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EUROPEAN UNION OSCE 75th Joint FSC - PC Meeting: Structured Dialogue

Vienna, 16 October 2019

EU Statement on the Structured Dialogue

The European Union and its Member States would like to thank the Czech FSC Chairmanship, as well as the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship, for convening the Joint FSC - PC meeting on the Structured Dialogue. We highly value and actively support the Structured Dialogue, which we are ready to develop further in accordance with the Hamburg Declaration, as a transparent, inclusive, state-owned and -driven confidence-building process, without a predetermined outcome and of high relevance for the EU.

We continue to see the Structured Dialogue as a meaningful platform for in-depth exchanges on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area. In this context, we would like to reiterate our serious concerns over Russia's acts of aggression against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which represent a clear violation of international law and a serious challenge to European security. It is essential to restore full respect for international law and fundamental OSCE principles by all participating States. Against this background, we welcome the continued focus of the Structured Dialogue on politico-military issues and on security threats and challenges of most concern to OSCE participating States.

We remain concerned about large scale and snap military exercises, the risk of unintended escalation stemming from hazardous incidents of a military nature, military activities in the vicinity of international borders without adequate transparency, as well as a selective approach to the implementation of OSCE's politico-military commitments and welcome the continued focus on these important issues during the Dutch Chairmanship of the IWG. We also look forward to further discussions on threat perceptions, including those resulting from conflicts, certain military activities and exercises, given their relevance. We share the view that a lack of transparency and

verification, including in the so-called “grey zones”, can make understanding threat perceptions more difficult. Discussions on the aspect of intent have proved useful and we support follow-on discussions on other parameters of intent.

Ambassador Boender, we thank you and your able team for your thorough and professional work during this year and for your second interim report. We welcome the continued focus on key issues, namely transparency, risk reduction and incident prevention throughout the year, including in the September IWG. This gave participating States a valuable opportunity to discuss full and better implementation of existing OSCE principles and commitments as well as to reflect on today’s military practices and related challenges, in particular with respect to military exercises. We welcomed the interactive expert level discussions on preventing and managing incidents on and over the high seas and on national practices. Moreover, we appreciated the discussions on military aspects of “hybrid” threats. We were encouraged to see participating States engaging constructively in these important discussions. It demonstrated once again that the Structured Dialogue has become a key part of our work both at the political and expert level in the OSCE and we should continue in this endeavor. It is important that participating States work together towards creating an environment conducive to reinvigorating Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs, as we all agreed in the Hamburg Declaration.

We reiterate our strong commitment to full implementation in letter and spirit of the existing principles and commitments in the politico-military dimension, which is essential for enhancing military transparency, predictability and political stability in the OSCE area. Important agreements in this area, including the Vienna Document, the Open Skies Treaty, and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe have provided us with important security gains for many years. As stated in our previous statements, the EU has been and remains a strong supporter of Vienna Document modernisation and takes positive note of the continuous and overwhelming support for urgent action to substantially modernise the Vienna Document. We hope that participating States can generate momentum for meaningful work on this at the FSC in the coming months.

We note that participating States have made many concrete and divergent proposals in the IWG meetings since the start of the Structured Dialogue process, a number of which merit further elaboration. In particular, we see merit in: 1) continuing expert level exchanges and military-to-military contacts within the Structured Dialogue; 2) development of a template for voluntary briefings on military exercises; and 3) further

discussion of best practices on the prevention and management of military incidents among participating States, for which we heard some concrete proposals by some EU Member States. When considering these issues, it is important to keep in mind however that voluntary measures are not a substitute for full implementation, in letter and spirit, of existing politico-military commitments by all OSCE participating States, and the importance of reciprocity in rebuilding trust and confidence. We also see merit in discussing military aspects of “hybrid” threats and take note of the proposal by some participating States to mainstream specific “hybrid” issues, like disinformation, malicious cyber activities or meddling in elections, in different OSCE fora and institutions. We look forward to examining these ideas further and working with the Chair in 2020.

Moreover, we would like to underline that we agree with the Chair’s assessment that exchange of national practices and common rules, and better communication could help to prevent incidents. Military-to-military contacts are therefore an important element in helping to reduce the risk of misunderstanding, miscalculation and accidental escalation and in building mutual confidence. However, their effectiveness depends on the presence of political will to engage in a constructive manner.

Finally, Ambassador Boender, we reiterate our full appreciation and support for your efforts as Chair of the Informal Working Group.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA* and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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