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Opening Session EU Opening Statement on “European Security quo vadis”

The EU and its Member States thank the German Chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat for organising this year's Annual Security Review Conference. Let me warmly welcome also His Excellency Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta and thank him for his keynote speech. We welcome this important opportunity to review persistent security challenges in the OSCE region in the spirit of the CiO's leitmotiv of renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust and restoring security.

We are collectively confronted with many threats and challenges, that come from inside as well as from outside our societies. Attempts to change internationally recognised borders by force, destabilising actions, terrorism, organised crime and cyber threats, as well as the migration and refugee crisis remain key challenges for all of us and continuously grow in number and complexity.

Where are we heading in the OSCE? Where do we want to go? As much as we try to renew dialogue and rebuild trust, it has to be said that first and foremost, as in the last two years, we gather against the backdrop of a most serious security crisis in Europe caused by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, which we will not recognise, and its destabilising actions in parts of eastern Ukraine. Russia's violations of international law, the UN Charter, and founding OSCE commitments represent a significant challenge to our fundamental principles. The crisis in and around Ukraine has above all demonstrated the dangerous consequences that follow when the fundamental principles of the OSCE are violated.

Restored respect and adherence to the established principles of the OSCE are key to overcoming the crisis and to get back on track. Acts that contravene these principles must be reversed. Reconsolidating European security cannot be separated from concrete actions in relation to the crisis in and around Ukraine. Hence, for the OSCE, we believe that Europe can be peaceful and secure only if we adhere to our values and act accordingly.

The question “quo vadis?” is as relevant to the OSCE as a whole, as it is to the European Union and its citizens. Today, a new EU Global Strategy will be presented to the European Council. It is based on an EU-wide strategic reflection process. It is likely to assess that European security is best served by the principles of engagement, responsibility and partnership. It is expected to acknowledge also that we need to build consensus among those with different views and find common pathways towards peace and stability.

The substance of the strategy is broadly well known: the several priorities the EU should pursue in its global action include: (1) helping increase the resilience of the EU and its Member States as well as states and societies in surrounding regions, so they can better withstand challenges; (2) an integrated approach to conflict and crisis that will allow us to act fast and decisively; (3) investing in regional security for lasting peace and prosperity and (4) strengthening global governance in the 21st century to ensure that everybody plays by agreed rules.

These principles and priorities are also relevant for our work in the OSCE and for our cooperation with the OSCE Partners. We seek to preserve and strengthen the OSCE acquis of commitments and principles, across the three dimensions, as well as the organisation itself, on the basis of the comprehensive concept of security.

We will come back in the next sessions to the urgent need to strengthen the OSCE's effectiveness across the conflict cycle and to achieve tangible progress in resolving the protracted conflicts in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, and of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We fully support the CiO's efforts to bolster the OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox. We thank CiO Frank-Walter Steinmeier for his personal engagement in these issues.

Today's challenges to European security also demonstrate the clear need to implement fully and in good faith the politico-military commitments. We underline the need to substantially modernise the Conventional Arms Control and Confidence and Security Building regimes in Europe, including the 2011 Vienna Document. We will discuss this too in more detail in the coming days.

Let me conclude, Mr Chairman, by saying that the answer to the question "European security: quo vadis?" is actually straightforward, do-able and imperative. Last year's 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act reminded us of the need to restore respect for the fundamental principles of the OSCE. Security and prosperity, democracy and a rules-based international system go hand in hand. The best way of offering a secure future to our youth, is by promoting our values and by implementing our commitments. The OSCE has the tools to do so. We should use these and strengthen them.

We look forward to stimulating and productive exchanges over the coming days. Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.