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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1400th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 November 2022

On the failure of the Polish OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office

Mr. Chairperson,

The preparations for the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in December have been clouded this year by an unprecedented step taken by the Polish OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office, which has arrogated to itself the authority to decide which ministers are to be present at that important international forum and which are not. Casting aside all the principles of our Organization, the Polish authorities are not allowing the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, to attend the Ministerial Council meeting in Łódź on 1 and 2 December. This step has left a dark stain on Poland's international reputation and is making the prospects for the OSCE's work very bleak indeed.

Poland has in effect put its national political interests above its OSCE commitments. It has failed to create the conditions for the equal participation of all the participating States. I would remind you that the principle of sovereign equality of the participating States is enshrined in our Organization's fundamental documents – the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Budapest Document of 1994 – and was repeatedly reaffirmed subsequently at summits.

We cannot accept the Polish representatives' invocation of restrictive measures allegedly required under European Union normative instruments as a justification for this discriminatory step. Such arguments are simply untenable. The Polish Government had every opportunity for availing itself of the exemptions provided for in EU decisions – above all, the exemptions related to the holding of OSCE events.

In an EU regulation issued on 17 March 2014 (Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP of 17 March 2014, Article 1(6)), direct reference is made to the fact that an EU Member State holding the OSCE Chairmanship may grant exemptions from the entry restrictions mentioned in Article 1(1). Moreover, in addition to that document, in a decision of the Council of the European Union of 25 February 2022 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/331 of 25 February 2022, Annex, Person No. 670) it is stated explicitly that the restrictions on entering EU territory do not apply to Mr. Lavrov. So on the basis of what norms have the Polish authorities forbidden the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation from going to the Ministerial Council meeting in Łódź? Furthermore, signals reaching us from Brussels through diplomatic channels indicate that this step by Poland was an arbitrary decision, one that had not been agreed on with its EU partners.

Bearing in mind the lack of legal grounds for such a step, we draw the unequivocal conclusion that the Polish authorities' decision is of an exclusively political nature. The Polish Chairmanship has gone down this path consciously, thereby trampling on the image of an "honest broker", which is the role expected of any OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. Alas, this is in keeping with the way that the Chairmanship has organized the OSCE's entire work in 2022.

Since the start of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, Poland has in effect ceased to fulfil properly the functions of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office in line with the mandate approved by Porto Ministerial Council Decision No. 8 of 2002, which clearly stipulates that the Chairmanship must "[ensure] that its actions are not inconsistent with positions agreed by all the participating States and that the whole spectrum of opinions of participating States is taken into account".

The Polish Chairmanship persistently incorporates into the agenda of regular meetings of the Permanent Council items with confrontational wording on the subject of the so-called "Russian aggression against Ukraine". This directly contravenes the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE (paragraphs IV.1(C)1 and IV.1(C)3), in which the structure of such meetings is defined to include the following as "standing items": "review of current issues", "general statements", or "security dialogue" ... and "any other business", under which any issue may be raised by any participating State". In terms of procedure, it is laid down there that agendas of Permanent Council meetings are to be prepared by the Chairmanship "in advance" and "taking into account views expressed by participating States".

Since the end of February, the Chairmanship has, without the participating States' agreement by consensus, almost completely deformed the OSCE's work covered by its mandate in the three dimensions. Through the Chairpersons of the Committees of the Permanent Council (the Security Committee, the Economic and Environmental Committee and the Human Dimension Committee) the Chairmanship has arranged for their activities to be yoked to the Ukrainian issue as far as possible.

As a result, the OSCE's thematic work has suffered considerably. Important events ended up on the chopping block. This year, the annual counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics conferences were not held; nor were the high-level meetings of border security and management experts and police experts. The practice of subject-specific seminars and workshops has been discontinued. Out of all the major events under the first "basket" that had been scheduled for this year, only two survived: the Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC) (Vienna, 28 and 29 June) and the Cyber/ICT Security Conference (Łódź, 20 and 21 October). At the Chairmanship's instigation, the ASRC took place under altered regulations, with extremely virulent anti-Russian rhetoric. The traditionally packed and popular agenda in the field of counter-terrorism has been replaced by individual seminars on non-consensus topics with a focus on the human rights component.

In the economic and environmental dimension there was an egregious violation of OSCE practice when the Polish Chairmanship refused to include the Russian speaker's statement in the programme of the second Preparatory Meeting for the 30th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (Łódź, 23 and 24 May).

In the human dimension, the Chairmanship stopped the mandatory consultations on preparing the "package" of human dimension events (which includes three Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and the associated seminar); it also rejigged the previously agreed focus areas for the work of the Human Dimension Committee of the Permanent Council. By putting forward unacceptable conditions, the Chairmanship essentially blocked the participation of prominent civil society organizations from Russia, South Ossetia and other countries in human dimension events. In a gross

violation of the mandate of an “honest broker”, the Chairmanship on three occasions joined the crude Moscow Mechanism activated against Russia by a group of countries.

At the end of July, under the pretext of Russia’s alleged “inability to reach agreement”, the Chairmanship refused to continue with consultations on the Organization’s Unified Budget Proposal for this year.

In violation of Helsinki Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/08 on strengthening the legal framework of the OSCE, the work of the relevant Informal Working Group has been “frozen” as instructed by the Polish authorities.

We note the Chairmanship’s unacceptable actions with regard to field operations. After the termination of the mandate of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine on 1 April 2022, that entity was transferred to some kind of “administrative mode”, allowing it to continue unjustifiably consuming the Organization’s financial resources. A draft technical decision on the winding up of the Mission and a plan for its closure have yet to be submitted to the participating States.

To return to the topic of the forthcoming Ministerial Council meeting, we must point out that, contrary to the OSCE’s long-standing practice, the Polish authorities, staying on the tack of “Ukrainization” of the OSCE agenda, eschewed the traditional work on preparing the package of ministerial decisions. Carrying out and co-ordinating that preparatory work is a direct obligation of the country holding the Chairmanship.

All the shortcomings and gross violations of the mandate of the Chairmanship-in-Office by Poland that we have enumerated are severely denting the OSCE’s credibility and role; they are narrowing the Organization’s scope for fulfilling its purpose, namely, the promotion of security and co-operation, which requires the equal involvement of all its participating States. Through its actions the Chairmanship is demonstrating that it is not interested in the OSCE for the discussion of security issues in Europe, but, rather, as a tool for criticizing Russia. Such behaviour is directly detrimental to the OSCE and undermines its potential for effective work.

The depressing conclusion is that the Polish authorities have proved not to be ready for constructive work at the helm of our Organization. In its striving to usurp the authority to single-handedly set the OSCE’s agenda, the Chairmanship has deprived our Organization of the opportunity to serve as a platform for the equal representation of the whole spectrum of opinions on pan-European matters. We would remind you that the OSCE is not a Western “interest group”-type club or a “coalition of the willing” or a non-governmental organization under the tutelage of the powers that be in Washington, D.C. or Brussels.

We call upon the representatives of all States that care about the OSCE’s fate to give a principled assessment of these actions by the Polish Chairmanship-in-Office. We urge future Chairmanships not to allow similar violations of OSCE rules and practice. Otherwise the Organization will have to pay a heavy price for such arbitrariness.

Thank you for your attention.