

CHAIRPERSONSHIP STATEMENT (ALSO ON BEHALF OF POLAND, MALTA AND FINLAND) ON SECURITY
CHALLENGES IN THE OSCE REGION

North Macedonia, Poland, Malta and Finland, representing the previous and current Chairpersonships of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as well as the forthcoming Chairpersonships for 2024 and 2025, recognize that the context of the OSCE region has negatively changed since February 2022, and this is directly affecting European security and the OSCE's work. We stand firmly with Ukraine in its right to freely choose its future and once again condemn the use of force by the Russian Federation. Russia bears the full responsibility for its war against Ukraine.

We call on Russia to immediately stop its war against Ukraine, and completely and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

As the OSCE approaches the Helsinki Final Act's 50th anniversary, participating States must reaffirm their commitment to the principles to which all participating States agreed in this historic document, and which they have affirmed many times since. The continuation of Russia's war against Ukraine is a fundamental threat to our organization and the European security. This war has seriously violated the international rules-based order, including the OSCE's founding principles and undermines the organization's ability to function effectively. The OSCE exists to deliver results for the people and we must preserve its functionality and efficacy. It is our task to uphold the OSCE's principles and unique role as a regional security organization created to prevent conflicts, implement comprehensive security, promote human rights, and democracy with the rule of law at its core. In times of crisis, the OSCE's leadership will continue to sustain and protect the essential functions of the organization and guide the process for participating States to resolve ongoing institutional issues and threats to security in the OSCE region. While doing so, the OSCE's values and commitments cannot be compromised.

We mourn the thousands of innocent lives lost in Russia's war against Ukraine. We deplore the widespread suffering that the war has caused for the people of Ukraine and the tensions and instability that it has inflicted on our region and our organization. We support efforts aimed at ensuring accountability and justice for all crimes committed amidst the Russian war against Ukraine. As we approach the 10th year of the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia, we will not accept the illegal annexation of regions of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Non-use of force, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, as well as the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, are core pillars of the OSCE and must never be undermined.

We call on Belarus to stop enabling Russia's continued war against Ukraine. We remain committed to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on full respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and reiterate our support for the Peace Formula presented by President Zelensky. In our collective efforts, we must aim for a renewal of trust and co-operation among participating States, which can only be achieved through the restoration of respect for the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and all OSCE commitments.

We recognize that women, children, senior citizens, and people with special needs are most vulnerable in times of conflict and must be afforded special protection. We denounce any attempt to intimidate and terrorize civilians through targeted attacks against civilian infrastructure. We further condemn the abduction and deportation of civilians, including children, as well as arbitrary political imprisonment. We demand from the Russian Federation the immediate release of the three OSCE officials still in detention in Donetsk and Luhansk. We further demand the return of OSCE assets that were illegally seized and taken from their respective storage facilities.

We condemn the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, which led to an ecological catastrophe in southern Ukraine. Such actions are unjustifiable and we call for the perpetrators to be brought to account. Protection of the environment is a key component of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and we call on all participating States to comply with the respective commitments. By destroying Ukrainian civil port infrastructure and grain storage facilities, blocking the Black Sea coast of Ukraine, and disrupting lawful transit in and through Ukraine's territorial seas and waterways, Russia exacerbates the global food crisis. We reiterate that challenging global food supplies should not be used by Russia as a weapon of war. We recognize that nuclear safety is a key component of our common security and call on Russia to return control of the nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia to Ukraine's civilian authorities.

We commend the resilience of Ukraine's people and society and applaud their commitment to the OSCE principles. The OSCE stands with the Ukrainian people and commends OSCE participating States that have provided shelter for refugees from Ukraine, as well as education for children from Ukraine and access to much needed social services. We applaud the work of the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine. The OSCE will remain fully engaged in Ukraine, both while the war continues and during post-war recovery. We recognize the need for a multifaceted response to the crisis by the OSCE.

In light of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, we reaffirm that the OSCE has the tools to gather evidence to contribute to investigations into alleged breaches of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, which includes potential war crimes. Various deployments of experts within the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism have provided essential reporting and have served as a platform for accountability.

We recognize that the spill-over effects of Russia's war against Ukraine, such as the displacement of civilians, as well as dynamic changes in the security landscape, have affected the Republic of Moldova and subsequently also the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. We applaud the Sides for their commitment to a peaceful resolution of outstanding issues, within the established formats, and recognize the crucial role of the OSCE Mission to Moldova in this process.

We reiterate our strong support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

We note the importance of the Geneva International Discussions, co-chaired by the European Union, the OSCE, and the United Nations, to address the consequences of the 2008 conflict in Georgia and welcome the implementation of three rounds of this negotiation format in 2023. We note the 5-6 December meeting of the 59th round of the Geneva International Discussions to address key strategic and humanitarian matters as enshrined in the Six-point Ceasefire agreement and to deliver results to the conflict-affected populations. We also commend the work of the related Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti, co-facilitated by the OSCE and the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and call for the restart of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism without delay.

We encourage the continued dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan and emphasize that dialogue and diplomacy should be the only means to settle disagreements and disputes. The use of force is unacceptable in overcoming differences, and we call on the parties to engage in good-faith negotiations to forge the necessary agreements to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the region. We underscore that the OSCE possesses the experience, expertise, and tools to serve as a platform for further dialogue and implementation of confidence-building measures.

We understand that long-term conflict settlement and long-lasting peace will only be achieved through co-operation across the OSCE region and beyond. We appreciate and remain convinced of the value of effective co-operation with our Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation, supporting our work to address global challenges. Close collaboration as well as honest and ongoing dialogue is indispensable for creating mutual trust and stability for the OSCE region. We look forward to continuing and deepening our good co-operation.

We welcome the decisions made throughout the Ministerial Council with regard to the Chairpersonship for 2024 as well as the top four leadership positions in the organization. We recognize that a clear mandate for the upcoming Chair is indispensable for the future of our organisation and for enhancing the OSCE's stability. We commend efforts made to find an agreeable solution. We regret the obstruction to this process by Russia and Belarus and call on them in future to act responsibly and in the best interests of our organisation.

We recall that all OSCE participating States joined the OSCE as a platform for pan-European dialogue based on shared values and principles to which all agreed. We reaffirm our full adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and to all OSCE norms, principles, and commitments, starting with the Helsinki Final Act, and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. The OSCE is unique in its geographical scope and as an essential tool for a dialogue of equals on European security issues. We strongly commend the use of this forum to settle disputes and conflicts.

Finally, we commend the Organization for continuing to fulfil its core functions, providing a platform for dialogue and delivering essential work in the field. We recognize that we stand at a crossroads of history, not only for our organization but also for security and stability in Europe. We owe future generations the opportunity to grow up in a free, democratic and peaceful world. Only through the restoration of peace and security in our region can we truly comply with the principles set out in the founding documents and return to a constructive dialogue.