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ENGLISH only

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**25<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council Milan,**

**7 December 2018**

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### EU Closing Statement

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1. We express our deep gratitude to Minister Moavero Milanese and to the Italian Chairmanship for the generous hospitality we have enjoyed here in Milan. Minister Moavero Milanese, you should be proud of Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni and his excellent team for their tireless efforts throughout the year.
2. When expressing a view on the final outcome, we will be leaving Milan with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we are pleased that we managed to adopt texts in all three dimensions, even though we would have preferred a higher level of ambition than the one we could agree to at 57.
3. Still, let us be very clear: in these difficult times, when common principles that we all have committed to are violated, respect for those principles must be restored. We deplore the fact that failing to agree on a substantial political declaration, or on a declaration addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine, has become a foregone conclusion.
4. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which we condemn and will not recognise, and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine continues to violate fundamental OSCE principles and commitments. This remains the most serious security challenge Europe is facing. We reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The European Union will support the continued international diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group. We strongly support the OSCE's role in the crisis and its efforts to facilitate the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, not least through the SMM's essential contributions. The restrictions imposed on our



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monitors and their assets are unacceptable. We call for the SMM's full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including Crimea and along the Ukraine-Russia state border. We also call on all sides to work effectively to fully implement the Minsk agreements and to re-establish full Ukrainian control of its internationally recognised borders. We have repeatedly condemned the recent so-called "elections" in certain parts of eastern Ukraine, and expressed our utmost concerns about the dangerous increase of tensions in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait. We are dismayed at this use of force by Russia which, against the backdrop of increasing militarisation in the area, is unacceptable and a stark reminder of the fact that, when international law is violated, tensions and instability are bound to rise, affecting us all.

5. The resolution of the protracted conflicts in the Republic of Moldova, in Georgia and of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains a priority for the European Union. We welcome today's Ministerial Declaration confirming the tangible progress achieved towards a settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. We call on all to continue to work, under the Slovak Chairmanship, on the three baskets of the agreed agenda for the negotiation process— in particular a comprehensive settlement including institutional, political and security issues. We welcome the joint statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries together with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan. We regret that it was not possible to adopt a statement on the conflict in Georgia.
6. It is deeply disappointing that we missed the opportunity to reach agreement on the draft decision on strengthening military transparency, risk reduction and incident prevention, a topic of high urgency and importance for many participating States. Our work towards achieving greater transparency and predictability must continue. We call for the modernisation of the Vienna Document which also provides ample opportunities for doing so. We emphasize the need to work towards creating an environment conducive to reinvigorating Conventional Arms Control and CSBMs. We also value the Structured Dialogue as a meaningful state-owned and state-driven process for in-depth exchanges on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area and we actively support it. Honest and genuine engagement by all participating States is key to this end.



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7. We welcome the adoption of a declaration on SALW/SCA, recognising the need to further enhance OSCE norms and best practices in order to better address present and emerging challenges.
8. We regret the lack of consensus on two topical texts aimed at addressing transnational threats: the proposed Decision on OSCE responses to the challenges related to returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters in the context of UNSCR 2396(2017), and the one on illicit trafficking in cultural property. Both drafts addressed important concerns to us, as well as to our Partners for Co-operation, and we should continue working on these issues.
9. The signals sent again from the parallel civil society conference reminded us about the urgent need to address the ongoing increasing restrictions on civil society and the crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms in many parts of the OSCE region. We appreciate the contribution of civil society in the implementation of our OSCE commitments, and we support their broad and unhindered participation in OSCE events.
10. We welcome the adoption of the decision on safety of journalists, after the extensive efforts put in the past years, by subsequent Chairmanships, to address the issue of freedom of expression and media freedom. There is a clear link between democratic, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to our joint security, and free expression and independent media. The many challenges to freedom of expression and media freedom in the OSCE area need to be taken with utmost seriousness by all OSCE participating States. Furthermore, violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive and persistent human rights violations across the OSCE area and we welcome the adoption of an important decision that strengthens our already existing commitments. We would have wanted a far more ambitious text, but we will work hard to ensure the most effective OSCE action in this field. Discussions on ensuring gender equality and advancing women's political participation must continue in the years to come.
11. We welcome that we adopted a decision on strengthening efforts to prevent and combat child trafficking, including of unaccompanied minors, considering the



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importance of the matter.

12. The European Union stresses its strong support for the OSCE autonomous institutions, the OSCE field missions and the Secretariat. We reiterate our deep appreciation for the work of ODIHR, the Representative of Freedom of the Media and the HCNM and our unwavering support for their mandates. In these times, participating States are in dire need of their assistance and support.
13. We reaffirm the importance we attach to our cooperation on economic and environmental issues as an important element of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. We welcome the adoption of the Declaration on the digital economy and the Decision on human capital development. However, in the context of global efforts to foster sustainable development and combat climate change, in particular in the context of the 2030 Agenda and after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, we deeply regret that we were not able to find consensus on a text dealing with transnational organised crime which damages the environment. Negotiations on this text should resume as soon as possible.
14. We warmly welcome that a Declaration on the Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean was adopted. We underscore that human rights and fundamental freedoms remain at the core of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security and we regret that language on gender equality and women's empowerment did not meet consensus. The Mediterranean remains a high priority for us and we recognise that the security of the OSCE area is inextricably linked to the Mediterranean region. We appreciate both the CiO's and the Slovak Chair's efforts throughout the year. The OSCE Mediterranean Conference in Malaga last October confirmed the relevance of energy in the security context and the opportunities that it presents.
15. We again emphasise the importance of incorporating the youth perspective in our work and of strengthening the participation of young people. In this context, we welcome the adoption of the Decision even if, here too, we would have wished for a more robust and comprehensive text.



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16. We greatly appreciate Slovakia's readiness to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE at this critical point in time. Minister Lajcak, we look forward to working with you and your able team during your Chairmanship and we wish you every success. You can count on our full support. In this vein, we would like to see timely adoption of the budget for 2019 and of a decision on scales of contributions. We warmly welcome the Ministerial Council's Decision that Albania will exercise the function of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2020. Finally, we look forward to our continued fruitful cooperation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

17. I request that this statement be attached to the journal of today's meeting.

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