



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Special Permanent Council No. 1457 Vienna, 25 January 2024

EU Statement in response to the address by the CiO and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta, Hon. Dr. Ian Borg

1. The European Union congratulates Malta on the assumption of the 2024 OSCE Chairpersonship and warmly welcomes our new CiO, Foreign Minister Borg, here in Vienna. Minister Borg, we thank you for your readiness to assume the responsibility of the OSCE Chairpersonship and for the presentation of Malta's programme today. In these critical times for European and global security and stability, your task is undeniably difficult. You can rely on the EU's strong support for your principled leadership.
2. We agree with your continued prioritisation of Ukraine and its people on the OSCE agenda – an approach rightfully followed by the preceding CiOs of Poland and North Macedonia. Let there be no doubt: We will continue to support Ukraine to defend its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders for as long as it takes for Ukraine to rightfully defend itself against Russia's brutal war of aggression and win the just and lasting peace it deserves. Similarly, we remain unwavering in our commitment to support Ukraine's resilience and reconstruction, in line with Ukraine's European future. We clearly see the need for the OSCE leadership, executive structures and autonomous institutions to strengthen the Organisation's continued engagement in and assistance to Ukraine on the ground, including through the Support Programme for Ukraine and ODIHR's Ukraine Monitoring Initiative.
3. We also believe that the OSCE should continue to provide support to the countries most impacted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, such as the Republic of Moldova, to strengthen their resilience.

4. Minister Borg, Russia's ongoing illegal, unprovoked, and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine, with Belarus' complicity, represents the gravest threat to European security since World War II. Pursuing its imperialistic and revisionist ambitions and in gross violation of international law, including the UN Charter, as well as OSCE principles and commitments, Russia has invaded a sovereign neighbouring State, Ukraine. Over the past 700 days, Russia has razed hundreds of Ukrainian towns and settlements to the ground, has attempted to illegally annex more territories of Ukraine, has killed and wounded thousands of civilians, has forcefully deported to Russia many Ukrainians, including children, and has created waves of displaced persons, the majority of whom are women and children, within and outside Ukraine. Russia has also been targeting residential buildings, hospitals, schools and cultural sites, as well as civilian infrastructure such as energy, water supply and port facilities, with the purpose of inflicting human suffering, breaking the resolve of the Ukrainian people and undermining its statehood and independence. Furthermore, it has also attempted to blackmail the world through food and energy shortages, and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and activities. Russia must immediately stop its war of aggression against Ukraine, and completely and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. We also condemn the continued military support for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine provided by Iran, Belarus and the DPRK.
5. Russia bears full responsibility for its war of aggression, and those in charge will ultimately be held accountable for all their hideous acts against Ukraine and its people. We fully support all measures, also within the OSCE, to ensure accountability for all violations of international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law in connection with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including for the crime of aggression.
6. Recognising the destabilising regional consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, we trust that your Chairpersonship will continue to focus on intensified engagement regarding the cross-dimensional and cross-regional impact of the war. The EU reiterates its unwavering support for, and commitment to, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and Georgia within

their internationally recognised borders. The EU reaffirms its support for the sovereignty, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan and remains fully committed to facilitate efforts to advance a comprehensive, just, sustainable and lasting peace in the interest of all populations in the whole South Caucasus. We also underscore the importance of maintaining security and stability in the Western Balkans and in Central Asia.

7. The EU is very supportive of your intention to ensure that efforts to resolve existing conflicts in a peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable manner remain the OSCE's top priority and we welcome your people-centred, human rights-based approach in this regard. Achieving progress in this field would contribute to strengthening overall security in the OSCE area. The OSCE has a unique role to play in conflict and crisis situations, including through its Conflict Cycle toolbox, which must be used more actively.
8. Promoting and mainstreaming gender equality and youth across all dimensions is also an important aspect of advancing the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security. We agree with you that OSCE activities in the Women, Peace, and Security agenda must also be strengthened. It is imperative that women's participation at all levels of decision-making processes is full, equal, and meaningful, including in the armed and security forces. We also value the importance you attach to the role youth should play in our societies.
9. Additionally, we welcome your intended cross-dimensional focus on digitalisation. Recognising the transformative power of digital technologies, Malta's commitment to addressing the challenges and opportunities across the three OSCE dimensions aligns with the EU's vision for a digitally resilient and inclusive future. Digitalisation extends beyond technological advancements and interlinks with critical areas such as border security management,—counterterrorism, countering disinformation and combating transnational organised crime, including trafficking in human beings. Strengthening cybersecurity — with an emphasis on building confidence and countering malicious cyber activities— is essential for a safe digitalisation process.
10. The economic and environmental devastation inflicted by Russia on Ukraine is appalling. It is crucial that the OSCE addresses and alleviates the devastating impact

of this war on human security, the environment, including biodiversity, and the economy in Ukraine and beyond. This includes addressing water, food and energy security. The EU continues to support the OSCE's crucial work in addressing the environmental degradation/climate change/biodiversity loss nexus and its impact on security across all dimensions of security.

11. We fully agree that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are essential prerequisites for comprehensive security. We have seen how Russia's external aggression, supported by Belarus, is mirrored by a systematic and drastic internal repression. We emphasise the importance of according special attention to the promotion of freedom of expression, media freedom, and the safety of journalists and media actors. We underline the crucial role civil society organisations and human rights defenders play in ensuring accountability and the functioning and development of vibrant democracies.
12. In light of the dramatic degradation of security in the OSCE area, we strongly welcome your intention to steadfastly support the resilience of the Organisation, including its executive structures and autonomous institutions –ODIHR, HCNM and RFoM. It is the responsibility of us all to preserve their strong mandates, and ensure their proper leadership, functioning and adequate budgets. We value their important work in assisting participating States to implement our shared OSCE commitments, including their efforts aimed at addressing the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
13. The EU also remains convinced of the importance of effective co-operation with our Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation in tackling global challenges.
14. The year 2024 will be significant, not only for the EU and its Member States but also for other participating States and numerous countries beyond the OSCE area, also due to scheduled elections. In this regard, we deeply regret that Belarusian authorities failed to invite ODIHR to observe Belarus' parliamentary and local elections, scheduled for 25 February, in complete disregard of OSCE commitments. The unprecedented level of repression in Belarus, including actions against civil

society and the media, greatly undermines the potential for fairness and legitimacy in these elections.

15. Minister Borg, the EU firmly believes that upholding and implementing OSCE principles and commitments, as well as meaningful dialogue, transparency and cooperation, are the only means to effectively address common cross-dimensional challenges, overcome disputes and bring peace, security and stability. We fully concur that rebuilding trust requires restoring respect for the fundamental rules, principles and commitments enshrined in our OSCE founding documents and international law. The use of force and coercion to change borders has no place in the 21st century. Relations among sovereign States must continue to be guided by international law, including the UN Charter, and the principles and commitments enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. We remind Russia and Belarus that these rules and principles are the basis of our peaceful coexistence. They are collective obligations and are neither negotiable nor subject to revision or re-interpretation.

16. Let us conclude by emphasising that we look forward to your Chairpersonship's political leadership of the OSCE in this endeavour. Rest assured of the EU's full support and cooperation in reinforcing our Organisation, and safeguarding its achievements and the collectively agreed principles and commitments that form its foundation, along with their sincere implementation by all 57 participating States. We wish you and your dedicated team every success.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and GEORGIA, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.