



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **Statement by the Head of the EU Delegation**

**Helga Schmid,**

**Secretary General of the European External Action Service**

**24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council  
Vienna, 7 December 2017**

Mr Chairman, Secretary General, Excellencies,

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The principles and commitments agreed 42 years ago in Helsinki remain fully valid today for sustainable peace in Europe. We need to restore respect for those principles and commitments. But we also need to restore trust as the Chairman has just pointed out.

For the EU maintaining peace and security in Europe has been at the core of the European project for the last 60 years. It is the OSCE that offers a collective, cooperative and comprehensive approach to security, a key quality for addressing the existing security challenges, including ongoing conflicts. This is why the EU provides significant and tangible support to the OSCE politically, financially, notably through funding of OSCE missions and contributions of EU Member States to the Organization's budget, and on the ground through cooperation between EU Delegations and OSCE field presences.

At the Eastern Partnership summit two weeks ago, the leaders of the 34 countries involved endorsed a cooperative agenda of 20 deliverables, which contributes to strengthening state and societal resilience through good governance, opening economic opportunities, fostering interconnections and connecting people. All Summit participants also stressed that the Eastern Partnership is not directed against anyone and indicated openness in principle for cooperation with third countries.

At the same time, Europe is confronted with continuous instability and conflict in its neighbourhood. In the east of Ukraine, continued ceasefire violations, lack of a meaningful withdrawal of heavy weapons, and presence of mines in many areas continue to cause suffering of the civilian population and destruction of critical infrastructure. Financial and military support to the separatists must stop! We also call again on Russia to reverse the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, which the EU will not recognize. The European Union will spare no effort to help find a sustainable political solution to this crisis, respecting Ukraine's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity.

The EU will continue to support the efforts in the Normandy 4 format and the Trilateral Contact Group towards full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides. We contribute about two thirds of both the personnel and the budget, as well as satellite imagery to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

Regrettably, the OSCE region also faces other protracted conflicts in Georgia, in the Republic of Moldova, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this context, we welcome the recent breakthroughs achieved thanks to the intensive efforts of the Austrian Chairmanship in Office in the framework of the 5+2 process on the Transnistrian settlement. The EU continues to be engaged on the ground, in particular in Georgia through the EU monitoring mission and in the framework of the Geneva International Discussions, to contribute to resolve the situation.

Promoting stability in the countries closest to the EU is a natural strategic priority. We have a strong shared interest in consolidating security on our continent by integrating the Western Balkans, as part of our European family into the EU. EU engagement will further intensify in 2018 with a new strategy, detailed country reports and a summit bringing together all 28 Member States and all six Western Balkans partners, aiming for concrete steps forward to make the path towards the EU irreversible.

Our rules-based security order is further challenged by terrorism, organized crime and malicious cyber activity, which we must fight together as the Chairman said at the beginning. The EU engages with OSCE partners on these objectives. At the

recent EU-Central Asia Ministerial meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, we confirmed the objective to further strengthen regional cooperation in pursuit of sustainable development and modernisation for the benefit of citizens.

Values lie at the heart of the European Union. Unfortunately, many places in the OSCE region face backsliding on human rights, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, a shrinking space for civil society and increasing intolerance. Security and political stability cannot be sustained without respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Autonomous institutions and the OSCE field presence are irreplaceable in supporting the implementation of the OSCE commitments by the participating States.

And finally, the European Union welcomes the high-level appointments in July of Secretary General Gremiger – and I want to confirm full support for his critical work – the High Commissioner for National Minorities, the Director of ODHHR, and the Representative for Freedom of the Media. On behalf of High Representative Federica Mogherini, I warmly thank Minister Kurz for his strong leadership, commitment and dedication to steer us through these challenging discussions, and we look forward to working with the Italian Chairmanship.

Thank you.