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FEDERAL MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE FEDERAL  
REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, AT THE TWENTY-FIRST MEETING OF  
THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Basel, 4 December 2014

Mr. Chairperson,  
Secretary General,  
Colleagues,

On 9 November in Berlin we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Wall. Seldom at a memorial celebration have I experienced so much unspoken joy but also reflection as I did on this recent weekend. The current deep crisis in European security has made one thing clear to us: how great a gift the triumph over the partition of Europe 25 years ago really was.

We Germans have the CSCE process to thank for this gift, and that is why I mention it here. It was a process that began, I would also like to recall, in perhaps the coldest era of the Cold War.

And then in 1989/90 we had a shared vision of a common space and indivisible security for us all from Vancouver to Vladivostok, without dividing lines or zones of influence, without hegemonic politics and the use of force, united by the shared attachment to the CSCE Final Act and the Charter of Paris.

Today, dear colleagues, we are unfortunately still a long way from achieving this. The annexation of Crimea in violation of international law, the military conflict in eastern Ukraine and the course of action by Russia are directly endangering the framework of European peace. Confidence built up over decades has been lost in the space of a few months. We now face the greatest challenge since the end of the Cold War.

Everyone at this table knows that there will not be a military solution to this conflict, nor does anyone desire it. We will therefore have to proceed on the painstaking path of negotiation – defusing the conflict, ceasefire, steps forward and backwards in the implementation, but then hopefully also steps towards a political solution.

In this process we need the OSCE more than ever today – in spite of the difficulty in achieving consensus among 57 participating States with different interests and different histories. Only here do we sit together in this unique configuration at the same table.

In a situation in which the framework of European peace is at stake, we cannot and should not just get on with our usual agenda. We have to concentrate on those issues that are of vital importance for European security. I see two priorities for the immediate future.

First, we have to use the OSCE instruments in the short term as extensively as possible so as to prevent a new military escalation in eastern Ukraine. The OSCE has made a considerable contribution in the last few months to achieving this very thing. The Monitoring Mission, the Observer Mission at the border points of Donetsk and Gukovo, and naturally the Trilateral Contact Group with the involvement of the OSCE have all played an important role in the de-escalation of the conflict that we have managed to achieve at least for some of the time. All parties must now be willing to work towards implementation of the Minsk agreements – including Russia. They do not yet offer a guarantee of lasting peace, but in the current situation they are the only way we can check the spiralling escalation. If the Minsk agreements are seriously implemented, they would offer the basis for further stabilization, both political and economic. A sustainable ceasefire and disengagement in the so-called “security zone” are the priority objective of the next few days. The next main step will then, of course, be securing the Russian-Ukrainian border. The OSCE has the necessary instruments to assist in this.

Second, we must reconnect with the understanding of the OSCE that pertained when it was set up 40 years ago: as a forum to promote security and co-operation in Europe through dialogue, collaboration and confidence-building measures. We must refocus on this core task. The equation “monologue plus monologue equals dialogue” doesn’t work – as we are discovering every day.

I am therefore very grateful to the Swiss Chairmanship for creating a Panel of Eminent Persons, because there can be no question of diluting or renegotiating the OSCE *acquis*. The OSCE principles are non-negotiable – they are the foundation on which the OSCE is built. But outside our rare Ministerial Council meetings we need to reflect on how to get back to a point at which the OSCE principles are really respected by all participating States. In my view a Panel of Eminent Persons could make an important contribution in this regard.

I should like to thank the Swiss Chairmanship not only for this idea but also for its tireless efforts in a difficult year. My thanks are due to all employees and all observers and, above all, to Heidi Tagliavini. I wish Serbia good luck in its Chairmanship.