



**Draft Statement by H. E. Prof. Dr. Srđan Darmanović,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro at the 26th OSCE Ministerial Council,
Bratislava, 5th December, 2019**

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Distinguished Minister Lajčák, Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

At the onset, I would like to congratulate the Slovak Chairmanship for their dedicated work during this year's presidency of OSCE, and, in particular, to express gratitude to Minister Lajčák as the Chairman-in-Office for his warm hospitality here in Bratislava, as well as his candid approach throughout the year.

Mr. Chair,

We are all witnesses that the security challenges our OSCE region is facing are growing in nature and complexity and are becoming increasingly intertwined. When international norms and principles are flagrantly disrespected, the confidence and trust among participating states, which represent cornerstones of multilateralism, become eroded. Amidst this reality, however, due to recent developments, it is with sincere, although cautious, satisfaction that this year I can begin my address on a more positive note.

The encouraging progress made in Ukraine and the completion of disengagement in Stanytsia Luhanska, Zolote and Petrivske areas represent positive steps towards finding a durable peace solution. The agreement to hold Normandy Four Summit next week in Paris is of tremendous importance, and we call on parties to show their full resolve to end a conflict that has had devastating impacts on regional stability as well as international order itself. In the face of these advances, however, it is clear that more joint efforts need to be invested in order to sustainably address the complex situation in eastern Ukraine.

Despite the agreed ceasefire, as reported by the Special monitoring mission (SMM), the civilian casualties, including children, are still the reality, while the damaging attacks on the civilian infrastructure are ongoing. The SMM's work, which is of vital importance to all of us, as recently once again demonstrated, is obstructed in significant aspects. Enabling the SMM, its monitors and equipment, unconditional, safe and unhindered access to the full territory of Ukraine and the entire Russian-Ukrainian border is of crucial importance to the future stability.

As stated so many times, Montenegro continues to strongly condemn the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and we express our unyielding support to the full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty within the internationally recognized borders and territorial waters. We call for a rescindment of all unilateral actions, withdrawal of troops and equipment from Ukraine, and enabling of free navigation and access to the Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov, in line with the international law.

Mr. Chair,

Despite the fact that we as 57 have, regrettably, yet not been able to reach a consensus on a Ministerial text welcoming the Vienna document modernization, the proposal for its comprehensive

update, put forward by 32 participating States of the OSCE, including my own, represents, most certainly, a positive step forward in the return of predictability and transparency and the reduction of risks. The 2011 Vienna document has not been reflecting the new politico-military and technological realities for an already significant period of time, and its update has been long overdue. We strongly urge all participating States to constructively consider and engage in the discussions on this proposal, so that, by next year in Tirana, we can show for a substantial progress achieved in revitalizing this document as our key confidence and security building measure.

Mr. Chair,

The OSCE has contributed greatly to the security of the Western Balkans, including Montenegro, through numerous assistance projects, among which many on arms control and disarmament. With the indispensable system of field missions, independent institutions and its multi-dimensional approach to security, I believe that the OSCE represents a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation, equipped with comprehensive sets of valuable tools for conflict prevention, mediation and reconciliation. In this regard, I am convinced that the long-lasting conflicts and severe consequences that civilians who are living in conflict areas and at contact lines experience daily, must remain in our strong focus, within the existing mediation formats.

The OSCE today is faced with numerous challenges, diverse transnational threats as well as insufficient respect for international norms, including its own commitments. To demonstrate that the OSCE has an added value in international architecture, we cannot afford to remain silent while new confrontation fronts are arising almost daily. We need to continue openly discussing ways to reduce risk and increase confidence, at all levels, including through the Structured dialogue, which we consider a relevant long-term platform to guide our future actions. Having said this, Montenegro's belief that this Organization is more crucial today than ever is in line with an appeal of the year's Chairperson in-Office, Minister Lajčak, that once again confirms OSCE's basic principles and commitments and stresses a need for more cooperative, dialogue-based approach in paving our way forward.

At this crossroads, in order for the OSCE to persist and succeed, we all must show sufficient vision and political will to overcome differences, to strengthen our commitments where needed, and to adopt them to the changing realities on the ground. In this regard, I hope that by the end of tomorrow we can reach consensus and adopt decisions that will reinforce and add on our existing commitments in relevant aspects of security, strengthening the resilience of our societies and our region.

Mr. Chair,

Montenegro is strongly committed to the highest standards of the respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, which we regard as indispensable elements of the comprehensive approach to security. To fight the evidently shrinking space for civil society, we as participating States need to preserve the OSCE's credibility by ensuring that our principal events and formats continue to serve as a unique platform for dialogue with actors among, as well as outside, the governments. In this regard, I would like to stress Montenegro's strong commitment to open, inclusive and constructive dialogue with all actors at the national and international level.

Finally, allow me to wish Albania, our neighbour and a regional partner, success in their chairmanship next year, and to stress the need for the OSCE to be steered in its work in a balanced manner among and within its dimensions. In this context, as a constitutionally proclaimed ecological state and a Mediterranean country, we look forward to the incorporation of more environmental topics in the next year's agenda and a stronger focus on the cooperation with our Mediterranean partners.

Mr. Chair, esteemed colleagues, I thank you for your attention.