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Statement by the Head of the EU Delegation,

Ms Helga Schmid,

Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in Kyiv. Let me first thank very much the Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office for hosting our meeting today. I would also like to congratulate the whole team of the Ukrainian Chairmanship for their steady hand in steering this organisation over the past year, and very much also for your results-oriented approach. I would also like to express appreciation for the work done by the Secretary General and his team.

The OSCE was founded nearly 40 years ago to overcome divisions on the European continent. The Europe of today is very different and unrecognisable from the Europe of 1975. It was the Prime Minister of Ukraine who referred to the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. And indeed, these principles remain just as valid in 2013. The European Union is firmly committed to the Helsinki Principles, including the commitment of each participating State to respect each country's "right to freely define and conduct as it wishes its relations with other States in accordance with international law." Any attempt to exert pressure or undue influence on other States' sovereign choice regarding its relations with other states and international organisations undermines this core principle. Let me therefore reaffirm our commitment to the sovereign right of the EU's partners to freely choose the level of ambition and the goals to which they aspire in their relations with the European Union, including of course in their economic relations. In this context, I was listening carefully to Prime Minister Azarov's description of the reasons for postponing the signature of the Association Agreement/DCFTA with the EU. Let me say that it is up to Ukraine to decide what kind of engagement it wishes to have with the EU. The EU's door remains open. Our Ukrainian partners are aware of the road that will lead us to early signature of the agreements. Let me also emphasise that stronger relations with the EU do not come at the expense of relations of our Eastern partners with their other neighbours. We see this as a win-win situation where all gain.

Preserving and safeguarding OSCE principles and commitments is among the main challenges the OSCE is facing. Protection of the right of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly is among the universal fundamental rights that every individual should enjoy. Excessive use of force by the police to disperse peaceful protesters and violence against journalists is a violation of these rights. It is essential for all participating States and particularly the country holding the Chairmanship in Office to uphold the OSCE acquis. I welcome the statement of the Chairman-in-Office to carry out investigations into the use of force against peaceful demonstrators in the night of last Saturday in Kyiv.

I urge all stakeholders in this political process to work now towards reducing tensions. All civil rights and liberties, in particular the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly need to be respected. I encourage all political actors to establish immediate dialogue to facilitate a mutually acceptable resolution to the current discord. A peaceful and political solution is the only way for Ukraine out of the current situation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE has several important challenges to address in order to stay relevant in the coming years. First, it must be able to preserve its main strengths and assets. These include the comprehensive concept of security with an established set of principles, norms and commitments in all three dimensions, as well as its broad membership. Crucially, this also means its instruments, particularly its strong autonomous institutions and field missions. These assets make the OSCE unique and in today's security environment represent the institution's major added value vis-à-vis other international organisations. We also believe that the engagement of the civil society can provide valuable contribution to the work of the OSCE.

OSCE norms and principles, agreed by all participating States, form a solid basis for the work of the organisation to advance peace and human security. To ensure that the comprehensive concept of security remains a cornerstone of the OSCE acquis, there must be advances in all of the OSCE's dimensions. Unfortunately, we have not made sufficient progress in developing our commitments in the human dimension over the past two years. In order to break the stalemate here in Kyiv, I therefore hope everyone will show resolve and engage constructively. We cannot go below previously agreed commitments, but must find ways to build further on them.

All participating States have the responsibility to preserve the strengths of the organisation. These very much include OSCE field missions, which are core pillars of the OSCE. The missions must be allowed to perform their tasks unhindered in all host countries. They are also the eyes and ears of the organisation, which can provide signals of early warning where necessary. We warmly welcome Mongolia's request to establish an OSCE field office. This development shows that field offices remain attractive for countries seeking to implement their OSCE commitments and we trust that participating States will consider this request positively.

A second challenge for the OSCE is to develop its toolbox further. Participating States should therefore take advantage of the enormous opportunity we have before us in the Helsinki+40 process, which was launched by the Irish Chairmanship last year, to have a serious discussion about the OSCE's future. Among our tasks is to look at whether the OSCE is adequately equipped to promote stability and security in the OSCE area in the coming years.

We believe that the OSCE has unused potential to develop its ability to address the new security challenges. It is in the interest of all participating States to ensure that the organisation's ability to address transnational threats is enhanced, be it in the area of fight against terrorism or cyber security. We therefore welcome the recent agreement on confidence building measures on cyber security and hope that its formal endorsement will be one of the main deliverables in this meeting.

Thirdly, the resolution of the protracted conflicts in the OSCE area is long overdue. We regret that despite constructive Chairmanships' efforts, very limited progress has taken place. It is extremely worrisome that in some respects the opposite is happening – witness the increased borderisation of the Administrative Boundary Line in Georgia.

I would like to reaffirm our firm commitment to advancing the "5+2" talks on Transnistria and the Geneva International Discussions, as well as our support for the efforts of the Minsk Group. Through confidence building between the conflict parties, the EU provides significant support for current efforts. We were also happy to host in Brussels, for the first time, a round of the 5+2 talks last October, and we highly value the efforts of the OSCE in this field and are ready to intensify our cooperation further. I am hopeful that a statement to be adopted here will advance us on this path.

As for this Ministerial Council, we wish to see progress on issues pertaining to the first dimension. We need to work to improve confidence and security-building measures in the OSCE area as well as to renew efforts to advance on conventional arms control.

We also wish to see progress in the human dimension, which has the central place in the concept of comprehensive security. We remain determined to pursue these objectives and hope to see progress both in terms of strengthened implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments and monitoring as well as updating these commitments to maintain the OSCE's relevance. Freedom of expression in media including digital media, safety of journalists, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of religion and belief, remain key priorities for all of us. We will also continue to strongly support the independent OSCE institutions in supporting the participating States in meeting the OSCE commitments and their monitoring in this area.

The OSCE ministerial decision on the protection of journalists would update the *acquis* in this area, reflecting international standards agreed in other fora. It is important that the Organisation agrees this decision at our meeting here in Kyiv and sends a powerful signal of the importance we attach to this.

In addition, we would also wish to see ministers reaffirm their political commitment to the Helsinki+40 process and OSCE engagement with Afghanistan. Given the forthcoming ISAF withdrawal, our efforts to provide long-term security and stability in the region are more important than ever. It also reinforces the importance of the OSCE field presences in Central Asia.

It will be important to advance in the second dimension, notably in areas where there is a clear link with security, as well as added-value and complementarity of the OSCE, including on conflict prevention.

Finally, we all need to reinforce efforts to build a security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok, uniting all OSCE participating States, free of dividing lines, conflicts and spheres of influence, as the 40th anniversary of the signature of the Helsinki Final Act approaches. We are ready to work with our partners in this spirit, for the long-term interests of our citizens.

Let me wish participating States all the best for a successful meeting with tangible results towards our common objectives of peace and stability.

Thank you.