seen the use of force prevail over diplomacy.

In our region, this has included a destructive war around Nagorno-Karabakh with a severe impact on civilians. While the ceasefire is welcome in halting the fighting, we must now support renewed efforts to achieve a long-term peaceful political settlement. There is wide support for the Minsk Group Co-Chairs and the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office to continue their diplomatic efforts.

On a more positive note, a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine has largely been respected for more than four months, offering the sides an opening to make progress on other tracks.

Political dialogue and mediation processes can continue even in online formats if the political will is there.

Processes where the OSCE is involved remain active, mostly in virtual mode, with support from the Secretariat as appropriate, even if formal meetings have not been possible for all of them.

Work has continued in the Trilateral Contact Group, pursuing a peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine; in the Geneva International Discussions on consequences of

the 2008 conflict in Georgia; in the Transdniestrian settlement process; and, of course, by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

The OSCE remains ready to provide its good offices and conflict prevention tools wherever they might be needed to help ease tensions.

This year we mark three historic OSCE milestones: the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris, and the 10th anniversary of the Astana Declaration.

These landmark documents, which set out our fundamental principles and commitments, were the work of political leaders with the courage and foresight to look beyond the tensions of their times and to embrace an inclusive vision of co-operative security. We should look to them for inspiration as we endeavour to resolve contemporary conflicts.

This year we also mark the 20th anniversary of the women, peace and security agenda. The OSCE continues to reinforce the meaningful role of women in all stages of conflict prevention and resolution, which – as is well documented – helps makes peace sustainable.

Also, over the years the OSCE has developed a robust toolbox for preventing conflicts and promoting security and stability. Next year we will mark the 10th anniversary of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 on strengthening the OSCE's capabilities across the conflict cycle. I would hope that we use this moment to take stock and consider how we could further strengthen our toolbox. The OSCE executive structures can support and assist efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, but ultimately it is up to participating States to make full use of the tools available to them – to you.

Ten years ago at the Astana Summit, participating States underscored that the security of the OSCE area is inextricably linked with that of our neighbouring regions. Our Asian and Mediterranean Partners are keen to work more closely with the OSCE. So a declaration by this Ministerial Council to strengthen co-operation with our Asian Partners would be a welcome development.

We all benefit from the synergies that both of these partnerships provide, since they enable us to promote peace and security more effectively and efficiently. This is also true for our partnerships with the United Nations and other international organizations.

Excellencies,

Next year the OSCE will continue to contend with an array of serious challenges. We look forward to working with the incoming Swedish Chairpersonship and Troika members Albania and Poland, who can count on the wholehearted commitment and support of all OSCE staff and executive structures. And you, dear ministers, can continue to rely on the OSCE to support the implementation of your decisions.

Especially now, when we are all equally vulnerable to the virus that is wreaking havoc on our societies, co-operation is essential.

So I hope in the coming weeks, also following your appointment of a new Secretary General and new heads of the institutions, we will see renewed commitment to co-operative security and the timely adoption of a reasonable budget that will enable the Organization to support you.

We are well aware that many participating States now face serious financial constraints.

I hope that you agree, that the OSCE has always been a very good value for money. Our 16 field operations, our three specialized institutions, our Secretariat, and 4,000 OSCE staff continue to promote security for the more than 1.2 billion people who inhabit our region – and on a total assessed budget of only 226 million euros (including 92 million euros for the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine).

I can assure you that we make every effort to prioritize and to find the most reasonable ways to use the money that you provide us in a prudent and transparent manner.

It is the women and men in our field operations, institutions and the Secretariat who translate your directives into action. So I would like to thank the entire OSCE staff for their commitment and hard work, and particularly in these challenging times, for their flexibility and resilience. They continue to deliver despite the added stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Their health and safety must remain our top priority.

Sadly, last month we lost an OSCE colleague to COVID-19. On behalf of us all, I extend my deepest sympathy to Ms. Tatiana Palaguta's family and friends and to her colleagues in our Programme Office in Bishkek.

This year, the pandemic reminded us that we need to be prepared for unexpected challenges, and that it is more important than ever to co-operate in finding solutions.

On a positive note, once again, the OSCE has demonstrated its responsiveness to crises and its ability to quickly adapt our work in promoting security and stability to new developments.

We have continued to see excellent co-operation among the Secretariat, the field operations, the institutions and the Parliamentary Assembly.

All in all, we can be proud that the OSCE remains flexible and resilient. In the coming year as well, you can count on us to do our utmost to fulfil the mandates that you have given us to promote peace and security for the benefit of people throughout our region.

In closing, I would like to thank the Albanian Chairpersonship and you, Prime Minister Rama, as the Chairperson of the OSCE, for placing your trust in me to carry out the essential functions of the Secretary General over the past few months. It has been a great honour and a privilege to do so. Along with my fellow directors and all the Secretariat staff, I look forward to the appointment of a new Secretary General.

Thank you.

**LETTER FROM
THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FORUM FOR
SECURITY CO-OPERATION TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR EUROPE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ALBANIA,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF THE
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE OSCE**

(Annex 26 to MC(27) Journal of 3 and 4 December 2020)

As Chairperson of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC), it is my pleasure to inform you about the Forum's activities in 2020.

In preparing this letter, I have consulted with the previous 2020 FSC Chairmanships, namely, Turkey and Ukraine. During 2020, the FSC Chairmanships worked in close co-operation to ensure continuity and efficiency in the implementation of the Forum's annual work programme.

Several initiatives undertaken by participating States led to the adoption of six decisions, all designed to support the implementation of existing commitments.

The year 2020 has been an extraordinary one on account of COVID-19 and has tested the FSC's conduct of work. In their immediate responses to the crisis, the FSC Chairmanships, in close co-ordination with the Chairmanship of the Permanent Council and the OSCE Secretariat, have maintained continuity in the FSC's work while following the host country's preventive measures and prioritizing duty of care for personnel. By closely following the prevailing developments of the COVID-19 situation, the FSC Chairmanships provided guidance on modalities of the FSC's work. With the invaluable support of the OSCE Secretariat, the FSC meetings, those of the Working Groups, and the informal meetings were conducted either in a blended format or remotely via teleconference, starting from the Ukrainian FSC Chairmanship. While recalling politico-military commitments and their relevance in times of crisis, the FSC Chairmanships highlighted the need for solidarity and co-operation. The Turkish FSC Chairmanship issued a letter appealing to all participating States, within their sovereign rights, to refrain from or postpone verification activities under the auspices of the Vienna Document 2011 whenever possible, until it was determined that the prevailing conditions allowed such activities to take place safely again. In addition, the FSC Chairmanship invited the participating States to conduct the annual Global Exchange of Military Information electronically. Furthermore, the German FSC Chairmanship issued a letter inviting the participating States to accomplish the 2020 annual exchange of military information electronically via the OSCE Communications Network and outlined the procedures to achieve this fully electronic exchange of data.

The strategic discussions during the security dialogues indicated the FSC's importance as a platform for dialogue, addressing security issues of common interest and concern.

Although the topic regularly raised by Ukraine, involving active participation of interested delegations, continued to be dominant in the Forum's discussions, there were a variety of other active discussions on the following themes: normative and project-related aspects in the field of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional

ammunition (SCA), including the topic of mine action; regional and subregional military and defence co-operation; the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda; the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, including private military and security companies; implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004); the Vienna Document 2011 and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs); matters related to terrorism; new technologies; and COVID-19 and its impact on politico-military aspects of security in the OSCE area, including the implementation of the CSBMs. In all, the three 2020 FSC Chairmanships organized a total of 21 security dialogues.

Three of the security dialogues and many informal meetings were devoted to small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SALW/SCA), as tasked by the relevant OSCE documents and various relevant FSC and Ministerial Council decisions. Two of these featured discussions on OSCE work in mine action. Moreover, the dedicated work on updating the Best Practice Guides on SALW and conventional arms continued throughout the year and the second OSCE Biennial Meeting to Assess the Implementation of the OSCE Documents on SALW and SCA – as decided at the 2017 Ministerial Council – was held under the German FSC Chairmanship in October 2020. The Biennial Meeting took stock of global actions and the new challenges and opportunities in combating illicit trafficking of SALW and conventional ammunition (CA). The participating States assessed the implementation of OSCE commitments on SALW and SCA and in their discussions focused on the options for improvement, in particular with regard to the review and update of the OSCE Best Practice Guides on SALW and CA and to the enhancement of the information exchanges and assistance mechanism.

Two security dialogues were held with a view to promoting regional stability and adherence to the principles and norms of the OSCE and international law. The one held under Ukraine's FSC Chairmanship concerned the security situation in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov region; the other one, held under the Chairmanship of Turkey, focused on regional security co-operation in countering irregular migration.

Another topic highlighted during the year was the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and United Nations Security Council resolution 1540, to which one security dialogue was devoted under the FSC Chairmanship of Turkey and another under the Chairmanship of Ukraine, with the latter highlighting the FSC's contribution to the Comprehensive Review of the Status of Implementation of UNSCR 1540 and challenges to the non-proliferation regime.

During the FSC Chairmanship of Turkey, instead of sending – as would normally be the case under the FSC's Announcing and Reminding Mechanism – a reminder letter to the participating States that had not provided information pursuant to the Vienna Document, the Chairperson individually approached officials from these States in order to expedite the process.

The 30th Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting (AIAM) took place in March 2020 during the FSC Chairmanship of Turkey. Led by Malta and Moldova, it provided an opportunity to raise and discuss various issues related to the present and future implementation of agreed confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs). The discussions at the AIAM resulted in a number of suggestions on how the current CSBMs could be implemented more effectively and improved in the future. Among other things, new notification formats were discussed, with participating States putting forward concrete

suggestions for improvement. Another instrument supporting and enhancing information exchanges between the participating States was the OSCE Information Management and Reporting System (iMARS) being developed by the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), which has become even more relevant in the unexpected context of the COVID-19 pandemic. With its focus on improving the accuracy and availability of the relevant military data, iMARS is an excellent tool for increasing transparency and fostering fact-based discussions among the participating States in relation to arms control and CSBMs.

The ninth Annual Discussion on the Implementation of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security was held online in June 2020 under the Ukrainian FSC Chairmanship. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity for participating States to review the enforcement of the Code and to exchange views on ways of further improving its implementation, which resulted in valuable concrete suggestions on the way ahead.

The FSC also contributed to the 2020 Annual Security Review Conference within its mandate, providing inputs to relevant session focusing on politico-military elements, including challenges and opportunities related to conventional arms control and CSBMs.

The year 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the landmark document UNSCR 1325. The FSC Chairmanships devoted a total of three security dialogues to gender equality. The German FSC Chairperson focused on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the OSCE area and the way ahead, underlining the need for education by highlighting the OSCE Scholarship for Peace and Security, while under the Turkish and Ukrainian FSC Chairmanships the discussions focused on various initiatives in the OSCE area and beyond.

2020 being a year of commemoration, Turkey dedicated one security dialogue to the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Istanbul Summit, using it to look at the lessons of the Summit, described as a “bridge-builder to the 21st century”, and to discuss contributions to the agenda of the FSC.

All three FSC Chairmanships co-operated closely with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office and the OSCE Permanent Council on cross-dimensional issues of relevance to both bodies in line with the OSCE’s concept of comprehensive and indivisible security. To this end, four joint meetings of the Forum for Security Co-operation and Permanent Council were held, on the Structured Dialogue, countering terrorism, UNSCR 1325, and hybrid threats and modern warfare.

To conclude, in 2020 the FSC has continued to serve as an important platform for dialogue and decisions, while at the same time providing participating States with a forum to discuss matters related to politico-military issues. Despite COVID-19, the FSC proved successful in taking measures to adapt to the current situation and keeping up with its regular work under the challenging circumstances.

REPORT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE OSCE ASIAN PARTNERS FOR
CO-OPERATION GROUP TO THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING
OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

(MC.GAL/6/20 of 21 December 2020)

During its Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group in 2020, Slovakia focused on promoting an open and interactive dialogue. When drawing up the Group's agenda for the year, Slovakia worked together with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship and, in particular, the Asian Partners to ensure that the agenda also reflected their priorities. This collaborative and demand-driven approach resulted in an agenda that took into account the Asian Partner countries' interests and concerns while supporting the OSCE Chairmanship's own priorities.

In 2020, owing to the COVID-19 restrictions, all five meetings of the Asian Partners for Co-operation Group had to be held in a virtual format. Nonetheless, the OSCE participating States and the Asian Partners were able in this way to engage in timely discussions on key security issues of interest to all parties, and to share best practices and experience with one another. Each meeting featured speakers from at least one of the Asian Partner countries and presentations on the chosen topics given by experts from international organizations, diplomats, academics and civil society representatives.

The first meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 5 June, dealt with the topic of "Peacekeepers as early peace-builders: Thailand's practical approach to sustainable peace" and was organized in partnership with Thailand. H.E. Mr. R. Boháč, Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, emphasized that the meeting was intended to provide an opportunity for the participating States and the Asian Partners to share their views and experience with regard to efforts to achieve sustainable peace. Such an exchange would help to advance the thematic priority set by Slovakia for the Group's agenda throughout the year, namely to promote active co-operation and dialogue. The OSCE Secretary General, Mr. T. Greminger, discussed the Organization's considerable experience in peace-building, acquired both through its field operations and through an expanding range of activities carried out by OSCE institutions and relevant departments in the OSCE Secretariat. The Organization was actively involved, together with its international partners, in several conflict resolution and peace-building processes, including the Geneva International Discussions and the two associated Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms; the Minsk Group; the Transdnisterian settlement process; and the Trilateral Contact Group. The Secretary General also noted how the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation was celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2020, and emphasized the importance of the decision adopted the year before by the Bratislava Ministerial Council to rename the Asian Contact Group. That decision had been a further step towards more substantial engagement based on meaningful political dialogue and practical co-operation.

H.E. Mr. I. Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Permanent Council, reviewed the priorities of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship in 2020.

H.E. Ms. M. Sriswasdi, Permanent Representative of Thailand to the OSCE, focused on her country's long track record in peacekeeping. Since joining the United Nations in 1946, Thailand had participated in more than twenty peacekeeping and humanitarian missions involving some 24,000 members of the Thai armed forces. Two Thai military officers

participated in the ensuing thematic discussion. Colonel N. Seangchan, an experienced national planner for peacekeeping operations, discussed the rationale behind applying a “sufficiency economy philosophy” approach to peacekeeping, while Colonel N. Panigabutr, a former commanding officer of the Thai infantry battalion deployed to Darfur, highlighted Thailand’s experience in achieving sustainable peace through sustainable development. Ms. T. Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre and Deputy Head of the OSCE Secretariat, gave a presentation on the OSCE’s co-operation with the United Nations and the Organization’s contribution to peace-building and peacekeeping efforts in the OSCE area. Ms. K. Kertysová, Policy Fellow at the European Leadership Network and a participant in the OSCE “Perspectives 20–30” initiative, focused on the importance of peacekeeping and international co-operation from the perspective of young people.

The second meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 10 July, focused on combating corruption and was organized in partnership with Japan. H.E. Mr. R. Boháč, Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, opened the meeting by noting how timely its main theme was in view of the OSCE high-level conference on “Good governance and the fight against corruption in the digital era” that had been held just a few days earlier, namely on 6 and 7 July. H.E. Mr. A. Mizutani, Permanent Representative of Japan to the OSCE, introduced the thematic session and referred to several relevant OSCE Ministerial Council decisions, including Decision No. 5/14 on the prevention of corruption and Decision No. 11/04 on combating corruption. The first speaker during the thematic discussion, Mr. C. Shimizu, Director of the International Safety and Security Co-operation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, presented his country’s efforts and commitments in the fight against corruption, focusing on the G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group, which Japan had chaired in 2019. Mr. E. Oyamada, a professor at Doshisha University in Kyoto, subsequently shared some observations on the global community’s anti-corruption efforts and on the assistance in that field provided by international donor agencies. He also discussed anti-corruption measures in Japan and the importance of preventive measures. Ms. P. Severino, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Corruption, discussed the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship’s perspective on the fight against corruption, which it had put at the very top of the Organization’s agenda for 2020. Ms. J. Brzobohatá, an expert at the Corruption Prevention Department in the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, presented her country’s efforts to prevent corruption, including the main priorities of the Slovak Anti-Corruption Policy for 2019–2023 and the electronic system used by Slovakia for corruption risk management. After the thematic discussion, a number of delegations delivered their statements, commending the speakers and sharing their countries’ best practices on combating corruption.

On 3 September, the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship convened a Permanent Council meeting the first part of which was dedicated to the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation. The Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group and the Asian Partners contributed, together with the participating States, to a review of the collaborative achievements under the Partnership, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2020. Tribute was paid to the continuously open and interactive dialogue with the Asian Partners – a demand-driven approach being used to identify the topics for discussion within the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group – and also to the strong focus on sharing experience and lessons learned among the OSCE and its Asian Partners.

The 2020 OSCE Asian Conference on “Multilateral Responses to the Global Security Challenges” was held on 12 and 13 October via video teleconference. Organized in partnership with the Republic of Korea, the conference had originally been scheduled to take place in Seoul. All five Asian Partners for Co-operation (Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand) and 30 OSCE participating States took part. More than 151 political representatives, policy experts and practitioners from international, regional and subregional organizations, academia, business and civil society from across the OSCE area and the Asian Partners for Co-operation came together to explore ways of tackling global security challenges. The opening session was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. C.-H. Shin, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the OSCE, and H.E. Ms. K. Žáková, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE. During the opening session, keynote speeches were delivered by H.E. Mr. T. Lee, Second Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; H.E. Ms. I. Brocková, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia (via a pre-recorded video message); H.E. Mr. A. Tare, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania; and Ms. T. Yrjölä, Officer-in-Charge/Secretary General and Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. The opening speakers’ remarks were followed by three thematic sessions. Session 1 dealt with “Regional confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) and exchanges of best practices between Europe and Asia”, session 2 was dedicated to “Mitigating trans-border environmental risks and challenges”, and session 3 was themed “The nexus between security and access to information in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”. The closing remarks were delivered by H.E. Mr. B.-H. Chung, Director-General for International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, and Ms. E. Dobrushi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE. Both speakers emphasized the importance of co-operation in tackling global security challenges.

Immediately after the 2020 OSCE Asian Conference, on 14 October, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea organized, with the support of the OSCE Secretariat, an Interregional Conference on the Impact of Emerging Technologies on International Security and Terrorism. Bringing together more than 170 representatives from over 50 countries, the conference was opened by Mr. B. Jongin, Ambassador for International Security Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, and Ms. A. Kupchyna, Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats, OSCE Secretariat. Experts from both the public and private sectors spoke about the most pressing issues in relation to emerging technologies. The first session was devoted to the impact of such technologies on international security, while the second session focused on their implications for terrorism. Each session covered both the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies.

The third meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 30 October, dealt with “Trade facilitation and the Lapis Lazuli route” and was organized in co-operation with Afghanistan. H.E. Ms. K. Žáková, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE and Acting Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, opened the meeting. She briefly discussed the Lapis Lazuli Transit, Trade and Transport Route Agreement, which had been developed with a view to promoting regional economic integration and trade-based connectivity between the member countries. H.E. Ms. K. F. Ebrahimkhel, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the OSCE, mentioned, in her opening remarks, that it was her last OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group meeting co-organized with the OSCE, since she was coming to the end of her ambassadorial tenure in Vienna. She then focused on the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement,

noting that it was an important milestone in the collective efforts of countries in the region. Implementation of the agreement would make a significant contribution to the establishment of an integrated transit and transport system covering all of the contracting parties and, more broadly, to the strengthening of economic and cultural ties between Asia and Europe. The first speaker at the thematic discussion, Mr. G. A. Farzam, Deputy Director General for Regional Connectivity, Trade, Transit and Investment, Directorate General for Economic Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, delivered his remarks on behalf of the Deputy Foreign Minister, H.E. Mr. M. Nab. Mr. Farzam emphasized the need to intensify the ties between the OSCE and its Asian Partners for Co-operation, and reiterated the significance of Afghanistan's geographical situation. Mr. L. Golian, Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia for Afghanistan and Pakistan, was the second speaker at the thematic discussion. Following the speakers' presentations, several delegations took the (virtual) floor, many of them noting the need for regional stability in order to achieve greater economic connectivity.

On 9 and 10 November, a round table on "Leveraging innovation and technology to address 21st-century security challenges and crises across the OSCE and Asian Partners for Co-operation" was held online and in Vienna. Nearly 180 participants from across the entire OSCE area joined this blended event, which was organized by the OSCE Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department and External Co-operation Section, in close co-operation with the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and with the support of the Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group and the OSCE Border Management Staff College. The round table focused on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on border control agencies' operations, and on a number of serious transnational security threats, including trafficking in human beings and terrorist activities. Challenges arising from the misuse of technology for terrorist purposes and for other transnational crimes were addressed by experts representing each of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation. The innovative use of emerging technologies, such as biometrics and advance passenger information/passenger name record systems, to help in countering the cross-border movement of foreign terrorist fighters and criminals was also discussed. Several international experts stressed the importance of protecting human rights when applying such technologies.

The fourth meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 13 November, had as its theme: "20 years on: UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security" and was organized jointly with Australia. After H.E. Ms. K. Žáková, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE and Acting Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, delivered her opening remarks, Ms. J.-A. Guivarra, Ambassador for Gender Equality at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, contributed to the discussion via a pre-recorded video statement. Among other things, Ms. Guivarra focused on the challenges that the COVID-19 crisis had posed in particular for women. She stressed that the need for national action plans on women, peace and security could not be underestimated, adding that Australia was currently in the process of launching its second such plan to facilitate women's participation in the response to the COVID-19 crisis. The next speaker at the thematic discussion, Mr. P. Hulényi, Director of the Department for the United Nations and International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, emphasized the importance of exploring the linkages between gender entrepreneurship and sustainable development, especially during the current global health crisis, when many women had become the main breadwinners in households. He also spoke about Slovakia's efforts in

implementing the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, focusing on his country's national action plan. Ms. A. Darisuren, Senior Adviser on Gender Issues at the OSCE Secretariat, highlighted the efforts to advance the WPS agenda undertaken by the OSCE and its Gender Section in particular. Following the presentations by the speakers, several delegations took the (virtual) floor and discussed their countries' efforts in promoting the WPS agenda; they agreed on the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into the OSCE's comprehensive security approach. In her closing remarks, Ms. Darisuren noted that the role of regional organizations was very valuable in the implementation of the WPS agenda at the national level, adding that it was an agenda with considerable potential for transnational co-operation. She stressed the need to identify existing barriers to women's participation in the three stages of the conflict cycle (conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation), one such barrier being the unpaid household and care work that women so often had to perform.

At the Tirana Ministerial Council meeting, held on 3 and 4 December, the ministers for foreign affairs of the OSCE participating States adopted the Declaration on Co-operation with the OSCE Asian Partners. In this document the ministers welcomed, among other things, the Asian Partners' active engagement in OSCE events and activities, and reiterated the Organization's commitment to enhancing dialogue and co-operation with its Asian Partners.

The fifth meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 11 December, was organized in partnership with the Republic of Korea and was dedicated to "Addressing challenges of emerging technologies and cybersecurity". In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr. I. Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Permanent Council, noted that cybersecurity ranked high on the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship's agenda and mentioned the events dedicated to the topic that had been held under its aegis. He emphasized the need for both participating States and Partners for Co-operation to continue engaging in effective multilateral efforts aimed at ensuring stability in cyberspace. H.E. Ms. K. Žáková, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE and Acting Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, discussed the 16 pioneering confidence-building measures (CBMs) for cyberspace that had been adopted by the participating States since 2013. She emphasized that the OSCE could not act alone in that field: strong co-operation and co-ordination at the national, regional and international levels were essential. Mr. J. Yoo, a professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Republic of Korea, was the first speaker during the thematic discussion. He discussed both the benefits and potential threats associated with information and communications technology (ICT), in particular with emerging technologies. His Institute was leading consultations at the bilateral level with various partners, including the European Union, and at the same time keenly observing the work done by the UNGGE. The next speaker, H.E. Mr. M. Peško, Ambassador-at-large, Hybrid Threats and Enhancing Resilience Unit, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, reminded the participants of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on ICT and cybersecurity, pointing out how cyberattacks had become widespread in recent months. Security challenges in cyberspace affected everyone, and no single country could tackle them on its own. Many countries currently had very developed cybersecurity capacities, while others required more support: the OSCE accordingly had to focus on providing assistance to the latter. H.E. Mr. K. Dán, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the OSCE, outlined his "Adopt a CBM" initiative, which encouraged individual participating States to volunteer and take ownership of one of the aforementioned 16 CBMs for cyberspace (enumerated in PC.DEC/1202), team up with others and thus create a group of countries dealing with one specific CBM. The first measure

to be thus “adopted” was CBM 3, which had been taken up by Switzerland and Germany; Serbia had initiated comprehensive work on CBM 9; and France and Germany were leading the way on CBMs 15 and 16. Ms. Sz. Toth, Cyber Security Officer at the OSCE Secretariat, was the final speaker during the thematic discussion. She underscored the significance of the Korean inter-regional conferences, which had been organized annually by the Republic of Korea since 2017, with every second conference being dedicated to cybersecurity. With regard to the 2020 conference, she noted the high level of interest shown by countries from other regions, notably the Arab States and Latin America. The thematic discussion was followed by the presentation of the booklet issued by the OSCE to mark the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation. The booklet includes all relevant historical documents, details of current and past projects, and information on other activities undertaken in the context of the OSCE Asian Partnership. It has already been published on the OSCE website and a print version will be made available in due course. The final speaker on the agenda, Ms. M. König, Senior External Co-operation Officer, Office of the Secretary General, OSCE Secretariat, gave a presentation about past and forthcoming OSCE activities, projects and events of special relevance to the Asian Partners.

The 2020 Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group expresses its sincere appreciation to all the Asian Partners for Co-operation and the participating States for their dedicated engagement in promoting the OSCE Asian Partnership as a platform for a mutually enriching exchange of experience, particularly in view of the many challenges created by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Slovakia wishes the incoming Albanian Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group every possible success, and encourages it to continue promoting an open and frank exchange in line with the commitments laid down in the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Declaration on Co-operation with the OSCE Asian Partners.

REPORT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE OSCE MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS
FOR CO-OPERATION GROUP TO THE TWENTY-SEVENTH
MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
(MC.GAL/7/20 of 29 January 2021)

In chairing the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group during 2020, Sweden promoted a dynamic, interactive and operational Mediterranean Partnership. The focus was on increasing security in the OSCE area, notably by harnessing the full potential of closer dialogue and co-operation with the Mediterranean Partners.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Sweden managed to organize three meetings of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group in the course of the year. These meetings fostered dialogue with the Mediterranean Partners on a range of key topics, and were aimed primarily at intensifying the exchange of best practices and identifying areas for long-term co-operation. The topics covered included information technology and the fight against trafficking in human beings; women, peace, and security; and youth engagement and participation to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

In addition, representatives of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation were involved in a number of other OSCE events. On 17 February 2020, an Arabic-language version of the OSCE handbook “Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Good Practices for Law Enforcement” was launched in Cairo – the fruit of co-operation between the OSCE Secretariat’s Transnational Threats Department and the League of Arab States. On 5 October 2020, the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship convened an OSCE-wide conference entitled “Addressing Organized Crime through Strategic Partnerships”, the programme for which had been designed by the Transnational Threats Department’s Strategic Police Matters Unit. A large number of participating States and partner countries gave an overview of the challenges they were facing in relation to organized crime and agreed on the need for an inclusive regional approach to tackle these.

The first meeting of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 11 May 2020, focused on “Information Technology and Human Trafficking: Challenges and Opportunities”. In her opening remarks, H.E. Ms. U. Funered, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, welcomed the Group in the new video-based format necessitated by the COVID-19 emergency and the restrictions on in-person gatherings. She underlined the seminal role of the Helsinki Final Act in establishing a link between European and Mediterranean security. Continuity was key to strengthening the Mediterranean Partnership, and Sweden had chosen topics for the Mediterranean Group’s agenda where the OSCE had a comparative advantage to offer, including: sustainable development; countering trafficking in human beings; women, peace and security; and the role of young people in countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

H.E. Mr. T. Greminger, Secretary General of the OSCE, noted that the pandemic called for further intensification of the dialogue with the Mediterranean Partners. That dialogue had always been about sharing best practices and lessons learned – in line with the

principle that “the security of one is the security of all”. He drew attention to the recently issued Partnership Fund report and noted that all too many projects involving the Partners for Co-operation still relied on a small number of donors and had a short lifespan.

H.E. Mr. I. Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Permanent Council, stated that in accordance with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship’s objective of keeping the Mediterranean Partnership high on the agenda, it was planned to hold a Permanent Council meeting on Mediterranean co-operation in the second half of 2020. With regard to combating trafficking in human beings, he noted that it was important to harness the potential of “big data”, specifically by combining digital archives with open-source information, court records and other information in a central hub. Without closer international co-operation, however, that could never be fully realized.

Referring explicitly to the meeting’s theme – “Information Technology and Human Trafficking: Challenges and Opportunities” – Mr. P.-A. Sunesson, Swedish Ambassador-at-Large for Combating Trafficking in Persons, noted how tens of millions of people were currently the victims of forced labour, sexual exploitation and other forms of exploitation. Vulnerable population groups, including women and girls, were at a much higher risk of becoming victims of exploitation. The potential of information and communication technologies in the fight against trafficking in human beings had still not been fully tapped, yet those technologies could play a formidable role both in preventing and prosecuting such criminal activities. Combating trafficking in human beings was a key priority for Sweden, and Mr. Sunesson duly called for multilateral co-operation in that field to be strengthened – despite the prevailing international tensions.

Ambassador N. Gabr, Chairperson of Egypt’s National Coordinating Committee for Preventing and Combating Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons, acknowledged that while new technologies could help countries to improve their citizens’ quality of life, they could also be misused by traffickers to exploit and harm vulnerable people. She argued that developing countries still lacked the proper knowledge, tools and legislation to counter crimes committed by means of modern technologies, and that traffickers and their associates were taking advantage of that situation. Crimes involving trafficking in human beings were expected to increase as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people were losing their jobs and thus finding themselves in a vulnerable situation. Among various recommendations, she called for the adoption of international and regional measures that would provide for law enforcement agencies to monitor the Internet for any unlawful acts.

Ms. A. Karra, Senior Attorney at the Cybercrime Department of the Office of the State Attorney, Ministry of Justice of Israel, underlined her country’s commitment to the protection, prevention and prosecution aspects of combating trafficking in human beings. The Israeli Government was constantly establishing and promoting partnerships to tackle that challenge. In the context of the global pandemic, a new reality of closed borders and physical distancing meant that law enforcement agencies had to increase their focus on the sophisticated tools used by organized criminal groups to continue their exploitative practices, including online platforms.

Mr. E. Anderson, Senior Consultant for Human Rights and Corporate Affairs at British Telecom, noted that millions of people were directly impacted by modern slavery and trafficking in human beings, with estimates indicating that there were some 40 million victims around the world. He gave several examples of the effective use of information and

communication technologies to combat trafficking in human beings, especially with regard to engaging supply chain workers in relevant efforts, the identification of victims and perpetrators, and case management systems for victims of trafficking. Private sector-driven tools and public-private partnerships were particularly promising.

Mr. V. Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, stressed the importance of realizing that technology was “a double-edged sword”. On the one hand, traffickers were able to conceal their identity and increase anonymity through such modern technologies as encrypted applications, cryptocurrency and fake social media accounts. On the other hand, partnerships with tech companies could greatly enhance research and development efforts to find new, more effective ways of combating trafficking. He praised the role of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group as a platform for the exchange of information and lessons learned, including innovative tools and practices.

During the follow-up discussion, many delegations suggested establishing a dynamic online platform to enable the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners to exchange best practices and lessons learned in making positive use of information technology to combat trafficking in human beings. Some delegations also called for a study to be launched on the Mediterranean dimension of such trafficking.

The second meeting of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 13 July 2020, was themed “Connecting the Tracks: Beyond the Official Negotiation Table – Women’s Comprehensive Contribution to Peace Processes”. The Chairperson of the Group, H.E. Ms. U. Funered, stressed that gender equality and women’s participation were key priorities for Sweden. The relevant experience of the Mediterranean Partners could undoubtedly enrich the exchange of best practices taking place within the OSCE.

Mr. R. Egnell, Vice-Chancellor of the Swedish Defence University, noted that a gender-balanced environment allowed efforts to be maximized and led to improved performance by everyone – women and men alike. This was because such an environment fostered co-operation and brought qualities and skill sets to the fore that would otherwise lie fallow. A lot still needed to be done in the security-military sphere, though, to give women equal access and influence. In particular, women had to be included in peace processes from the very start, namely during the conceptualization and design phases. Peace initiatives had to be framed around a comprehensive notion of security that envisaged both women and men addressing the various aspects of a security situation, from the human to the political. The OSCE had a unique advantage in that regard, since its approach to security had been comprehensive ever since its founding documents.

Ms. A. Mici, Director of the Directorate of Integration, Coordination and Assistance, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Albania, referred to the imminent 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and drew attention to the need to better implement its provisions. As part of its first National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, covering the period 2018–2020, Albania intended to foster Mediterranean regional dialogue on women’s participation in security and peace matters – by, *inter alia*, promoting initiatives related to track II (backchannel) diplomacy. Gender equality had to be recognized as the cornerstone of any empowerment strategy. She thanked the OSCE Presence in Albania and UN-Women for their co-operation with Albania’s national authorities on those matters.

Ms. S. Al-Nims, Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, drew attention to the role that her country had historically played in promoting peace-building and mediation, emphasizing the successes achieved by Jordanian diplomacy in a complicated regional setting. Jordan had fully included women in its national coalition for peace-related initiatives since 2010. She further noted that her country's National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 took due account of the key contribution made by Jordanian women both to preventing conflict and to resolving security situations.

Ms. Z. Langhi, an international expert on mediation and the women, peace and security agenda who in 2011 co-founded the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, shared some of her "observed lessons" as a researcher and practitioner. Inclusive peace was a more sustainable type of peace, and negotiation efforts tended to be more successful when women were fully involved, resulting in peace agreements that were more comprehensive and responsive to a variety of needs and situations on the ground. Women also had a unique ability to raise security-related issues that might otherwise be neglected – for instance, the plight of orphaned children, detainees and their families, and refugees; and access to contested resources such as food and water. It was important to frame the discussion in terms of gender equality, rather than simply in terms of women's rights. She also reiterated the need for links between informal and formal tracks of diplomacy, and called for the involvement of women in all phases of peace initiatives, from conflict management to conflict resolution and post-conflict stabilization.

Ambassador C. Sparre, Director of the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, noted that she had been involved in track II processes focused on the Middle East in the 1990s, when there had been very limited participation of women. While gender imbalances seemed normal at the time, those initiatives had almost immediately highlighted the fact that insecurity in the region was inseparable from gender inequality and that promoting women's participation was key to enhancing security. In recent years, the approach had improved on the whole, with inclusivity becoming a new paradigm in terms of the gender, age and background of participants in peace-related initiatives. However, women were all too often involved in track III (grass-roots) and track II (informal) efforts but not in track I (formal) negotiations. Like some of the other speakers, she argued that the implementation of UNSCR 1325 remained a challenge in a number of countries. She called for the OSCE to assume a more active role in promoting cross-regional dialogue, notably by drawing on the growing number of networks of women mediators.

Ms. H. Fry, a Canadian Member of Parliament and (since 2010) the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on Gender Issues, lamented that even after 20 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, discussions still revolved around how to achieve the desired results. Women constituted only 3 per cent of mediators and 8 per cent of negotiators in peace process. In the OSCE area, only 43 per cent of countries had national action plans in place for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, and only 28 OSCE participating States had the requisite resources to put their action plans into practice.

The thematic presentations were followed by a lively and rich discussion, during which delegations outlined a number of national initiatives and cited relevant aspects of their national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The representatives of the Mediterranean Partners noted the crucial contribution made by women to security-related matters in their respective countries, stressing that the role of women was increasingly

acknowledged in national legislation and across all diplomatic tracks, not merely at the grass-roots or community levels.

The third and last meeting of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 14 September 2020, focused on “Youth Participation and Engagement to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT)”. The Chairperson of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, H.E. Ms. U. Funered, noted that VERLT often affected young people disproportionately, while at the same time young people had a key role to play as positive agents of change in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. Efforts to effectively prevent and combat VERLT had to take into account the different needs and concerns of both young women and men so as to ensure their meaningful participation. The Mediterranean Partners could bring much experience and added value to OSCE discussions on that topic.

Ambassador F. Ornbrant, Counter-Terrorism Co-ordinator at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, emphasized that 1.2 billion people worldwide were aged between 15 and 24 years, accounting for around 16 per cent of the total global population. She highlighted the role of young people in preventing VERLT, citing the relevant OSCE Ministerial Council declarations adopted in Belgrade (2015) and Hamburg (2016). Young people were often the victims of acts of violence perpetrated by terrorist networks, both offline and online. One key task that lay before organizations such as the OSCE was to ensure that young people had access to the available tools for preventing and combating violence and extremism.

Mr. D. Ruah, a member of the Radicalisation Awareness Network and of the Core Group of Experts of the OSCE “Perspectives 20–30” initiative, stressed in a pre-recorded video message that young people were the main target audience of violent extremist groups, since so many of them had access to online networks and technologies. However, young people could act as a powerful antidote to the spread of violent extremism by virtue of their growing engagement in promoting better economic governance and more equitable societies, not least in the light of the COVID-19 crisis. Without the mentorship of experts, though, youth organizations would be unable to assimilate best practices fully: they needed to receive training in programme management, monitoring and evaluation, and in human rights and media literacy. Organizations like the OSCE could help young people by providing such training.

Ms. F. Ezzahra Benoughazi, President of the Young Leaders Council of Tangier, focused on best practices and lessons learned from the Council’s work. The Council had been organizing various training workshops and launching initiatives to facilitate young people’s dialogue with the local government. However, the global COVID-19 pandemic had revealed several challenges. In particular, the crisis was likely to have long-term effects on the critical work undertaken at the grass-roots level by youth organizations, which relied heavily on volunteers. Such organizations were already facing major obstacles in accessing funds. She also noted how civic engagement was shifting increasingly towards the cybersphere. Among various recommendations for the post-pandemic context, she advocated including young people in decision-making processes; creating an enabling environment by adopting strategies and laws that met young people’s needs; closing the gender gap; promoting best practices in youth-led approaches to community resilience; and developing a comprehensive approach to combat terrorism.

Ms. I. Ghedhioui, Innovation Policy Adviser, Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, spoke about her country's experience with the design and implementation of policies to combat VERLT among young people. Public sector reform could help to build robust State institutions by promoting approaches that addressed human security and good governance. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of developing more user-friendly policies to prevent youth radicalization. Using a "gov-tech approach" to create online security platforms for young people in Tunisia could help to reduce inequalities and promote trust within society.

Ms. K. Seferi, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Youth and Security, presented a number of initiatives undertaken by Albania to prevent VERLT, such as the adoption of a national strategy on countering violent extremism and the addition of extra classes on religion to the school curriculum. The OSCE possessed a comparative advantage in that field by virtue of its ability to connect the participating States with relevant stakeholders from the Mediterranean area, including young people and youth-led organizations. She emphasized the OSCE's field operations, in which young women and men were working together to prevent VERLT. In particular, the OSCE Presence in Albania had played a crucial role in raising awareness among young people.

During the discussion that followed the panel presentations, the representatives of the Mediterranean Partners noted the crucial contribution made by young people to efforts to combat VERLT in their respective countries. Young women in particular could play a highly constructive role in helping to achieve peace and security. International co-operation was essential in the fight against terrorism. Several delegations recommended organizing another OSCE-wide Youth Forum to discuss VERLT. Some delegations also observed how the COVID-19 crisis directly impinged on VERLT, because it hit young people particularly hard in terms of impairing their economic prospects but also by aggravating their sense of disenfranchisement and marginalization. Several references were made to the Milan Ministerial Council Declaration on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean, which, it was argued, could serve as the basis for enhanced OSCE engagement with the Mediterranean Partners on youth-related issues.

The 2020 OSCE Mediterranean Conference, held on 3 November 2020, provided a high-level political platform for advancing the Mediterranean Partnership and for discussing security developments in the OSCE and Mediterranean areas, also taking into account the security implications of the ongoing pandemic. Entitled "Promoting Security in the OSCE Mediterranean Region through Sustainable Development and Economic Growth", the conference was a full-day online event with more than 250 participants drawn from over 60 countries. The high-level political segment was attended by a total of 16 ministers and deputy ministers from Partners for Co-operation and participating States, confirming the Mediterranean Conference's status as a ministerial-level forum for regional dialogue. It was opened by H.E. Ms. A. Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden; H.E. Mr. A. Tare, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania; and H.E. Ms. T. Yrjölä, Officer-in-Charge/Secretary General, OSCE Secretariat. The conference reviewed the security situation in the Mediterranean region, with a focus on development-related aspects. It began with a high-level political segment devoted to the question of how to promote security through sustainable development and economic growth during the COVID-19 pandemic. H.E. Ms. Linde stressed that, within the wider context of the response to the pandemic, the Mediterranean Conference was a valuable mechanism for enhancing such efforts. The political segment was followed by two afternoon thematic sessions, which focused,

respectively, on women's economic empowerment and on promoting environmental co-operation. Several delegations put forward specific proposals for enhancing the Mediterranean Partnership and striding towards a more secure, peaceful and prosperous future – for the benefit of all. During the concluding remarks, Ambassador P. Lärke, Head of the Task Force for the incoming Swedish OSCE Chairmanship, stressed that environmental co-operation and the empowerment of women, the two main themes covered by the Mediterranean Conference, would rank high on Sweden's agenda when chairing the OSCE in 2021.

The 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship devoted a Permanent Council meeting on 12 November 2020 to a review of co-operation with the Mediterranean Partners. H.E. Ms. U. Funered, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, observed how despite the pandemic, the Albanian Chairmanship, by introducing various innovative modalities for OSCE meetings, had helped to make the Mediterranean Partnership even more dynamic, interactive and operational.

**REPORT TO
THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON STRENGTHENING THE
LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE OSCE IN 2019–2020**
(MC.GAL/3/20 of 3 December 2020)

Introduction and background

The absence of a universally recognized international legal personality for the CSCE/OSCE led to various efforts to secure legal status and privileges and immunities for the Organization, its officials, and the representatives of its participating States across the region.

Meanwhile, various participating States granted legal status, privileges and immunities to the OSCE through national legislation or bilateral agreements/arrangements. Therefore, the OSCE is operating under a variety of legal measures resulting in a fragmentation of the legal framework of the OSCE. Against this background, operational problems illustrate the need for a uniform solution.

In 2009, the open-ended Informal Working Group on Strengthening the Legal Framework of the OSCE (IWG) was established to foster the necessary dialogue among participating States on this topic. It generally meets two to three times per year in an ongoing effort to achieve progress on legal protection for the OSCE and its officials, and to reach a solution that would grant international legal personality in accordance with one of the currently four options that continue to be the subject of the meeting discussions.¹

A practice has arisen that the Chairmanship reports to the Ministerial Council in a form such as this on the developments concerning the efforts to strengthen the legal framework of the OSCE. The Albanian Chairmanship has been informed that there was no such report in 2019 on account of the inability of the Office of the Secretary General/Office of Legal Affairs to produce such a draft report for the Chairmanship of the IWG due to it labouring under a strenuous workload and an acute rate of vacancies in the period immediately preceding the 2019 Ministerial Council. Thus, the current Chairmanship presents this report covering both 2019 and 2020, the latter with the agreement of Slovakia, the participating State holding the Chairmanship in 2019.

Proceedings of the Informal Working Group in 2019 and 2020

In 2019, the IWG was convened by the Slovak Chairmanship three times and in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was convened once by the Albanian Chairmanship in blended format in the autumn of the year. Throughout this reporting period, the IWG was chaired by Ambassador H. Tichy. As reported in previous years² and as detailed in the

1 The documents relating to the four options were compiled in CIO.GAL/8/17/Rev.1 dated 25 January 2017.

2 Reports to the Ministerial Council on Strengthening the Legal Framework of the OSCE, respectively MC.GAL/5/14/Corr.1 dated 3 December 2014; MC.GAL/4/15 dated 1 December 2015; MC.GAL/7/16 dated 9 December 2016; MC.GAL/7/17/Rev.1 dated 13 March 2018; MC.GAL/10/18 dated 7 December 2018.

Chairmanship invitations and draft agendas for the IWG meetings of 2019 and 2020³, the four options for consideration remained to be the following:

- Option one: Adoption of the 2007 Draft Convention;
- Option two: Adoption of a constituent document prior to, or in parallel with, adoption of the 2007 Draft Convention;
- Option three: Development of a “Convention Plus” (a hybrid solution consisting of elements of a constituent document incorporated into the 2007 Draft Convention);
- Option four: Implementation of the 1993 Rome Council decision through signature and ratification of the 2007 Draft Convention by a group of interested participating States.

These options were discussed at all meetings during the reporting period but no progress was made towards either identifying a favoured option or eliminating options. Some participating States reiterated their long-standing position on the topic. No new initiatives were proposed by any participating State during this period.

In an effort to stimulate novel ways of viewing the options during this period of stalemate, the Chairmanship of the IWG invited guest expert speakers to present on various aspects of the topic of legal personality for the OSCE at each of the meetings. A brief summary of these contributions in IWG meetings convened in 2019 and 2020 are recorded below.

Meeting of 5 March 2019

Presentation by Mr. A. Solntsev, Deputy Head of the Department of International Law, People’s Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), Moscow

Mr. Solntsev presented an academic analysis of the creation and development of international organizations, in particular he gave an overview of the history of the development of intergovernmental organizations and their constituent documents. He presented the history of different organizations, such as the Council of Europe, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Organization of American States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, ASEAN, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. He underlined that, in most cases, a constituent document of the international organization preceded a convention on privileges and immunities being adopted for these organizations. However, he mentioned several international organizations that do not have such a constituent document. Among them the OSCE, but also the Nordic Council, Arctic Council, BRICS, G20 and G7. Mr. Solntsev highlighted that 2020 would mark 45 years since the conclusion of the Helsinki Accords and 30 years since the adoption of the Paris Charter, thereby making the case that it is time to solve the problem of legal capacity for the Organization, in line with option two.

3 CIO.GAL/29/19 dated 22 February 2019; CIO.GAL/91/19 dated 25 June 2019; CIO.GAL/128/19 dated 23 September 2019; CIO.GAL/182/20 dated 7 October 2020.

Presentation by the Office of the Secretary General/Office of Legal Affairs on the operational consequences of the lack of a clear legal framework for the OSCE

To illustrate the risk to the Organization of operating in complex environments without an adequate legal basis, the Office of Legal Affairs presented a summary of the Administrative Tribunal of the International Labour Organization (ILOAT) case of A. v International Criminal Court (ICC) of 2018.⁴ The case concerned a complainant who was detained while on an official mission in Libya. Following her release, the complainant submitted a request for compensation and/or other damages to the ICC and alleged that the ICC had acted with malice, reckless disregard for her safety and that that amounted to gross negligence. The ILOAT found that the complainant's ordeal was a direct result of the ICC's failure to put in place a sufficient legal basis for the mission. The Tribunal found in favour of the complainant and awarded moral damages amounting to 140,000 euros. The Office of Legal Affairs suggested that this judgment is illustrative of an evolution in the application of the principle of "duty of care" in international administrative law. The Office of Legal Affairs submitted that this case is relevant to the OSCE because it outlines the possible legal, financial and reputational risks of operating in States where the OSCE or its officials do not enjoy privileges and immunities or where the Organization operates with no legal framework whatsoever.

Meeting of 8 July 2019

Presentation by outgoing Head of the Office of Legal Affairs, Ms. L. Tabassi

Ms. L. Tabassi, the then Head of the Office of Legal Affairs noted that in 2019 the IWG had reached its 10-year anniversary and in her presentation she reviewed its achievements. Some of the most significant include the number of options under consideration by the IWG being reduced from six to four in 2014; the strengthening and reissuing of the "OSCE Red Book" to OSCE officials, as authorized by the 1993 Rome Council decision; several surveys conducted among participating States that have shed light on the scope of the existing legislation of participating States that have granted legal status, privileges and immunities to the OSCE and its officials; various conferences and lectures held in co-operation with academia, and; the book published by Cambridge University Press on the legal framework of the OSCE.

Ms. Tabassi gave an overview of the operational consequences that the OSCE was facing, including fragmentation of legal arrangements and the resulting gaps in treatment of the OSCE and its officials; the inability to open bank accounts, forcing the OSCE to operate in cash with all the risks that this entails; the inability of officials to receive visas recognizing privileged status, forcing them to carry out official functions with the status of a tourist; inability to conclude leases for premises or contracts with local individuals due to the lack of legal capacity; imposition of customs duties or restrictions on the import or export of OSCE property for official activities; imposition of income tax for locally recruited officials.

4 International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT), A. v. ICC, 126th Session, Judgment No. 4003, 26 June 2018.

Meeting of 15 October 2019

Presentation by Mr. T. Höbek, Counsellor at the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey to the United Arab Emirates, on his draft dissertation “Legal personality of international organizations in the absence of a constituent legal instrument – The case of the OSCE”

Mr. Höbek presented the main theories regarding international personality of international organizations and a case study on the OSCE. He further elaborated on the main components of international legal personality, which are the privileges and immunities necessary for the international organization to function; the treaty-making capacity, and; the international responsibility of the international organization, which should be differentiated from that of the member States. In his concluding remarks, he recommended the adoption of the 2007 Draft Convention.

Update on the operational consequences of the lack of a clear legal framework for the OSCE

Mr. S. Walsh, the Head of the Office of Legal Affairs, gave an overview of the operational consequences that the OSCE was facing, including: a secondee being unable to commence duty in a mission are due to a visa issue; the difficulty in opening bank accounts and having to transfer funds in cash to one mission; and the ongoing attempts to attain basic protection such as the inviolability of archives in memoranda of understanding with some participating States.

Meeting of 19 October 2020

Presentation of the book The Legal Framework of the OSCE published by Cambridge University Press

As the IWG meeting scheduled for May 2020 had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the October 2020 meeting aimed at building on the discussions of the last IWG meeting of 15 October 2019. It featured a presentation by Ms. A. Peters, Ms. M. Steinbrück Platise, and Ms. C. Moser of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg, Germany, and editors of the book *The Legal Framework of the OSCE*, published by Cambridge University Press.

The editors expressed their hope for the book in helping efforts to strengthen the legal framework of the OSCE. Subsequently, they emphasized how all sides of the debate – those who see the OSCE as a purely political instrument and those who consider it to be an integral part of the global order and governance – can benefit from the volume, both finding new arguments to maintain their position but also further reflecting on it. The editors indicated that granting international legal personality to the OSCE or adopting a charter could make the OSCE more effective. They suggested that the book offers food for thought for all the other options on the table.

Update on the operational consequences of the lack of a clear legal framework for the OSCE

Mr. S. Walsh, the Head of the Office of Legal Affairs, gave an overview of the operational consequences that the OSCE faced in 2020, including the unprecedented challenges in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and how legal advice was sought on how to fulfil the OSCE's mandate while discharging its duty of care; the risk that given the

inconsistent level of privileges and immunities among the executive structures it cannot be excluded that affected persons might attempt suit against responsible official of the OSCE in their personal capacity; that the OSCE encountered difficulties persuading the relevant national authorities to grant the necessary protections to the OSCE, such as inviolability of OSCE premises, property and assets, freedom of movement and unrestricted communications when negotiations with three participating States on the terms of agreement for the hosting of OSCE field operations; how the lack of clear OSCE legal status resulted in suboptimal contractual terms and conditions being offered to the OSCE receiving extrabudgetary funding.

Conclusion

The four options for strengthening the legal framework of the OSCE remained tabled in 2019 and in 2020 without any perceptible progress towards consensus. Nevertheless, the level of participation in the meetings, as well as the interest in the recent publication on the legal framework of the OSCE, continue to demonstrate the strong interest in resolving the matter with the appropriate legal means to protect the OSCE, its officials and the representatives of participating States, while pursuing their functions. The diverse topics and operational challenges elaborated during the meetings of the IWG in 2019 and in 2020 underscored the multitude of aspects which are affected by the protracted pursuit of solutions.

Both in 2019 and 2020, the Informal Working Group on Strengthening the Legal Framework demonstrated that it continues to be the appropriate mechanism and a valuable forum for dialogue to discuss, co-ordinate and address this core aspect of the OSCE's existence and operations.