

Vienna, 31 March 2014

**Panel discussion: UKRAINE/CRIMEA: Crisis as usual or new
European divide?**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be among you today to discuss such important and timely issues. Thank you for allowing me to open a debate among such distinguished panelists. I will do so by sharing with you some brief personal thoughts on initial answers to the following questions:

How do events in and around Ukraine affect the OSCE, including the Helsinki +40 process?

Recent events regarding the annexation of Ukrainian territory pose a real challenge not only to the OSCE, but also to the whole global system based on international law. As Chairman of the Permanent Council of the OSCE for 2014, I will focus my brief presentation on the former – namely the challenge faced by the OSCE.

With the annexation of Crimea, fundamental OSCE principles and commitments - most notably the Helsinki final Act - have been violated. This has been denounced by many, including the CiO of the organization, Swiss President Didier Burkhalter. The OSCE being a principle-based organization, the violation of several of its core principles has been considered by several voices as a threat to the OSCE's relevance and – consequently - to its very existence.

At the same time, the OSCE has proven to be a relevant dialogue platform, allowing for concerns to be shared and - more importantly – addressed. The rapid appointment of a Personal envoy for Ukraine, Ambassador Tim Guldemann, who visited Ukraine on several occasions, including Crimea, allowed for a rapid assessment of the situation on the ground while at the same time providing space for dialogue among the actors involved. The visits of High Commissioner on national minorities Astrid Thors and Representative for the freedom of the media Dunja Mijatovic proved useful for evaluating tensions and confirming the need for immediate action.

The practical response of the OSCE was diverse and immediate: a national dialogue project carried out through the OSCE's field presence is currently under way, while a human rights assessment mission is being conducted jointly by two OSCE institutions: the Office for Democratic institutions and Human rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). Earlier in March, a specific OSCE mechanism, Chapter 3 of the Vienna Document, was activated for the first time by Ukraine and allowed the visits of military observers from over 20 participating States.

The most significant contribution of the OSCE was probably the agreement by all of its participating States on the deployment of a Special monitoring mission to Ukraine. Following weeks of intensive debates in Vienna as well as between other major capitals, the decision to launch this large-scale operation which could number up to 500 monitors from all participating States was adopted on March 21st by consensus.

One must be realistic: the OSCE cannot prevent wide-scale violence, nor can it prevent an invasion. But the OSCE has undoubtedly the capacity to contribute to de-escalation and stabilization through its activities aimed at building bridges and diffusing tensions. What did we witness: despite a serious blow to its founding principles, the OSCE was able to swiftly deploy a wide variety of tools, establishing itself as the leading impartial organization on the ground.

How does this impact the debate over the future of the organization?

How does it affect the Helsinki + 40 process?

I will present just a few initial thoughts. I hope that your discussions will allow us to gain additional insight into this matter.

1. Recent events in and around Ukraine, more specifically in Crimea, have marked a clear setback on the path toward the creation of a common security community. We have all witnessed a clear violation of core OSCE principles. What we need today is a reconfirmation of norms, particularly - but not exclusively - of those that were violated. We need a process that takes participating States to recommit to the fundamental principles and thereby rebuilding trust and restoring confidence and to prevent a repetition of the Crimea pattern.

2. The past several weeks have also shown clear evidence for the utility of the OSCE as a tool for moderating recurring East-West tensions. In this respect, it has to be recalled that the OSCE remains the only regional security organization in which both Western states and the Russian Federation participate. The OSCE has a number of tools that have proven to be of great use in addressing the current challenges. It must refocus on addressing the East-West rift, making the best possible

use of its unique international position, its expertise and its proven ability to evolve and adapt.

3. It must be recalled that discussions over the future of the OSCE have been initiated well before the onset of the Ukrainian crisis in the framework of the Helsinki +40 process. In view of the current crisis in Ukraine, the OSCE cannot just return to its business as usual; nor should it abandon its entire Helsinki +40 road map. Many reflections conducted within the Helsinki +40 process are indeed still relevant today. What we need is a critical review of the Helsinki +40 road map in light of recent events and a clear commitment to continue work on identified issues.

Dear colleagues, the debate over the future of the OSCE is not a discussion between participating States and diplomats. Much like the future of Ukraine, it concerns us all. This is why I particularly look forward to listening to your views during tonight's discussions.