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AT THE 2021 OSCE ANNUAL SECURITY REVIEW CONFERENCE**

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**Working session II: Transnational threats – current and future threats in the OSCE
area and beyond**

Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We should like to welcome all participants in the Annual Security Review Conference to the session on countering transnational threats in the OSCE area and beyond. Because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, this is the second time we have been obliged to meet in this blended format.

We regret to note the additional dangerous potential that transnational threats have acquired in these circumstances. The fact that States' attention has been diverted towards dealing with the pandemic, the deteriorating socio-economic situation, rising unemployment, social and political tensions, and the escalation of disagreements between ethnic, national and religious groups plays into the hands of terrorists and other criminals. In some countries, terrorists and extremists are seeking to exploit the situation to their advantage by promoting the idea that national authorities are unable to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. It is important that the OSCE, as a major regional organization, continues to focus on tackling terrorism, transnational organized crime and illicit drug trafficking, also taking into account the challenges posed to the world by the spread of the coronavirus.

The most serious concern at the moment is the situation in Afghanistan and the continuing terrorist threats in that country, especially in connection with the activities of Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), which risk spilling out beyond Afghanistan's borders, thereby jeopardizing the security of neighbouring States in Central Asia. Moreover, the flow of internally displaced persons and refugees from that country gives rise to additional risks. Terrorist organizations can exploit this situation to infiltrate their warriors into migration flows. The recent terrorist attacks at Kabul airport, which killed and injured more than 300 people, demonstrated the extent of ISIS's strength and the fragility of the security situation in the country.

In our analysis of the current threats to security in the OSCE area, we should like in particular to highlight the increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by terrorists. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted their "decamping" to the Internet and social media, where their propaganda

and recruitment activities have intensified. They seek to use technology, including artificial intelligence, to promote their propaganda, organize terrorist attacks, recruit new supporters, obtain funds for terrorist activities and spread malware. Another danger is the possibility of terrorists gaining access to technology that can be used for hacking, attacks on critical infrastructure, and also the theft of confidential data, including personal and banking information.

It is clear that the scale of the problem demands the concerted efforts of all States, in conjunction with civil society and the information technology industry, to combat the use of ICTs and the Internet for criminal purposes. This topic could serve to bring the OSCE participating States closer together in seeking joint responses to this challenge. We invite the Swedish Chairmanship to pay attention to this issue when preparing documents for the forthcoming OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Stockholm.

The problem of foreign terrorist fighters is a further serious challenge to the international community, helping as it does to spread the threat of terrorism. Halting their movements around the world requires decisive action at the national level and joint efforts by all countries, including efforts within the OSCE, in strict compliance with the norms and principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and with effective implementation of relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions against terrorism and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Pragmatic dialogue at the international level and an increased exchange of information on foreign terrorist fighters are required so as to enable these to be prosecuted effectively and brought to justice for their crimes. At the same time, rehabilitation and reintegration are no substitute for observing the overriding notion that there can be no impunity for crimes, in accordance with the “extradite or prosecute” principle. In our view, it is important to continue the work that has been started within the OSCE on the implementation of relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

We attach the utmost importance to preventing terrorism from being fuelled by resources of any kind, above all those of a financial, material, human and ideological nature. We support the OSCE’s efforts to combat the financing of terrorism. Russia is a donor to a multi-annual joint project by the OSCE and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to reduce the risks of terrorist financing in the States of Central Asia, which is aimed at enhancing the capacity of the relevant national agencies to identify, investigate and suppress the financing of terrorist networks. In Russia, we make extensive use of the facilities of the Moscow-based International Training and Methodology Centre for Financial Monitoring. Between 2017 and 2020, 5,176 experts from 22 OSCE participating States received training and were able to improve their qualifications there. In the past year alone, 1,887 specialists from OSCE countries availed themselves of the Centre’s facilities.

Despite these efforts, we are obliged to note that the OSCE as a whole has clearly lost the initiative in combating terrorism, as shown by the failure of the OSCE Ministerial Council to agree on the relevant documents since 2017. In our view, one of the reasons for this situation is attempts to impose questionable, non-consensus concepts that in practice undermine the current international legal framework for combating terrorism and create a dangerous basis for interference in the internal affairs of States. We expect the Swedish OSCE Chairmanship to be able to find a way out of the impasse this year. We also hope that a more balanced and considered approach to expanding the role of civil society in countering terrorism will become established at the OSCE, in particular without an artificial gender or other bias, which in itself by no means always contributes to the overall effectiveness of efforts in this area.

For our part, we continue to be a proactive advocate of strengthening the OSCE’s institutional framework to combat terrorism, in particular through the creation of an informal counter-terrorism working

group and/or an increase in the number of meetings of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council.

We regard combating illicit trafficking in drugs as a further important aspect of our joint efforts to counter transnational threats. The pandemic has led to an increase in drug-related crime. Drug gangs have successfully adapted to the new environment, using secure channels of communication and adjusting transport patterns, trafficking routes and concealment methods to take account of transport restrictions imposed by States.

In our opinion, increased co-operation by the competent bodies and the strengthening of operational co-ordination would enhance the OSCE's added value. Our country has been training counter-narcotics personnel for many years already. A number of projects are being implemented through the UNODC in conjunction with financial support from Russia. We intend to continue to provide donor support in this area.

It should be pointed out that despite the OSCE's solid counter-narcotics potential, its capabilities in this area are not being used to the full extent at present. In particular, since the signing of the Belgrade Declaration on the OSCE Activities in Support of Global Efforts in Tackling the World Drug Problem, not one single document on this burning issue has been adopted, although there have been at least two landmark events at the United Nations level – the 2016 United Nations General Assembly special session and the 2019 ministerial segment. Mention should also be made in particular of the unpredictable scenario due to the evolution of the security situation in, and opiate trafficking flows from, Afghanistan in the “underbelly” of the OSCE Eurasian area. Under these circumstances, it is particularly important for the OSCE to step up its efforts on the dynamically evolving counter-narcotics front. We are counting on the Swedish Chairmanship to explore the possibility of putting forward a draft counter-narcotics document at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting.

We regard countering transnational organized crime as a key aspect of law enforcement. We believe that the OSCE should continue to focus on this issue, all the more so in the light of the Declaration successfully adopted in 2020 to strengthen co-operation in this area. We also hope that the forthcoming OSCE Asian Conference on 20 and 21 September will help to consolidate international anti-crime efforts within the Organization.

We attach particular importance to co-operation in criminal matters. We invite the OSCE participating States to focus on finding effective ways of addressing the existing difficulties and obstacles in this area, in the first instance by strengthening the legal framework for international anti-crime co-operation.

We believe that, despite the difficulties encountered, the OSCE still has potential for strengthening its contribution to international co-operation on countering transnational challenges and threats. We call on participating States to make effective use of the capacities of our Organization to restore mutually beneficial, results-oriented dialogue without politicization or double standards.