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OSCE ANNUAL SECURITY REVIEW CONFERENCE**

31 August 2021

Opening session

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are pleased that the Chairmanship has been able after all to convene this conference – even if for the first time not before but after the summer recess. It would be ill-advised to deprive ourselves of a valuable opportunity to exchange views on key security issues in our vast area.

The security situation in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area continues to deteriorate. The withdrawal of the United States of America from the Treaty on Open Skies and the reluctance to consider possible compromises for getting the Treaty to function again have put paid to yet another important confidence-building measure in the OSCE area. The NATO Summit in June once again demonstrated the Alliance's willingness to continue confrontation, increase defence spending and build up military capabilities and infrastructure near Russian borders. This undermines stability and increases the risk of misinterpretation of actions and intentions. NATO has avoided substantive discussion of de-escalation and has not taken up Russian proposals to reduce military activity, prevent incidents and institute a reciprocal moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe, despite the fact that we all have a real need for such a discussion.

The OSCE has the potential to be a useful platform for dialogue on the issue of European security. For example, in view of NATO's freezing of military-to-military contacts with Russia, the Structured Dialogue remains a unique confidence-building measure and essentially the only format where representatives of defence departments can communicate freely and in a depoliticized manner.

Overall, however, our Organization is increasingly perceived as a debating society in which the parties spout out mutual accusations without even trying to listen to one another. There are increasing attempts to erode the culture of consensus that forms the very foundation of the OSCE. I hope everyone hears me – both the participating States and the Secretariat. We will not allow this process of collective and equal decision-making in the OSCE to be dismantled or perverted. Destroying consensus would destroy the Organization.

Every one of us can easily name cases where the OSCE, with its toolkit, could have done more to prevent crisis situations, but unfortunately failed to do so. It has fallen victim to the political egotism of certain States and their desire to impose and commercially exploit a “European security order” of their own imagination to the detriment of international law.

The Organization’s mandate, originally geared towards addressing the cornerstone issues of European security, has been transformed by the efforts of the collective West into a set of secondary and often marginal tasks tailored to sometimes highly questionable “liberal values”.

We are committed to the principles and obligations of the Helsinki Final Act. They do not require correction, but should be interpreted equally by all and should apply to all States without discriminating between “established democracies” and others. There can be no place in today’s world for politics based on an ideology of superiority. The interests of all States matter and must be equally respected.

The situation in Afghanistan – right on the borders of the OSCE area – demands serious discussion. We advocate the formation as early as possible of an inclusive coalition government with the participation of all ethno-political forces in the country. The activities of ISIS remain a significant factor in the deteriorating situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It is unlikely under the current circumstances that the ISIS warriors will lay down their arms and give up the idea of building a “global caliphate”. The terrorist attacks at Kabul airport on 26 August this year are a reminder of the dangers posed by these terrorists. Nor can it be ruled out that ISIS warriors may attempt to cross the border into Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries, disguised as refugees, for example. The problem of drug production and smuggling is extremely critical. In 20 years, Afghanistan has become the largest supplier of opiates in the world, accounting for as much as 90 per cent of the global market. It is unacceptable for the military infrastructure of the United States and NATO, as well as the Afghans who co-operated with them, to be transferred from Afghanistan to the territory of neighbouring countries. The threat posed by the flow of refugees also presents a high security risk for the States in the region. We will continue to provide the necessary assistance to our allies and partners in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Events in the Trans-Caucasus have called for serious peacekeeping efforts by Russia. Our country played a key role in stopping the bloodshed and initiated the signing of a statement by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia on 9 November 2020. We are working within a trilateral working group to unblock economic and transport links in the region. We are doing everything possible to de-escalate tensions on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border beyond Nagorno-Karabakh and to facilitate the start of the process of delimitation and subsequent demarcation. We support the work of the OSCE Minsk Group on the basis of the existing mandate and with adequate consideration of new regional realities.

Unfortunately, the settlement process for the internal Ukrainian crisis is stagnating and being sabotaged. The Ukrainian authorities are not engaging in dialogue with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk and are unwilling to understand that the problem cannot be solved by force and without taking into account the fundamental interests of the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine. Ceasefire violations, civilian deaths and the destruction of civilian infrastructure are on the rise. These facts are confirmed in the reports by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. The socio-economic blockade of Donbas appears particularly inhumane in the context of the pandemic. Strong pressure is being put on civil society, the Church, the media and on a huge part of Ukraine’s population who want to speak Russian, the native language of very many people, and to follow their traditions. All of these things would hardly have been possible without the incitement and patronage of some Western countries. The only possible strategy to break the stalemate is to persuade the Ukrainian authorities that there is no alternative to the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, which was approved by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202.

As for the Transdniestrian settlement, we are in favour of a swift restart of the peace process within the framework of the “5+2” negotiation format. We welcome the initiative to hold a formal meeting under this mechanism in the autumn.

We remain committed to the Geneva International Discussions, which continue to be the only negotiating platform for direct dialogue between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We are managing to keep up a steady negotiating momentum. The priority is to conclude a legally binding agreement on the non-use of force between Georgia, on the one hand, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the other, and to delineate and demarcate the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian borders.

I should like once again to emphasize the need to focus in the OSCE on common interests and to move away from bloc-based approaches and zero-sum games. Today’s world presents many transnational threats but also opportunities for mutually beneficial co-operation to curb them.

Particular attention should be paid to combating drug trafficking, terrorism and transnational organized crime. We look forward to a balanced set of documents on these issues by the time of the Ministerial Council meeting in Stockholm. Depoliticized dialogue on international information security – without unsubstantiated accusations of unlawful activities in cyberspace – is important. It should be ensured that confidence-building measures in the area of information and communication technologies do not jeopardize the security of participating States and third countries and are not used to interfere in internal affairs.

Distinguished colleagues,

In the face of an unprecedented crisis of trust, confrontation and sanctions, it is impossible to tackle the full spectrum of tasks at the OSCE in one fell swoop. It is up to us alone to ensure that our Organization remains useful and in demand. The need to improve its efficiency and adapt it to changing needs in line with the many decisions taken by decision-making bodies in the past is long overdue.

We propose that discussion should begin as soon as possible regarding de-escalation, including the mutual reduction of military activity along the borders of Russia and NATO countries, and enhancement of the mechanisms for preventing and resolving dangerous incidents. Russia is willing to participate in constructive dialogue on these issues and to work in parallel on the promising areas of co-operation already in place to counter common transnational challenges.

I hope that we can all work fruitfully towards ensuring common, equal and indivisible security based on mutual consideration of interests and respectful dialogue. The OSCE should not be an arena for settling political scores. It was conceived and built for a much more noble purpose. The forthcoming anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act is an additional reminder of that.

Thank you for your attention.