

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

MC.DEL/7/20
3 December 2020

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

**STATEMENT BY
MR. SERGEY LAVROV, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Tirana, 3 and 4 December 2020 (via video teleconference)

Mr. Chairperson-in-Office,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are grateful to the Albanian Chairmanship for its preparations for the Ministerial Council meeting under *force majeure* conditions. The coronavirus pandemic has become an additional factor in the fragmentation and anxiety in international relations. At the same time, the global crisis has clearly demonstrated once again the need to work out systemic responses together to common challenges and to counter real rather than imaginary threats.

The stumbling block remains the unwillingness of Western countries to abandon confrontational bloc-based approaches and their arrogant attitude towards the legitimate interests of other States, which stems from the feeling of their own “exceptionalism”. The policy of replacing international law with some kind of “rules-based order” is leading to an increasingly tough and dishonest game without rules but with an abundance of disinformation and double standards. The fewer real facts there are involved in orchestrated media campaigns, the more aggressive these campaigns become.

The difficulties encountered this year in appointing a Secretary General and the heads of the three OSCE institutions merely illustrate the problems and imbalances that have accumulated within the Organization. The misguided refusal of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe the presidential election in Belarus, the subsequent one-sided criticism of the Belarusian authorities and the invoking of the obsolete Moscow Mechanism were a heavy blow to the OSCE’s reputation. The ODIHR’s political bias, its participation in campaigns against some countries and its reticent, and let us be frank, cowardly silence about the situation in others brings discredit upon our Organization.

It is clear that the OSCE is in urgent need of reform. This reform must be aimed at increasing the transparency and efficiency of the work of the Secretariat, the institutions and the field operations, improving the election observation methodology, optimizing the programmes of events and the preparations for Ministerial Council meetings, achieving a balance between the three “baskets” and enhancing the budgetary process. It is necessary to draw up a new agenda, focus on what unites us rather than what divides us, and seek compromises through open dialogue as equals. We suggest that the future Swedish Chairmanship establish an informal working group on increasing the OSCE’s effectiveness.

This is not a call to start from scratch. The task of building an equal and indivisible security community remains our common reference point. It is important to breathe new life into the package of interconnected OSCE commitments that has taken shape over the past few decades. The Organization will not have a future if the participating States themselves have no need for it. The proposals by Russia and our allies on OSCE reform have long been well known. It is time for our Western colleagues to stop acting as if changes were not necessary. Otherwise, the future of the OSCE itself, which is rapidly losing its reputation and prestige in the eyes of participating States, will be called into question.

The new OSCE officials need to be fully aware of this situation and take these alarming trends into account in their practical work. They must act without bias and in a responsible manner, in the interests of strengthening the fundamental consensus rule, rather than at the prompting of particular States.

At a time when the strategic stability architecture is being destroyed and tensions persist between NATO and Russia, we need to look for common ground in the Structured Dialogue format with the involvement of military experts. So far, however, our constructive proposals for de-escalation and minimizing the consequences of the dismantling of the arms control system have not received a coherent response.

The shockingly brutal acts of terror in France and Vienna confirm the need to step up the OSCE's role in the fight against terrorism. Countering the drug threat, organized crime and cybercrime requires additional effort.

We note the high-quality work carried out by the Albanian Chairmanship on the pressing topic of combating corruption. More attention should be paid to the second "basket" in general, especially as regards economic connectivity and the alignment of integration processes.

Social and economic rights of citizens and the realization of the right to development are acquiring particular importance during the pandemic. There needs to be an unbiased approach to the human dimension. The situation of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic States and Ukraine remains a cause for deep concern. The instruction issued by the Basel Ministerial Council in 2014 on adopting declarations in defence of Christians and Muslims has not been carried out to this day. The "gilets jaunes" protests in France, the exacerbation of interreligious tensions, large-scale demonstrations in other European countries, and fierce racial clashes with dozens of casualties in the United States of America confirm that acute problems as regards the observance of human rights are to be found not only to the "east of Vienna".

In a number of participating States, we see a growing intolerance towards alternative points of view reflecting what these States consider to be an unpalatable truth. Not only traditional censorship, but also the technical capabilities of social media and information technology giants are being used against undesirable information resources and "dissidents". We support the elaboration of OSCE commitments on public access to information. This principle was proclaimed in the early 1990s, but now our Western colleagues are trying to consign it to oblivion.

The Organization's conflict resolution potential is still in demand. The agreements reached to resolve crisis situations in the OSCE area should receive greater support from the participating States, which will facilitate their implementation.

We expect this to be done with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, which we will continue to promote in every possible way. We value the co-operation among the three Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

We are counting on the Ukrainian Government to finally stop sabotaging the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which are the only framework for an internal Ukrainian settlement, and not to shirk from fulfilling the decisions of the “Normandy format” summit held in Paris or from direct dialogue with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk.

The OSCE can return to its origins, namely to its role as a pan-European framework for the discussion and adoption of collective decisions on security in all its dimensions. The key to this lies in the hands of the participating States, which must demonstrate their political will for compromise and for mutually respectful co-operation as equals.

I should like to wish everyone good health, first and foremost, and our Swedish colleagues a successful OSCE Chairmanship.

Thank you for your attention.