



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council N° 1211 Vienna, 10 January 2019**

#### **EU Statement in response to the OSCE CiO Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák**

The European Union and its Members States warmly welcome the new OSCE Chairperson in Office, Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák, to the first meeting of the Permanent Council in 2019.

On assuming your responsibilities you indicated your aim to be ambitious in promoting dialogue, trust and stability in the OSCE area, stressing at the same time the need to be realistic, as challenges and complexities are rife. We welcome your priority areas for action in 2019: preventing, mediating and mitigating conflict while focusing on the people it affects; providing for a safer future; and promoting effective multilateralism.

The principles and commitments we agreed in Helsinki and Paris remain the foundation for sustainable peace in Europe. For multilateralism to be an effective means for security and human dignity, respect for those principles and commitments must be restored. The EU will continue to promote a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle.

Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which we will not recognise, and the clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014, remain the most serious violations of our fundamental OSCE principles and commitments today. We therefore welcome the importance that you attach to the resolution of this conflict, which is our key priority in the OSCE. We appreciate your intention to travel to Ukraine next week.

We fully share your call that a sustainable political solution is needed to this conflict. Such a solution must restore respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The full implementation of the Minsk Agreements is paramount in this regard, including unconditional and lasting respect for the ceasefire and full, safe, unconditional and unhindered access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission throughout Ukraine including along the Ukraine-Russia state border and the Crimean peninsula. Security of SMM personnel and assets is the responsibility of the parties. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially. We strongly support the efforts in the Normandy Format as well as the work in the Trilateral Contact Group.

We have repeatedly condemned the so-called "elections" in certain parts of eastern Ukraine which are a clear violation of the Minsk agreements. We have also expressed our utmost concern about the dangerous increase of tensions in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait and Russia's violations of international law. This also has a negative impact on the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. We reiterate our dismay over the unacceptable use of force by Russia on 25 November, which happened against the backdrop of increasing militarization in the area. We reiterate our strong call on Russia to release the captured vessels, their crew and equipment unconditionally and without delay. This incident is a stark reminder of the fact that when international law is violated tensions and instability are bound to rise, affecting us all.

We appreciate that you will strive to support the existing negotiating formats of the protracted conflicts in the OSCE area. The settlement 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 the Milan Ministerial Declaration confirming the tangible progress achieved towards a settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. We call on all to continue to work, under your 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 also welcome the joint statement at the Milan MC 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.

As you know, we are working for peace, stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans. The EU remains committed to the EU perspective of the region and is determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation, including through increased assistance, based on tangible progress, on the rule of law, as well as on socio-economic reforms, by the Western Balkans.

We strongly believe in the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. We are concerned about ongoing and increasing restrictions on civil society, crackdowns on human rights and fundamental freedoms, growing pressure on human rights defenders, attacks on journalists and other media actors as well as increasing intolerance in many parts of the OSCE region. The signals sent again from the civil society conference which took place in parallel to the Ministerial Council in Milan reconfirm the urgent need to address these worrying trends, which represent challenges to our common and indivisible security. Lasting security cannot be sustained without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. We thus underline the importance we attach to the third dimension in the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. Our OSCE commitments are more relevant than ever and we call on all participating States to redouble the focus on their implementation, including the recently adopted decision in Milan on the safety of journalists.

Our work towards achieving greater transparency and predictability in the politico-military sphere must continue. We call for the modernisation of the Vienna Document which provides ample opportunities for doing so. We encourage all participating States to re-engage on Vienna Document modernisation in 2019 and note that there are already a number of promising modernisation proposals on the table which enjoy widespread support. 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. We welcome the adoption in Milan of a Ministerial Declaration on OSCE efforts in the field of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition. We however regret that

it was not possible to reach consensus in Milan on a Ministerial Council Decision on strengthening military transparency, risk reduction and incident prevention: these remain important goals, the achievement of which could benefit all participating States.

The OSCE makes a valuable contribution in preventing and countering transnational and emerging threats and we should do what we can to strengthen our cooperation in this field, despite regrettably not having found consensus on two highly topical texts last December in Milan. We welcome your continued focus on strengthening cyber and ICT security, and in particular to further the implementation of the agreed CBMs. You also rightly emphasize the threat posed by violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism, as we need not only to counter terrorism but also to prevent it. One of the traditional Slovak priorities, which we support, is SSG/R. OSCE capacity building efforts across the security sector are most useful and help to implement UN cooperation. We stress that, in preventing and countering TNT, respecting human rights, working with civil society and adopting a gender-sensitive approach contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of our efforts.

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. You stressed that rapid technological change, digitalization and innovation offer vast opportunities, but can also pose challenges. Digital transformation has the potential to enhance our co-operation within the economic and environmental dimension by promoting sustainable economic growth and development as well as connectivity. The recent adoption in Milan of the Declaration on the digital economy and the Decision on human capital development provide a sound basis to further develop work to seize opportunities and tackle challenges in this specific field of the second dimension. The environmental field is no less important: we reiterate our call to see the text on combating transnational organized crime which damages the environment, so strongly supported in Milan, adopted soon.

The autonomous institutions and field operations whose work and mandates we fully support, play an indispensable role in the implementation of commitments across the OSCE area and we must ensure that they remain able to fulfil them. We also believe civil society is an essential partner for the implementation of our commitments.

Safeguarding the open character of the OSCE in relation to civil society organisations is of key importance to us. We count on the Slovak Chairmanship to continue working closely with civil society.

We welcome the Chairmanship's decision to mainstream gender throughout the OSCE. We use this opportunity to highlight, once more, the importance of implementing all gender-related OSCE commitments including the recently adopted Milan Decision on preventing and countering violence against women, and the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

The challenges we face in the OSCE area go beyond the borders of our Organization and we underline the importance of following a comprehensive approach, including through strengthened cooperation with Mediterranean and Asian partner countries, which should remain a priority. In anticipation of this year's 25th Anniversary of the Mediterranean Contact Group, we encourage participating States to revitalise the OSCE's commitment to the Mediterranean, in accordance with the 2018 Milan Declaration on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean.

We value Slovakia's emphasis on youth given the important role it can play in building not only peaceful and secure communities, but also vibrant economies and open societies.

Mister Minister, we greatly appreciate Slovakia's readiness to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE at a critical point in time. Minister Lajčák, 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 the adoption of the budget for 2019 and of new scales of contributions.

We are confident that with your experience and proven leadership you will successfully steer the OSCE through these turbulent and challenging times.

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

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.