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

Milan, 6 December 2018

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,
Mr. Secretary General,

I should like first of all to thank the Italian Chairmanship for organizing the meeting and for an atmosphere that is conducive to mutually respectful dialogue and co-operation. These values are reflected in the Helsinki Final Act, which remains the basis for inter-State relations and the realization of a positive pan-European agenda.

Unfortunately, compliance with its key provisions is not to everyone's liking. In an effort to achieve supremacy, a small group of countries is using blackmail, pressure and threats, and thinks nothing of meddling in internal affairs. The support for the coup d'état in Ukraine and the unprecedented pressure on Macedonia are clear evidence of this. The reckless expansion of NATO, the build-up of the Alliance's capacity on the "eastern flank", the deployment of United States anti-missile defence systems in Europe and illegal sanctions under fabricated pretexts – all this has led to a crisis of confidence in the Euro-Atlantic region. New risks are being created in connection with the intention of the United States of America to "bury" yet another international agreement – the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty).

The member countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) today adopted a special statement in this regard, which is being circulated as an OSCE document.

Russia is in favour of discussing concerns not through a "megaphone" but professionally. We supported the German initiative of the Structured Dialogue on challenges to security. If we keep this process in a depoliticized framework, we will be able to contribute to de-escalation, prepare the ground for work on arms control and strengthen the tools for preventing dangerous incidents. It is clear, however, that this requires regular military contacts, but the West has frozen such contacts and so far refuses to resume them.

We appreciate the OSCE's contribution to combating terrorism, its propaganda and financing, and to the exchange of information on foreign terrorist fighters. It is important to enhance the role of the Organization in combating the drug threat as well.

The topic of economic connectivity and the alignment of integration processes offers unifying potential. The Platform for Co-operative Security, adopted by the OSCE at the initiative of the European Union (EU), provides a good basis for contacts between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the EU.

Unfortunately, the human rights situation is deteriorating. There are attacks on freedom of the media and on linguistic, educational and religious rights. The shameful phenomenon of statelessness remains in Latvia and Estonia, both EU countries. Laws leading to the prohibition of languages other than Ukrainian in all spheres of life are being adopted in Ukraine. At the same time, the Ukrainian Government promises concessions, but only for the languages of EU countries, thereby showing that its goal is discrimination and, even more, the destruction of the Russian language, which, I recall, is spoken by the majority of Ukraine's citizens. I hope that the EU countries really understand this plan, which grossly violates not only the Ukrainian Government's international commitments but also the Constitution of Ukraine. All this requires immediate intervention on the part of the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

We are concerned that a number of countries are striving to cleanse the information space of dissent under the pretext of combating propaganda. It would seem that we are returning to censorship. Journalists are subjected to discrimination in France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ukraine and the Baltic States. Attempts to draw up whitelists and blacklists of media resources are unacceptable. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has a duty to respond to this.

We have submitted for consideration by our meeting draft documents on the protection of the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities and on free access of journalists and the media to information. We support the declaration on the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE. We recall the importance of adopting declarations on the protection of Christians and Muslims. This is urgently needed in view of the plight of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa and the increase in interreligious tensions in the European Union.

Year after year, we emphasize the danger of rewriting history and glorifying Nazism. It has acquired ugly forms, in particular, in Latvia, where Waffen-SS veterans are honoured. Radical nationalists are rampaging in Ukraine under the banner of the same SS. We hope that the resolution recently adopted by the European Parliament on the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe, in which there is also a reference to the corresponding United Nations General Assembly resolution, will help the members of the EU to take a principled stand against abhorrent phenomena of this type.

The OSCE's crisis-response efforts are in demand. With our support, its representatives are co-ordinating negotiations between the Ukrainian Government and Donbas in the Trilateral Contact Group. The Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine is working in strict accordance with its mandate. The Minsk Package of Measures remains the only framework for overcoming the internal Ukrainian conflict. The Ukrainian Government is consistently sabotaging its implementation, as it is the implementation of decisions by the Normandy Quartet leaders. The efforts to resolve the Ukrainian crisis are encountering ever more obstacles, including flagrant interference by the State in Church affairs, which only aggravates the already difficult domestic political situation and polarizes society. It is astounding that the regime in Kyiv enjoys complete impunity among its Western patrons,

who forgive and even justify all its antics. This also applies completely to the recent provocation organized by the Ukrainian naval forces in the Black Sea and the active military preparations by the Ukrainian armed forces at the line of contact in Donbas.

We support the OSCE's efforts in the settlement of the Transdniestrian and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts and its Co-Chairmanship of the Geneva International Discussions on the Trans-Caucasus.

We must remain focused on the Balkans. We recall that the mandates of the OSCE institutions and missions do not provide for assisting in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries of that region. These mandates must be respected. Kosovo's participation in OSCE events as a "State" is unacceptable, as is encouraging the authorities in Priština in their actions in violation of UN Security Council resolution 1244. We expect the European Union to secure implementation from the authorities in Priština of the agreements reached between them and the Serbian Government with the mediation of the EU, including the creation of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo.

We are in favour of continuing the reform of the OSCE. The Organization needs a Charter, procedures for its executive structures, and order in election observation, the human dimension, and staffing and financial matters.

We firmly believe that it is only on the basis of the principles of mutual respect and consideration of interests that the OSCE can achieve its "rated capacity" and move towards the goal set at the Astana Summit: the formation of an equal, comprehensive and indivisible security community. The main guideline in our work should be the interests of the people. In spite of everything, they – the people – are strengthening ties in the areas of culture, science, education, sport and business. They seek a peaceful, safe life and do not want confrontation. Let us not sacrifice the interests of our citizens for the sake of geopolitical games, whether in the Mediterranean or in Ukraine.

In conclusion, I should like to wish Slovakia every success as the future OSCE Chairmanship.

Thank you for your attention.