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**STATEMENT BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY MR. DIDIER NAGANT DE DEUXCHAISNES,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM TO THE  
OSCE, AT THE TWENTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE  
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Stockholm, 2 December 2021

Madam Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of Minister Sophie Wilmès, who regrets that she is unable to be present among you today.

Allow me, on her behalf, to raise three points with you.

First of all, the need to continue dialogue in a constructive manner so as to ensure our common security.

The situation in the Donbas region remains worrying. The Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) has its origins in the OSCE, and all the members of the Organization should put their full weight behind it. The peace process in Donbas calls for intense and continuous dialogue between Russia and Ukraine within the framework of the Normandy format and the TCG. Belgium continues to fully support the diligent work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, not only in words but also in practice, by providing personnel and additional funding. At the same time, we deeply regret the failure to renew the mandate of the border Observer Mission.

The recent Russian military manoeuvres on the border with Ukraine are more than worrying, as is the tense situation on Belarus's border with Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States. Here too, dialogue must be the key word.

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to limit direct contacts, reducing the opportunities for dialogue and thereby increasing the risk of fostering mistrust. It is precisely because of this mistrust that conventional arms control is currently dangerously close to finding itself in a "danger zone".

It is now our collective responsibility to renew the dialogue on co-operative security and make it work.

Speaking of collective responsibility brings me to my second point, namely respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Belgium regrets that the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was cancelled for the second time, owing to the inflexible positions adopted by some of us. It is our joint responsibility to ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and also to maintain and strengthen regular dialogue with civil society organizations and human rights defenders.

The efforts of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to carry out its task of observing elections in the OSCE participating States, despite the multiple challenges due to the pandemic, are admirable. Let us remember that all the participating States have a responsibility to invite and host election observation missions on their territory while respecting the ODIHR's autonomy and independence.

As one of the countries that invoked the Moscow Mechanism and the Vienna Mechanism on Belarus, Belgium calls on the Belarusian authorities to reconsider their approach, to implement the recommendations made in the Benedek report and to engage in constructive and inclusive dialogue with a view to finding peaceful solutions that meet the aspirations of the entire population of Belarus.

My third point relates to the important role of the OSCE in implementing the women, peace and security agenda in our region.

The two previous points cannot be achieved without the involvement of the whole population, including women. Until now, their role has too often been underestimated or even ignored, and this is an issue that is close to Belgium's heart. We thank the Swedish Chairmanship for putting this subject at the top of its agenda throughout the year. The fact that no consensus could be reached on the declaration on the women, peace and security agenda, nor on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the armed forces, shows that more attention to the role of women remains essential. From a Belgian perspective, the OSCE is a forum that can play its full role only if the link between gender equality and our common security is highlighted.

In conclusion, let me congratulate Minister Ann Linde for the diplomatic skills that she demonstrated throughout the year as Chairperson-in-Office and assure Minister Zbigniew Rau that Poland can count on our full support for its Chairmanship in 2022. We look forward to working closely with you during the Belgian Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation in the last trimester of 2022.

Finally, I should like to congratulate Finland on being awarded the mandate to chair our Organization in 2025, 50 years after the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, while regretting that consensus could not be reached on Estonia's candidature for 2024.

Thank you for your attention.