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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 88th JOINT MEETING OF
THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION AND
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 July 2023

Security and environment nexus

Madam Chairperson,

Over the years, we have time and again indicated our position of principle that the attempts to apply a broad interpretation to the mandate of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) are leading to its erosion. We have called for this stagnation on the part of the Forum to be overcome, in particular by reducing the space allotted to “soft” security issues on its agenda, which have barely any discernible impact on the continent’s politico-military climate. We have not been heeded. Unfortunately, the Bulgarian Chairmanship, which is mandated to consider the opinions of all participating States without exception, has also failed to take Russia’s arguments into account.

We are convinced that turning the FSC into an interest-based debating society is unacceptable given the highly charged politico-military situation in Europe. In that connection, we categorically object to and will not support any decisions or initiatives designed to give the FSC additional functions in the environmental field. This is not a topic for the FSC and we will not allow its mandate to be opened up. In the long run, promoting a non-consensus agenda could plunge the Forum’s work into a state of uncertainty.

A few words about the politico-military commitments of the OSCE participating States, which were sketchily mentioned in the concept note for today’s meeting.

Let us begin with the Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, which does not say a single thing about “the economy and the environment”, much less in connection with a mechanism for preventing dangerous military incidents. If some participating States want to carry out “environmental monitoring” of areas affected by emergency situations, then they can utilize the provisions of the Treaty on Open Skies for that purpose and hold the relevant discussions in the designated forum that is the Open Skies Consultative Commission. As for the Vienna Document 2011, instead of attempting to endow it with non-existent features, the Western participating States should return to fulfilling their commitments in good faith and stop using the Document as an instrument for waging an information war against the Russian Federation.

The mention of the OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition (SCA) also came as a surprise, given that it seems to have completely lost its relevance for the collective West. Over the past year and a half, none of the FSC Chairmanships have held a Security Dialogue devoted to a comprehensive review of the Document on SCA, and our Western interlocutors wrecked the annual meeting to assess the implementation of the OSCE Documents on Small Arms and Light Weapons and SCA, thus demonstrating their complete lack of interest in discussing the challenges, threats and consequences arising from their unrestrained illicit transfers of weapons and ammunition to the zone of armed conflict in Ukraine – issues ranging from deaths among the civilian population to feeding the black market for arms. It is symptomatic that they hush up their responsibility for these acts in every possible way. And now they are suddenly interested in how to reduce the environmental footprint resulting from the use of ammunition and explosive devices. There can be only one recommendation in that respect: do not put depleted uranium shells into the wrong hands, and the problem will go away by itself.

We have long felt a sense of bitter irony at the fact that some delegations persistently try tagging on to the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security any topic of interest to them. These topics have already included the subject of private military and security companies, as well as “gender” equality, which are completely outside the realm of the Code of Conduct. In other words, the Western participating States are endeavouring to create a semblance of feverish activity around the Code of Conduct, lest anyone should recall that, at the tail end of the twentieth century, they slammed the door on the key principles for the OSCE area, namely the indivisibility of security and not ensuring one’s own security at the expense of the security of other States.

All of this once again confirms that there is no direct link between environmental issues and the FSC’s mandate. We no longer intend to provide any further clarification in this regard.

At the same time, Russia is taking a responsible approach to the fulfilment of its OSCE commitments in the economic and environmental dimension. We agree that environmental degradation can have a serious negative impact on security, something that has been repeated many times in various OSCE documents, beginning with the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. This postulate was reflected yet again in Decision No. 3/21 on strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change, which was adopted at the 2021 Ministerial Council meeting in Stockholm. That document, adopted by consensus, supplemented the solid set of commitments by the OSCE participating States in the field of environmental protection, notably through the enhancement of international co-operation in this sphere. The 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security acknowledges that “co-operation on environmental issues may serve as a tool to prevent tensions, to build confidence and to promote good-neighbourly relations in the OSCE region”. This should be the focus of the efforts to fully unlock the potential of the OSCE’s second “basket”.

It is also true that environmental degradation could potentially serve as an additional factor in the emergence of conflicts. At the same time, each conflict situation has its own specific characteristics and requires a situation-specific approach. However, attempts to take the discussion in the opposite direction and raise the question of the environmental impact of a conflict in a particular country amount to a distortion of the mandate and are therefore counterproductive.

Now let us turn to the reference to Vilnius Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 on elements of the conflict cycle, also in the context of what was said earlier. The selective reading of that document raises questions. We should like to recall in particular paragraph 6 of that decision, in which the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the OSCE participating States urged the Chairmanship to convene without delay the Permanent Council or a joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council to consider early warning signals and possible response options. The Ministerial Council also recommended that “follow-up to discussions in the Permanent Council on emerging crises and conflict situations” be pursued.

Seeing that the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant was mentioned here today, we note that at the Permanent Council meeting on 10 November 2022, we reported the strike on the Kakhovka plant carried out by Ukrainian formations on 6 November 2022 using US-made HIMARS multiple-launch rocket systems. However, no response from the Chairmanship was forthcoming. What else had to happen for the Chairmanship to pay attention to this matter in terms of employing the early warning instruments? In the end, what was going to happen did happen: in the early hours of 6 June, following systematic attacks by the Kyiv regime on this critical infrastructure facility, which had never been used for military purposes, the hydroelectric dam was destroyed, resulting in significant damage. Against this backdrop, what is surprising is the Chairmanship's demonstrative unresponsiveness, over a period of at least six months, to warnings about specific threats and risks to the aforementioned facility, and the blatant politicization of the issue in the aftermath, with labels pinned left and right for the benefit of a group of certain OSCE participating States.

We see today's initiative to discuss the topic of environment and security as a manifestation of North Macedonia's EU aspirations in line with the approaches being promoted in the European Union in the context of the European Commission's report on addressing the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security and defence, which was published at the end of June this year. It has nothing to do with the objectives of strengthening international co-operation in the field of environmental protection and minimizing the negative effects of climate change in accordance with OSCE commitments.

Thank you for your attention.