

**Statement by Mr. Barrie Robinson, Political Director of the Department of
Foreign Affairs of Ireland**

OSCE Ministerial Council, Belgrade 3-4 December 2015

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ireland fully associates itself with the remarks delivered earlier by High Representative Mogherini on behalf of the European Union. We are grateful to Serbia for an excellent Chairmanship in 2015 and in particular for the hospitality we have enjoyed in Belgrade over the past few days. As it leaves the troika, we also acknowledge the important contribution to OSCE made by Switzerland over the past three years.

We meet at a time of extraordinary challenges for European security. The crisis in and around Ukraine, where infringements of that country's sovereignty and territorial integrity are in clear violation of the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, has rightly been front and centre of the work of the OSCE in 2015. At the same time we are conscious of the growing threat posed by terrorist acts and the need to enhance our joint efforts in the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation. We take this opportunity to express solidarity with the victims of all these attacks. This year, conflict, insecurity and instability in Europe's immediate Mediterranean neighbourhood has also resulted in the biggest migration crisis since the Second World War and this is posing huge practical challenges to many of our societies. The OSCE is an Organisation whose purpose is comprehensive security. If we fail to contribute as best we can within the parameters of OSCE's mandate in order to help address these challenges, we will have fallen short in our ambitions for this organisation.

The current ceasefire in Ukraine gives us cause for cautious optimism in relation to the crisis. However, the recent increase in violence along the contact line is a reminder of how fragile the truce remains. Ireland is strongly supportive of the role of the OSCE and in particular the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. The mandate and membership of the OSCE meant that we were uniquely placed to deploy the Special Monitoring Mission, to

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facilitate the work of the trilateral contact group, and to respond to the efforts of the Normandy Four in a timely and committed manner. We need to do everything possible under the new German chairmanship to bring the current peace efforts to a successful conclusion based on full respect for Ukrainian sovereignty. The Permanent Council should continue to take a close and constructive interest in the work of the trilateral contact group and the SMMU as they work towards the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. To this end, the renewal of the mandate of the SMMU beyond March is essential.

Maintaining the ceasefire is critical. But it is just the first step. We cannot lose sight of the fact that other key elements of the Minsk Agreements remain to be implemented. It is vital that work towards a political agreement based on the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements and respect for the core principles of the OSCE is continued. Drawing on our own experience in the Northern Ireland peace process, which took a further important step forward just a couple of weeks ago, we in Ireland have come to appreciate that even in the presence of continuing differences, including on important matters of principle, it is possible to work the common ground, build trust, and avoid backward steps.

Despite our recent activism in Ukraine, for at least a decade we the participating States have acknowledged that the OSCE is failing to live up to its full potential as a regional security organisation. Ireland believes that a greater level of ambition regarding the future of the OSCE will provide a platform not just to address the crisis in and around Ukraine but also the many other issues that should claim our attention. We also need to bear in mind a bigger picture. The OSCE is not 'an island unto itself.' We should constantly be alert to the possibilities that exist for cooperation with partners and with other organisations such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, and other regional bodies. We look to a future based on respect for OSCE principles in inter-state relations, mutual support in the development of open, democratic governance, protection of civil society space, and respect for Human Rights and cooperation across the three dimensions.

Ireland initiated the Helsinki +40 process during our Chairmanship in 2012. We welcome the decision we are taking this week to continue work on the renewal of the OSCE and will be glad to offer our full support to forthcoming Chairmanships in taking this work forward. We were glad to have an opportunity to hear from the Panel of Eminent Persons. The

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parameters of our dialogue have changed since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act. We need to adapt to these changes while remaining true to our core principles.

Debates over the Unified Budget absorb too much energy by comparison with the programming and budget cycle in comparable organisations. As Chair-in-Office in 2012, Ireland tabled a draft constituent document for the OSCE. We hope there will be an opportunity in 2016 to continue work in this area. In the matter of privileges and immunities we owe a duty of care to those who serve the OSCE in the field. Progress on these areas is important if the OSCE is to fulfil its potential as an effective regional security organisation.

My delegation strongly supports the work of Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commission for National Minorities, and the field operations throughout the OSCE region and commends their valuable contribution in helping participating States to implement our OSCE commitments. We are concerned at any attempts to undermine the effectiveness of these offices or to deprive them of adequate resources, and we reiterate our full support for the fulfilment of their mandates.

Mr. Chairman

Let us hope that by the time we meet in Hamburg in 2016, we will be in a position to affirm more clearly than we can today that each participating State has a stake in the future welfare of every other participating State. Ireland continues to believe in the indispensable role of the OSCE within the wider Europe. It is our intention to continue to offer the OSCE as much support as we can.

Thank you.