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**STATEMENT BY
MS. ANNALENA BAERBOCK, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, AT THE THIRTIETH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Skopje, 30 November 2023

Dear Bujar Osmani,
Dear Helga Schmid,
Madam President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,
Dear colleagues,

When we think back to last year, many of us would certainly not consider the meeting in Łódź to have been the most important political signal – at least in the media. I do believe, however, that the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in December 2022 was one of the most important political meetings last year. By launching its war of aggression in violation of international law, Russia attacked not only Ukraine and its people but also our European peace and security order.

As 55 OSCE participating States, we made it clear in Łódź that we will hold together this fundamental pillar of our security architecture – our Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. With everything that we have.

Fifty-five countries, as different as they are, as different as we are. From Central Asia to the Republic of Moldova, from the South Caucasus to the Western Balkans, we chose to stand on the side of international law, on the side of peace and freedom. Even when Russia tried to block the budget in order to reduce our options to zero. As Russia is in the room today – obviously, as at other meetings, the Foreign Minister is here because he himself is speaking, not because he is listening to others speak – I should like to take this opportunity to say this once again: stop this war, which is also a war against the Organization itself, against security and co-operation in Europe.

Stop the unspeakable suffering that you are inflicting on millions of people and with which you are also undermining the values of our Organization, this Organization here, on a daily basis. This does not require negotiations, and it certainly does not require any concessions from Ukraine. This requires a decision from Russia to uphold the basic principles of this Organization, the OSCE, withdraw its troops and recommit itself to peace. I should like to emphasize equally as clearly that three staff members of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine are still being held captive by Russia and that this is also a gross violation of our common OSCE rules.

I will say this just as clearly: we will continue to do everything we can to ensure that the OSCE does not break up, even if this Russian war of aggression continues. Because we have seen in recent weeks that the future of this Organization and its values is more important than ever, that we must defend the OSCE

again and again if we want to preserve what it has achieved in terms of co-operation and dialogue among our countries – as the largest security organization in the world.

I should like to thank the Chairmanship, I should like to thank you, dear Bujar, and also your team for the fact that you have managed to keep this largest security organization in the world functioning over the past year. With a great deal of creativity and a lot of extra contributions. I express my sincere thanks for that too. Germany has also made a considerable voluntary contribution to the budget in order to continue to include such important issues as human rights, civil liberties, media diversity and the protection of women and children on the agenda, which would have been almost impossible without a regular budget.

Dear Helga Schmid, dear Bujar Osmani, a prime example of this is the OSCE's first Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Conference, which was organized to highlight the fact that women and children in particular suffer the most in conflicts.

I am grateful that, with Malta, a new Chairmanship will now take over that has also shown that it is solution-oriented and can act pragmatically, even in the most difficult circumstances. I should therefore like to express my sincere thanks to Malta for taking over the Chairmanship in 2024. I am convinced that Estonia would have fulfilled the role of Chairmanship just as well.

But a Chairmanship alone is not enough. Right now, in order to continue the vital work for the people – this year, the OSCE's motto is "it's about people", after all – in order to continue this work for the people, we need a Secretary General like Helga Schmid. We need a Media Representative like Teresa Ribeiro. We need a Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights like Matteo Mecacci. And we need a High Commissioner on National Minorities like Kairat Abdrakhmanov. I should also like to thank you all for your tireless efforts over the past three years. Just like all the other OSCE employees who bring the values of this Organization to life every day, despite the many obstacles in their way.

I believe it is imperative that we decide together tomorrow to extend the term of these four people. Work can only succeed if it is carried out on a long-term basis rather than on an ad hoc one. That is why it made good sense to plan for the work to last three years. We still think it is right that the work should be carried out over three years.

But I should also like to emphasize this: we will not allow a blockade of the OSCE's ability to act to result in it not being able to work at all. A compromise on a compromise is not an option, however. If a compromise is needed, then we are ready. But compromises on compromises are no longer compromises, they are a complete blockade. With this in mind, I should like to appeal to everyone here, to all those who are prepared also to listen and not just to deliver their own statements, that we do everything we can to maintain our OSCE's ability to act by making a joint decision. By making a joint decision in support of the European peace order, a joint decision in support of the over 1 billion people in all our countries. As diverse as we are, it is now a matter of saving the OSCE.

Saving the OSCE means safeguarding our people, this is our responsibility.