



Republic of Serbia
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



MC.DEL/66/15
1 February 2016

ENGLISH only

Ministerial Council Opening Session

Opening Address by

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First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Serbia

Belgrade Ministerial Council
3 December 2015

Dear Ministers,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Twenty-Second Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. We are glad that the OSCE/CSCE has returned to Belgrade again. We are proud to be able to host, here in Belgrade, once again, after 1977-1978, a high-level meeting of our Organization. We hope that you will be enjoying our hospitality.

The OSCE Chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia is aiming for consensus on substantive issues important for advancing cooperative security in our region. Although circumstances are complicated, we are convinced that, with political will, we will be able to conduct open, frank and constructive dialogue on all issues of common concern.

There is no doubt that the OSCE's most important task at this moment is to further de-escalate the crisis in and around Ukraine. As we assumed the Chairmanship early this year, the conflict had been in progress, causing many casualties. Meanwhile, the Package of Measures to implement the Minsk agreements has been signed. Four Working Groups have been established within the Trilateral Contact Group, and talks started on the implementation of the Minsk Package, showing certain results. The mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission was extended by a year; its stable financing ensured, and strengthening of its capacities enabled in both technical terms and with regard to human resources.

The efforts of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine – the SMM – and of many other parts of the Organization are aimed at establishing peace and stability in Ukraine. The ceasefire has generally been holding and the activities related to the withdrawal of heavy weapons have continued. In this context, I would like to underline the significance of the adoption of the Addendum to the Package of Measures pertaining to withdrawal of some additional categories of heavy weapons. There is no doubt that we have to do everything in our power to make the ceasefire last and thus prevent further violence.

The Trilateral Contact Group and its four Working Groups provide a critical mechanism for establishing a dialogue on complex political, security, socio-economic and humanitarian issues between the sides. This is an exclusive format enabling the sides to intensify their engagement aimed at the implementation of the high-level agreements adopted in the Normandy Format.

In carrying out its mandate, the SMM has shown the ability to continuously adapt to new challenges. This would not have been possible without both the political and practical support of all of us in the OSCE. I would like to thank all the participating States for their support to the SMM, especially in recruitment, provision of technical means and budget contributions, which has been vital to sustaining and strengthening the SMM's operative capacity.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Chief Monitor of the SMM and all the monitors for their personal courage and commitment, without which such a challenging Mission would not be

possible. I also thank the many other dedicated OSCE staff both on the ground, as well as in the OSCE Secretariat and Institutions who are contributing to these efforts.

Dear Colleagues,

Our determination to contribute to addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine, which has sharpened the already existing divisions among us, will largely determine our ability to revive an atmosphere that is conducive to working together towards a shared vision of a free, democratic, common and indivisible security community in the OSCE region.

Although the crisis in and around Ukraine dominated the agenda of the Organization and our Chairmanship, there are still many other challenges to security in our region today. The so-called frozen conflicts remain unresolved, continuing to pose a serious threat to our common security. Therefore, we need to persevere and step up our efforts to revitalize the respective negotiation formats.

At the same time, transnational and global threats and challenges continue to undermine security in the OSCE region and beyond. Terrorism, organized crime and climate change, as well as the current migrant crisis require an urgent, decisive and coordinated responses by all of us. As we agreed, in weeks preceding the Ministerial Council, on condemning the terrorist attacks in Sinai, Paris and Ankara, I believe that we will remain united also in continuing our common fight against this global and growing threat. I strongly condemn these acts and express condolences to governments of the affected countries and families of the victims.

Our current divisions should not prevent us from taking part in addressing the challenges I already mentioned. In that respect, our Chairmanship, in co-operation with other participating States, invested large efforts in order to define the OSCE response to these serious threats. Enhancing OSCE engagement on these issues with other international actors, in particular our Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation, is vital to addressing these complex and often interconnected threats that affect all our participating States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last January, when I presented Serbia's Chairmanship priorities at the Permanent Council in Vienna, I referred to the primary importance of rebuilding trust and confidence to create a positive agenda for the future. I highlighted some key words that should determine our action at this point in time more than ever before: dialogue and compromise, peaceful resolution of disputes, confidence-building, solidarity, responsibility and cooperation. In such complex circumstances, the issue of rebuilding consensus on European security must be our central concern. We tried to encourage constructive discussion during the Informal High-Level Meeting in Helsinki in July and on other occasions throughout the year. I am hopeful that the continuation of this debate here in Belgrade will take us at least a step further along the difficult road of rebuilding confidence.

I am convinced that the OSCE, with its inclusive membership and comprehensive concept of security, is the most appropriate forum for this discussion. In the year when we are marking the fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Charter of Paris, we are deeply aware of the legacy that we have inherited. We should draw inspiration from the courage of those Cold War leaders who managed to draw up a new foundation for regulating relations between states despite an ideologically charged atmosphere of intense antagonism. I remain optimistic that, in time, we will manage to rebuild mutual trust and find our way back onto the right track.

Having said this, there is no question that our dialogue should be based on the full respect for OSCE principles and implementation of the commitments in all three dimensions undertaken by all OSCE participating States. There can be no compromise on the applicability of the fundamental principles and commitments that provide the foundation for co-operative security in the OSCE area. Assuring their effective implementation is the only possible basis on which trust and confidence can be rebuilt.

Serbia's Chairmanship has also sought to encourage effective and open dialogue within both regular OSCE meetings and the "Helsinki +40" Process. Despite difficult circumstances, in which it was conducted in the past three years, the informal Helsinki +40 Process dialogue has provided us with some useful ideas. In particular, let me highlight efforts to pursue discussions on enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the OSCE that can provide significant building blocks for a future-oriented debate – a discussion we should continue to engage in.

We will also need to engage in a more in-depth discussion on building the capacity of our Organization in order to prepare it for adequate response in all the phases of the conflict cycle, as well as to link it closer with efforts of partner organizations, particularly with the UN, in line with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. From our part, we contributed to this goal by convening an informal discussion on OSCE peace operations, which many of you attended on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. I believe that this important event was only the first of many debates that we must hold if we are to effectively prepare our Organization for future security crises that may face us in years to come.

Steering continued informal dialogue on the broader crisis of security and cooperation in the OSCE area, and on ways to strengthen the Organization's capacities to address security challenges across the three dimensions will certainly have to include the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as cooperation with the civil society. I am confident that such a comprehensive dialogue will bring us closer to fully respecting our principles and commitments.

This will be an important task for the incoming German and Austrian Chairmanships, and I wish them success in leading this dialogue in the next two years.

In conclusion, I particularly wish to thank Switzerland, our partner in consecutive chairmanships, for its close cooperation and support. I believe that this kind of cooperation can serve us as a useful experience and a role model for some future chairmanships.

Serbia will continue to be an active partner in this effort as a member of the 2016 Troika and beyond, as it strongly believes that our Organization can ensure an essential contribution to consolidation of security and rebuilding of confidence in the Euroatlantic and Eurasian areas.

Thank you.