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10 January 2019

ENGLISH only

Statement by the Chairperson in Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Closing of Presentation of Priorities

OSCE

Vienna, Austria

10 January 2019

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to start by thanking you all, again, for being here today and for your warm words of support.

And, I have to say I feel very encouraged by our discussions today. You brought a lot of great ideas and suggestions to the table, and I listened to them carefully.

I will not attempt to summarise everything that has been said, as I would not do it any justice. But, I want to assure you that my team and I will follow up on all of them.

However, I do want to touch on a few of the main messages I heard. And I will do so with five brief points.

First: Many of you spoke of the security situation in our region today.

And, this is not surprising. Because it is the single most important priority, concern, dream - but also fear - for our citizens.

You said that what is happening in and around Ukraine is unacceptable. That protracted conflicts undermine the security of the entire continent. And that we need to look at new challenges to our security, including those coming from violent extremism and terrorism, cyberspace, or environmental degradation and climate change.

Yet, it was clear you believe in the tools we have, to combat them. In particular, many of you spoke out, in strong support of the OSCE's field operations, as well as this organization's autonomous institutions. You pointed to the crucial work they are doing - and the need for our continued support, as they react to changing realities.

We couldn't agree more. So our Chairmanship wants to be ambitious.

Ambitious in promoting stability and trust in the OSCE area, and in supporting the good functioning of our organisation. This ambition is tempered with realism, however. We understand the context in which the OSCE operates, and the significant challenges ahead. So we will always promote the potential of the OSCE, while objectively assessing the realities and challenges we face.

Second: People were very much at the centre of our discussions.

Even though the people affected by conflict were not in this room today, their stories were still at the core of your interventions. People waiting in line for hours to cross a line of contact. People forced to make the decision between risking their lives to stay, or risking their lives to flee. People cut off from the basic supply of water, electricity or heating or under threat of environmental catastrophe. And you made a case for us to do more; more for them.

We agree with you, which is why we want to focus on people, in the year ahead.

Today, many of you outlined a vision in which peace, human rights, gender equality, and the rule of law are a reality for all. I am sure countless people on the ground in our region have the same vision. We want to use our chairmanship to shed light on their stories, perspectives and experiences. And, work to bring our shared vision to life.

Third: Many of you spoke words of commitment.

You reminded us all of our promises to provide a secure future for people and our planet. You said we are stronger together, in a system based on dialogue, co-operation and multilateralism. You stressed that any alternative would risk our common security and shared stability.

It is clear that we have many champions of multilateralism in this room. Some of you even had ideas for new mechanisms for cooperation.

And, our Chairmanship wants to support you.

We must always remember that differences in unilateral positions do not prevent multilateral agreement. They might give us more work to do. Our negotiations might be more difficult. But they can also make the outcome stronger.

Fourth: Many of you voiced reservations.

That too often the OSCE's ability to fulfil its mandate has been hampered by disagreements among participating States. And the perfect example of this was the budget negotiations. We see the OSCE blamed for our own failures. We see its negotiations burdened with unrelated issues. We see the organization flooded with bilateral agendas. This is not a way forward. For anyone.

So, our Chairmanship wants to be honest.

We will focus on finding innovative, hands-on solutions to common challenges. And we will be impartial, fair and honest in our role as partners and mediators. We are committed to working with all of you to find viable, sustainable ways to overcome our differences. And, in the immediate term, that will mean working for progress that can lead to a compromise on the long-standing and politically-sensitive issue of the expired Scales of Contribution. In this context, I want to inform you that I will

appoint a new Chair of the Informal Working Group on Scales by 15 January, to move this forward without delay.

Lastly, many of you looked forward.

Your statements didn't just focus on challenges.

Actually, we heard many innovative ideas for further cooperation today. These related to the substance of our work, all across the three dimensions - as well as practical suggestions on our processes and working methods. We also heard a lot of you call for more discussions on the longer-term future of this organization.

Our Chairmanship is on the same page.

We believe that the OSCE has immense potential. Potential to do more. Potential to achieve a secure, prosperous and sustainable world for all. We were glad to hear so many ideas and solutions around the table today - and we are committed to bringing them forward in the year ahead.

So, what's next on our agenda?

Next week, I will travel to Ukraine and to Moldova, and to the South Caucasus soon after.

And in February, I will host a high-level conference in Bratislava, organized together with ODIHR, focusing on anti-Semitism in Bratislava.

Other events will happen throughout the year, as an initiative from the Chairmanship, in response to participating States, or in reaction to events happening around the world.

To conclude, I want to thank you once more for being here today and sharing your views. But if we all leave this room, and continue with business as usual, we will have wasted our time.

The people we have been talking about here today, they need us to meet our words and commitments with actions – now, more than ever.

Slovakia is ready to get to work, and we are looking forward to working with all of you in the year ahead.

Thank you.