



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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SKOPJE

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2023

**Thirtieth Meeting of the  
Ministerial Council  
30 November and 1 December 2023**

**Decisions of the Ministerial Council**

**Statements by the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE and  
delegations**

**Reports to the Ministerial Council**

**Skopje 2023**

1 December 2023

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## **I. DECISIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**



**DECISION No. 1/23**  
**TIME AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE**  
**OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**  
(MC.DEC/1/23 of 25 January 2023)

The Ministerial Council,

Decides that the Thirtieth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council will be held in Skopje on 30 November and 1 December 2023.

**Attachment to MC.DEC/1/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER**  
**PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE**  
**OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND**  
**CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“While joining the consensus regarding the decision on the time and place of the next meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, the Russian Federation assumes that North Macedonia, as the host country of that event, as well as all transit countries, will take exhaustive measures to ensure that the representatives of all the OSCE participating States without exception, at whatever political level they themselves choose, can come to Skopje. This means that there will be no discrimination with regard to the composition of national delegations, nor any impediment to the flight or travel of members of delegations to the Ministerial Council venue by the means of their choice, including special flights. In this regard, we take note of the statements by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office that North Macedonia will make all the necessary efforts to that end.

We emphasize that improper implementation of the OSCE documents governing the convening of the Ministerial Council will make it impossible for any decisions and documents to be adopted at the meeting.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of today’s meeting of the Permanent Council.”

**DECISION No. 2/23**  
**OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP IN THE YEAR 2024**  
(MC.DEC/2/23 of 1 December 2023)

The Ministerial Council,

Welcoming the readiness by Malta to assume the function of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2024,

Decides that Malta will exercise the function of the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2024.

**Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/2/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Malta:

“Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished colleagues,

I wish to start by expressing my gratitude to you, Bujar, and the distinguished representatives of the participating States, for placing your trust in Malta to assume the Chairmanship in 2024.

In the most unprecedented circumstances, Malta heeded your request. We accepted to take up this vital role, as we remain strong believers in this OSCE, its relevance and the principle of consensus which has underpinned the *raison d'être* of this Organization since its inception in 1975. And this principle remains the bedrock of our joint endeavours and our shared responsibility.

Although quite late in the day, we are pleased that as an OSCE community we could reach consensus. This demonstrates our collective ambition to save our Organization and to put it on the path to make it thrive again for the well-being of all.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are most grateful to Estonia for their candidature. Like the European Union, Malta stood firmly and strongly behind Estonia's candidacy. Estonia respects OSCE commitments and fulfils all the necessary criteria to steer the OSCE as the Chairmanship. We regret that Estonia's candidature could not garner the necessary consensus. For us, Estonia remains a solid, relevant, and dependable partner.



Mr. Chairperson,

Malta takes up its role as Chairmanship in 2024 with absolute commitment.

Sixty years into our independence in 1964, Malta's foreign policy has consistently been rooted in a steadfast belief system, committed to upholding international principles and obligations. Geographically positioned at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, Malta has perpetually embraced a mission to act as a bridge builder, facilitating connections and fostering co-operation.

This is a historic moment for my country as we embark on chairing this august body for the very first time. We feel honoured but also humbled ahead of the great responsibility and duty that lies ahead of us.

To fulfil our role, we depend on the close co-operation and support of all participating States to fulfil the OSCE's mandate, and to return to our shared values in full respect of our agreed principles and commitments.

As so very well expressed in your Chairmanship's motto – 'It's all about people' – it is paramount to work on improving, intensifying, and bridging our relations to overcome distrust for the good of all, and to build back confidence.

Thank you."

**Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/2/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

"In connection with the adoption of the decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2024, the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Malta as Chairmanship for 2024. We thank Malta for answering the call to lead the OSCE at this critical time. We have every confidence that Malta will be a principled and capable Chairmanship that will ensure the OSCE's continued effectiveness in the next year.

We appreciate also Estonia's willingness to lead the Organization and look forward to a future Chairmanship.

This decision was taken at the very last minute, which should not be the case. We would like to remind one delegation of its commitment to appoint a Chairmanship 'as a rule two years before the Chairmanship's term of office starts.'

We look forward to supporting Malta in every way we can as it takes up the Chairmanship.

I request that this statement be attached to the decision and to the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/2/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2024, the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under Paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom welcomes the appointment of Malta and wishes them every success in carrying out their duties as Chairmanship for 2024. We particularly appreciate Malta’s willingness to answer the call of its participating State partners to take up this important undertaking at such a late stage. We offer the United Kingdom’s full support to Malta as it prepares, and holds, the Chairmanship. We encourage others to do the same.

The United Kingdom thanks the current Chairmanship, North Macedonia, for their good faith efforts over the last year to try to bring a resolution to this issue.

We strongly endorsed Estonia’s candidacy. The United Kingdom notes with regret that two participating States could not join consensus on that candidacy. Estonia would have been a principled and competent Chairmanship – and still could be in future.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Norway (also on behalf of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom):

“I am speaking on behalf of the following countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Ukraine, and of my own country Norway in relation to the decision on the OSCE Chairmanship for 2024. In this context, we wish to make the following statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

Our delegations endorse this decision and extend our gratitude to North Macedonia’s Chairmanship for their exceptional leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE’s effectiveness.

We express our deep appreciation to Malta for agreeing to uphold the operational integrity of the OSCE by accepting the Chairmanship for 2024. This gesture demonstrates Malta’s commitment and capability, and we pledge our full support to assist in their endeavours. We fully endorse Malta’s nomination for the 2024 OSCE Chairmanship and look forward to a productive and co-operative relationship during their term.

We deeply regret that Russia and Belarus have impeded Estonia’s candidacy for the 2024 OSCE Chairmanship. We believe that Estonia would have been a principled and reliable Chairmanship for the OSCE. We thank Estonia for its willingness to lead the Organization.

The consensus principle is in the DNA of the OSCE, serving as the bedrock upon which collaborative decisions are made. In our pursuit of collaborative decision-making, we must remain vigilant against the misuse of the consensus principle for unilateral purposes, which erodes the very foundation of our collective trust and co-operation.”

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2024, the European Union would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

The European Union has joined the consensus on adopting this decision and expresses its appreciation to the Chairmanship of North Macedonia for the dedicated efforts in fostering consensus on pressing matters for the effectiveness of the OSCE.

We express our gratitude to Malta for agreeing to step in at the eleventh hour to preserve the functionality of the Organization and assume responsibilities as the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2024. We commend Malta’s commitment to upholding the values and principles of the Organization. In this regard, the European Union expresses its full support for Malta’s 2024 OSCE Chairmanship nomination and looks forward to co-operating closely and constructively during its tenure.

We reiterate our deep regret that the same two participating States, Russia and its accomplice in its ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, Belarus, have blocked the candidature of Estonia for the 2024 OSCE Chairmanship. The European Union has remained steadfast in its support of Estonia’s candidacy and is confident that Estonia would serve as a principled and reliable Chairmanship.

We reiterate that all participating States have the responsibility to facilitate and not obstruct the necessary decisions for the effectiveness of the OSCE by using the consensus rule as a weapon.

The candidate countries North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Albania<sup>1</sup>, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra align themselves with this statement.”

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1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Armenia:

“Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of the Republic of Armenia would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE in connection with the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2024.

We would like to thank Malta for expressing its readiness to assume the leadership of this Organization in this challenging time. We acknowledge that it was not easy to make that decision under the current circumstances. The readiness of Malta to provide its valuable leadership and assistance in resolving the stalemate within the OSCE is greatly appreciated and fully endorsed by Armenia.

We stand ready to constructively engage and support Malta in fulfilling its mandate work in 2024.

I kindly ask this interpretative statement to be attached to the decision adopted and reflected in the journal of the day.

Thank you.”

**DECISION No. 3/23**  
**EXTENSION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF THE**  
**OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL**  
(MC.DEC/3/23 of 1 December 2023)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the decision of the Ministerial Council taken at its third meeting in Stockholm in 1992 to establish the post of Secretary General, Ministerial Council Decision No. 15/04 of 7 December 2004 on the role of the OSCE Secretary General, Ministerial Council Decision No. 18/06 of 5 December 2006 on further strengthening the effectiveness of OSCE executive structures and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/08 of 22 October 2008 on the periods of service of the OSCE Secretary General,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE Secretary General carries out her functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE Secretary General,

Considering that the term of office of the current Secretary General of the OSCE, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid, comes to an end on 3 December 2023,

Decides that, as an exceptional temporary measure aimed at ensuring an essential level of leadership for the OSCE when appointment for the regular period is not feasible, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid shall remain in office as the Secretary General of the OSCE until 3 September 2024.

**Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/3/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER**  
**PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE**  
**OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND**  
**CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the extension of the mandate of the OSCE Secretary General, the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the extension of the term of Secretary General Helga Schmid. While we joined consensus on this decision as an exceptional temporary measure in the interest of ensuring the continued leadership of the OSCE, this should have been a regular three-year extension. This decision does not set a precedent for future appointments or extensions of the term of the Secretary General.

We support the work of the Secretary General and the OSCE Secretariat. We recall that the Secretary General derives his/her authority from the collective decisions of the participating States and acts under the guidance of the Chairperson-in-Office. He or she is the chief administrative officer of the OSCE, and is tasked, among other things, to act as the representative of the Chairperson-in-Office and support him or her in all activities aimed at fulfilling the goals of the OSCE.

Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to alter the mandate of the Secretary General or restrict the work of the Secretary General in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments, and decisions, and it is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.”

**Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/3/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus regarding the extension of the Secretary General's term of office, the Russian Federation emphasizes the exceptional nature of this decision, which does not relieve the head of this OSCE executive structure of the responsibility for strict compliance with its mandate as approved by the participating States of the Organization.

It is our understanding that the incoming Maltese Chairmanship will launch without delay in early 2024 a competition procedure to fill the position in question.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of today's meeting.”

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the extension of the mandate of the OSCE Secretary General, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid, the European Union would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

The European Union fully supports the extension of the mandates for all four top leadership positions. This approach ensures the proper functioning of the Organization and its comprehensive approach to security, especially in these challenging times, marked by Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine.

The European Union welcomes the extension of the mandate for Ms. Helga Maria Schmid. We fully support the work of the Secretary General and the OSCE Secretariat.

However, we express deep regret that, due to the position of one participating State, consensus was blocked for both a three-year renewal as provided by the Rules of Procedure and a one-year extension proposed by the Chairmanship as a compromise solution.

We consider that a nine-month extension is an exceptional measure that falls short of ensuring the necessary continuity and an essential level of sound administration. We emphasize that this, in no way, sets a precedent for the future.

We call upon all participating States to recognize the importance of providing the OSCE with continuity under strong leadership, particularly when its principles, commitments and values are more crucial than ever for our common security.

We request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day.

The candidate countries North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Albania<sup>1</sup>, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra align themselves with this statement.”

---

1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.



**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Canada (also on behalf of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland and Ukraine):

“I am speaking on behalf of the following countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, and my own country Canada – in relation to the decision on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, Ms. Helga Schmid. In this context, we wish to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

Our delegations endorse these decisions and reiterate our gratitude to North Macedonia’s Chairmanship for their exceptional leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE’s effectiveness.

We would like to express our appreciation for and trust in the current leadership of the executive structures. Our position has long been that we would support a full renewal of all four mandates for three years.

We deeply regret that consensus for a three-year renewal could not be reached. In the spirit of co-operation, we support the current shorter extension as a temporary and exceptional measure, but this should in no way be seen as setting a precedent for future decisions in relation to the leadership of the Organization.

The consensus principle, fundamental to the OSCE, forms the foundation of our collaborative decisions. We must guard against its misuse for individual agendas, as this undermines our shared trust and co-operation.

We would like to request that this statement be attached to the decision and reflected in the journal of the day.”

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General and wishes her every success. We particularly appreciate her willingness to continue in this important role – at such a late stage. We offer the United Kingdom’s full support and encourage others to do the same.

The United Kingdom regrets that we have had to adopt these decisions as exceptional temporary measures.

However, we note that, along with the new Chairmanship and other leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE, at a particularly difficult time.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

**DECISION No. 4/23**  
**APPOINTMENT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR**  
**DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**  
(MC.DEC/4/23 of 1 December 2023)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the 1990 Charter of Paris and the decision of the Ministerial Council taken at its second meeting in Prague in 1992 concerning the development of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR),

Reaffirming the necessity that the Director of the ODIHR carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of ODIHR,

Considering that the term of office of the current Director of the ODIHR, Mr. Matteo Mecacci, comes to an end on 3 December 2023,

Decides that, as an exceptional temporary measure aimed at ensuring an essential level of leadership for the ODIHR when appointment for the regular period is not feasible, Mr. Matteo Mecacci shall remain in office as the Director of the ODIHR until 3 September 2024.

**Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/4/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER**  
**PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE**  
**OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND**  
**CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the extension of the term of ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci. While we joined consensus on this decision as an exceptional temporary measure in the interest of ensuring continued leadership of the OSCE, this should have been a regular three-year extension. This decision does not set a precedent for future appointments or extensions of the term of the Director of the ODIHR.

We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the ODIHR. Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be

interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the Director of the ODIHR in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments and decisions and it is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/4/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus regarding the extension of the term of office of the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Russian Federation emphasizes the exceptional nature of this decision, which does not relieve the head of this OSCE executive structure of the responsibility for strict compliance with its mandate as approved by the participating States of the Organization.

It is our understanding that the incoming Maltese Chairmanship will launch without delay in early 2024 a competition procedure to fill the position in question.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of today's meeting.”

**Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/4/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Mr. Matteo Mecacci, the European Union would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

The European Union fully supports the extension of the mandates for all four top leadership positions. This approach ensures the proper functioning of the Organization and its comprehensive approach to security, especially in these challenging times, marked by Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine.

The European Union welcomes the extension of the mandate for Mr. Matteo Mecacci. We fully support the work of the ODIHR Director and the Office.

However, we express deep regret that, due to the position of one participating State, consensus was blocked for both a three-year renewal as provided by the Rules of Procedure and a one-year extension proposed by the Chairmanship as a compromise solution.

We consider that a nine-month extension is an exceptional measure that falls short of ensuring the necessary continuity and an essential level of sound administration. We emphasize that this, in no way, sets a precedent for the future.

We call upon all participating States to recognize the importance of providing the OSCE with continuity under strong leadership, particularly when its principles, commitments and values are more crucial than ever for our common security.

We request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day.

The candidate countries North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Albania<sup>1</sup>, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra align themselves with this statement.”

**Attachment 4 to MC.DEC/4/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Canada (also on behalf of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland and Ukraine):

“I am speaking on behalf of the following countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, and my own country Canada – in relation to the decision on the appointment of the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Mr. Matteo Mecacci. In this context, we wish to make the following interpretive statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

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1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Our delegations endorse these decisions and reiterate our gratitude to North Macedonia's Chairmanship for their exceptional leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We would like to express our appreciation for and trust in the current leadership of the executive structures. Our position has long been that we would support a full renewal of all four mandates for three years.

We deeply regret that consensus for a three-year renewal could not be reached. In the spirit of co-operation, we support the current shorter extension as a temporary and exceptional measure but this should in no way be seen as setting a precedent for future decisions in relation to the leadership of the Organization.

The consensus principle, fundamental to the OSCE, forms the foundation of our collaborative decisions. We must guard against its misuse for individual agendas, as this undermines our shared trust and co-operation.

We would like to request that the full interpretative statement be attached to the decision and reflected in the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 5 to MC.DEC/4/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the extension of the appointment of the Director and wishes him every success. We particularly appreciate his willingness to continue in this important role – at such a late stage. We offer the United Kingdom's full support and encourage others to do the same.

The United Kingdom regrets that we have had to adopt these decisions as exceptional temporary measures.

However, we note that, along with the new Chairmanship and other leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE, at a particularly difficult time.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 6 to MC.DEC/4/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Armenia:

“Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of the Republic of Armenia would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE in connection with the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Being driven by the interest of the Organization and cognizant of the importance of preserving functionality, integrity and the ability to continue the mandated work of the OSCE and its institutions, the Republic of Armenia is joining the consensus with the understanding that the dysfunctionality and shortcomings of institutions will no longer be tolerated, and the leadership of the ODIHR will use this term to rectify the failures in discharging the mandate.

We would like to urge the upcoming Chairmanship, Malta, to use this extension period for issuing the respective vacancy notice for the position of the Director of the ODIHR in a timely manner in order to provide an opportunity for the participating States to appoint a Director under whose leadership the ODIHR would make essential contributions to building a secure and safer future for our region by protecting and promoting human rights, in line with its mandate.

I kindly ask this interpretative statement to be attached to the decision adopted and reflected in the journal of the day.

Thank you.”

**DECISION No. 5/23**  
**EXTENSION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF THE**  
**OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES**  
(MC.DEC/5/23 of 1 December 2023)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the decision of the CSCE Helsinki Summit 1992 to establish a High Commissioner on National Minorities,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,

Considering that the term of office of the current OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, comes to an end on 3 December 2023,

Decides that, as an exceptional temporary measure aimed at ensuring an essential level of leadership for the institution of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities when appointment for the regular period is not feasible, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov shall remain in office as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities until 3 September 2024.

**Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/5/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER**  
**PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE**  
**OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND**  
**CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the extension of the term of High Commissioner on National Minorities Kairat Abdrakhmanov. While we joined consensus on this decision as an exceptional temporary measure in the interest of ensuring continued leadership of the OSCE, this should have been a regular three-year extension. This decision does not set a precedent for future appointments or extensions of the term of the HCNM.

We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the HCNM. Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s



autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments and decisions and it is first and foremost the responsibility of participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/5/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus regarding the extension of the term of office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Russian Federation emphasizes the exceptional nature of this decision, which does not relieve the head of this OSCE executive structure of the responsibility for strict compliance with its mandate as approved by the participating States of the Organization.

It is our understanding that the incoming Maltese Chairmanship will launch without delay in early 2024 a competition procedure to fill the position in question.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of today's meeting.”

**Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/5/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the extension of the mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, the European

Union would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

The European Union fully supports the extension of the mandates for all four top leadership positions. This approach ensures the proper functioning of the Organization and its comprehensive approach to security, especially in these challenging times, marked by Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine.

The European Union welcomes the extension of the mandate for Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov. We fully support the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

However, we express deep regret that, due to the position of one participating State, consensus was blocked for both a three-year renewal as provided by the Rules of Procedure and a one-year extension proposed by the Chairmanship as a compromise solution.

We consider that a nine-month extension is an exceptional measure that falls short of ensuring the necessary continuity and an essential level of sound administration. We emphasize that this, in no way, sets a precedent for the future.

We call upon all participating States to recognize the importance of providing the OSCE with continuity under strong leadership, particularly when its principles, commitments and values are more crucial than ever for our common security.

We request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day.

The candidate countries North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Albania<sup>1</sup>, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra align themselves with this statement.”

**Attachment 4 to MC.DEC/5/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Canada (also on behalf of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Ukraine):

“I am speaking on behalf of the following countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Ukraine, and my own country Canada – in relation to the decision on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,

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1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov. In this context, we wish to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

Our delegations endorse these decisions and reiterate our gratitude to North Macedonia's Chairmanship for their exceptional leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We would like to express appreciation for and our trust in the current leadership of the executive structures. Our position has long been that we would support a full renewal of all four mandates for three years.

We deeply regret that consensus for a three-year renewal could not be reached. In the spirit of co-operation, we support the current shorter extension as a temporary and exceptional measure but this should in no way be seen as setting a precedent for future decisions in relation to the leadership of the Organization.

The consensus principle, fundamental to the OSCE, forms the foundation of our collaborative decisions. We must guard against its misuse for individual agendas, as this undermines our shared trust and co-operation.

We would like to request that this statement be attached to the decision and reflected in the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 5 to MC.DEC/5/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner and wishes him every success. We particularly appreciate his willingness to continue in this important role – at such a late stage. We offer the United Kingdom's full support and encourage others to do the same.

The United Kingdom regrets that we have had to adopt these decisions as exceptional temporary measures.

However, we note that, along with the new Chairmanship and other leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE, at a particularly difficult time.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

**DECISION No. 6/23**  
**EXTENSION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF THE**  
**OSCE REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA**  
(MC.DEC/6/23 of 1 December 2023)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling Permanent Council Decision No. 193 of 5 November 1997 on establishing an OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media carries out her functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,

Considering that the term of office of the current OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, comes to an end on 3 December 2023,

Decides that, as an exceptional temporary measure aimed at ensuring an essential level of leadership for the institution of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media when appointment for the regular period is not feasible, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro shall remain in office as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media until 3 September 2024.

**Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/6/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER**  
**PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE**  
**OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND**  
**CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the extension of the term of Representative on Freedom of the Media Maria Teresa Ribeiro. While we joined consensus on this decision as an exceptional temporary measure in the interest of ensuring continued leadership of the OSCE, this should have been a regular three-year extension. This decision does not set a precedent for future appointments or extensions of the term of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media. Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for

them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States underscores that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments and decisions and it is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.”

**Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/6/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus regarding the extension of the term of office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Russian Federation emphasizes the exceptional nature of this decision, which does not relieve the head of this OSCE executive structure of the responsibility for strict compliance with its mandate as approved by the participating States of the Organization.

It is our understanding that the incoming Maltese Chairmanship will launch without delay in early 2024 a competition procedure to fill the position in question.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of today's meeting.”

**Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/6/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

“In connection with the adoption of the decision on the extension of the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, the European Union would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

The European Union fully supports the extension of the mandates for all four top leadership positions. This approach ensures the proper functioning of the Organization and its comprehensive approach to security, especially in these challenging times, marked by Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine.

The European Union welcomes the extension of the mandate for Ms. Teresa Ribeiro. We fully support the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

However, we express deep regret that, due to the position of one participating State, consensus was blocked for both a three-year renewal as provided by the Rules of Procedure and a one-year extension proposed by the Chairmanship as a compromise solution.

We consider that a nine-month extension is an exceptional measure that falls short of ensuring the necessary continuity and an essential level of sound administration of the Representative on Freedom of the Media’s Office. We emphasize that this, in no way, sets a precedent for the future.

We call upon all participating States to recognize the importance of providing the OSCE with continuity under strong leadership, particularly when its principles, commitments and values are more crucial than ever for our common security.

We request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day.

The candidate countries North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Albania<sup>1</sup>, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra align themselves with this statement.”

**Attachment 4 to MC.DEC/6/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Canada (also on behalf of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland and Ukraine):

“I am speaking on behalf of the following countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland,

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1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Ukraine, and my own country Canada – in relation to the decision on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro. In this context, we wish to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

Our delegations endorse these decisions and reiterate our gratitude to North Macedonia's Chairmanship for their exceptional leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We would like to express our appreciation for and trust in the current leadership of the executive structures. Our position has long been that we would support a full renewal of all four mandates for three years.

We deeply regret that consensus for a three-year renewal could not be reached. In the spirit of co-operation, we support the current shorter extension as a temporary and exceptional measure, but this should in no way be seen as setting a precedent for future decisions in relation to the leadership of the Organization.

The consensus principle, fundamental to the OSCE, forms the foundation of our collaborative decisions. We must guard against its misuse for individual agendas, as this undermines our shared trust and co-operation.

We would like to request that this statement be attached to the decision and reflected in the journal of the day.”

**Attachment 5 to MC.DEC/6/23**

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER  
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE  
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND  
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the extension of the appointment of the OSCE Representative and wishes her every success. We particularly appreciate her willingness to continue in this important role – at such a late stage. We offer the United Kingdom's full support and encourage others to do the same.

The United Kingdom regrets that we have had to adopt these decisions as exceptional temporary measures.



However, we note that, along with the new Chairmanship and other leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE, at a particularly difficult time.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”



## **II. STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE AND DELEGATIONS**



**OPENING STATEMENT BY  
THE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE**

(MC.DEL/59/23 of 13 December 2023)

Your Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to welcome you to the 30th Ministerial Council meeting of the OSCE. I have invited Minister Borg to join me at the head table, as on Monday at the Permanent Council, we reached consensus for Malta to serve as the 2024 Chairmanship. According to the agenda, we will formalize this tomorrow.

I am particularly glad to welcome you all to Skopje, a city known as a crossroads of cultures, faiths and civilizations.

I hope you will have a chance to explore the historical and cultural heritage of our capital and feel the sense of diversity and coexistence it nurtures.

Sixty years ago, when 80 per cent of our city was destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake, the world rallied for support. In times of dramatic Cold War divisions, Skopje became the symbol of global unity and solidarity. Ideology and geopolitical competition succumbed, humanity prevailed.

Days after the tragedy, Jean-Paul Sartre stated: “Skopje is not a film, not a thriller where we guess the chief event. It is a concentration of man’s struggle for freedom, with a result which inspires further struggles and no acceptance of defeat.”

Let us hope and strive that Skopje can once again provoke the best in us, in spite of differences and divisions. The complex challenges of war and confrontation in the OSCE area, the blatant violation of our values and commitments, the crises and enormous human suffering around us – they all oblige us to do more, to do better ... to be inspired to aim higher ... they all spell Sartre’s words “no acceptance of defeat”. At the finish line of our Chairmanship, I send the message of hope that we will not miss our meeting with history, that we will respond responsibly to the gravity of the moment and that we will ensure a predictable and constructive future for the OSCE.

I will focus my intervention as the Chairman-in-Office on three key messages.

Number one: The OSCE has endured and continues to deliver.

North Macedonia took over the OSCE Chairmanship in a year of active war with unprecedented threats to European security and to the international rules-based order.

Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine flies in the face of all that this Organization holds dear, the Helsinki Final Act, and other key documents that underpin the European security architecture and its unwavering commitment to human security.

This war undermined trust, dialogue and our capacity to deliver. Above all, it devastated the lives of ordinary people, their right to live freely, trembling with fear of war and warlike circumstances.

Within the OSCE, the dialogue on co-operation has been replaced with a dialogue of division and polarization.

Consensus, often instrumentalized for achieving national political objectives rather than serving collective interests, has been weaponized, making even prudent initiatives distant and difficult to attain.

This complex backdrop created a uniquely challenging operating environment for the Chairmanship. Despite this extremely difficult context, we remained resolute on our course to serve as a devoted guardian of OSCE values and commitments.

Backed by the vast majority of participating States, we managed to avoid defeatism and convene disparate voices and critical energy to address varied challenges to the OSCE's existence together.

I feel free to say that we managed to maintain our Organization's relevance and utility. All of us together managed to preserve the OSCE.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE pivoted successfully and stands forbearing and resilient in the face of all challenges and trials.

Our Organization continues to apply its mandates where possible and when necessary. As Chairmanship, we have engaged in all three dimensions of the OSCE portfolio, organizing the conferences the OSCE is known for, as well as numerous relevant events that added to OSCE's visibility, sharpening the optics that the Organization continues to fulfil its mission of co-operative security.

Against all odds, the OSCE continues to deliver.

The field missions continue to make a difference, offering essential practical support to all regions on the map and strengthening capacities in different participating States.

We actively engaged across regions, offering our good offices and an indispensable platform for dialogue. Despite the dark realities of conflict faced in Ukraine and the Middle East, multilateralism remains the best tool to prevent conflict and overcome differences and disputes. The OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organization, is recognized and valued as a needed and reliable partner for peace and stability.

With an eye to the future, we have prioritized and engaged in several important areas, including climate change, cybersecurity, anti-corruption, gender, and youth. As the world changes, so has the OSCE, and we will continue to adapt to better serve the people and live up to the Helsinki Final Act, come what may.

Number two: We must reinforce the OSCE for the future.

While underlining the continued relevance of our work and the importance of upholding our values, our Organization faced an additional burden with the lack of agreement on its leadership, including the 2024 Chairmanship and executive structures, and its budget.

To continue building an OSCE for the future, we need strategic clarity, not strategic confusion.

As Chairmanship, we left no stone unturned to seek and offer solutions to these critical challenges. First among these remains the Chairmanship for 2024.

I am grateful that many participating States joined us in this quest and that the Republic of Malta has assumed the important responsibility, and with the agreement of all participating States, stepped up to fill the vital role of 2024 Chairmanship of the OSCE.

Minister Borg, I salute your leadership in the OSCE's hour of need. North Macedonia, in its capacity as a Troika member together with Finland, will provide its support and experience to help make your term as Chairperson-in-Office the success we all need and want it to be.

We would like to congratulate all participating States for joining consensus in Vienna.

At the same time, I am confident that Estonia would have served as a competent and dedicated Chairmanship and that their righteous commitment to serve as a Chairmanship of the OSCE will come forth soon.

This Organization, like any other, needs and deserves leadership. In addition to a Chairmanship, the OSCE requires a Secretary General, a Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, a High Commissioner on National Minorities, and a Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The participating States have demonstrated their strong support for the OSCE, its structures, and mandates, but this commitment is still necessary to resolve these key questions. Without a budget, Chairmanship or executive structures, the OSCE will struggle mightily to deliver the solutions and outcomes our people expect.

The OSCE's programmes, field missions, and mechanisms create confidence and trust in our common region, paving the way to greater security and stability for all of us. We cannot allow these tools that have made a difference in the lives of so many to lie unused due to internal inability to wield them. That is paradoxical and unacceptable, and, most of all, a betrayal of the people we serve.

Last year in Łódź, I emphasized that the weight of today's uncertainty lies on our shoulders. So does the burden of responsibility. I underscored that if we are serious about our very own and the future of our Organization, we must act accordingly in line with our values, common purpose, and entrusted mandate.

What the OSCE offers is simply too valuable for us to fall short of our people's demands and expectations. Instead, we need a strengthened organization, refreshed,

reinforced, and ready to continue meeting the real challenges we face now and beyond the immediate horizon.

We must deliver. Let me repeat: we must deliver; we are here to serve the interest of the people.

Number three: The OSCE exists for the people.

As Chairman-in-Office, I have said since day one that “It’s about people.” Throughout the year, we spared no efforts to promote the message that the OSCE exists and functions for the benefit of its people. Our focus was indeed on the people of the OSCE area, acknowledging the OSCE’s role and responsibility in facilitating human security. This concept has guided our minds and hands and is here to stay. Building an “OSCE for the people” narrative will be North Macedonia’s legacy for the future of our Organization and I am glad that it has been embraced by so many.

For us as Chairmanship, this choice of a narrative was neither a coincidence nor a public relations stunt. When we said “It’s about people” we actually paid tribute to our challenges, our history and our experience with the OSCE. We have managed to build a resilient multi-ethnic State against all odds, in a decade and region defined by war and hostilities, due to our determination and courage, but also due to the OSCE’s relentless and constructive support in the most sensitive areas of human security, inter-ethnic dialogue, rule of law, human rights. We can proudly say that the OSCE has really worked for the people of North Macedonia. As we begin our Ministerial Council meeting, I implore all of us to remember this motto, to assert its relevance and to keep our focus where it belongs: on the people of the OSCE area and what is best for them, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, race, colour, religion, gender, sexuality, or creed.

It is our responsibility, and our duty, to uphold and implement the Helsinki Final Act. We owe this to our people, to hold each other accountable on their behalf, and ensure that their rights and security are protected and ensured.

We have seen the devastating effects of the ongoing aggression on the people of Ukraine and have witnessed the unacceptable carnage caused by a government abandoning the values and principles of the OSCE and pursuing its political goals through the use of force.

The OSCE must serve as an active platform for accountability in times when tensions and conflicts are on the rise.

The shocks are felt across far and wide, with diverse ramifications over human lives.

This year, we have also observed humanitarian challenges elsewhere in the OSCE area, as over 100,000 Karabakh Armenians fled their homes and homeland, with no sense of if or when they would be able to return. Safeguarding their rights and security is in line with the OSCE commitments.

The Chairmanship supports the continuation of political processes towards a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.



Sustained, constructive, and inclusive dialogue in good faith is the only path toward durable peace.

The OSCE offers that platform today, tomorrow, and for the foreseeable future. We should not forget that the OSCE is engaged across the region and works towards solutions for the immediate needs of the people. We have been entrusted valuable mandates in promoting compliance and continued adherence to OSCE principles and commitments, while addressing different challenges in Eastern Europe, South East Europe and Central Asia.

As a trusted partner, through its executive structures and autonomous institutions and field missions, the OSCE remains active at all levels of our societies, contributing to the comprehensive security for all.

Distinguished colleagues,

Conflict's negative impact on human security only validates the need for the OSCE, its values, and unique toolkit, mechanisms, and institutions, which exist to not only prevent conflict, but also address its consequences.

As I stated on many occasions in the past, the OSCE can do a lot during war, but it can do even more to prevent conflicts and mitigate the fallout of armed conflict.

For these reasons, we need this Organization to foster multilateralism and facilitate co-operation, so people can live freely and enjoy normal lives.

Our discussions will be difficult. But, if I have learned something from my many years in politics, it is that the most difficult discussions are the most important ones. And they can be the most rewarding ones – if we engage in them with the needed resolve and humility.

Let us answer this call together, because it comes not from me as Chairman-in-Office, but from the people of the OSCE area – the people and citizens of our countries.

Let me repeat again, it's about people. It is only about people.  
Our deeds of today are the legacy of our tomorrow.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF FINLAND**

(Annex 2 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Distinguished Chairperson, dear Bujar,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

While fully aligning with the statement of the European Union, I make the following remarks in my national capacity.

We meet in extremely serious circumstances as Russia continues its brutal and violent war of aggression in Ukraine. Russia is not only blatantly violating the UN Charter, but also breaking the core principles and commitments of the European security order. Russia has been trying to subvert these basic principles for years, including in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine since 2014. These principles are neither negotiable nor subject to revision or reinterpretation. Russia's notions of spheres of influence or zero-sum-game have no place in Europe in the 2020s.

War and destruction are Russia's choice. It is important to remember that Russia could end this war at any time, and Russia alone is responsible for where we are now: facing another winter of war in Europe.

And already now we can say that Russia, who attacked with a quick victory in mind, has failed to defeat Ukraine. Ukrainians' resilience and bravery are admirable.

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has severely damaged the OSCE. I want to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to you, dear Bujar, and to your team, for your staunch leadership when faced with this challenge. Your team has worked hard to safeguard the future of this Organization.

We are very pleased that this week a consensus was found, and grateful for the leadership shown by Malta by stepping up for the Chairmanship in 2024. We are ready to support you by all possible means as a participating State and as a Troika member.

Yet the disruptive policies of Russia continue to sabotage the functionality of the OSCE. We need a decision on the top four positions, all of them.

Mr. Chairperson,

The OSCE contributes to promoting and upholding the rule of law, democracy and human rights, as well as conflict prevention and peace mediation in the OSCE area.

We should make full use of the OSCE toolbox across all three dimensions, in autonomous institutions and in OSCE field operations.

Without the political will and commitment to the OSCE of all participating States, this Organization's potential is not fully realized. This Organization is only as effective as we, the participating States, allow it to be.

While our focus is on Russia's war against Ukraine, we should not lose sight of the valuable and concrete work that the Organization does across the OSCE area. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the OSCE staff, in Vienna, in the autonomous institutions and field operations across the OSCE area for the important work they carry out in difficult circumstances.

As Finland is preparing to assume the Chairmanship in 2025, I want to stress our commitment to strengthen the rules-based order through reconfirming the Helsinki principles and to safeguard the OSCE to serve its purpose, promoting security in the OSCE area.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF ITALY**

(Annex 3 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson-in-Office,  
Esteemed colleagues,

In aligning myself with the statement made by the European Union, I should like first of all to congratulate North Macedonia for its efforts in leading the Organization during these difficult times marked by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the continued Russian obstruction of the orderly functioning of the OSCE.

Despite this, the OSCE has remained faithful to its fundamental values and has continued to effectively implement its mandate to protect the security of our countries and citizens.

Italy reiterates its strongest condemnation of the war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine, with the complicity of Belarus – an unprovoked, unjustified and illegitimate war that for 21 long months has been causing death, destruction and unspeakable suffering to the Ukrainian people, with negative consequences for the security of the European continent and the entire OSCE area, and aggravating the economic vulnerabilities and food insecurity of many countries in the rest of the world.

We reaffirm our steadfast commitment to supporting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. A just and lasting peace can be achieved only through the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Russian forces and equipment from Ukraine's internationally recognized borders.

Italy is committed to safeguarding the OSCE as one of the pillars of the rules-based European security order. Thanks in part to our commitment, the Organization has shown great resilience since 24 February 2022 and has been able to adapt to the new circumstances.

We are very pleased that it proved possible to reach consensus on entrusting Malta with the OSCE Chairmanship for 2024, so as to ensure the truly vital function of the Organization's leadership during the year that will begin in just a month's time. We assure our Maltese friends of our complete and unwavering support as they carry out the delicate task ahead of them. At the same time, we regret the unjustified opposition of some participating States to Estonia's valid candidature and thank it for the high sense of responsibility that it has demonstrated.

Very good work has been done by the Secretary General and the heads of the autonomous institutions in conformity with their respective mandates in circumstances that were indeed difficult both in political and in organizational terms. We sincerely thank them for their excellent work and very much hope that all their mandates will be renewed so as to ensure the continuity of functions that the Organization needs.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is undeniable that the OSCE is going through a difficult and sensitive phase politically and in terms of its functioning. The consensus rule is being abused and instrumentalized, without taking into account what could be irreparable consequences for the proper functioning of the Organization.

We note with great regret that it has not been possible to approve a Unified Budget since 2021. The OSCE must be able to count on adequate financial resources.

As we look ahead to the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025, I should like to reaffirm Italy's unwavering support for the OSCE and the fundamental principles and commitments on which it is based. These principles and commitments are non-negotiable and not open to revision or reinterpretation.

The OSCE also possesses an *acquis*, built up over more than 50 years of work, on issues that will be crucial at the end of the conflict, such as confidence-building measures, arms control and, above all, the promotion of human rights, with a view to a holistic principle of security.

Italy, which is among the leading contributors to the OSCE in financial terms and in terms of personnel, will continue to commit itself with conviction and consistency to the common good of the Organization. We strongly urge all participating States to do the same.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF CZECHIA**

(Annex 4 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson,

I align myself with the statement made by the European Union. In addition, I would like to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

This is the second time the Ministerial Council convenes while a full-fledged war is raging in Europe. As we speak, Russia is waging a war of aggression against another participating State. Russia must abide by international law and withdraw its military forces from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

The OSCE finds itself in a crisis. This crisis is caused by Russia's disregard for the most fundamental OSCE principles, as well as its policy of deliberate obstruction of the OSCE decision-making by misusing the consensus rule of the Organization.

We have gathered here in Skopje to ensure that the OSCE endures as an organization institutionalizing the best practice in conflict prevention, promoting human rights and democratic values, and advancing economic development and environmental protection. The OSCE should be preserved as a valuable platform for dialogue across our region.

The experience with the process of selection of the new Chairmanship has been painful. I very much regret that Estonia's candidacy was blocked by Russia and Belarus.

In this situation, we welcomed Malta's readiness to take on this challenging task. I support Malta's candidacy. Czechia will continue to stand side by side with the upcoming Chairmanship in defence of the OSCE values.

I urge the Ministerial Council to make also other necessary institutional decisions. I have full confidence in the Secretary General as well as the heads of all three autonomous institutions, who have all been doing tremendous work in highly demanding circumstances, and I am convinced that their mandates should be renewed.

The OSCE has an important role in assisting Ukraine in dealing with the consequences of the war and its impact on the lives of its citizens, the economy, and the environment. Czechia is a proud voluntary contributor to the Support Programme for Ukraine.

So far, we have made available 240,000 euros for the OSCE activities in support of Ukraine. That also includes our latest pledge in support of the office of the newly appointed Special Representative for Ukraine.

I also support the OSCE efforts to document Russia's war crimes and human rights violations caused by its aggression against Ukraine. The Moscow Mechanism proves to be a very useful instrument to this end. Russia must and will be held fully accountable for the whole spectrum of its crimes.

The OSCE must remain functional in all three dimensions. It is important that events like the Prague Forum on the Economic and Environmental Dimension and the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference took place, in spite of Russia's obstructions. However, regular OSCE meetings should take place as mandated. They must be the rule, not the exception.

I would like to see the OSCE values upheld across the whole OSCE area. Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders must be respected.

In the same vein, we hope in progress towards a sustainable and lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The rights and security of Karabakh Armenians, including those who wish to return to their homes, need to be ensured.

I would like to close my remarks by expressing my gratitude to the current Chairmanship of North Macedonia. Minister Osmani, you have provided strong leadership in very tough times, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson, I would like to ask for this statement to be attached to the journal of today's meeting.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF POLAND**

(Annex 5 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Poland wants to thank North Macedonia for bravely steering the OSCE ship through stormy waters and our Secretary General for her efforts to preserve the ship intact.

The OSCE is irreplaceable as our common good. We share responsibility for its past and for its future. However, we need to remember that our mission is to protect the OSCE's content not the packaging.

Poland has been supportive of all decisions that would help to continue the valuable work of the OSCE. Therefore, we condemn Russia's constant blocking of the processes aimed at restoring the Organization's financial security and basic functioning.

Let me make a few points which Poland considers lessons learned from our experience and vital for long-lasting stability in the OSCE area.

First, I would like to express my deep sadness that we are meeting at another OSCE Ministerial Council with the ongoing Russian aggression in the background. The Skopje Ministerial Council meeting needs to mark our solidarity with the Ukrainian people who, day after day, fall victim to the deadly aggression of Putin's regime. Russia bears full responsibility for the crimes committed in Ukraine and will face its consequences. Individual perpetrators must be prosecuted before the appropriate courts. We have to maintain our firm stance on good and evil. The OSCE activities must be focused on Ukraine, including through further practical assistance within the framework of the Support Programme for Ukraine.

Second, no lasting security architecture will be possible as long as the war continues and the Helsinki principles are violated. All the Russian troops have to leave the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine immediately. As long as the invasion lasts, there is no room for any "business" with the aggressor.

Third, we have to continue investing in human rights and fundamental freedoms. Security without them will not work. We call it "comprehensive security". This is why the OSCE's human dimension is so important.

Finally, we must not fall into the trap of accepting Moscow's cynical blackmail to appease on issues of primary importance and long-time consequences. We must not allow the Russian war to be named an "operation" or "crisis", a blockage, "lack of consensus", and "business as usual" to be put above the *acquis* developed over many years.

Let me conclude by wishing the incoming Chairmanship perseverance in upholding the principles, and – hence – the relevance of the OSCE. The latter will only become possible when the former is prioritized.



**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF ROMANIA**

(Annex 6 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson,

Romania fully subscribes to the statement of the European Union. In addition, we would like to make the following remarks in a national capacity.

We join other speakers in thanking North Macedonia, H.E. Minister Osmani, for hosting us today, as well as for his and his entire team's tremendous efforts in steering our Organization during these extraordinary times. We welcome the principled, firm position of North Macedonia regarding Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and for continuing to ensure that the Organization is bringing its contribution to addressing its multiple consequences.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are facing an unprecedented security and humanitarian crisis, caused by Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, in blatant violation of the basic principles of international law, the UN Charter and OSCE commitments. Once more, we strongly condemn this unprovoked, unjustified war of aggression and the continuous attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, including on the ports at the Danube, close to Ukraine's border with Romania. We reiterate our firm call on the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally stop this unprovoked and unjustified aggression and withdraw all its military forces and equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders. We also reiterate our call on Belarus to stop enabling the Russian aggression and to abide by its international obligations.

Deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure and killing of innocent civilians by the Russian Federation are horrendous. They constitute blatant violations of international humanitarian law and must stop immediately. We are determined to make those responsible of all the heinous crimes committed in Ukraine, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, accountable for their acts. Romania is joining all efforts of the international community in holding those responsible accountable, including within the OSCE, by joining the participating States that invoked the Moscow Mechanism.

Romania will continue to stand with Ukraine. Together with all European Union and NATO member States, Romania has been supporting Ukraine and the Ukrainian people affected by Russia's war of aggression, by providing humanitarian aid, and macro-financial and military assistance. We have been providing shelter, food, medical assistance, access to education and the labour market to all those fleeing the war and entering Romania, and we will continue to do so. Our support remains solid, for as long as it takes.

We have been witnessing the incredible resilience of the Ukrainian people in defending their country and resisting in front of the aggressor. The people of Ukraine are also fighting for their European future: thus, the granting of the status of candidate country to Ukraine is of historical importance, together with the recent recommendation by the European Commission to open the accession negotiations.

Mr. Chairperson,

As Russia continues its blatant war of aggression, it is important to address and alleviate its consequences which are felt beyond Ukraine's borders. We welcome the efforts of the OSCE to increase the resilience of the Republic of Moldova, including in the field of combating corruption and money laundering, combating trafficking in human beings or building democratic institutions. Let me underline that Romania will continue to provide all relevant support to the Republic of Moldova, to strengthen its resilience in the face of destabilizing activities by external actors and to support its European accession path. Romania firmly supports a comprehensive, peaceful, and sustainable settlement of the conflict in the Republic of Moldova, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders and without affecting the European perspective of the country. In this context, let me reiterate once again the importance of withdrawing Russian troops and ammunition from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with international law and OSCE commitments. In this context, we expect also the mandate of the OSCE Mission to be extended in accordance with the regular procedure.

Ambassador Viorel Moșanu, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus, is investing professionalism, energy, and dedication in supporting the Geneva International Discussions. We reiterate our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

This year, another humanitarian crisis unfolded in the OSCE area. We continue to closely monitor the difficult situation on the ground. We reaffirm our support for the sovereignty, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan. We also encourage Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue their diplomatic engagement, with the support of the EU, in order to find comprehensive solutions to all outstanding issues.

The impact of the war is felt beyond Ukraine, as Russia recklessly exploited energy and food as a weapon of war. Russia bears responsibility for the global food security crisis it has provoked by instrumentalizing food in its war against Ukraine. Romania, together with all European Union Member States, will continue to support the timely and stable delivery of Ukrainian agricultural products to global markets. More than 30 million tons of grain transited through our country.

Mr. Chairperson,

This unprecedented security crisis has affected also the OSCE as a whole. By abusing the consensus rule, the Russian Federation has been systematically hampering the well-functioning of the Organization, limiting its ability to act on the ground and depriving it of much-needed financial resources. Russia is the sole responsible for the current state of the Organization.

But the Organization has proven its resilience. We warmly thank the previous Polish Chairmanship and current Chairmanship of North Macedonia, the Secretary General, the field operations and the autonomous institutions that have kept the Organization operational and have provided valuable support to its participating States and its people. Thus, the Organization has continued to provide valuable support to Ukraine, through: the Support

Programme for Ukraine (to which also Romania is a donor) and the Special Representative, as well as through the work of the autonomous institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (monitoring the human rights situation or strengthening the capacity of civil society and human rights defenders to act) and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (with its watchdog function, continuing to monitor media freedom and the safety of journalists on the ground). This is a testimony of the importance of our Organization, of its institutions, and the reason for all of us to make further, strengthened efforts to ensure its continuous functioning.

In this difficult context, we welcome that consensus has been reached on the next Chairmanship of the OSCE and we are grateful to Malta for assuming this responsibility. However, let me state that Estonia was perfectly able to lead the Organization, defend our common principles and commitments, and ensure that the Organization remains relevant on the ground and credible on the international arena. The Russian Federation has never provided a solid argument why this would not be the case.

We also need to ensure continuity at the top management level of the Organization and thus support the extension of the mandates for the current incumbents of the four top positions: the Secretary General, the ODIHR Director, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. We are grateful for their tireless work and that they stand ready to continue in these unpredictable times, with limited resources at their disposal. Let me use this opportunity to reconfirm our support for the mandates and autonomy of the institutions.

We also believe that the Organization should be provided with adequate resources and we have supported the Chairmanship in its assiduous efforts to ensure it, by exploring different avenues. We also provide voluntary contributions to several projects of the Organization.

Mr. Chairperson,

We need a robust and principled OSCE that continues to bring its contribution in maintaining peace and security, to hold Russia to account for its aggression against a sovereign State, and to deliver on the ground, for its participating States and its people. We will support Malta in their efforts to contribute to this end.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA**

(Annex 7 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Distinguished colleagues,

At the outset, I would like to thank North Macedonia's OSCE Chairmanship for leading this Organization during the last year. Indeed, it was not an easy task, as the OSCE, which still remains the biggest security organization in the world, is rapidly declining as once duly adopted and well-elaborated mandates and commitments are totally disregarded.

This process started several years ago when the OSCE failed to implement its core tasks – early warning and conflict prevention. Unfortunately, this process will continue unless there is no common understanding that violation of international law in any part of the world shall be unequivocally condemned and not tolerated, otherwise it creates a sense of impunity becoming the new normal in other parts of the world. Regrettably, the OSCE area of responsibility is not an exclusion.

In the South Caucasus the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the root causes of which were hatred and xenophobia in its various forms and the existential threat to the people who wanted to live in freedom and dignity in their ancestral homeland, reached its final stage this year. After a nine-month-long inhuman siege, on 19 September Azerbaijan launched yet another large-scale military offensive against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in mass forced displacement of its indigenous population. At this point in time, we can state that in the silent agreement of the international community Azerbaijan has reached its long-standing goal – to get the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh without its Armenian population.

However, even after having this done the claims of the Azerbaijani side were not halted. Now the entire sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia has become the target of our neighbour. This, coupled with continuous hatred, military rhetoric, use of force and threats of use of force, refusal to come to the meetings organized by various international actors, including the United States of America and the European Union, illustrates that this country is not sincerely interested in peace and stability in our region.

Distinguished colleagues,

Despite this humanitarian disaster in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia remains committed to opening a new era of peace in the South Caucasus and believes that it is still possible. To turn this possibility into a reality, we need the reciprocally genuine engagement of Azerbaijan and the strong support of international actors to our efforts, which are based on well-elaborated and well-known principles. These principles that were widely discussed and admitted or at least not rejected by the Azerbaijani side include:

- Mutual recognition of territorial integrity based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration and without any further ambiguity;
- Delimitation of the State border between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on the freshest and legitimate maps – USSR General Staff maps of 1974–1978;

- Opening of all transport and economic communications with full respect of the countries' sovereignty and jurisdiction, as well as based on the principles of equality and reciprocity.

The Armenian side, reaffirming its commitment to the above-mentioned principles and demonstrating its readiness to embark upon practical steps, has recently presented the concept of a connectivity project which we called "Crossroads of Peace". This ambitious project is aimed at connecting east with west and north with south and through regional co-operation to create conditions for strengthening economic and cultural ties, soften contradictions and foster better connectivity and political dialogue between the countries of our region.

In this regard the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border is also of crucial importance. As you might be aware, we have reached agreement to open the land border for third country citizens and Armenian and Turkish citizens holding diplomatic passports, which was reconfirmed by my counterpart, Minister Fidan, at our bilateral meeting on 23 October; even concrete timing was indicated meaning the upcoming weeks, and we hope that in the nearest future we will implement this first, but quite tangible step.

Madam Chairperson,

There are also a number of humanitarian issues on Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization that cannot be ignored. The release of all Armenian detainees, including the ones imprisoned after 19 September, co-operation in addressing the fate of missing persons, and protection of Armenian cultural property in and around Nagorno-Karabakh can pave the way to long-lasting, just and dignified peace.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that Armenia as a responsible member of the OSCE has proved on numerous occasions its devotion to regional and global peace and will continue to take steps to that end. And once again, I reiterate that Armenia remains ready for negotiations and we need Azerbaijan to stop rejecting the proposals of facilitators to meet and finalize the peace treaty. To ensure this goal we need the genuine efforts of all interested parties and the international community as a whole to turn the page of violence in the South Caucasus and strengthen the international rules-based order.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF JAPAN (PARTNER FOR CO-OPERATION)**

(Annex 8 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the OSCE and the Chairmanship country, North Macedonia, for their efforts in the preparation for the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. I am also honoured to attend this Council as the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs on behalf of Japan, which serves as an Asian Partner of the OSCE.

The international community faces complex and various challenges.

A few weeks ago, the G7 Foreign Ministers issued a joint Foreign Ministers' Statement, where the ministers of the G7 countries concurred on their recognition of the situation surrounding Israel and Palestine on the occasion of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo. It is essential to realize humanitarian pauses to secure humanitarian access, to comply with international law including international humanitarian law, and to realize peace in the Middle East based on a "two-State solution" from a mid- to long-term perspective.

The hostages were released several times based on the deal between Israel and Hamas. Both sides extended the humanitarian pause twice so far.

Japan welcomes the continuous implementation of the deal. It is important to steadily implement the deal and continue the pause over a longer period of time. The G7 Foreign Ministers announced that they support the further extension of this pause and future pauses as needed to enable assistance to be scaled up, and to facilitate the release of all hostages.

I attended the International Humanitarian Conference for the Civilian Population in Gaza, and I keenly felt the need of de-escalating the humanitarian situation on the ground as soon as possible and the importance of co-operation with other countries and international organizations for this purpose.

The Government of Japan disbursed an emergency grant aid of 10 million US dollars in response to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip in the areas of food, water and health care. In addition to the above, we are preparing to make additional contributions totalling approximately 65 million US dollars to Palestine.

Even in the growing tension situation in the Middle East, we should never forget Ukraine. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is an outrageous act that shakes the very foundation of international order. Japan once again strongly condemns Russia. Japan's attitude to impose severe sanctions against Russia and to provide strong support for Ukraine remains unchanged.

Japan has pledged approximately 7.6 billion US dollars in total to support Ukraine, and will steadily implement this support. As was agreed upon during the telephone talks in November between Prime Minister Kishida of Japan and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, Japan will hold the Japan-Ukraine Conference for promotion of Economic Reconstruction in Tokyo next February. Japan will accelerate its effort to support Ukraine in its recovery and reconstruction through the co-operation between both public and private sectors.

It is also important to support Ukraine on the diplomatic front. Japan will continue its efforts to advance the process of a Peace Formula together with international partners.

Turning our eyes to the Indo-Pacific, a unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force continues, or even is strengthened in the East and South China Seas. Besides, North Korea is intensifying its nuclear and missile activities on 21 November, which is a clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Japan, as an Asian Partner country of the OSCE, would like to emphasize that unilateral changes to the status quo by force cannot be tolerated anywhere in the world, and that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific are inseparable.

Given such an international environment, let me introduce the co-operation between Japan and the OSCE. Japan has been the longest-standing Asian Partner of the OSCE. We have contributed to the OSCE's concrete projects for the enhancement of democratization and the promotion of regional stability.

For example, Japan has dispatched experts to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, and has provided financial assistance to strengthen the border management capacity of Central Asia and Afghanistan. Japan's such co-operation projects are based on the recognition that the security of any corner of the world is inseparable.

Japan will continue to further strengthen its co-operation with the OSCE, which takes a comprehensive approach to the security situation, including political, military, economic and environmental, as well as human rights issues.

Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Japan will host the OSCE Asian Conference next year. While the international community is facing an inflection point in history, Japan will further strengthen co-operation with the OSCE to uphold a free and open international order based on the rule of law, in order to lead the world toward co-operation rather than division and confrontation.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF TÜRKIYE**

(Annex 9 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Thank you Mr. Chairperson, thank you Minister Osmani, also for your very warm hospitality in Skopje.

Allow me to thank you and North Macedonia for shouldering the OSCE Chairmanship this year and to commend you for your very hard work.

Let me also commend Secretary General Schmid and the four top leaders of this Organization, and the staff. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the time ahead.

Türkiye appreciates and congratulates Malta for stepping forward as the Chairmanship for 2024.

We are meeting once again under extraordinary circumstances for international peace and security.

The tragic war in Ukraine has been continuing, for soon to be two years now.

The devastation, destruction and human suffering in Ukraine have been immense.

The war's regional and global fallout is also on the rise.

We have all been negatively affected by this war.

Let me reaffirm, once again, our principled position in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as our commitment to upholding dialogue and diplomacy for a political settlement.

Since we last met in the reinforced format in late September, we have been witnessing immense devastation, destruction and human suffering in another part of the world, not too far away from the OSCE area.

Unfortunately, on and after 7 October, we have been shaken to the core because of the massive loss of civilian lives. After an initial high ground, Israel has been indiscriminately targeting and heavily attacking civilians and all kinds of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals in Gaza.

Humanity has not seen such a massive loss of civilian lives, mostly women and children, in such a short period of time in recent history. The United Nations itself has never lost such a huge number of civilian personnel in an armed conflict.

As North Macedonia's Chairmanship motto says, "It's about people". Yes, it should be. Not just my kind of people but all kinds of people.



Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,

It is not an overstatement to say that the OSCE has been going through the most challenging period in its history.

There have been difficult times in the past as well, times when it was not easy to take decisions.

However, it never got to the situation as is the case now.

Yet, the Organization remains important as the most inclusive platform for comprehensive security and co-operation in Europe.

This platform, as is, needs to be preserved.

If we cannot pull the Organization out of the difficult state it is in, then what hope can we entertain for co-operative security anywhere, any time? Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, would be locked into confrontation, even conflict. No transparency, no arms control, no confidence and security. It is time for reflection and action.

Reform should be part and parcel of our work.

I believe the old but very relevant concept of co-operative security, which underwrote the post-Cold War security architecture and discourse in Europe, should be given a fresh opportunity in 2024 and 2025.

If there was no OSCE today, we would not be able to create it. It is such a unique and valuable construct. It is against this background that my country, Türkiye, would ask fellow participating States to seek consensus, but also compromise and vision to strengthen this Organization and open a new chapter for co-operative security in Europe.

To facilitate debate, we will devote attention to this topic in the context of the upcoming Antalya Diplomacy Forum in March, in the very forum which brought Ukraine and Russia together for the first time in 2022 after the beginning of the war.

Thank you for your attention.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

(Annex 10 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

The delegation of Spain, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

The European Union expresses its gratitude to the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Osmani, and the 2023 OSCE Chairmanship of North Macedonia for their hospitality in Skopje, and for the manner they steered the Organization during turbulent times. We would also like to pay tribute to Ambassador Igor Djundev, and his dedicated team in Vienna for their tireless efforts throughout this past year, marked by continuous challenges for the OSCE area and for the Organization itself, stemming from Russia's ongoing illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. We are particularly grateful to the Chairmanship of North Macedonia for keeping this aggression high on the Organization's agenda. The EU also expresses its appreciation to the Chairmanship for the dedicated efforts in fostering consensus on pressing matters for the OSCE's functionality.

We welcome the decisions by the Ministerial Council on the Chairmanship of Malta in 2024 and on the extension of mandates for the Secretary General and the heads of the three autonomous institutions. We look forward to working with and supporting Malta in its goal to lead the Organization and to ensure that the OSCE contributes to addressing the unprecedented challenges to European security we currently face.

We reaffirm our strong support for the OSCE Secretary General, the Secretariat and the other executive structures, including the field operations, as well as for the autonomous institutions and their heads. It is our common responsibility to preserve the effectiveness of the Organization and maintain its ability to act under these difficult circumstances and allow for its effective functioning across all three dimensions, including by providing adequate financial resources. We also look forward to our continued fruitful co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as well as with the OSCE Partners for Co-operation.

We call upon all participating States to recognize the importance of providing the OSCE with continuity under strong leadership, particularly when its principles, commitments and values are more crucial than ever for our common security.

For a second consecutive year, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine marked the Ministerial Council meeting. Just like last year, however, Russia did not succeed in its attempts to misuse this forum to legitimize its war of aggression and deflect its responsibility for it. Russia's groundless claims and false accusations were once again met with resounding condemnation of its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine as a blatant violation of international law, including the UN Charter, and OSCE principles and commitments, as well as the most critical threat to our common security. Against this background, the continuous overwhelming support among the participating States for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders underlined the non-negotiable and irrevocable nature of the core norms, principles and commitments that lie at the heart of European security.

In upholding these norms and principles, the European Union and its Member States remain determined to stand by Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes. On the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor events, we reiterate our grave concern about the repetition of the reprehensible actions of the past, with Russia once again using food as a weapon, with severe and tragic consequences for many countries worldwide.

For a second consecutive Ministerial Council meeting the call for ensuring accountability for all heinous acts committed as part of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including for the crime of aggression, resounded loud and clear. We also took a good note of the recommendations of the Civic Solidarity Platform parallel conference in this regard, as well as of the conclusions of the side event initiated by Ukraine under the title: "In the shadow of Russia's occupation: How to ensure accountability and civilian detainees' return". In this context, we will continue to demand the immediate release by Russia of all individuals unlawfully deprived of their liberty, including the three arbitrarily detained OSCE staff members. Russia must ensure that all Ukrainians in Russian captivity are treated in full compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Grounded on our common OSCE commitments and our renewed determination to implement them, we will continue to use, preserve and even enhance its tools and assets in all three dimensions of security.

To conclude, the crisis we confront is not a flaw in the common rules and underlying principles of the European security order. It is not a failure of the OSCE. It is the failure of one participating State, actively supported by another one, to abide by those rules and principles. We call on Russia to immediately stop its war of aggression against Ukraine, and completely and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We can achieve a common, indivisible security space built on trust and co-operation and at peace when all 57 participating States uphold universal values, principles, and rules they all have willingly agreed upon.

We request that this statement be attached to the journal of today's Ministerial Council meeting.

The candidate countries North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Albania<sup>1</sup>, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, the potential candidate country Georgia, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino align themselves with this statement.

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1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF LUXEMBOURG  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, BELGIUM, BULGARIA,  
CANADA, CROATIA, CZECHIA, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND,  
FRANCE, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, ITALY,  
LATVIA, LITHUANIA, MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS,  
NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL,  
ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN,  
TÜRKIYE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 11 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson,

This statement is delivered on behalf of NATO Allies and the invitee Sweden.

Peace in the OSCE area has been shattered. Russia's illegal, unjustifiable, and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest terms, gravely undermines the Euro-Atlantic security order. It is a blatant violation of international law, including the UN Charter, and contravenes OSCE principles and commitments, such as those contained in the Helsinki Final Act.

We reaffirm our unwavering solidarity with Ukraine. We will never recognize Russia's attempted illegal and illegitimate annexations, including of Crimea. We fully support Ukraine's rights to self-defence and to choose its own security arrangements. Ukraine's future is in NATO. We remain steadfast in stepping up political and practical support to Ukraine for as long as it takes. We welcome other OSCE participating States supporting Ukraine.

There can be no impunity for Russia's abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, such as the forced deportation of children. We furthermore condemn attacks on energy infrastructure, especially during winter. Russia's war has also profoundly harmed the environment, nuclear safety, global energy and food security. We are working to ensure Ukrainian grain exports continue and actively support international efforts to alleviate the global food crisis.

We urge all countries not to provide any kind of assistance to Russia's aggression. Belarus's support has been instrumental as it continues to provide its territory and infrastructure to enable Russia's attacks on Ukraine. Belarus must end its complicity with Russia and return to compliance with international law. We condemn Russia's announced deployment of nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable systems in Belarus.

Russia is the most significant and direct threat to our peace, security and stability. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, disinformation, aggression and illegal attempted annexations. Russia's military build-up, including in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Sea regions and the High North, along with its military integration with Belarus, challenges our security. Russia's posture, intensified

hybrid actions, including through proxies, and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, as well as its use of force to pursue its political goals, undermine the rules-based international order.

We do not seek confrontation and we pose no threat to Russia. Russia must halt its aggressive behaviour and fully comply with international law. We remain willing to keep open channels of communication with Moscow to manage and mitigate risks, prevent escalation and increase transparency, including at the OSCE. We will significantly strengthen deterrence and defence, enhance our resilience and remain committed to supporting our partners to counter malign influence and aggression.

Russia has instigated conflicts in the OSCE area and inhibited efforts to resolve them. We call on Russia to end its occupation of Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and withdraw all its forces and materiel stationed in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova without their consent. We firmly support their sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders.

Russia continues to demonstrate disregard for arms control. We condemn Russia's withdrawal from the landmark Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). As a consequence, Allied States Parties intend to suspend the operation of the CFE Treaty for as long as necessary. We remain united in our commitment to effective conventional arms control as a key element of Euro-Atlantic security. This complements the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture that Allies have decided to further strengthen.

Russia must immediately stop its war of aggression, and completely and unconditionally withdraw from Ukraine. We are committed to achieving a just and lasting peace that upholds the UN Charter's principles, and therefore welcome President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula.

In light of the unprecedented challenges the Organization faces, we reiterate the key importance of the OSCE as a unique forum for dialogue and advancing comprehensive security. We will continue to support the OSCE's work across all three dimensions of security, and advocate for its effective and unimpeded functioning, including the independent institutions and field missions.

The participating States subscribing to this statement request its attachment to the journal of this Ministerial Council meeting.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**

(Annex 12 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

On behalf of the United Kingdom, I want to begin by thanking you and your committed team. Thank you for your warm hospitality here in Skopje. And in this difficult year, thank you for your outstanding leadership. And to the Secretary General, dear Helga, our deepest appreciation and gratitude to you, the heads of the autonomous institutions and the hard-working staff of the OSCE.

As Lord Cameron said this week, the United Kingdom will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes. We will continue to give political, economic, military and moral support to ensure Ukraine prevails, to secure the lasting peace that the Ukrainian people deserve and the security that our continent demands, in the face of such unfettered, unjustifiable aggression.

As the overwhelming majority of members of this Organization have continued to reiterate this week, Russia – supported by the Belarusian regime – is solely responsible for the illegal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. To Russia we say simply this – your actions, your violations of the United Nations Charter and the principles of the Helsinki Final Act are indefensible.

As the overwhelming majority have expressed here in Skopje – these principles – of sovereignty and territorial integrity – matter; this Organization matters; and that when it matters, we have shown once again that we will stand together to defend both.

Yesterday, we heard Mr. Lavrov say that the OSCE was on the “brink of the abyss”. A comment of little value from the representative of a country which invaded Georgia in 2008, illegally annexed Crimea in 2014 and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year. A comment of little surprise, given the OSCE’s crucial role in holding Russia to account, including through the Moscow Mechanism. A comment that this Ministerial Council meeting shows has fooled no one.

Mr. Chairperson, what we have shown is that we need the OSCE. In a turbulent region, the OSCE’s democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights institutions are globally renowned, holding nations to account. OSCE field missions are deployed across the Balkans and Central Asia, working with host governments to deliver long-term change.

The United Kingdom is delighted to have agreed on a new Chairmanship, and welcomes extending the mandates for the Secretary General and heads of the autonomous institutions. We thank them for stepping up at such short notice to ensure the continued efficacy of the OSCE. You can all count on the United Kingdom’s full support. Mr. Chairperson, as we all know, the OSCE still needs an agreed and appropriate budget. We look forward to returning to Vienna in the spirit of consensus in order to finalize this important issue.

Mr. Chairperson, as we look to 2024, we will continue to stand with Ukraine. We will continue to stand up for the OSCE. And we will continue to stand for the foundations and values of our collective European security. That is our choice and it is why we are here.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF ICELAND  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF BULGARIA, CANADA,  
CZECHIA, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, IRELAND, LATVIA,  
LITHUANIA, NORWAY, POLAND, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA,  
SWEDEN, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 13 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson,  
Honourable ministers,  
Madam Secretary General of the OSCE,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Iceland wishes to wholeheartedly thank Mr. Bujar Osmani and our North Macedonian hosts, for leading our Organization through these incredibly challenging times. We are grateful as well to our Secretary General, heads of the OSCE institutions and OSCE staff.

We also wish to thank Malta for taking on the immense responsibility of chairing our Organization in 2024, at the eleventh hour, and we assure Minister Ian Borg of Iceland's full support.

Mr. Chairperson,

The OSCE was founded to protect peace and security, and foster justice and co-operation.

And for a long time, our Organization has been a strong platform for dialogue, diplomacy, co-operation, and trust-building in the OSCE area. It has laid the foundations for democracy, rule of law, human rights, and peaceful coexistence.

Yet here we are, almost 50 years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, with the Russian Federation having brutally invaded another OSCE participating State.

For over 21 months Russia's unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine has caused devastating suffering, loss of life, damage, and destruction, and shaken the European security architecture to its core. Russia's war of aggression is a direct attack on the multilateral system, democratic values, and the rules-based international order.

And let me make this clear: Iceland remains unwavering in its solidarity with Ukraine in the face of Russia's brutal aggression and is united with allies and partners to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia is also directly undermining this very Organization by blocking consensus on decisions of critical importance for its future and functioning.

It is especially disturbing – but also revealing – to see that Russia’s attacks are directly targeted at those institutions tasked with protecting and promoting democratic values and human rights.

And that is not all – Russia’s withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and de-ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are yet another example of Russia’s aggressive behaviour aimed at undermining European and global security.

Russia’s conduct is unacceptable and in stark contradiction to the OSCE commitments that each participating State represented in this room, including Russia, has agreed to respect.

Mr. Chairperson,

In times like these, strengthened multilateral co-operation is of the utmost importance.

We must not shy away from the challenges we face, be it war in Europe, the effects of climate change, or democratic backsliding.

Instead, we must push back against this downward spiral, and be relentless advocates for democracy, freedom and peace that is built on justice.

As an integral part of the multilateral system the effective functioning of this Organization is our joint responsibility – a responsibility we must all take to heart.

Let me assure you that for our part, Iceland remains convinced of the value of the OSCE, its field missions and independent institutions. We are fully committed to continuing to support its work.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.



**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF SWEDEN  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, ANDORRA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM,  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA,  
CYPRUS, CZECHIA, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE,  
GEORGIA, GERMANY, GREECE, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY,  
LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA,  
MOLDOVA, MONACO, MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS,  
NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA,  
SAN MARINO, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN,  
SWITZERLAND, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM  
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 14 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

I have the honour to make this women, peace and security statement on behalf of the following 43 participating States: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and my own country Sweden.

Firstly, we reiterate our commitment to the women, peace and security agenda – which celebrated its 23rd anniversary this year – as a cornerstone to achieving comprehensive and sustainable peace and security in the OSCE area. The OSCE, as a regional security organization, has – and will continue to – play a crucial role in implementing the women, peace and security agenda. The continued broad support for the women, peace and security agenda amongst participating States, and our ability to leverage the OSCE as a platform, was well illustrated this year. The Chairmanship of North-Macedonia’s Conference on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, in Tetovo, served as an important forum to share recommendations and commitments related to enhancing gender mainstreaming in the OSCE and across all dimensions. Our three Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) Chairmanships, furthermore, undertook tireless efforts to uphold the focus on UN Security Council resolution 1325’s central role in the FSC mandate. These successes demonstrate our ability to place women, peace and security where it belongs: at the top of our, and the OSCE’s, agenda.

As we reflect on this past year, the importance and urgency of implementing the women, peace and security agenda in our region remains clear. The international community has long recognized the significance of incorporating gender perspectives in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation. Understanding and integrating these perspectives is essential in addressing the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, in all their diversity. This is happening in a context of a general rollback in women’s rights, and concerted efforts by hostile actors to weaponize gender as part of attempts to weaken the international rules-based system and destabilize democracies. By mainstreaming gender in military, political, humanitarian, and diplomatic planning, we can increase the effectiveness of conflict prevention efforts and respond more effectively to these realities, leading to improved outcomes during and following conflict.

Since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine began, Ukrainian women have been indispensable in courageously defending their country's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. They have also played a crucial role in rebuilding their country's future, while facing greater risks of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence. Besides, Ukraine's efforts to revise its National Action Plan during wartime demonstrate not only its commitment to the 1325 agenda, but also the crucial role of the women, peace and security agenda in responding to the gendered dimensions of conflict.

We must address the under-representation of women in the political, public and security sector, particularly in leadership positions. Women's full, equal and meaningful inclusion in security forces ensures a greater diversity of views, which is linked to greater innovation and effectiveness within any organization. It is also well established that women's meaningful participation in peace processes results in more inclusive peace agreements that are effective and last longer. Therefore, it is crucial that structural barriers and underlying causes of under-representation are removed, keeping in mind the intersectional aspects.

Allow me to emphasize that we cannot solve today's global challenges without the full participation of women – not without women soldiers, police officers, human rights defenders, and not without women peacebuilders and their networks. Nor can we attain gender equality without the support, engagement, and accountability of men. Only together can we build a more equal world. We must remember that gender equality is not to the benefit of some, but to the shared benefit of all.

We reaffirm our support for the development of an OSCE-wide Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions. In 2020 we made recommendations ranging from the development of national action plans on women, peace and security to encouraging and supporting the sharing of experiences and best practices as regards the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation. I will attach the 2020 statement to the written version of this statement and I encourage participating States to review these recommendations and where possible implement them.

In conclusion, we underline our commitment to sustained efforts towards our shared goals of ensuring the full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation of women, including in all activities of the OSCE.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF DENMARK  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, ANDORRA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM,  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA,  
CYPRUS, CZECHIA, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GEORGIA,  
GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY,  
LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA,  
MOLDOVA, MONACO, MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS,  
NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA,  
SAN MARINO, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN,  
SWITZERLAND, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 15 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 45 participating States:

Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain/European Union, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and my own country Denmark.

Mr. Chairperson,

2023 marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that recognizes that all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights, with human rights as the basis for a free, just and peaceful world order. The OSCE principles and commitments and its comprehensive concept of security exemplify this.

Over the past decades, we have made great strides in advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms. Yet, in recent years, it has become more evident than ever that the fight for freedom, gender equality, justice and democracy is far from over, and that their defence requires our ongoing vigilance and principled action. Across the region, the space for civil society and independent media is rapidly shrinking, offline and online. There has been an alarming rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim bigotry and violence in the OSCE area. Discrimination still excludes many from full, equal and meaningful participation in our societies. And peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, journalists and media actors too often face threats and violence.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, enabled by the Lukashenka regime in Belarus, serves as the starkest example and reminds us all that human rights and fundamental freedoms are among the primary targets of an aggressor and that ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is a prerequisite for lasting security and peace among and within States. We are appalled by the independent reports, *inter alia* under the OSCE's

Moscow Mechanism, which have found serious violations of human rights and “clear patterns of violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces” in Ukraine, including targeted killings of civilians, unlawful detentions, abductions, forcible transfers and large-scale deportations as well as the use of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence. We strongly condemn these horrific violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. All alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes and crimes against humanity must be duly and thoroughly investigated. Those responsible must be held to account.

Mr. Chairperson,

Recognition that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is integral to comprehensive security is enshrined in the guiding principles of the Helsinki Final Act. Since this Organization’s earliest days, it has been a leading platform for championing the liberty, dignity and equality of all persons who call this region home. We will continue to speak out when democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated or abused. Whether it is human rights defenders, journalists and media actors facing reprisals, including imprisonment, for their brave work, or violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters aspiring for democratic change. We will continue to fight for the rights of women and girls and to promote gender equality. We will press for the release of all those arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for knowing and acting upon their rights. We will keep pressing for the eradication of torture and other ill-treatment. We will continue to support free and fair elections. We will promote tolerance and condemn, investigate, and prosecute hate crimes. We will challenge stereotypes and prejudice, combat myths and disinformation with facts, and promote a world where no individual is left behind or targeted for who they are, for whom they love, for what they look like, or for what they believe or say.

Mr. Chairperson,

Civil society is an indispensable part of our countries’ conscience and an important partner in advancing the values and work of this Organization. It is a key component of an open, inclusive and thriving democracy. We pay tribute to the individuals and civil society organizations that work tirelessly to defend our shared dedication to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms. They deserve our recognition, protection and support. We thank those who joined the Parallel Civil Society Conference on 29 November 2023.

We highly value the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) as an important platform for participating States and civil society to review together the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments. In the regrettable repeated absence of the yearly HDIM, the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference yet again proved a valuable opportunity for an exchange of views with civil society. The continued obstruction of the HDIM is unacceptable. It is important that the HDIM is held next year as mandated, and we will support the efforts of the 2024 Chairmanship to that end. We value and commend the OSCE autonomous institutions for their efforts to promote and protect human rights, as core components of peaceful, inclusive and democratic societies. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential to the promotion and advancement of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in our area. As many of the conflicts in our area are linked to failures to observe commitments in the human dimension, these efforts are indispensable.

All participating States have categorically declared that commitments in the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned. We will continue to fight to place implementation of OSCE principles and commitments at the forefront of our work in this Organization for the benefit of all who call the OSCE area their home.

In closing, we would like to thank the OSCE Chairmanship and the Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee who work on our behalf to strengthen the human dimension despite challenging times.

I would be grateful if you would attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

(Annex 16 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

First of all, Ambassador Djundev, dear Igor, thank you. Thanks to you and Foreign Minister Osmani for your exceptional leadership and, I think it is no exaggeration to say – herculean efforts to keep this Organization focused on its foundational principles and to your insistence on not losing the forest for the trees. You said at the beginning of the year that “It’s about people”. That is absolutely right and – with all due respect to everyone in this Council – it is not just about us diplomats. It is about people like Tatyana and Oleksander. I wish everyone in this Council would have taken the time to listen to them at yesterday’s side event. Oleksander described the inhuman conditions of his detention by Russian authorities – the humiliation, abuse, and violations of his dignity. The irreversible pain that has been permanently seared into his memory and that he will never, ever be able to wipe out of his mind. Or the fact that Tatyana’s son is still languishing somewhere in Russia’s filtration gulag. Disappeared and torn away from his family.

Every minute we spend debating rules of procedure or technicalities of this Organization is a minute less that we devote to talking about the suffering of people like Oleksander and Tatyana. It is not abstract. It is real and it is happening right now as we speak, in Ukraine. Filtration, torture, enforced disappearances. All happening right now. Yes, it is about the Helsinki Final Act and the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders. But it is not just about abstract principles of international law. It is about the lives and real-time suffering of children, women, and men who are being targeted simply for being Ukrainian.

Now, I believe the stronger our Organization is, the more we can contribute – in our own way – to supporting Ukraine. We have proven we can make a real difference, by using the Moscow Mechanism to document war crimes in Bucha. By having the victims of filtration camps come and speak at side events. By providing psychological support to children and families, and by telling their stories every week at the Permanent Council. Bilaterally, our countries can support Ukraine militarily; in this Council we can support it morally. In the long run we will also support Russia, because the principles we agreed to in Helsinki and Paris will in fact benefit every citizen of the OSCE area, regardless of their nationality.

To our friends in Malta, we thank you for agreeing to take on the enormous responsibility of defending our values. We have faith in your leadership. We pledge to support you in every way we can. There is so much work to be done: encouraging peace in the South Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the de-occupation of Georgia. Supporting democracy and the rule of law in Moldova and the Western Balkans. Advancing connectivity and trade in Central Asia. Combating anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We know you will take all of this on and more.

To Secretary General Schmid, dear Helga, we so greatly value your leadership of this Organization and your ability to bring leaders together to advance bold new initiatives, like the high-level event on climate change.

To Director Mecacci, dear Matteo, your Organization is at the heart of our common values – defending human rights and strengthening democratic institutions.

Dear Representative on Freedom of the Media, dear Teresa – your voice on freedom of the media is vital to supporting democracy in our region.

Dear High Commissioner, dear Kairat – you know how essential national minority rights are to peace, stability and democracy and we will continue to support the work of your Organization.

Colleagues, we have a lot of work to do. Count on the United States to work with you to defend our core values. The more united we are, the stronger we are and the more we can do to support the principles that all of us – at one time – pledged to uphold.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, ANDORRA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM,  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA,  
CYPRUS, CZECHIA, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE,  
GEORGIA, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, IRELAND,  
ITALY, LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG,  
MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS,  
NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA,  
SAN MARINO, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN,  
SWITZERLAND, UKRAINE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM)**

(Annex 17 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the following 43 participating States: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the European Union delegation.

Mr. Chairperson, recalling the joint statement on the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor of 1932–1933, delivered at the 15th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, and the resolution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly of 2008, we commemorate the 90th anniversary of the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine.

During the Holodomor, the cruel actions and policies of the Stalinist regime caused brutal and prolonged mass starvation, killing millions of innocent people in Ukraine.

We honour the memory of the victims of this tragedy inflicted upon the people of Ukraine. Given the OSCE commitment in the 1990 Copenhagen Document to “clearly and unequivocally condemn totalitarianism,” we once again underline the importance of raising public awareness of the tragic events of our common past, of promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, and of strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for the prevention of human tragedies in the future.

We acknowledge the efforts undertaken in recent years to educate the public about the Holodomor in the OSCE participating States as well as in the United Nations and its specialized agencies. We recognize the adoption on 1 November 2007, of the relevant UNESCO resolution by 193 Member States. We are determined to take part in relevant events and invite all OSCE participating States to do the same, given the crucial role the OSCE plays in the promotion of respect for human rights and dignity.

We urge participating States to promote the dissemination of information, to educate on the Holodomor in Ukraine and to memorialize it as a dark chapter in world history. Telling the truth about history honours the victims, acknowledges their suffering, and highlights the heroism of those who resisted these totalitarian crimes.



Memorialization also promotes accountability for despots whose policies impose catastrophes, with contempt for the humanity of those affected. Within their national frameworks to promote remembrance and education about the tragedy, certain participating States have recognized the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine as a State-induced campaign of starvation, while a number of participating States or their legislative branches of government have recognized the Holodomor as a genocide.

For decades the Holodomor – an appalling act of inhumanity – was suppressed and denied by the Soviet Union. Today, there are ongoing attempts by the Russian Federation to glorify Stalinism and deny the Holodomor and other atrocities committed by the communist regime, including through the persecution of all those individuals and organizations who have sought to expose such Soviet era atrocities. We express our grave concern about the repetition of the unconscionable actions of the past.

Today, the Kremlin is again attempting to subjugate the people of Ukraine by force. It is once again using food as a weapon, not just against Ukraine, but also against many countries over the world, by restricting Ukraine's food exports which are crucial for global food security. Today, Russia's aggression is accompanied by Stalinist methods of dehumanization campaigns, mass atrocities, cruel filtration procedures, forcible transfers and deportations, including of children, and practices to deny, suppress and punish expressions of Ukrainian identity.

All this is aimed at breaking the will of the Ukrainian people and subjugating the sovereign State of Ukraine. We reiterate our commitment to bring all those responsible to account for the sake of justice and peace, as well as for the prevention of such atrocities and abuses.

We commend Ukraine's initiatives to ensure global food supplies despite the Russian Federation's attempts to weaponize food by restricting Ukraine's food exports, thus undermining global food security, and threatening the supplies people worldwide depend on. We strongly deplore the Russian Federation's theft and destruction of Ukrainian agricultural products, equipment, and infrastructure as well as the Russian Federation's efforts to prevent Ukrainian food from reaching the most vulnerable populations around the world.

Mr. Chairperson, the 90th anniversary of the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine serves as a powerful reminder about the dangers of autocratic regimes. The history of the Holodomor also reminds us of our common responsibility to defend the cause of humanity and our shared respect for human life.

I would be grateful if you would attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF CANADA**

(Annex 18 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson,

In addition to the statements that Canada has joined, I would like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

I will begin by thanking the Government of North Macedonia, and particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and North Macedonia's OSCE delegation for their warm hospitality during this year's Ministerial Council meeting and at the various meetings that you have hosted in your beautiful country over the course of this past year.

I would like to reiterate Parliamentary Secretary Oliphant's thanks to the staff of the OSCE for their creativity, determination and resilience in continuing to uphold the mandate of this Organization in the difficult circumstances it is facing. And I would like to extend the same thanks to the team that comprises North Macedonia's delegation in Vienna. We could not have asked for better partners in a challenging year and I underscore this in particular in Canada's role as Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation.

Mr. Chairperson,

While this Organization has faced many challenges over the last year, the vast majority of participating States have displayed an overwhelming unity on the most important issues: on the need to uphold OSCE commitments; on support for the work of the Secretariat, the autonomous institutions and field missions; on the importance of election monitoring; on the necessity of agreeing on a budget that provides the Organization with the resources it needs to accomplish its mandate; on the holding of the mandated meetings; on the need to address the existential threat posed by climate change; on the importance of strengthening democratic institutions and human rights protections; and, most urgently, on the condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

This overall unity of purpose, and a willingness to engage in good faith where we disagree, is common to almost all participating States. There is, of course, one glaring exception – the Russian Federation.

In its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated its complete rejection of the UN Charter and our shared OSCE commitments. In its incessant targeting of civilians and civilian objects and in the atrocities committed in occupied areas, it has shown its disregard for its human rights and international humanitarian law obligations. And the Russian Federation has sadly pulled Belarus in its wake, making it not only complicit to its act of aggression against Ukraine, but also to its persistent attempts to undermine this Organization from within.

Canada stands with Ukraine as it defends its independence, freedom and democracy.

Canada also stands for effective multilateralism.

The OSCE was created in an era of division, as a platform for finding common ground. While the OSCE is facing challenges, we remain convinced that it can continue to play an important role in providing direct benefits to the people of the region and in restoring the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. As you and your excellent team have demonstrated so clearly, Mr. Chairperson, it is about the people.

In this context, we very much look forward to working with Malta as the Chairmanship in 2024. We have no doubt that Malta will lead the Organization in a principled manner and uphold and defend the OSCE's core principles and commitments. We will stand with them in those efforts.

In closing, Canada would like to sincerely thank you again and the entire Chairmanship team for your extraordinary efforts this year. Canada applauds the firm and principled leadership you have provided as Chairmanship. As Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation this trimester, we particularly appreciated this close collaboration, and we would like to offer to you, Ambassador Djundev, and to your outstanding team, our most sincere gratitude, respect and admiration.

Thank you.

I would like to request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS, THE  
REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC  
AND THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN)**

(Annex 19 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Reaffirming the commitment to the development of friendly, equal and mutually beneficial inter-State relations in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area and to the idea of establishing a free, equitable, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community, rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals,

Emphasizing the need to preserve the central co-ordinating role of the United Nations in inter-State relations and further strengthen the primary role of the United Nations Security Council in maintaining international peace and security and in facilitating the resolution of international problems,

Adhering to the objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, the Astana Commemorative Declaration and other consensus documents of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe,

Guided by the common objective of ensuring the harmonious coexistence of different peoples and ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area, and recognizing their indisputable right to civilizational, cultural, political, religious and ideological diversity and identity,

In view of the inadmissibility of a policy of exceptionalism, domination, the imposition on peoples of cultural and value paradigms that are alien to them, and given also the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States,

Guided by the need to uphold and respect the fundamental principle of equal and indivisible security whereby no State, group of States or organization may have pre-eminent responsibility for maintaining peace and stability or may strengthen its security at the expense of the security of others,

We affirm the importance of preserving the OSCE as a regional forum operating on the basis of the consensus rule and the principle of the sovereign equality of States, in the interests of strengthening security and developing co-operation among participating States.

We are convinced of the need to enhance the effectiveness of the OSCE, to search for unifying themes and to prevent double standards and geographical and thematic imbalances in its activities.

We believe it is important to observe the Rules of Procedure and other decisions of the OSCE decision-making bodies and to adhere to the principles of impartiality, transparency and accountability.

We advocate the promotion of a positive agenda, openness to discussing the most difficult issues and challenges, and a commitment to non-ideological pragmatic dialogue to solve common security problems, which in particular involves:

- Joining efforts to counter contemporary transnational challenges and threats on an equal basis, primarily international terrorism and extremism, organized crime, illegal migration, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, threats to the security of information and communication technologies, illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings;
- Developing mutually beneficial co-operation in addressing economic and environmental challenges in the OSCE area, expanding co-operation, free from protectionism and discrimination, in the fields of transport, energy, trade, investment, education, public health, agriculture and tourism, strengthening connectivity, and ensuring the social, economic and cultural rights of citizens;
- Respecting the diverse civilizational, cultural and historical backgrounds of OSCE participating States;
- Protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and unconditionally respecting the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities and other ethnic groups;
- Reinvigorating the fight against all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, gender and religion, in sports, culture, education and science, and against the ideology of the superiority of one race, religion or nationality over others and manifestations of anti-Semitism, Christianophobia, Islamophobia and xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism;
- Preserving and promoting freedom of movement of citizens and human contacts, free circulation of goods and capital without ideological and political dividing lines; stimulating the creation of an open, equitable and non-discriminatory environment for development without protectionism, unilateral sanctions and other types of pressure;
- Joining efforts to maintain an open and secure global information space based on the principles of pluralism and freedom of expression, and free from hate speech and the manipulation of public opinion.

The present statement remains open for alignment by other OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation.

I request that the text of this joint statement be attached to the journal of the closing session of the Ministerial Council.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

(Annex 20 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

Mr. Chairperson-in-Office,  
Madam Secretary General,  
Colleagues,

Allow me to make a few comments on the outcome of the Skopje discussions.

At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office of North Macedonia and to Minister Bujar Osmani personally and his team for the efficient organization of this key annual OSCE event and for the hospitality provided. We consider the exchange of opinions that took place in the current extremely difficult circumstances to have been very useful, despite the directly opposing views and assessments on the part of a number of participating States, which was to be expected. We will not make a tragedy out of it. We have always emphasized that dialogue is useful in any situation – that is what our Organization was created for.

One of the premises on which the Helsinki process was conceived and developed is the shared conviction that the basis for security on the European continent is reciprocal respect for the interests of States, the sovereign equality of States and the collective search for responses to emerging challenges to overall stability. The OSCE has been and remains an integral part of the identity of a greater Europe. This is reflected in the very name of our Organization.

Unfortunately, over the past decades, thanks to the efforts of the Western alliance countries, the OSCE has significantly lost its potential and is going through an acute identity crisis. I am sure that each of the States represented here would like to regard the Organization as a useful tool for the pursuit of its interests. That is only right. But only if the interests of others are taken into account. Such a balance must underpin the OSCE's future action for the benefit of all participating States without exception.

A new, fairer and more democratic world order is being formed before our eyes. New centres of economic, cultural and civilizational influence are rapidly gaining traction. Common tasks in all security dimensions remain before us in the OSCE area. The threats of terrorism, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings have not disappeared. There is still work to be done in the economic and environmental dimension. A great many problems remain in the area of linguistic, educational and religious rights and freedoms. We are ready to work together if the OSCE can return to the path of open and honest dialogue, overcome the propensity for confrontation and the pursuit of narrow group interests, and demonstrate its readiness for co-operation on an equal basis with unconditional respect for the fundamental rule of consensus.

We trust that Malta, as the holder of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office in 2024, will work in strict compliance with the existing mandate and will be able to restore the culture of diplomatic dialogue and intensive consultations. We are confident that the distinguished Secretary General, Helga Schmid, will provide the Maltese Chairmanship with all the necessary support.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of today's closing session of the Ministerial Council.

Thank you for your attention.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE CHAIRPERSON (ALSO ON BEHALF OF POLAND,  
MALTA AND FINLAND)**

(Annex 21 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

North Macedonia, Poland, Malta and Finland, representing the previous and current Chairmanships of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as well as the forthcoming Chairmanships for 2024 and 2025, recognize that the context of the OSCE area has negatively changed since February 2022, and this is directly affecting European security and the OSCE's work. We stand firmly with Ukraine in its right to freely choose its future and once again condemn the use of force by the Russian Federation. Russia bears the full responsibility for its war against Ukraine.

We call on Russia to immediately stop its war against Ukraine, and completely and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

As the OSCE approaches the Helsinki Final Act's 50th anniversary, participating States must reaffirm their commitment to the principles to which all participating States agreed in this historic document, and which they have affirmed many times since. The continuation of Russia's war against Ukraine is a fundamental threat to our Organization and European security. This war has seriously violated the international rules-based order, including the OSCE's founding principles, and undermines the Organization's ability to function effectively. The OSCE exists to deliver results for the people and we must preserve its functionality and efficacy. It is our task to uphold the OSCE's principles and unique role as a regional security organization created to prevent conflicts, implement comprehensive security, and promote human rights and democracy with the rule of law at its core. In times of crisis, the OSCE's leadership will continue to sustain and protect the essential functions of the Organization and guide the process for participating States to resolve ongoing institutional issues and threats to security in the OSCE area. While doing so, the OSCE's values and commitments cannot be compromised.

We mourn the thousands of innocent lives lost in Russia's war against Ukraine. We deplore the widespread suffering that the war has caused for the people of Ukraine and the tensions and instability that it has inflicted on our region and our Organization. We support efforts aimed at ensuring accountability and justice for all crimes committed amidst the Russian war against Ukraine. As we approach the tenth year of the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, we will not accept the illegal annexation of regions of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Non-use of force, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, as well as the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, are core pillars of the OSCE and must never be undermined.

We call on Belarus to stop enabling Russia's continued war against Ukraine. We remain committed to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on full respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and reiterate our support for the Peace Formula presented by President Zelensky. In our collective efforts, we must aim for a renewal of trust and co-operation among participating States, which can only be achieved through the restoration of respect for the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and all OSCE commitments.



We recognize that women, children, senior citizens, and people with special needs are most vulnerable in times of conflict and must be afforded special protection. We denounce any attempt to intimidate and terrorize civilians through targeted attacks against civilian infrastructure. We further condemn the abduction and deportation of civilians, including children, as well as arbitrary political imprisonment. We demand from the Russian Federation the immediate release of the three OSCE officials still in detention in Donetsk and Luhansk. We further demand the return of OSCE assets that were illegally seized and taken from their respective storage facilities.

We condemn the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, which led to an ecological catastrophe in southern Ukraine. Such actions are unjustifiable and we call for the perpetrators to be brought to account. Protection of the environment is a key component of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and we call on all participating States to comply with the respective commitments. By destroying Ukrainian civil port infrastructure and grain storage facilities, blocking the Black Sea coast of Ukraine, and disrupting lawful transit in and through Ukraine's territorial seas and waterways, Russia exacerbates the global food crisis. We reiterate that challenging global food supplies should not be used by Russia as a weapon of war. We recognize that nuclear safety is a key component of our common security and call on Russia to return control of the nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia to Ukraine's civilian authorities.

We commend the resilience of Ukraine's people and society and applaud their commitment to the OSCE principles. The OSCE stands with the Ukrainian people and commends OSCE participating States that have provided shelter for refugees from Ukraine, as well as education for children from Ukraine and access to much needed social services. We applaud the work of the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine. The OSCE will remain fully engaged in Ukraine, both while the war continues and during post-war recovery. We recognize the need for a multifaceted response to the crisis by the OSCE.

In light of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, we reaffirm that the OSCE has the tools to gather evidence to contribute to investigations into alleged breaches of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, which includes potential war crimes. Various deployments of experts within the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism have provided essential reporting and have served as a platform for accountability.

We recognize that the spillover effects of Russia's war against Ukraine, such as the displacement of civilians, as well as dynamic changes in the security landscape, have affected the Republic of Moldova and subsequently also the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. We applaud the Sides for their commitment to a peaceful resolution of outstanding issues, within the established formats, and recognize the crucial role of the OSCE Mission to Moldova in this process.

We reiterate our strong support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

We note the importance of the Geneva International Discussions, co-chaired by the European Union, the OSCE, and the United Nations, to address the consequences of the 2008 conflict in Georgia and welcome the implementation of three rounds of this negotiation format in 2023. We note the 5 and 6 December meeting of the 59th round of the Geneva

International Discussions to address key strategic and humanitarian matters as enshrined in the six-point ceasefire agreement and to deliver results to the conflict-affected populations. We also commend the work of the related Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti, co-facilitated by the OSCE and the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and call for the restart of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism without delay.

We encourage the continued dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan and emphasize that dialogue and diplomacy should be the only means to settle disagreements and disputes. The use of force is unacceptable in overcoming differences, and we call on the parties to engage in good-faith negotiations to forge the necessary agreements to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the region. We underscore that the OSCE possesses the experience, expertise, and tools to serve as a platform for further dialogue and implementation of confidence-building measures.

We understand that long-term conflict settlement and long-lasting peace will only be achieved through co-operation across the OSCE area and beyond. We appreciate and remain convinced of the value of effective co-operation with our Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation, supporting our work to address global challenges. Close collaboration as well as honest and ongoing dialogue is indispensable for creating mutual trust and stability for the OSCE area. We look forward to continuing and deepening our good co-operation.

We welcome the decisions made throughout the Ministerial Council with regard to the Chairmanship for 2024 as well as the top four leadership positions in the Organization. We recognize that a clear mandate for the upcoming Chairmanship is indispensable for the future of our Organization and for enhancing the OSCE's stability. We commend efforts made to find an agreeable solution. We regret the obstruction to this process by Russia and Belarus and call on them in future to act responsibly and in the best interests of our Organization.

We recall that all OSCE participating States joined the OSCE as a platform for pan-European dialogue based on shared values and principles to which all agreed. We reaffirm our full adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and to all OSCE norms, principles, and commitments, starting with the Helsinki Final Act, and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. The OSCE is unique in its geographical scope and as an essential tool for a dialogue of equals on European security issues. We strongly commend the use of this forum to settle disputes and conflicts.

Finally, we commend the Organization for continuing to fulfil its core functions, providing a platform for dialogue and delivering essential work in the field. We recognize that we stand at a crossroads of history, not only for our Organization but also for security and stability in Europe. We owe future generations the opportunity to grow up in a free, democratic and peaceful world. Only through the restoration of peace and security in our region can we truly comply with the principles set out in the founding documents and return to a constructive dialogue.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF NORTH MACEDONIA  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, ANDORRA, AUSTRIA,  
BELGIUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CANADA,  
CROATIA, CYPRUS, CZECHIA, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND,  
FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND,  
IRELAND, ITALY, LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN, LITHUANIA,  
LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONACO, MONTENEGRO,  
THE NETHERLANDS, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA,  
SAN MARINO, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN,  
SWITZERLAND, UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM  
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(MC.DEL/51/23 of 5 December 2023)

Recognizing the essential role of media freedom, pluralism and the diversity of voices in enabling and sustaining democracy and comprehensive security, it is imperative that States intensify their efforts to safeguard the rights and safety of journalists. Of particular concern is the alarming trend of online violence and disinformation disproportionately targeting women journalists, with severe repercussions for plurality and democracy. With nearly three-quarters of women journalists experiencing online gender-based violence in the course of their work, increased collaborative efforts are urgently needed to address the safety of women journalists, both online and offline.

Studies further substantiate a clear causal relationship between online threats and gender-related disinformation targeting women journalists and subsequent offline attacks. Gender-based violence online and offline and gender-related disinformation endanger the well-being of journalists and their ability to perform their professional duties. These acts have a chilling effect, causing women journalists to self-censor or even leave their careers entirely at a cost not only to those targeted, but also to media freedom and plurality as a whole.

This also perpetuates a climate of impunity for crimes against them. Enhanced efforts are thus needed to uphold key OSCE commitments, in particular Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the safety of journalists, as well as international human rights obligations and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Building on the OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Gender Equality and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media work on the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO), we hereby reaffirm our commitment to comprehensively enhancing the safety of women journalists and promoting media freedom and information integrity.

The 2023 OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, following the launch of the SOFJO Monitoring Guidelines by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, provides an important opportunity for States to underscore the crucial role of the SOFJO agenda for the principles of equality, free media and democracy in the OSCE area. Recognizing the need to enhance data collection and analysis on online gender-based violence and gender-related disinformation against women journalists, we commend the Representative on Freedom of the Media on the launch of the SOFJO Monitoring Guidelines and endorse the Guidelines'

objective of more effective monitoring, recording and transparent reporting on incidents. To this end, we declare our dedication to prioritizing the crucial issue of online safety for women journalists on both the international stage and within our respective national contexts and recall the importance of:

- Condemning incidents of online gender-based violence and gender-related disinformation against women journalists as one of the most serious contemporary threats to their safety and damaging to media freedom, as highlighted in the 2022 Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Gender Justice;
- Addressing the safety of journalists holistically, including by adopting a gender perspective, by paying attention to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination facing journalists, and by recognizing the multifaceted nature of threats faced by journalists. We acknowledge that physical, legal, psychological, digital and economic risks are interlinked and often intertwined with broader challenges to media freedom;
- Enhancing data collection efforts, the analysis and reporting of cases of gender-based online violence building on the SOFJO Monitoring Guidelines in order to prevent the escalation of violence, facilitate research, raise public awareness and inform the design of effective protection measures and policies;
- Strengthening mutual co-operation to foster an inclusive, gender-responsive, and whole-of-society approach. Sharing best practices in combating online gender-based violence contributes to enabling an environment conducive for pluralism and media freedom.
- Encouraging digital technology companies, in particular online platforms, to proactively fulfil their responsibilities to respect the rights of women and girls, centre their policies and practices on human rights, and implement transparent and accessible reporting mechanisms;
- Dedicating sufficient human and financial resources to tackling online gender-based violence against women journalists, supporting those targeted.

We underscore the vital importance of upholding media freedom, adopting a gender perspective in our approach to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to freedom of expression, and enhancing the psychological and physical safety of journalists, both offline and online. We extend a call to action to all OSCE participating States, urging all States to join us in increasing efforts to champion both media freedom and gender equality across the OSCE area.

**STATEMENT BY  
THE DELEGATION OF NORTH MACEDONIA  
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA,  
MONTENEGRO AND SERBIA)**

(MC.DEL/47/23 of 5 December 2023)

We, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe from South-Eastern Europe,

Recalling relevant OSCE documents adopted in the field of preventing and countering corruption, in particular Ministerial Council Decision No. 11/04 on combating corruption; Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/14 on prevention of corruption; Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/16 on strengthening good governance and promoting connectivity; Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/18 on human capital development in the digital area and Ministerial Council Decision No. 6/20 on preventing and combating corruption through digitalization and increased transparency,

Underscoring our resolute and unconditional determination to work together to prevent, suppress, investigate and prosecute corruption in South-Eastern Europe, including through the use of financial investigations, digitalization and asset recovery,

Recognizing that corruption at all levels weakens the rule of law and undermines trust in State institutions, endangers social and economic development and prosperity, undermines the stability and security of participating States, threatens the OSCE's shared values, and facilitates all types of criminal activity,

Underlining the central role played by law enforcement authorities, judicial institutions and administrative bodies in preventing and combating corruption,

Reaffirming our commitment to strengthening national and cross-border co-operation, in partnership with relevant international and regional organizations, to prevent and combat corruption in a comprehensive way, including by making use of the digital transformation, addressing the links between corruption and money laundering, and enhancing the use of asset recovery in achieving this shared goal,

Confirming the importance of international co-operation between national anti-corruption and other relevant bodies for the sharing of knowledge and exchange of best practices among anti-corruption practitioners, and further development of effective anti-corruption measures,

Welcoming the fact that all the OSCE participating States in South-Eastern Europe have ratified or acceded to the United Nations Convention against Corruption and are working towards meeting their commitments under the Convention, and recognizing the support of the OSCE in assisting participating States to implement the Convention,

Noting the OSCE's support in the fight against corruption in the form of capacity-building activities and awareness-raising events, scoping and advisory missions, activities aimed at strengthening institutional and legislative frameworks, as well as the OSCE's work on strengthening the fight against transnational organized crime in

South-Eastern Europe through improved regional co-operation in asset seizure, confiscation, management and reuse and other activities aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of asset recovery efforts,

Highlighting the importance of co-operation with other relevant international organizations in preventing and combating corruption,

We jointly commit:

- To promote the use of digital tools for early detection, prevention of corruption and enhancement of transparency.
- To further strengthen our national efforts to combat corruption through the efficient use of asset recovery tools. Such efforts should include advancing national legal and institutional frameworks to enable effective tracing, seizure and confiscation of the instruments and proceeds of crime.
- To further develop capacities to manage the risks associated with virtual assets, including cryptocurrencies, in the context of money laundering.
- To promote and enhance regional and international co-operation to facilitate cross-border seizure and confiscation of criminal assets, including virtual assets.
- To renew our focus on fostering the exchange of information, good practices and capacity-building initiatives to maximize cross-border co-operation in recovering the proceeds of corruption and transnational crime.
- To increase the reuse of confiscated assets for social and crime prevention purposes. Reusing confiscated assets or funds to reinvest in communities delivers a message that corruption and crime do not pay. The legislative and policy mechanisms should facilitate such use of confiscated assets and ensure a transparent and accountable social reuse mechanism, including through improved multi-agency co-operation at the national level, as for example through the establishment of a multi-agency committee or working group to co-ordinate criminal asset reuse policy and review good practices.
- To strengthen co-operation between civil society organizations and government agencies throughout the asset recovery cycle. Recognizing the important role of civil society in combating corruption, efforts should be increased to improve government and civil society co-operation at local, national and regional levels, including through the social reuse of confiscated assets.
- To support awareness-raising and other public outreach activities on the social reuse of assets. Creating awareness of effective asset recovery mechanisms and making social reuse of confiscated assets visible contributes to deterring involvement in organized crime by sending a clear message that “crime does not pay”.
- To develop activities specifically to inform young people about the negative consequences of corruption for society and the opportunities offered by civil action, digitalization and asset recovery to prevent and combat corruption.

- To support the participation of women in the development and implementation of anti-corruption activities and to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed in anti-corruption work, taking into account that corruption disproportionately affects women and people in vulnerable situations.

**CLOSING STATEMENT BY  
THE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE**

(MC.DEL/60/23 of 13 December 2023)

Dear colleagues,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for your valuable views and insights.

This has been an eventful Ministerial Council meeting following a year full of challenges. It has been my pleasure and my honour to host you here in Skopje and to chair this Organization in 2023.

As this is the concluding session of the Ministerial Council meeting, I hope you will allow me to speak a little longer than expected.

My team and I have endeavoured to lead this Organization in the face of unprecedented external and internal challenges.

I do not say this lightly.

Since Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and its continued aggression against its sovereign neighbour and fellow participating State, this Organization has had to navigate uncharted waters. The OSCE has faced threats to the principles and values that form its very foundation. The security architecture on which we all rely to maintain stability and prevent conflict while also addressing its adverse effects has also been undermined.

Meanwhile, in Vienna, and here in Skopje, we have worked with all participating States to forge agreements and build consensus to ensure the OSCE has the leadership and financial predictability it needs to continue fulfilling its key objectives and delivering valuable results for the people of our common region.

Let me repeat: to continue building an OSCE for the future, we need strategic clarity, not strategic confusion.

This involves mid- to long-term predictability to avoid drastic deadlocks and continue delivering results across all three dimensions. We cannot afford for this vital mission to be obstructed by conditionalities and impositions. Bona fide dialogue and co-operation are the OSCE's DNA. Should we strive to build a robust and effective Organization for the future, our overall engagement must be in good faith. There is no other way. Otherwise, we risk weakening the OSCE and tying its hands when its tools are needed most. This would be a failure for all.

I am pleased once again to note with gratitude that the Republic of Malta has seen the need for leadership and put itself forward to fill the role of 2024 Chairmanship.



Even so, ladies and gentlemen, our task is not yet finished, and neither North Macedonia, nor Malta, nor any other Chairmanship, can address these questions or resolve these difficulties alone.

All OSCE participating States have pledged to uphold the principles and values of the Helsinki Final Act and have taken upon themselves the responsibility for preserving this Organization.

Dear colleagues,

I remain proud of all that we have accomplished this year with North Macedonia at the helm of the OSCE. By active engagement and flexible, innovative, but principled approaches we have managed to keep the OSCE relevant and visible, when some wanted to see it sidelined. I would like to once again express our gratitude to all those who helped us in that mission, tirelessly engaging in support of the Organization and its values and principles.

Although we managed to overcome the most critical challenges, we stand still at the precipice of greater success.

We must find ways to prevail over different hurdles to ensure that our Organization continues to remain relevant and able to address the threats that lurk just over the horizon.

Building on this premise, North Macedonia will continue singing the OSCE's praises and stands ready to work together with the next Chairmanship Malta and reliable Troika partner Finland to build a stronger OSCE for the future.

I have full confidence that Estonia, had it been allowed, would have been equally able to meet this challenge to lead this Organization and address the challenges and threats we must address together. I hope, in the future, Estonia will be granted the privilege and the responsibility to take its place as Chairmanship, which it so richly deserves.

Building a strong OSCE is a shared investment; the dividends will bring peace, stability and dignity for all the people of the OSCE area, for years to come. This must simultaneously be the lighthouse that guides our engagement as well as our final destination.

Therefore, I am also pleased to note the participating States have reached an agreement on the extension of the mandates for the leadership of the OSCE's executive structures. Our ability to come together now and forge consensus among all 57 participating States reveals, once more, the importance and efficacy of building agreement through negotiation and compromise on behalf of our common goals and objectives.

Despite our differences and disagreements, we have shown the strategic vision required to continue our constructive efforts towards implementing and applying the OSCE's competitive advantages through the work of its executive structures to the benefit of all our people.

I encourage this positive dynamic to continue. Because it must. We must continue to work together in good faith to resolve not only the complicated internal questions that face us in the OSCE but the greater threats and challenges to the security and stability of our region.

Let the spirit of Skopje and today's achievements stay with us as we encounter more serious matters that have even greater implications for the lives of our people.

On a personal note:

I am serious about the claim that if we did not have the OSCE, we would need to invent it. Throughout this year, the Organization has grown on me. From the get-go, I have remained driven and was not afraid to fail in order to find ways to create positive dynamics. We have left no stone unturned and bent over backwards to move forward.

It would have been wrong not to try. My team accepted the call boldly and without any hesitation. Winston Churchill's words clearly depict how we positioned ourselves in the face of recurring challenges: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." So here we are at the end, with a long, difficult, but rewarding year, now behind us.

In hindsight, we will remember it not for the final outcomes only, but for the processes we engaged in, ardently and resolutely hoisting the "It's about people" flag so high everyone can see it, because the OSCE is about people and that is how it should be and where our joint priorities must remain.

In conclusion, before I close the meeting, allow me to dedicate a few words of appreciation to "my people," the team in Skopje and Vienna and our international secondees for their genuine commitment, grit and tenacity. You showed that we can do it, so we did it. Kudos for that.

I would also like to pay tribute to all the diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their hard work and dedication to make this meeting not only possible, but successful.

My thanks also go to all my colleagues and friends from North Macedonia for their support.

On the OSCE side, I would like to take a moment to express gratitude for the support and co-operation to my colleagues of the OSCE participating States, especially to my Troika colleagues, Ministers Valtonen and Rau, but also to:

- OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmidt and the able staff of the OSCE Secretariat;
- The President and the Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Pia Kauma and Roberto Montella;
- The heads of the OSCE's autonomous institutions: Theresa Ribeiro, Kairat Abdrakhmanov and Matteo Mecacci;
- My personal and special representatives working determinedly on different portfolios, as well as all heads of the OSCE field operations, the "blue ribbon" of our engagement.

Lastly, particular gratitude goes to the exceptional team, Conference and Language Services.

I wish our friends from Malta every success and a less challenging year. We are here to support you in all your endeavours.

Thank you.



### **III. REPORTS TO THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**



**REPORT BY  
THE OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE THIRTIETH MEETING  
OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

(MC.GAL/3/23 of 1 December 2023)

Prime Minister,  
Mr. Chairperson,  
Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,

This is my third Ministerial Council meeting as Secretary General of the OSCE and it is an honour to deliver my report to you. And as we are gathered here in Skopje, the security environment we face across the OSCE area and beyond weighs heavily on us all. We have just heard from Prime Minister Kovačevski, from Minister Osmani, and from President Kauma about the serious challenges we face – from all-out war to simmering tensions to terrorism, from organized crime and corruption to climate change, from human trafficking to gender-based violence to intolerance and discrimination.

And this Organization – based on principles and commitments agreed by all participants in Helsinki nearly 50 years ago – is meant to not only address a range of security challenges but also to hold its participants to account.

I have served under three Chairpersons-in-Office – Minister Linde of Sweden, Minister Rau of Poland, and our current Chairperson, Minister Osmani of North Macedonia. All of them have worked tirelessly to uphold and advance OSCE principles – including in the face of grave violations. I am deeply proud of having worked to serve these principles as well – as have my colleagues, Teresa Ribeiro, Matteo Mecacci, and Kairat Abdrakhmanov.

Take the work of Teresa Ribeiro – our Representative on Freedom of the Media – and her team. They provide staunch support for freedom of expression, free media, and the safety of journalists – all vital for free and fair societies.

Or Matteo Mecacci and his staff at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. They promote and stand up for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. They help reinforce good governance and provide support and expertise that bolster a broad range of OSCE principles.

And Kairat Abdrakhmanov – the High Commissioner on National Minorities – and his team in the Hague help prevent conflict by promoting inclusive dialogue and strengthening consultative mechanisms within and between participating States.

From the beginning, we have worked in the spirit of a whole-of-the OSCE approach, and I am grateful for the excellent co-operation – including with the Parliamentary Assembly – now President Kauma and Secretary General Montella.

As I conclude the third year of my tenure as Secretary General, I want to share with you what I have learned about the Organization in these most tumultuous of times.

I have seen the stranglehold that consensus-based decision-making can bring when not paired with the spirit of compromise.

I have seen the hardship posed by the lack of an approved budget and the impact of insufficient resources based on more than a decade of zero nominal growth.

I have felt the weight of responsibility for our staff in Ukraine on 24 February last year: the urgent work to relocate or evacuate them; the devastation of having lost a member of staff to shelling; and the ongoing anguish over three of our colleagues who continue to be detained for their work – despite the functional immunity to which they are entitled.

There is much that might lead to disillusionment.

And yet, through all of this, I have seen how very much this Organization has to offer. I have seen how, through dedication and ingenuity, our staff have managed to deliver against the odds. And I have seen how unique and remarkable the value of what we deliver truly is to governments and communities across our area.

Part of what sets the OSCE's work apart is our ability to foster regional approaches to shared challenges. Take for instance our work in Central Asia. In Stockholm in 2021, I put forward suggestions of how to support our participating States in Central Asia in dealing with the implications of the brutal Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. You tasked me with developing a plan that addresses a broad range of the challenges across the region. So we developed a programme in the Secretariat – in co-operation with our field missions. And thanks to several donors, including partners, we are currently implementing 77 million euros' worth of extrabudgetary projects in this context that ultimately serve us all.

The local expertise that we have built through our field presence – including here in South-Eastern Europe – is another key aspect of the OSCE's added value. For instance, while armed conflict once tore apart Majeвица in Bosnia and Herzegovina, today, thanks to the help of the OSCE Mission there, the mayors of Majeвица's five municipalities are working together on economic and ecological development.

This is just one example. I could give many more. But the point is that we are delivering unique value through a regional approach. And our work has more buy-in and greater impact because of how we work with governments and due to the local knowledge and expertise we have developed over decades. And here let me pay tribute to our excellent local staff who are a key part of what makes the OSCE so effective.

We need to remain effective so that we can respond when participating States request support. In Ukraine, while we had to close both of our missions last year, we continue to support the government and society to address the impact of the war as well as to support the country's democratic institutions. This is possible due to the wholly extrabudgetary work that is being done there, with funding from 30 participating States and the European Union and a dedicated Special Representative on the ground. This supports 20 projects to address issues from the impact of landmines and the environmental effects of the war to trafficking in human beings.



I was in Yerevan last week for the Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Among other issues, I addressed the humanitarian situation facing the Karabakh Armenians who fled their homes nearly two months ago. We have followed that situation closely and stand ready to support a sustainable solution for all. Our years of experience with the conflict cycle, including in relation to confidence-building and reconciliation, can be of service here.

We offer solutions that are tailored to local circumstances and we also address challenges that affect every one of our participating States. There are an estimated 25 million victims of human trafficking per year and most perpetrators are never held to account. This is not only a human rights issue but a security issue as well, which is why – across the whole of the OSCE area – we are working with governments and parliaments to take more consistent action against human trafficking. I am proud that the OSCE is a global leader in this fight.

On the security impacts of climate change – which you all agreed in Stockholm that the OSCE should do more on – we are playing a truly unique role.

At the high-level conference I hosted in July, this was underscored by Ministers who spoke about how the OSCE has been a game changer for fostering co-operation across their regions. And by collaborating with actors from other international organizations and by involving all parts of society, not least women and youth, we are ensuring that our efforts are not only efficient but sustainable.

I am very proud of the work we do to engage those who might be underrepresented – including national minorities, youth, and of course women. We are not only combating gender-based violence, but also promote women as agents for change, whether in water management or community policing. And through a network I launched last year, we are supporting women peacebuilders and mediators from across the OSCE area as well as Afghanistan. We are helping them to improve their skills and expand their networks, because we need more women at all levels of decision-making.

There are many more examples I could offer – on cybersecurity, connectivity, anti-corruption, and so much more. But you know the value of the OSCE, and you know that despite the challenges we face, we continue to deliver tangible results.

As Secretary General, I am the OSCE's chief administrative officer. And I am tremendously proud of the staff we have in the Secretariat, field missions, and institutions. It is truly thanks to them that we are able to deliver so much value so consistently – despite the difficulties.

I have persistently sought to improve ways of working in the Secretariat and with the whole of the OSCE. And as promised at the outset, I have modernized internal policies with a focus on effectiveness, including on results-based management and evaluation. And in line with my duty of care, we revised the OSCE's internal justice system, implementing a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of harassment.

We have also finalized the Secretariat Functional Review, a comprehensive two-phase change process that involved contributions from a significant portion of the Secretariat staff. The results include many improvements to processes, systems, structures and the

organization of work across the Secretariat. All of this was delivered without additional cost to the Organization.

Where it is within our remit, we are finding ways to improve how the OSCE operates, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. Yet there is a real need for reforms that depend on you – the participating States.

When it comes to resources, we are seeing record amounts of extrabudgetary contributions; these have doubled during my tenure. And while I take this as a sign of trust and I am truly grateful to all who generously contribute, it cannot substitute for a fixed budget. And as you know, there has not been a Unified Budget adopted since 2021.

As a result, the level of resources we have been operating with has become truly unsustainable. This year, to compensate for inflation and other rising expenses, we had to set up a special fund to supplement our core operating costs. I am truly grateful to the participating States who have contributed to this fund – which is the only way we could avoid insolvency in 2023. This is no way to run an organization.

And while we are meant to align our salary scales with the United Nations – something participating States agreed – we are not able to do this. In some of our field missions, the alignment rate is barely 60 per cent. The fact that we still have such tremendous staff is remarkable, but not sustainable. We are losing staff across the Organization – people who want to support the work of the OSCE but simply cannot afford to do so.

There are ways to address these and other challenges, but we need your support.

Dear Ministers,  
Dear colleagues,

As I conclude my report to you, I am more convinced than ever that the OSCE is an essential part of the security architecture.

The need for our unique contributions is greater than it has ever been.

I am proud of the work we do, the results we deliver, and the ways in which we make a difference across the OSCE area. This Organization has key instruments needed to support peace and security. This Organization brings all those relevant to security in Europe and Eurasia together around one table – including our Partners for Co-operation. Thank you again, dear Chairperson, dear Bujar, for hosting us all here. And thank you also for your dedicated leadership throughout this year.

The OSCE has been and remains a quietly powerful force for change for so many of our citizens across the OSCE area. It is, indeed, about people. With your support, the OSCE can be a crucial contributor to a better future.

**LETTER FROM THE CHAIRPERSON  
OF THE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION TO THE  
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF NORTH MACEDONIA,  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE THIRTIETH MEETING OF THE  
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE OSCE**

(Annex 22 to MC(30) Journal of 30 November and 1 December 2023)

As Chairperson of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC), it is my honour to inform you about the Forum's work in 2023.

In preparing this letter, I have consulted with the 2023 FSC Chairmanships, namely, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria. During 2023, we worked in close co-operation to ensure continuity and efficiency in the implementation of the Forum's annual work programme.

This year marked the second year of FSC operations under the unprecedented security situation and geopolitical tensions arising from Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022. The war against Ukraine continues to negatively impact the whole security architecture in Europe and beyond, jeopardizing the Organization's underlying concept of co-operative security. In its response to the unprecedented security situation, the FSC, in close co-ordination with the Chairperson of the Permanent Council and the OSCE Secretariat, have led the FSC's work in the spirit of preserving its mandate against the current security challenges. All three FSC Chairmanships continuously highlighted the role of the FSC in upholding peace, security, and democracy and promoted its dialogue on security across the OSCE area.

By maintaining the FSC as an important platform for the exchange of information and views on politico-military aspects of security among the OSCE participating States, in addition to the exchanges on the war against Ukraine under the FSC's agenda item "General statements", in total, 12 Security Dialogues were held<sup>1</sup>.

All three FSC Chairmanships emphasized the importance of mine action and combating illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SCA), each holding a Security Dialogue on those topics, in the context of south-east Europe (FSC Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina), capacity development (FSC Chairmanship of Bulgaria) and the impact on children (FSC Chairmanship of Canada).

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1 Topics of the Security Dialogues that took place in 2023: Small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition in south-east Europe; the OSCE Code of Conduct and the security sector; mine action; \*Joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council on UNSCR 1325/women, peace and security; Black Sea region – security horizons; Capacity development in humanitarian mine action; OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security (international humanitarian law, private military and security companies); UNSCR 1325/women, peace and security; \*Joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council on security and environment; mine action (focus on the effect on children); Women, peace and security; \*Joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council on mental health impacts of war.

All three FSC Chairmanships prioritized the importance of international humanitarian law in the light of ongoing conflicts in the region, guided by the norms and principles set by the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

Since the last Ministerial Council meeting of the OSCE, several initiatives undertaken by some participating States were designed to support the implementation of existing politico-military commitments in the field of the information exchange on the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security by updating the voluntary questionnaire on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325. To raise awareness on the topic of children and armed conflict, the Group of Friends developed a new voluntary questionnaire on children and armed conflict.

In order to increase awareness and widen the understanding of the destructive impacts of war and its consequences, two joint meetings of the FSC and the Permanent Council explored the important topics of the security and environment nexus (under the FSC Chairmanship of Bulgaria) and mental health impacts of war (under the FSC Chairmanship of Canada).

All three FSC Chairmanships held Security Dialogues – one of them in a joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council (under the Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina) – on the topic related to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 and advancing the women, peace and security agenda towards the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels pertaining to security issues in the OSCE area. Throughout the year, the FSC Chairmanships supported the 2023 OSCE Scholarship for Peace and Security training programme empowering youth, especially women, to engage meaningfully in policy-making, planning and implementation processes in conflict prevention and resolution through arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation in the OSCE area.

Under the Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Chairmanship of Bulgaria, the focus of the FSC's work included a focus on regional security in south-east Europe and the Black Sea region respectively.

The work of the Forum for Security Co-operation has been affected by the deterioration of trust amongst the participating States. Despite the efforts of the FSC Chairmanships 2023, 3 out of 15 proposed Security Dialogues did not take place due to one participating State not agreeing upon those meetings' agendas. Respective FSC Chairmanships, with the support of the FSC Troika, chose to organize side events on the value of sub-regional initiatives for arms control, international humanitarian law with a focus on military command responsibility and information integrity in the military space.

The military information exchange remained at a high rate, although some participating States decided not to exchange the information at all or not to provide it to all participating States in light of the current security situation. The development of the OSCE Information Management and Reporting System (iMARS) progressed with efforts to expand States' access over the OSCE Communications Network and build data loaders to keep iMARS daily updated with incoming information.

The FSC continued to support the OSCE's work in the politico-military dimension of security on practical assistance in the area of the SALW and stockpiles of conventional

ammunition (SCA) controls. The OSCE's assistance projects on SALW and SCA continued to provide steady support in 2023. In 2023, the OSCE managed a portfolio of 19 assistance projects, worth 52 million euros, delivering a wide range of tailored technical assistance throughout the OSCE area. Several projects are aimed at ensuring the secure and safe management of stockpiles of SALW and SCA through infrastructure, material and equipment upgrades at storage sites, as well as establishment of laboratories for chemical analysis of SCA stability and its surveillance. A significant element of the projects was providing support to the efforts of combating illicit trafficking in SALW across the OSCE area. Considerable support was provided to Central Asia in support of countering the threat and risk of potential SALW and SCA trafficking from Afghanistan, as well as strengthening physical security of SCA. Consistent progress was also made throughout south-eastern Europe. Further information and details on the individual SALW and SCA assistance projects is always available through the SALW portal (<https://salw.osce.org/>).

In 2023, on average 30 per cent women and 70 per cent men participated in the FSC plenaries and the co-ordination meetings of the politico-military focal points. The panellists providing expert views in Security Dialogues and/or side events in 2023 were comprised of 38 per cent women and 62 per cent men.

In 2023, the security situation precluded the conduct of the FSC-related annual meetings. Despite best efforts, each Chairmanship concluded that there was no agreement on the conduct of these meetings in light of the current security situation. An informal briefing on SALW and SCA projects in the OSCE was held for participating States, Partners for Co-operation, OSCE Secretariat and field operations in the absence of an annual meeting. In the absence of consensus on the Annual Discussion on the Implementation of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, a dedicated thematic FSC Security Dialogue was held in the second session.

The FSC Chairmanships commend the work of the Conflict Prevention Centre in developing both introductory and in-depth elearning modules covering FSC-related topics, which are aimed at systematizing the transfer of knowledge on, *inter alia*, military information exchanges, the Vienna Document and confidence- and security-building measures, SALW and SCA, conventional arms control, and the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. Thus far, over 1,000 participants, including over 350 women from 48 participating States, have taken part in the programme. This excellent resource is available, in English and Russian, for delegates of participating States and Partners for Co-operation in Vienna, national focal points in their capitals, and staff of Verification Centres.

In 2023, the Forum unfortunately witnessed the withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe by one State Party, followed by the suspension of the Treaty by a large majority of States Parties. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe is one of the pillars of the OSCE Framework for Arms Control.

In conclusion, the Forum for Security Co-operation remains committed to serving as an important platform for dialogue and decision-making in the first dimension, providing participating States with a platform to discuss politico-military security issues, raise security concerns, and keep each other accountable for adherence to the OSCE principles and implementation of their commitments.