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**EU Statement in response to the President of the OSCE
Parliamentary Assembly**

The European Union warmly welcomes the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Mr. George Tsereteli to the Permanent Council. As 2019 is just starting we wish you a fruitful new year.

One week ago, at the Permanent Council, the new Chairperson-in-Office Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia Miroslav Lajčák, outlining the priorities of the Slovak Chairmanship, offered a sobering analysis of the state of European security. Speaking about challenges, he pointed first of all to “a crisis on our doorstep”, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Minister Lajčák rightly lamented that “what is happening there ... is simply unacceptable” and stressed that “Slovakia strongly feels the urgency of the matter”. We agree on both counts.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine and its negative implications for the OSCE region remain the most serious security challenge Europe is facing. Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which we condemn and will not recognize, and the destabilization of eastern Ukraine continue to violate fundamental OSCE principles and commitments. Russia's unacceptable use of force against three Ukrainian naval vessels on 25 November was a stark reminder that when international law is violated tensions and instability are bound to rise. The only way to overcome this challenge is to restore full respect for the principles that have been violated.

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. The SMM, its monitors and assets must be protected, and allowed to carry out their mandate, not hindered or intimidated.

Such a serious conflict in the heart of our region must remain at the top of our respective priorities. We appreciate that you have personally led two delegations to Ukraine this past year, including to the areas on the frontline in Donbas. We also appreciate the visit to Ukraine this past December of two leaders of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions. Seeing up close the tragic human cost of the conflict, you have rightly stressed that urgent steps must be taken to alleviate the humanitarian situation, including the need to reach a sustained ceasefire and increased demining activities, for the sake of the civilian population and especially children. The parliamentary side can make an important contribution and reinforce the efforts of our side.

The peaceful 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 and enhanced efforts should be made at all levels to strengthen political will in order to make tangible progress for conflict resolution based on principles and norms of the OSCE and of international law. Protracted conflicts deserve our joint, continued attention, and we believe that parliamentarians can contribute to creating the conditions for the settlement of such conflicts. The status quo is detrimental to the security of the whole OSCE area. We welcome the readiness you expressed to work with the Chairperson-in-Office and his Personal and Special Representatives on mediating, resolving and preventing conflicts, as well as promoting a safe and secure future and recommitting to effective multilateralism.

We stress the importance we attach to the human dimension in the OSCE concept of comprehensive security, as lasting security cannot be sustained without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. We know that this strongly resonates with you and we welcome that the Berlin Declaration of

2018 and the resolutions there adopted are a clear indication of the priority that parliamentarians give to these challenges and of their willingness to tackle them proactively. 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. Our OSCE commitments are more relevant than ever and we call on all participating States to redouble their efforts in implementing them, including the recently adopted Milan MC decisions on the Safety of Journalists and Violence against Women. The Parliamentary Assembly, also through the work of its Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions can contribute to such efforts.

In this vein we echo the appeal of 14 January by the leaders of the PA's Democracy and Human Rights Committee for urgent steps by the Turkish authorities to ensure the safety of Turkish MP Leyla Güven, imprisoned pending trial.

We very much value the Parliamentary Assembly's role in election observation, as it contributes to strengthening international election observation efforts and to ensuring that elections comply with OSCE commitments and international standards. We reiterate our full support for ODIHR's election observation methodology and the independent, professional and impartial manner in which it is implemented by ODIHR in partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly. We look forward to the planned PA election observation at the upcoming elections in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, both the presidential elections in March and the parliamentary ones in autumn.

We appreciate the work carried out by the various PA committees and the special representatives, some of whom are parliamentarians from EU MS, to address specific cross cutting issues or geographic areas that can benefit from parliamentary attention. Also here we see opportunities for convergence and for reinforcing shared political messages.

In their travels throughout our region, members of the PA have the opportunity to experience first-hand the important work carried out by the OSCE field operations as

they assist host countries in putting their OSCE commitments into practice. We very much value the work field operations carry out. Equally, we value the OSCE autonomous institutions whose mandates and independence must be preserved.

The year that just started has a rich calendar of meetings and events, notably including the first meeting in a partner country outside the OSCE region. They offer many opportunities for the parliamentary side of our Organization to contribute to the achievement of the shared objectives and priorities. The decisions adopted at the Milan Ministerial Council and the resolutions adopted in Berlin last July should not live separate lives but should rather serve to cross fertilize the same ground on which we work. Members of the PA have an important contribution to make to our shared goals by generating political will in support of the full respect and implementation of OSCE commitments and by bringing the OSCE closer to our citizens.

President Tsereteli, in closing, we wish to assure you that we will be following with undiminished interest your personal activities and those of the PA, attentive to always better utilize occasions for synergies and cooperation.

I thank you for your attention.

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 the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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