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Speech by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier

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New York

Ivica Dačić,
Sebastian Kurz,
Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson
Ms. Otunbayeva,
Mr. Guéhenno,
Ambassador Apakan,
distinguished colleagues,
Excellencies,
ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, it is my pleasure to welcome you here to the German House to advance our dialogue on The Force of Civilian Crisis Management – Strengthening the Capacities of the OSCE as a Chapter VIII organization.

The past nine months in the driving seat of the OSCE have given me the opportunity to gain some first-hand impressions of the invaluable work of the OSCE in the field. I just returned from a visit to Kiev and to eastern Ukraine. Our observers in the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission told my French colleague Jean-Marc Ayrault and me about the enormous challenges they are confronted with on a daily basis.

The work of this mission is an impressive example of the value of the OSCE's civilian crisis-related capabilities and of its flexibility. It is pioneering work - and therefore a learning experience not only for the SMM, but for the entire organization.

It underlines the strength of the OSCE as a civilian force. The UN and its global regulatory framework are indispensable. But there are good reasons why the UN Charter foresees a distinct role for regional operations in maintaining international peace and security. Organizations such as the African Union or the OSCE play a crucial role. They are best adapted to regional needs and following their own modus operandi. So while binding measures are sometimes necessary, as a means of last resort, we must not underestimate the strength of the consensus-based approach used by the OSCE, which is focused on dialogue! Even if putting this into practice may not always be easy ...

For it is clear, that any success will only be possible if there is strong and sustained political support by all participating States. Let me therefore thank the OSCE countries represented in this room for their commitment!

Germany has taken over the OSCE Chairmanship in troubled times because we are convinced of the indispensable role this organization plays for international security. We are committed to its inclusive, civilian and comprehensive approach, covering the entire conflict cycle: from early warning and prevention to crisis management and post-conflict peacebuilding. It uses so called "soft tools" such as mediation and dialogue, both on the ground and at the political level.

But given this experience of the OSCE in civilian crisis engagement, and given persistent challenges to security in the OSCE area, how can we further strengthen its capacities?

I am particularly grateful for the efforts of the previous Chairmanships led by Didier Burkhalter and Ivica Dačić, who were committed to practical improvements and innovation – also through earlier side events here in New York.

Building on these efforts, we initiated a process of dialogue in Vienna. It resulted in a good number of forward-looking ideas. We are now examining how to put some of them into practice.

Let me give you a few examples:

- As a first step, we have asked the OSCE Secretariat to review rules and regulations and to make suggestions for practical improvements – for example on mission security, training, procurement, and the use of technical equipment.
- Secondly, our discussions have yielded broad consensus that the organization would benefit greatly from the establishment of a crisis fund for rapid reaction. Even if not everyone has agreed until now, I fully subscribe to this idea!
- Thirdly, the discussions have highlighted the urgent need to provide the OSCE with a legal personality, for a whole range of operational reasons. We will pursue our efforts to build consensus on this issue.
- Another aspect: the need for the OSCE to step up cooperation with international organizations – first and foremost with the UN. There is good co-operation already, for example in Kosovo and on Georgia, to name but just two. We should deepen this cooperation.

- We do not need to start from scratch here. A framework agreement between the UN and the (then) CSCE was signed as early as in 1993, pre-paring the ground for valuable work for example on mediation-support. And I am glad that a UN liaison officer to the OSCE will start his work in Vienna two weeks from now!
- We should explore ways to further deepen the links between the UN and the OSCE, for ex-ample when it comes to providing material that is needed on the ground quickly.
- Last but not least we need to talk about money: We should look into the option of recruiting technical, planning and mediation expertise when we negotiate next year's budget for the OSCE.

Colleagues,

I am aware that all these points add up to an ambitious agenda. We will need to join forces to build consensus on some of these issues. I am all the more grateful for the presence of my colleagues from the OSCE Troika, Ivica Dačić and Sebastian Kurz.

I am looking forward to the contributions by an extremely insightful and experienced panel and to the opening remarks of Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson.