



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE 79th Joint FSC - PC Meeting: Structured Dialogue

Vienna, 28 October 2020

The European Union and its Member States would like to thank the Albanian Chairmanship and the German FSC Chairmanship for bringing the topic of the Structured Dialogue to the joint meeting of the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Cooperation. We highly value and actively support the Structured Dialogue, which we are ready to develop further in accordance with the Hamburg Declaration, as a transparent, inclusive, state-owned and -driven confidence building process, without a predetermined outcome and of high relevance for the EU.

We regret that today's meeting takes place against the background of the ongoing conflicts, which pose a very serious threat to the security of the entire OSCE area. The resolution of the existing conflicts in the OSCE area, including the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula, remains a priority for the EU and our positions on these conflicts are well known. It is essential to restore full respect for international law and OSCE principles by all participating States. Against this background, we welcome the continued focus of the Structured Dialogue on politico-military issues and on security threats and challenges of most concern to OSCE participating States to foster a greater understanding on these issues, which could serve as a common solid basis for a way forward.

We thank the Spanish Chair of the Informal Working Group, Ambassador Cuesta and his team, for the successful conduct of this year's meetings, in the challenging COVID-19 environment. We thank you for your Report and reiterate our support for

your approach guided by the motto “*Understanding for Security*”. We agree that the Structured Dialogue is a CSBM in itself that allows us to address our differences and our commonalities. We welcome your continued focus on key politico-military issues of security, inter alia on transparency, risk reduction and incident prevention. This provides a valuable opportunity to discuss full implementation of existing OSCE principles and commitments as well as to reflect on today’s military practices and related challenges, in particular with respect to military exercises. We were encouraged to see participating States engaging constructively in these important discussions. It demonstrated that the Structured Dialogue has become a key part of our work both at the political and expert level in the OSCE, which we should continue. It is important that participating States work together towards creating an environment conducive to reinvigorating Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs, as we all agreed in the Hamburg Declaration.

We are grateful for including COVID-19 as a timely topic in the agenda of the June and October meetings of the IWG. As underlined by many participating States, it is vital that COVID-19 is not used as a pretext to ignore violations of international law and fundamental OSCE principles and commitments, both in the politico-military dimension and regarding human rights. We reiterate our call on all participating States to continue to be guided by the principles of transparency and openness aimed at building confidence among States, avoiding possible misperceptions and reducing the risk of conflict in the OSCE region.

Transparency is even more important in these times, as verification activities in the field of arms control and CSBMs have been on hold for the most part. Thus, on top of ongoing implementation issues, the conventional arms control and confidence and security building measures face a new challenge. The postponement of verification activities has the potential to further diminish trust among participating States. In this context, all States should comply with the existing commitments and exercise full transparency by providing adequate and accurate information about major military activities. We recognize that a number of participating States have already resumed verification activities, accompanied by appropriate protective measures. We hope that this will encourage all participating States to resume the verification activities without unnecessary delay.

Furthermore, it is important to continue our work on the modernisation of the Vienna Document. Its key elements focus on enhancing transparency and predictability and reducing risk. These are issues, which are highly relevant during these challenging times. The EU has been and remains a strong supporter of Vienna Document modernisation. We appeal to all participating States to generate momentum for meaningful work on this at the FSC in the coming months.

Concerning the politico-military aspects of security discussed during the June and October IWGs, we support continuing discussions on best practices on risk reduction measures and on practical tools and mechanisms for incident prevention and management to minimise risks and reduce escalatory potential. It is of utmost importance to improve safety and promote risk reduction regarding military activities through appropriate OSCE confidence building measures. We support continuing expert level exchanges and military-to-military contacts within the Structured Dialogue. We also see merit in the development of a template for voluntary briefings. When considering these issues, it is important to keep in mind however that voluntary measures are not a substitute for full implementation, in letter and spirit, of existing politico-military commitments by all OSCE participating States, and the importance of reciprocity in rebuilding trust and confidence.

Mr. Chairperson, we continue to see the Structured Dialogue as a meaningful platform for in-depth exchanges on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE. We reiterate our openness to the dialogue and hope that all participating States are ready to do the same in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect. We welcome the fact that the Expert Level Workshop and the IWG meeting last month were well attended by all participating States. We see merit in discussing military-related aspects of hybrid threats that are coherent with the SD mandate. It is important that we all work together towards creating an environment conducive to reinvigorating Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs, as we all agreed in the Hamburg Declaration.

Mr. Chairperson, we thank you for the opportunity to exchange views on this important topic and once again we would like to reiterate our full appreciation and support for your leadership, Ambassador Cuesta, as Chair of the Informal Working Group.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.