



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

M A L T A

2024

**Thirty-First Meeting of the
Ministerial Council
5 and 6 December 2024**

Decisions of the Ministerial Council

**Statements by the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE and
delegations**

Reports to the Ministerial Council

Malta 2024

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I. DECISIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

DECISION No. 1/24
TIME AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
(MC.DEC/1/24 of 5 June 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Decides that the Thirty-First Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council will be held in Malta on 5 and 6 December 2024.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/1/24

INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

By the delegation of Liechtenstein (also on behalf of Albania, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom):

“I am speaking on behalf of the following participating States – Albania, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and my own country Liechtenstein – in relation to the Ministerial Council decision on the time and place of the next meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council.

In this context, we wish to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure:

Our delegations fully support this decision and look forward to the Ministerial Council meeting to be held in Malta on 5 and 6 December 2024.

We would, however, like to express our position that determining the time and place of the Ministerial Council meetings should not require a separate decision by the Ministerial Council nor by the Permanent Council. Instead, to promote efficiency, this determination should be entrusted to the Chairmanship-in-Office.

Consequently, we would support amending the OSCE Rules of Procedure to this effect.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.”

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus regarding the adoption of a Ministerial Council decision on the time and place of the next meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, the Russian Federation assumes that exhaustive measures will be taken by Malta as the host country of that event, and also by all transit countries, to ensure that the representatives of all OSCE participating States without exception, at the political level chosen by these States themselves, are able to attend the Ministerial Council meeting. This implies no discrimination with regard to the composition of national delegations, and also no impediments to the overflight or transit of members of delegations to the venue of the Ministerial Council meeting by the means of their choice, which may include special flights. In that regard, we take note of the assurances by the OSCE Chairmanship that Malta will make all the necessary efforts to that end.

We stress that the improper implementation of OSCE decisions governing the convening of a Ministerial Council meeting will make it impossible for any decisions or documents to be adopted at the meeting.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of today’s meeting of the Permanent Council.”

DECISION No. 2/24
APPOINTMENT OF THE OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL
(MC.DEC/2/24 of 6 December 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the decision of the Ministerial Council taken at its third meeting in Stockholm in 1992 to establish the post of Secretary General, Ministerial Council Decision No. 15/04 of 7 December 2004 on the role of the OSCE Secretary General, Ministerial Council Decision No. 18/06 of 5 December 2006 on further strengthening the effectiveness of OSCE executive structures and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/08 of 22 October 2008 on the periods of service of the OSCE Secretary General,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE Secretary General carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE Secretary General,

Considering that, according to Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/23 the term of office of the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid, came to an end on 3 September 2024,

Decides to appoint Mr. Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu as Secretary General of the OSCE for three years with effect from 6 December 2024.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/2/24

INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

In connection with the adoption of the decision for the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure. The United States welcomes the appointment of Mr. Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu. We support the work of the Secretary General and the OSCE Secretariat.

The Secretary General derives authority from the collective decisions of the participating States and acts under the guidance of the Chairperson-in-Office. He or she is the Chief Administrative Officer of the OSCE, and is tasked, among other things, to act as the representative of the Chairperson-in-Office and support him or her in all activities aimed at fulfilling the goals of the OSCE. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to alter the

mandate of the Secretary General or restrict the work of the Secretary General in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States regrets that participating States failed to adopt this decision before the previous Secretary General's term expired on 3 September. We underscore that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments, and decisions. It is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson."

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/2/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Canada (also on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland):

"In relation to the decision on the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, we would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and Canada:

We reiterate our gratitude to Malta's Chairmanship for their leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We welcome the appointment of Mr. Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu as Secretary General of the OSCE and we reiterate our commitment to the work of the Secretary General and the OSCE Secretariat.

We regret that consensus on the leadership of the Organization could not be reached earlier, leading to extended vacancies in these critical positions. This should not set a precedent for future similar decisions.

We reiterate the importance of co-operative decisions on the leadership of the Organization and the autonomous institutions that should be based on individual candidates and their ability to support OSCE principles and commitments. As participating States, we should avoid politicization of the consensus-based process and return to the spirit of multilateralism that guides our collaborative decision process.

Furthermore, we as participating States should strive to ensure gender equality in the leadership of the Organization, including by putting forward more women as candidates.

The Secretary General role is to be guided by Ministerial Council Decision No. 15/04. We recall that the Secretary General derives his/her authority from the collective decisions of the participating States and acts under the guidance of the Chairperson-in-Office, and that as representative of the Chairperson-in-Office supports him/her in all activities aimed at fulfilling the goals of the OSCE. We also recall that as Chief Administrative Officer of the OSCE the Secretary General is responsible to the Permanent Council for the efficient use of the Organization's resources and, as head of the OSCE Secretariat, is responsible for its effective and efficient management.

We would like to request that this statement be attached to the decision and reflected in the journal of the day.”

Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/2/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Albania:

“Thank you, Chairperson.

The delegation of Albania would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE in connection with the adoption of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General:

Albania joined the consensus on the appointments agreed at this Ministerial Council meeting for the positions of the OSCE Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and wishes them success in carrying out their duties.

We reaffirm Albania's long-standing and well-established commitment to security, co-operation, dialogue and multilateralism, which has been consistently demonstrated, both within and beyond the OSCE.

In light of the importance that Albania attaches to the OSCE and with a view to ensuring quality in its management, Albania put forward a high-profile candidate for the position of OSCE Secretary General.

We believe his unique and strong connection to the OSCE – serving throughout his career as Permanent Representative, Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Director at the Secretariat, and Minister of Foreign Affairs – along with his distinguished professional experience and diplomatic expertise, made him precisely the right person for the assignment at this critical juncture for the Organization.

Albania's candidate for OSCE Secretary General garnered clear and enthusiastic support from an overwhelming majority of participating States and faced no substantive objections. This was evident during numerous consultations, including his numerous personal engagements with delegations in Vienna, as well as in Preparatory Committee and informal ambassadorial meetings. To our understanding, this support remained unchanged throughout the process.

However, in an effort to overcome the stalemate and recognizing the importance of filling the senior management positions, Albania chose not to obstruct consensus on other candidates. This decision was made despite the significant influence of political considerations over merit-based principles in this process, which may have resulted in a decision that does not reflect the preferences of the majority.

It is Albania's firm belief that the OSCE executive structures are a shared asset of all 57 participating States. We remain convinced that greater inclusivity in senior roles, especially when based on the undeniable professional merits of candidates from smaller countries, would advance the Organization's interests and strengthen its sense of collective ownership.

We owe it to ourselves and to our people, including the more than 2,000 dedicated men and women that work for this Organization, not just to make decisions, but to make the right ones and deliver the right messages that reflect our values and drive the Organization forward.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the many partners who supported us throughout this process, offering their trust, solidarity and principled backing. Your advocacy for fairness and equity reinforces our unwavering commitment to the values that underpin this Organization.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted decision and included in the journal of the Ministerial Council meeting.

Thank you.”

Attachment 4 to MC.DEC/2/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the appointment of Mr. Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu as Secretary General of the OSCE, and wishes him every success in the role. We offer the United Kingdom’s full support to the new Secretary General in taking forward his mandate. We continue to urge participating States to ensure all OSCE structures, autonomous institutions and field operations are adequately financed to fulfil their mandates.

We note that, alongside the appointments to other OSCE leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE over the coming three years.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

Attachment 5 to MC.DEC/2/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Armenia:

“Madam Chairperson,

The delegation of the Republic of Armenia would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE in connection with the adoption of the Ministerial Council decisions on the appointment of the OSCE Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and on the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

It is our conviction that while building consensus on the appointment of the ‘top four’ positions of the OSCE institutions, the participating States were driven by the best interests of this Organization, upholding the importance of preserving its functionality, integrity and the ability to continue the mandated work of the OSCE based on our common principles, as well as the letter and spirit of decisions adopted in this framework.

We further believe that the distinguished heads of institutions should be cognizant of this critical reality and during their tenure should act in accordance with it. In all their activities they should do their best within their mandates to only strengthen this collaborative attitude of the participating States that led to their appointment and that is vital for properly performing the OSCE’s mission in these most challenging times in a principled and inclusive manner.

Having this in mind, Armenia wishes all the best to the newly appointed heads of institutions in dispatching their important duties.

We kindly ask that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision adopted and reflected in the journal of the day.

Thank you.”

DECISION No. 3/24
APPOINTMENT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE
OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
(MC.DEC/3/24 of 6 December 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the 1990 Charter of Paris and the decision of the Ministerial Council taken at its second meeting in Prague in 1992 concerning the development of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR),

Reaffirming the necessity that the Director of the ODIHR carries out her functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the ODIHR,

Considering that, according to Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/23, the term of office of the Director of the ODIHR, Mr. Matteo Mecacci, came to an end on 3 September 2024,

Decides to appoint Ms. Maria Telalian as Director of the ODIHR for a period of three years with effect from 6 December 2024.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/3/24

INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

In connection with the adoption of the decision for the appointment of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Ms. Maria Telalian. We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the ODIHR. Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the Director of the ODIHR in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States regrets that participating States failed to adopt this decision before the previous ODIHR Director's term expired on 3 September. We underscore that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments and decisions. It is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/3/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Sweden (also on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania and Switzerland):

“In relation to the decision on the appointment of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), we would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Switzerland and Sweden:

We reiterate our gratitude to Malta's Chairmanship for their leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We welcome the appointment of Ms. Maria Telalian as Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

We regret that consensus on the leadership of the Organization could not be reached earlier, leading to extended vacancies in these critical positions. This should not set a precedent for future similar decisions.

We reiterate the importance of co-operative decisions on the leadership of the Organization and the autonomous institutions that should be based on individual candidates and their ability to support OSCE principles and commitments. As participating States, we should avoid politicization of the consensus-based process and return to the spirit of multilateralism that guides our collaborative decision process.

Furthermore, we as participating States should strive to ensure gender equality in the leadership of the Organization, including by putting forward more women as candidates.

In connection to the decision on the appointment of the Director of the ODIHR, we would reiterate our strong support for the ODIHR's mandate and autonomous work in the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We also recall the ODIHR's election observation mandate and note that the ODIHR's election observation methodology is based on the principles of independence, impartiality and professionalism, is applied in the same manner in all participating States, and is globally recognized. We highlight the crucial role of its Director in exercising the ODIHR's mandate.

In recent years, some participating States have misused consensus to prevent the allocation of resources to the third dimension. We reiterate our position that the OSCE should have adequate resources to fulfil its mandate across all three dimensions.

We would like to request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day."

Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/3/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

"Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the appointment of Ms. Maria Telalian as Director of the ODIHR and wishes her every success in the role. The ODIHR's role is a manifestation of the principle that lasting security can only be achieved through respect for human rights and strong democratic institutions. The United Kingdom fully respects the autonomy of the ODIHR and calls on all participating States to offer their full support to the new Director in taking forward her mandate. We urge participating States to ensure the ODIHR is adequately financed to fulfil its mandate.

We note that, alongside the appointments to other OSCE leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE over the coming three years.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day."

DECISION No. 4/24
APPOINTMENT OF THE
OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES
(MC.DEC/4/24 of 6 December 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling the decision of the CSCE Helsinki Summit 1992 to establish a High Commissioner on National Minorities,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,

Considering that, according to Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/23, the term of office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, came to an end on 3 September 2024,

Decides to appoint Mr. Christophe Kamp as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities for a period of three years with effect from 6 December 2024.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/4/24

INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

In connection with the adoption of the decision for the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure. The United States welcomes the appointment of Mr. Christophe Kamp. We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the HCNM.

Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the HCNM in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States regrets that participating States failed to adopt this decision before the previous HCNM’s term expired on 3 September. We underscore that it is the

OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments and decisions. It is first and foremost the responsibility of participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/4/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Denmark (also on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland):

“In relation to the decision on the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), we would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark:

We welcome the appointment of Mr. Christophe Kamp as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and we reiterate our commitment to the autonomy and the work of the HCNM.

We reiterate our gratitude to Malta's Chairmanship for their leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We regret that consensus on the leadership of the Organization could not be reached earlier, leading to extended vacancies in these critical positions. This should not set a precedent for future similar decisions.

We reiterate the importance of co-operative decisions on the leadership of the Organization and the autonomous institutions that should be based on individual candidates and their ability to support OSCE principles and commitments. As participating States, we should avoid politicization of the consensus-based process and return to the spirit of multilateralism that guides our collaborative decision process.

Furthermore, we as participating States should strive to ensure gender equality in the leadership of the Organization, including by putting forward more women as candidates.

In recent years, some participating States have sought to weaken the OSCE's autonomous institutions and have misused consensus to prevent the allocation of resources to

all three dimensions. We reiterate our position that the OSCE should have adequate resources to fulfil its mandate across all three dimensions.

I would request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day.”

Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/4/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the appointment of Mr. Christophe Kamp as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and wishes him every success in the role. The United Kingdom fully respects the autonomy of the HCNM and calls on all participating States to offer their full support to the new High Commissioner in taking forward his mandate. We continue to urge participating States to ensure the HCNM is adequately financed to fulfil its mandate.

We note that, alongside the appointments to other OSCE leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE over the coming three years.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

DECISION No. 5/24
APPOINTMENT OF THE
OSCE REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA
(MC.DEC/5/24 of 6 December 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Recalling Permanent Council Decision No. 193 of 5 November 1997 on establishing an OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,

Reaffirming the necessity that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media carries out his functions in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,

Considering that, according to Ministerial Council Decision No. 6/23 the term of office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, came to an end on 3 September 2024,

Decides to appoint Mr. Jan Braathu as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for a period of three years with effect from 6 December 2024.

Attachment 1 to MC.DEC/5/24

INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

By the delegation of the United States of America:

“Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

In connection with the adoption of the decision for the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM), the United States would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United States welcomes the appointment of Mr. Jan Braathu. We fully respect the autonomy and support the work of the RFOM.

Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been pressure from some participating States to weaken the OSCE’s autonomous institutions and cut resources for them. Nothing in this decision should be interpreted to diminish the autonomy of or restrict the work of the RFOM in the full exercise of his or her mandate.

Finally, the United States regrets that participating States failed to adopt this decision before the previous RFOM's term expired on 3 September. We underscore that it is the OSCE participating States which have adopted the OSCE's principles, commitments and decisions. It is first and foremost the responsibility of the participating States to implement them.

I request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and that it be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.”

Attachment 2 to MC.DEC/5/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of Iceland (also on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Sweden, and Switzerland):

“In relation to the decision on the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM), we would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and Iceland:

We reiterate our gratitude to Malta's Chairmanship for their leadership in forging consensus on critical issues, thereby enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness.

We regret that consensus on the leadership of the Organization could not be reached earlier, leading to extended vacancies in these critical positions. This should not set a precedent for future similar decisions.

We reiterate the importance of co-operative decisions on the leadership of the Organization and the autonomous institutions that should be based on individual candidates and their ability to support OSCE principles and commitments. As participating States, we should avoid politicization of the consensus-based process and return to the spirit of multilateralism that guides our collaborative decision process.

Furthermore, we as participating States should strive to ensure gender equality in the leadership of the Organization, including by putting forward more women as candidates.

We welcome the appointment of Mr. Jan Braathu as Representative on Freedom of the Media. We reiterate our commitment to support the work and autonomy of the RFOM.

We reaffirm our expectation, as set out in Permanent Council Decision No. 193, that the RFOM should be impartial, independent and objective.

In recent years, some participating States have misused consensus to prevent the allocation of resources to the third dimension. We reiterate our position that the OSCE should have adequate resources to fulfil its mandate across all three dimensions.

I would request that this interpretative statement be attached to the decision and included in the journal of the day.”

Attachment 3 to MC.DEC/5/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the United Kingdom:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

In connection with the approval of the Ministerial Council decision on the appointment of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM), the United Kingdom would like to make the following interpretative statement under paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the OSCE Rules of Procedure.

The United Kingdom joins the consensus on the appointment of Mr. Jan Braathu as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and wishes him every success in the role. The United Kingdom fully respects the autonomy of the RFOM and calls on all participating States to offer their full support to the new OSCE Representative in taking forward his mandate. We continue to urge participating States to ensure the RFOM is adequately financed to fulfil its mandate.

We note that, alongside the appointments to other OSCE leadership positions, this decision supports the predictability and stability of the OSCE over the coming three years.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this interpretative statement be attached to this decision and included in the journal of the day.”

DECISION No. 6/24
TIME AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

(MC.DEC/6/24 of 6 December 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Decides that the Thirty-Second Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council will be held in Vienna on 4 and 5 December 2025.

DECISION No. 7/24
OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP IN THE YEAR 2026
(MC.DEC/7/24 of 30 December 2024)

The Ministerial Council,

Taking into consideration the recommendation of the Permanent Council,

Decides that Switzerland will exercise the function of the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2026.

Attachment to MC.DEC/7/24

**INTERPRETATIVE STATEMENT UNDER
PARAGRAPH IV.1(A)6 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

By the delegation of the Russian Federation:

“Having joined the consensus regarding the Ministerial Council decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2026, the Russian Federation notes the following.

Our assumption is that, as holder of the OSCE Chairmanship, the Swiss Confederation will make a meaningful effort to salvage the Organization’s ability to perform, and to restore a culture of professional, dialogue-oriented inter-State co-operation.

We expect Switzerland to adhere closely to the mandate of the Chairmanship-in-Office, as set out in the Porto Ministerial Council decision of 2002, and avert the recurrence of the shameful practice of previous Chairmanships with regard to introducing confrontationally worded topics for discussion at official events. We trust that the future Chairmanship will actively hold consultations with all participating States on the preparation of key events in the OSCE’s annual cycle, guarantee equal and unhindered access to these events for everyone without exception, and not allow programmatic work to be skewed altogether towards certain issues.

Permanent Council Decision No. 485 of 28 June 2002 – which stipulates that the OSCE’s leadership must act in the public eye exclusively in accordance with approaches agreed upon by consensus – remains a categorical imperative in the work of the Chairmanship-in-Office. No violations indulged in by previous Chairmanships may be used as a precedent or justification for any further deviations from that rule.

I request that this statement be attached to the adopted Ministerial Council decision and included in the journal of today’s meeting of the Permanent Council.”

**II. STATEMENTS BY THE
CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE
AND DELEGATIONS**

**OPENING STATEMENT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE**

(MC.DEL/68/24 of 11 December 2024)

Madam Chairperson,
Madam President,
Excellencies,
Officers-in-charge,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to welcome you to the 31st Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council.

The first hosted by Malta, and a proud milestone in our 60-year history as an independent island nation.

Despite our size, my country has always sought to maximize its contribution to the international community.

Thirty-five years ago – almost to the day – George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev held their historic meeting on Malta's stormy shores.

Times have changed fundamentally, but our relations are again defined by intense geopolitical rivalries and threats to European peace and security.

Today, as then, Malta stands as a staunch defender of peace and dialogue in the face of seemingly insurmountable differences and challenges.

In Skopje, you collectively entrusted us with the political leadership of the OSCE at a time of overlapping polycrisis, both for the Organization and globally.

One year on, my analysis is a sobering one.

This is our third meeting since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, which continues to pose a systemic threat to European security.

When I outlined our priorities to the Permanent Council in January, I made clear that what we do for peace today will help determine whether we live in war tomorrow.

Tomorrow has come, and little has changed. If anything, the situation has deteriorated.

Security threats – in the OSCE area and beyond – have become even more complex, while global divisions and uncertainties have continued to grow.

Institutionally, we found an OSCE on the brink.

No appointed senior leadership since September, no agreement on who will chair the Organization beyond its 50th year, and no Unified Budget since 2021.

The difficulties we face, colleagues, are not unique to the OSCE and have not developed in a vacuum.

They are symptomatic of a broader crisis of our collective commitment to multilateralism.

The principles, rules, and institutions that have underpinned international peace and security for almost 80 years are being questioned, challenged and actively undermined.

Despite this grim starting point, we were determined to ensure that these testing times would neither breed despair nor resign us to inaction.

We embraced the responsibility of leading this Organization and have sought to honour the trust placed in us at such a critical juncture.

Here, I would like to recognize the relentless efforts of my Chairmanship team in Vienna, led by Ambassador Natasha Meli Daudey, and the Foreign Ministry.

We simply would not have made it this far without your perseverance, dedication and positive energy throughout the year, despite the difficulties you faced with no preparation time.

You have done a tremendous job.

Under our motto “Strengthening Resilience, Enhancing Security”, we have sought to serve as a bridge between North Macedonia and Finland, by reinforcing the pillars of the OSCE and upholding the principles and commitments on which it stands.

As we prepared to host this meeting, we drew inspiration from Malta’s very own Fort Ricasoli and its lighthouse in illustrating this vision.

The lighthouse represents our principles and commitments, providing guidance as we navigate turbulent times. The fort stands for the OSCE’s resilience as a bastion of indivisible security.

Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the inviolability of frontiers, and the non-use of force are four of the central principles guiding relations between OSCE participating States, as set forth in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of the United Nations.

We continue to condemn the flagrant breaches of these obligations in Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine.

We call on the Russian Federation to withdraw from the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine and end this war.

The recent escalation of attacks must stop immediately to pave the way for a diplomatic process – one that leads to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

I also renew my urgent call for the immediate and unconditional release of our three illegally detained OSCE colleagues: Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov, and Dmytro Shabanov. This injustice must end, and they must be returned safely to their families.

While this war presents unprecedented challenges, the OSCE has assisted Ukraine's resilient people in mitigating its impact, including through the Support Programme for Ukraine. It also remains a vital platform for accountability.

This is a testament to the depth, value and flexibility of the OSCE's unique conflict management instruments and expertise.

These are ready to be activated to address further consequences of the war and in advancing any future settlement alongside our international partners.

Earlier this year, at the Summit for Peace in Ukraine, I underlined that our Organization can and should play an important role beyond the "day after".

Indeed, I am convinced that the OSCE must remain determined to facilitate and accompany a meaningful, result-oriented dialogue to build peace in and for Ukraine.

This is why we have also consistently included the impact of the war on Ukraine in all our initiatives and meetings across all three dimensions.

Colleagues,

In a year full of bumps in the road and different hurdles, we have prevailed in maintaining the OSCE's principled engagement across its comprehensive approach to security.

Our initiatives and high-level conferences have focused on key areas. These include building on our work as an elected member of the UN Security Council to advance the women, peace and security agenda.

In promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, meanwhile, we have placed particular emphasis on the urgent need for interfaith and intercultural dialogue to help bridge the divides between communities.

We have also addressed the effects of climate change and cyberthreats on our security, and promoted media literacy and the safety of journalists.

We have relied on the OSCE's toolbox and expertise in facilitating dialogue, preventing escalation, and promoting stability across the broader OSCE area.

My visits to countries affected by protracted conflicts in our region have shown me once again that the OSCE has the right instruments to address outstanding disagreements and contribute to diplomatic, sustainable solutions.

We have the experience and expertise to accompany those who seek greater security and prosperity.

Ultimately, however, the parties involved must be willing to lay the first brick in building trust and developing these crucial elements of peace.

I had the privilege of visiting almost all of the OSCE's field operations in Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.

Our missions are true success stories, proving that the OSCE can make a difference on the ground.

I highly recommend that you pay them a visit if you are in one of the host countries.

You will be able to see first-hand the dedication of the more than 2,000 OSCE staff and their excellent work with the respective host countries across all dimensions, and in accordance with their national priorities.

These experiences left me in no doubt that the work of this Organization has a real and material impact on the life and security of our people.

Unfortunately, a recurring theme throughout these visits is the significant impact of budget shortfalls and planning uncertainty on the well-being of OSCE staff and the operational effectiveness of the missions.

And this is a problem affecting not just the missions but the entire Organization.

For the OSCE to endure, for it to keep serving our communities, it needs to be functional.

As participating States, it is our collective duty to equip the OSCE, its field operations and institutions with the necessary resources, leadership and agility to fulfil their mandates and respond to existing and emerging security threats.

Colleagues,

The run-up to this meeting was dominated by our tireless efforts to find solutions for three critical issues: the appointment of the Organization's leadership, the approval of the Unified Budget, and a decision on future Chairmanships.

These decisions require the consensus of all 57 participating States.

For months, we have been stressing the urgency of these decisions.

We have underlined that if we fail to reach an agreement by the end of this meeting, the Organization's functionality and long-term survival will be in jeopardy.

I am pleased that a preliminary agreement has been reached on the appointments of the new OSCE Secretary General and the heads of institutions.

However, the vital decisions on the Unified Budget and who will chair the OSCE in 2026 and 2027 remain unresolved.

On the latter, I must express my gratitude to Cyprus for officially presenting its bid to assume this role in 2027.

We should all support and show due recognition to those who are willing to make such an important contribution to this Organization.

A solution seems to be within reach. But we are not there yet.

We recognize that what is on the table carries high political significance.

That is why we need one final political effort to make it a reality.

We can write history together. Of this I am convinced.

What we can no longer do, colleagues, is kick the can down the road – because we have run out of road.

Malta was aware of the challenges we would face when, at the eleventh hour, we accepted to take up the responsibility of this role.

As I said in Skopje, we remain steadfast believers in the OSCE, its relevance, and the principle of consensus which has underpinned the *raison d'être* of this Organization since its inception in 1975.

But let us be clear: taking responsibility cannot be a one-way street. The OSCE can only be as strong as its participating States allow it to be.

We must remember that the OSCE has never been a homogeneous organization of like-minded States.

As politicians and diplomats, we like to define ourselves as bridge-builders. Today, however, we are not talking about building or rebuilding bridges that have been destroyed in the recent past.

We are talking about preserving one of the few we have left. It is precisely in such times of crisis that we must keep this channel of communication open and functional.

In Skopje, we were given a clear task. Now here in Malta, at this delicate moment in our Chairmanship, I count on your full support, co-operation and flexibility in helping us get these critical decisions over the line.

We constantly talk about our collective responsibility for this Organization and our commitment to multilateralism. It's time to walk the talk.

The decisions we take over the next two days will determine whether we can finally set this Organization on a path towards a more sustainable, effective and resilient future. Let's get it done.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF BULGARIA**

(Annex 2 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Bulgaria fully aligns with the statement made by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union.

For the third year in a row, the OSCE Ministerial Council takes place in the shadow of gross violations and blunt denunciation of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and the OSCE principles and commitments laid down nearly 50 years ago to prevent new wars in Europe. The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has brought the continent to the most challenging times in decades and has exploded the tacit consensus since the end of the Cold War that inter-State war around the globe is a phenomenon of the past.

The UN Charter and the OSCE founding documents have been clear: the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States must be respected, and borders cannot be changed by force. We have also agreed here in this Organization as a family of sovereign, free and independent States that each and every participating State has the right to determine its own foreign policy and security arrangements.

The resilience and determination of the Ukrainian people to face unyielding hostilities and to defend their homeland from the Russian aggression for more than a thousand days already, are remarkable. Bulgaria will continue to stand firmly by Ukraine and to support its sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence as the country exercises its inherent right to self-defence as enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter, including through the possibility of striking any military target involved in operations targeting its territory.

We condemn the persistent attacks on civilian targets, devastation and destruction of critical infrastructure in Ukraine by the Russian Federation, including of substations and energy supplies of the Ukrainian nuclear power plants. The latter not only bring everyday suffering to the civilian population but continue to fuel the reckless Russian roulette game with nuclear safety and security threatening a much wider region. Those actions must stop immediately. There should be no impunity for any war crimes or violations of international humanitarian law committed during this war.

The regular nuclear arms rhetoric from Moscow threatens to bring the world to the brink of a major war with devastating global impacts. We strongly condemn all the military support that Belarus, the DPRK and Iran are providing to Russia for its aggression that further escalates tensions and has a global destabilizing potential.

Russia's war against Ukraine has changed profoundly the security and economic landscape in the Black Sea region. The escalation of Russia's military activities in the Black Sea, the attacks against Ukraine's ports and other facilities, and the imposed restrictions on freedom of navigation, trade and food supply chains are a matter of particular concern for Bulgaria as a littoral State.

Russia must immediately cease its military actions and unconditionally withdraw all of its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. This war must end with a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on international law, including the UN Charter and respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. For achieving this goal, Bulgaria will continue to engage in the efforts to support the implementation of President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula. Our support for Ukraine remains unwavering and will continue through all available OSCE tools and mechanisms, including the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine but also by channelling Bulgarian development funds with priority to Ukraine.

We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to release immediately and unconditionally the three illegally detained staff members of the former OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

While Europe is facing the most significant security crisis since decades, we should not lose sight of the other conflicts in the OSCE area. They remain a matter of serious concern and possible source of further instability. Bulgaria will continue to support the diplomatic efforts to find working and lasting solutions to the protracted conflicts based on international law, the UN Charter and OSCE principles and commitments.

Colleagues,

Against the backdrop of turbulence and increasing security challenges beyond the OSCE area, it is our responsibility as participating States to work against the dismantling of the security architecture established in Europe through the commitments undertaken in this Organization. But it is our responsibility also to prevent the collapse of the OSCE as a consensus-based co-operative security organization firmly settled on the Helsinki Decalogue with confidence and mutual respect. What is at stake now is not just the OSCE's functionality and ability to perform. The larger stake is to safeguard the enduring value of the OSCE as a forum for dialogue, transparency and confidence-building, a very special owner of a conflict management toolbox. We should not allow the institutional integrity, the operation of the field missions and the financial stability of the Organization to become victims of differences of opinion and be taken hostage to political games.

In this vein, we welcome the agreement on the appointment of the "top four", and congratulate the incumbent Chairmanship for this achievement. We hope the good will and political courage will also prevail to solve the issues with the decisions on the 2026 and 2027 OSCE Chairmanships and the adoption of the Unified Budget. We extend our strong support to Cyprus for their readiness to take over the 2027 OSCE Chairmanship.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Maltese OSCE Chairmanship for their hospitality and commend them for their leadership of the Organization in hard and very challenging times.

I wish resilience and success to Finland as the incoming Chairmanship, and reassure them of Bulgaria's full support for their efforts to navigate the Organization in the year of a symbolic anniversary for the OSCE.

I thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

(Annex 3 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

The delegation of Hungary, in its capacity as EU Presidency, passed the floor to the representative of the European Union, who delivered the following statement:

The European Union extends its sincere gratitude to the Maltese Chairperson, Deputy Prime Minister Ian Borg, for the hospitality and the leadership demonstrated during a particularly challenging year. The ongoing illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine has tested the Organization's resilience and functionality. We also commend Ambassador Natasha Meli Daudey and her dedicated team in Vienna for their tireless efforts, particularly in fostering consensus on critical issues such as the "top four" appointments, future Chairmanships and the Unified Budget.

We welcome the newly appointed Secretary General and the heads of the three autonomous institutions, and we underscore the shared responsibility of all participating States to maintain the OSCE's effectiveness across all three dimensions of security, firmly rooted in our shared principles and commitments.

Adequate financial resources are essential to achieve this goal. We regret that, despite the tremendous efforts of the Maltese Chairmanship until the eleventh hour, a decision on the 2024 Unified Budget could not be reached.

For the third consecutive year, Russia has failed in its attempts to misuse this forum to justify its war of aggression or deflect its accountability. Groundless claims and false accusations were met with widespread and resolute condemnation. Russia's brutal war represents a flagrant violation of international law, including the UN Charter, as well as OSCE principles and commitments. This war poses the gravest threat to European security. The overwhelming support among participating States for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders highlights the unwavering and non-negotiable nature of these fundamental principles.

The European Union and its Member States remain steadfast in their commitment to supporting Ukraine and its people. Accountability for all crimes committed in the context of Russia's war of aggression, including the crime of aggression itself, is a priority. We also emphasize the importance of the discussions held during the side event, "In Russia's Captivity: Way to Freedom," co-sponsored by the European Union. We will continue to demand the immediate release of all individuals unlawfully detained by Russia, including the three OSCE staff members. Russia must fully comply with its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, ensuring humane treatment for all Ukrainian captives.

We recall the European Union's attachment to the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the signing of a peace agreement.

We reaffirm our commitment to preserving and strengthening the OSCE's tools and mechanisms across all three dimensions of security, grounded in our shared principles. We look forward to supporting Finland as it assumes the Chairmanship and leads the Organization in addressing the current unprecedented challenges to European security.

To conclude, the crisis we face is not due to a flaw in the rules or principles of the European security order, nor is it a failure of the OSCE. Rather, it is the failure of one participating State, actively supported by another, to adhere to these agreed-upon principles. We call on Russia to immediately end its war of aggression against Ukraine and to fully and unconditionally withdraw its forces from Ukraine's internationally recognized territory. A common and indivisible security space can only be achieved when all participating States uphold the universal values, principles and rules to which they have committed.

We request that this statement be attached to the journal of today's Ministerial Council meeting.

I thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF CANADA**
(Annex 4 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Mr. Chairperson,

In addition to the statements that Canada has joined, I would like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

First, I extend my gratitude to Malta, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Malta's OSCE delegation, for their warm hospitality during this Ministerial Council meeting and the various meetings hosted in your beautiful country over the past year.

I also wish to commend the OSCE staff for their creativity, determination and resilience in upholding the Organization's mandate despite the challenging circumstances.

The OSCE offers a robust set of tools to prevent conflict and enhance security.

The issues we face today are not due to the OSCE's shortcomings but stem from the blatant refusal of some States to adhere to the Helsinki Final Act principles and their OSCE commitments more generally, with Russia's actions in Ukraine being the most egregious example.

To support all OSCE participating States in meeting their commitments, it is essential that the Secretariat, field missions and autonomous institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities – be allowed to fulfil their mandates.

No single participating State should be able to block unilaterally the OSCE's budget or other important decisions and, in the process, weaken the OSCE, its autonomous institutions and field missions.

We regret that the consensus principle continues to be abused.

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine shows its rejection of the UN Charter and OSCE commitments. Its attacks on civilians and atrocities in occupied areas reveal a blatant disregard for human rights and international humanitarian law and its threat of escalation is a rebuttal of its Helsinki Final Act commitments.

Canada stands with Ukraine in its defence of independence, freedom and democracy. We regret that Belarus has been complicit in Russia's actions and in undermining the OSCE from within.

The OSCE, created during a time of division, remains a crucial platform for finding common ground and restoring Euro-Atlantic security.

We look forward to supporting Finland as the Chairmanship in 2025. We are confident that Finland will guide the Organization with integrity, upholding and defending the OSCE's fundamental principles and commitments.

We welcome Cyprus' offer to chair the Organization in 2027.

Canada thanks you, Mr. Chairperson, for the steadfast and principled leadership you have demonstrated, and for the exemplary work of your team.

Thank you.

I would like to request that this statement be attached to the journal of this meeting of the Ministerial Council.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

(Annex 5 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

This Ministerial Council meeting has focused rightly on the importance of respect for the fundamental principles of this Organization – the very principles Russia blatantly and brutally disregards with its illegal war against Ukraine. As we have done since the beginning of Russia’s war, speaker after speaker at this Ministerial Council meeting has stood with Ukraine in defence of the OSCE’s bedrock principles and against Russia’s aggression. Speaker after speaker has condemned and rejected Russia’s attempts to impede the work of this Organization in order to avoid accountability for its malign actions in pursuit of the Kremlin’s territorial ambitions and designs to control its sovereign neighbours.

To Chairperson-in-Office Borg and your fantastic team led by Ambassador Meli Daudey, thank you for taking on the responsibilities of the Chairmanship in 2024. Your principled leadership has kept the Organization focused on Russia’s war against Ukraine while also advancing the OSCE’s vital work across the region in all three dimensions. You had a daunting agenda and despite some disappointments Malta has done a great service to this Organization with your successes.

First of all, congratulations on bringing us to consensus on the “top four”. We now have four senior leaders appointed for three years. There is still work to do on future Chairmanships. We hope we will get movement on a 2026 OSCE Chairmanship before too long, and we welcome and fully support Cyprus’ bid to chair the OSCE in 2027.

Mr. Chairperson, it is deeply regrettable that the lack of a Unified Budget since 2021 has forced the OSCE – in particular the field missions – to maintain operations day-to-day and respond to urgent needs without predictable resources that enable effective planning. We urge all participating States to negotiate in good faith on the Finnish Chairmanship’s proposed 2025 Unified Budget, and as others have noted, there might still be a chance for 2024. At present, unfortunately, lack of good faith on the part of one participating State has prevented agreement in Malta, and has contributed to the non-functioning of our Organization.

To Finland, you have the United States’ full support for what we are confident will be a consequential Chairmanship marking 50 years of the Helsinki Final Act. We know that you will take this Organization forward, confident in the continuing relevance of its founding principles which will guide our work as we tackle ongoing challenges in all three dimensions and new ones the future is sure to bring.

Mr. Chairperson, many times during the Helsinki Final Act’s 50 years, my country and other participating States have rallied to the defence of its core principles whenever they were under siege. Our collective resolve in defence of the Helsinki principles has given the OSCE important political and moral weight to channel change peacefully when historic opportunities have opened.

The need for the OSCE never has been more acute. We need the OSCE’s capacity, its flexibility, its platform for dialogue, and its credibility to work with governments and civil society from North America to Europe and Central Asia in building peace, creating conditions for prosperity, advancing democratic governance and promoting respect for

human rights. Together, we must strengthen the resilience of this unique Organization so that it will continue the work that no other international organization is positioned to attempt.

As we look to the future, we should sharpen our focus on the politico-military and economic and environmental dimensions and on issues like border security and transnational threats, as well as hybrid concerns.

Looking to the future, we should all aim to sustain our assistance to Ukraine. The OSCE and its Support Programme for Ukraine can play a key role in responding to the problems caused by Russia's war and fostering reforms that will help Ukraine along its chosen democratic path and toward integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. Beyond Russia's abuses and atrocities against the people of Ukraine, we also must continue to address the challenges for democracy and human rights elsewhere in the OSCE area, such as the proliferation of undemocratic laws that restrict civil society and independent media, and the continuing unjust detentions of individuals in multiple countries just for, as the Helsinki Final Act puts it, "knowing and acting upon their rights."

Progress between Armenia and Azerbaijan in negotiations means a peaceful and prosperous South Caucasus is in closer reach than ever. The OSCE must be ready to support good faith, participating State-driven efforts to build mutual trust in the region. We encourage the parties to seize this historic opportunity and not let disagreements outside the scope of an agreement slow this move toward peace. A binding peace agreement is the strongest guarantee for the region's future and should be signed as soon as possible.

We see emerging opportunities for greater co-operation with Central Asian States, particularly on second dimension priorities, including water security.

The Helsinki Final Act at 50 is an opportunity to increase the visibility of the OSCE field missions. Every day, the missions' work helps to defuse tension, improve governance, and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. They need to be adequately resourced.

We can deepen co-operation with the OSCE's Partners for Co-operation, including partners in the Indo-Pacific. As Russia's growing reliance on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has demonstrated, developments in the Indo-Pacific region directly affect the OSCE area – and vice versa. The OSCE's partnerships for co-operation will be crucial to addressing these and other shared and interconnected security challenges.

And we will continue to value the essential role and substantial contributions of civil society in promoting implementation of the rich body of commitments that all participating States have made. We appreciate the recommendations put forward at the parallel civil society event earlier this week. We look forward to discussing ways to further strengthen civil society engagement with the OSCE.

The United States remains dedicated to the OSCE and advancing our shared goal of a secure, peaceful and prosperous region where the human rights and dignity of all are respected. We are ready and willing to partner with all those who share that goal. Let us all support this Organization and the incoming Finnish Chairmanship-in-Office so that the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act testifies to our powers of innovation as well as our passion for freedom.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF DENMARK
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, ANDORRA,
AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA,
BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, CZECHIA, ESTONIA,
FINLAND, FRANCE, GEORGIA, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY,
ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY, LATVIA, LIECHTENSTEIN,
LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MALTA, MOLDOVA, MONACO,
MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH MACEDONIA,
NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SAN MARINO,
SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND,
UKRAINE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 6 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 44 participating States: Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the EU and its Member States, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and my own country, Denmark.

Mr. Chairperson,

In December 2023, as we marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this year, as we mark the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, we are reminded of how nations came together in the wake of the Second World War to build a framework to ensure future peace and security so that the horrors of that war were never repeated. These seminal documents underscored the need to protect the inherent dignity and rights of all individuals, in peace and in war.

In the decades that followed, we saw progress on strengthening human rights protections. In the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, we further acknowledged that ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is a prerequisite for lasting security and peace among and within States.

The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, with human rights, democracy and the rule of law at its core, is our shared commitment. Yet, in recent years, actions taken by the governments of some participating States – whether against fellow participating States or against their own people – have challenged these hard-won achievements, undermining the very progress we have collectively worked for, for so long.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, enabled by the Lukashenka regime in Belarus, and other third countries, remains the starkest example, reminding us all that human rights and fundamental freedoms are among the primary targets of an aggressor. We are gravely concerned by the findings of the 2024 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report regarding the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation. The report detailed allegations of "widespread and systematic" violations by the Russian

authorities and concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has also concluded that it has sufficient evidence to determine that Russian authorities have acted pursuant to a co-ordinated State policy and have therefore committed crimes against humanity of torture. These reports add to the ever-growing evidence of Russia's systemic disregard for human rights and international humanitarian law.

We also remain deeply concerned by the Kremlin's operations to forcibly transfer Ukrainian children within Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine and/or deport them to Russia. Children have been subjected to pro-Russian indoctrination and in some cases adopted by Russian families. The May 2023 Moscow Mechanism expert report concluded that this practice may amount to a crime against humanity.

We strongly condemn all violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. All alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes, and crimes against humanity must be duly and thoroughly investigated and those responsible held to account, including for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. All civilian detainees must be released immediately and all forcibly transferred or deported children must be returned safely to Ukraine, or to a third location, taking into account the best interests of the child.

We are also concerned that the human rights situation within Russia has deteriorated further despite the recommendations of the 2022 Moscow Mechanism report, which clearly demonstrated the link between Russia's domestic repression and its threats to international peace and security.

Meanwhile, in Belarus, while acknowledging the release of some political prisoners, the regime's harsh repression of those advocating for peaceful democratic change remains ongoing, with an estimated nearly 1,300 political prisoners and credible reports of large-scale torture and other mistreatment, including incommunicado detention.

Mr. Chairperson,

The foundations of freedom, equality and justice are under pressure across the OSCE area. An alarming rise in violence against persons based on their religion or belief, as well as overall intolerance and discrimination including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry are limiting the full and equal participation and security of all people in our societies.

Civil society is an indispensable part of our countries' conscience and an important partner in advancing the values and work of this Organization. Therefore, it is with deep regret that we observe a shrinking civic space within many OSCE participating States, including through the use of so-called foreign agent legislation or "sovereignty protection" measures. Authorities of a number of participating States beyond Russia and Belarus threaten and arbitrarily arrest and detain peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, political opponents, and journalists and media actors. We pay tribute to the individuals and civil society organizations that work tirelessly, often at great personal risk to their livelihoods and even their lives, to defend our shared dedication to democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

To that end, we highly value the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting as an important platform for participating States and civil society to assess the implementation of OSCE commitments in the human dimension and discuss how to improve it. While the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference has proved itself a valuable alternative, the ongoing obstruction of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is unacceptable. We emphasize the necessity of holding it next year as mandated and we will support the 2025 Chairmanship in these efforts. Further, we commend the OSCE autonomous institutions for their vital role in promoting the implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments by participating States. Their autonomy and dedication are indispensable for advancing democracy, the respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

Recognition that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is integral to comprehensive security is enshrined in the Decalogue of the Helsinki Final Act. We will continue to speak out when democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated or abused, whether it is human rights defenders, journalists and media actors facing reprisals, including imprisonment, for their brave work, or violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters aspiring for democratic change. We will continue to fight for women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights and to promote gender equality. We will press for the release of all those arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for knowing and acting upon their human rights. We will keep pressing for the eradication of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other ill treatment. We will continue to support free and fair elections. We will promote tolerance and non-discrimination and condemn, investigate and prosecute hate crimes, including online. We will continue to demand accountability for the crimes committed. We will challenge stereotypes and prejudice, combat myths and disinformation with facts, and promote a world where no individual is left behind or targeted for who they are, for whom they love, for what they look like, or for what they say, believe or do not believe.

All participating States have categorically declared that commitments in the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned. We will continue to work for the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments.

In closing, we thank the OSCE Chairmanship and the Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee as well as the autonomous institutions for their tireless work to strengthen the human dimension in these challenging times.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF BELARUS, KAZAKHSTAN,
KYRGYZSTAN, TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN)**

(Annex 7 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

We, a group of OSCE participating States,

Are deeply concerned about the growing threat of terrorism and are aware that there are a number of internal and external factors that contribute to the serious problem of radicalization, which breeds violence and promotes involvement in terrorist and extremist activities;

Offer our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the peoples and governments affected by terrorist acts in the OSCE area and beyond;

Unequivocally condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, recognizing that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever and by whomsoever committed;

Express great alarm at the growing number of terrorist and other extremist acts that pose a threat to society and the State, which are committed under the influence of radical ideas, including on the grounds of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance or in the name of religion or belief, while stressing that terrorism and extremism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group;

Oppose double standards in the fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as attempts to use terrorist and extremist groups for self-serving purposes;

Reaffirm our unwavering determination to remain united in the international fight against terrorism and to work together to prevent and suppress terrorist acts, and also to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and extremism by strengthening co-operation, fully respecting the central and co-ordinating role of the United Nations, complying with the relevant obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and relevant international conventions and protocols, implementing the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and implementing in a balanced manner the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy;

Acknowledge that States should play a leading role in countering terrorist and extremist threats and, in this regard, emphasize the importance of developing regional and international co-operation to strengthen the relevant capacities of State institutions, recognizing that this should take into account, first and foremost, States' experience and priorities and the national context in view of the various legal, political, socio-economic, cultural, religious and other local specificities;

Consider it necessary to step up States' individual and collective efforts to counter radicalization that leads to terrorism and extremism motivated by terrorist ideas and other radical ideologies, including religious intolerance, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and

ethnic and racial discrimination, which promote incitement to terrorism and recruitment for terrorist activities;

Also call for the implementation of comprehensive measures to counter the financing of terrorism and other forms of support for terrorist activities, including by suppressing recruitment, weapons supply channels and the cross-border movement of terrorists;

Believe it is necessary to continue to enhance advanced methods and tools for combating terrorism, in particular to stop attempts by terrorists and extremists to use modern information and communication technologies, including the Internet, to disseminate their radical ideology and practices;

Emphasize the importance of eliminating the causes of and conditions for the emergence and spread of radicalism, primarily among young people, of involving the education system, the media, civil society, religious leaders, academic structures and the business community in the various preventive measures and outreach undertaken by States in order to raise awareness of the danger of the ideologies and activities of terrorist and extremist organizations, and of advancing the principles of tolerance, social cohesion and respect for ethnic, religious and cultural diversity;

Note the particular relevance of the efforts to deradicalize and socially reintegrate individuals who have been influenced by radical ideology, including those previously involved in the illegal activities of terrorist and extremist organizations, those held in detention facilities for committing crimes of an extremist or terrorist nature, and those who have served their sentences for engaging in terrorism and extremism, including so-called foreign terrorist fighters;

Call upon the OSCE executive structures, within their existing mandates, to actively promote the development of co-operation through an inclusive regional dialogue on preventing and combating terrorism with the involvement of all participating States and interested Partners for Co-operation by encouraging the exchange of national experiences and best practices in this area, and to assist participating States (if necessary and upon their request) in implementing their relevant international obligations, while also taking into account their national priorities and legal, political, socio-economic, cultural, religious and other local specificities;

Call upon all OSCE participating States to discuss and possibly develop common measures to counter terrorist and extremist threats on the basis of the relevant collective commitments, including those adopted within the OSCE.

I kindly ask you, Mr. Chairperson, to attach this statement to the journal of this meeting of the Ministerial Council.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF KAZAKHSTAN
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, HUNGARY,
KYRGYZSTAN, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN)**
(Annex 8 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

We, a group of OSCE participating States,

Reaffirm our commitment to respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, as stipulated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and in the relevant OSCE commitments in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination;

Strongly condemn all manifestations of discrimination, violence and terrorist acts against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions. Note that acts of terror committed by individuals or groups identifying themselves with a particular religion or belief can never justify intolerance towards people on the basis of their religion. Categorically reject the equation of terrorism and violent extremism with any religion;

Express serious concern at the increasing number of incidents targeting Christians and Muslims in the OSCE area and in neighbouring regions, including acts of intolerance, discrimination, prejudice, violence and hate crime, which pose a challenge to our stability and security and to the very existence of Christian and Muslim communities, their holy sites and places of worship;

Also express deep concern at the continuing acts of intolerance, violence and terrorism against people on the basis of religion or belief, including against members of other religions;

Commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 of the Declaration on Enhancing Efforts to Combat Anti-Semitism (MC.DOC/8/14) and emphasize in this regard the pressing need to accomplish the urgent task contained therein to elaborate declarations on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions;

Call upon political leaders and public figures in OSCE participating States to speak out against hate-motivated incidents and crimes committed against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions on the basis of their religion, to promote relevant educational programmes and to take steps to effectively counter manifestations in the OSCE area of intolerance and discrimination against Christians and Muslims and members of other religions on the basis of their religion or beliefs.

I kindly ask you, Mr. Chairperson, to attach this statement to the journal of this meeting of the Ministerial Council.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF BELARUS
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN)**

(Annex 9 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

We, a group of OSCE participating States,

Express our deep conviction that the cultural heritage of each of us represents an integral part of our civilization, memory and shared history that must be passed on to future generations;

Reaffirm the importance of the complete and lasting documentation of sites, structures, cultural landscapes, objects and cultural systems, including historical, religious and cultural monuments, as they presently exist;

Express deep concern at the increasing number of deliberate attempts at, and incidents involving, the desecration or destruction of monuments erected in honour of those who fought against Nazism during the Second World War, which are a consequence of the failure to implement the relevant OSCE commitments, including the 1991 Document of the Cracow Symposium on the Cultural Heritage of the CSCE Participating States, and a violation of the relevant bilateral agreements, and urge respect for, unimpeded access to and prevention of the vandalism and destruction of memorials and graves, regardless of their location;

Express our concern at the shameful actions connected with the glorification of Nazism, including the spraying of graffiti with pro-Nazi content, particularly on monuments to the victims of the Second World War;

Welcome the efforts of participating States to preserve the historical truth, including through the construction and preservation of monuments and memorials to those who fought in the ranks of the anti-Hitler coalition;

Call upon the OSCE participating States that have not yet done so to take appropriate measures, including in the educational sphere, to counter the distortion of history and the outcome of the Second World War and to accurately reflect those tragic pages in history, first and foremost the suffering of millions of people as a result of the spread of the misanthropic ideology of Nazism and fascism;

In this regard, we welcome the United Nations General Assembly resolution on combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which is a testament to the international community's resolve not to repeat the tragic mistakes of the past and to build the future on the basis of unifying principles.

I kindly ask you, Mr. Chairperson, to attach this statement to the journal of this meeting of the Ministerial Council.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF SLOVAKIA
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF BULGARIA, CANADA, CZECHIA,
DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, ICELAND, IRELAND, LATVIA,
LITHUANIA, NORWAY, POLAND, ROMANIA, SWEDEN, UKRAINE,
THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**
(Annex 10 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

This statement is delivered on behalf of Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

We reaffirm our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Sixteen years since the Russian Federation's military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and underline the need for peaceful resolution of the conflict based on full respect for international law and commitments, including the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.

We condemn Russia's military aggression against Georgia in 2008 in blatant violation of international law and express our concern that Georgia has been a target of Russia's hybrid tactics as well as conventional warfare ever since regaining its independence. We express our deep concern over Russia's ongoing illegal military presence, military exercises and violation of airspace in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. In this regard, we express deep concern over the steps taken to establish a Russian naval base in the Ochamchire district of the occupied Abkhazia region as another provocative attempt to destabilize the already dire situation on the ground and in the wider Black Sea region. We also reiterate our condemnation of Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine.

We welcome Georgia's compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement. We call upon Russia to fulfil immediately its clear obligation under the ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, as well as its commitments to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and not to impede the creation of international security arrangements on the ground. We call upon Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to ensure the safe and dignified return of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their homes in a manner consistent with international law.

We condemn the steps aiming to incorporate Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russia's political, military, social, economic, judicial and other spheres, including attempts at implementation of the so-called integration and alliance treaties between Russia and Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, which constitute a clear violation of international law by the Russian Federation and directly contradict OSCE commitments. We further condemn transferring Sokhumi airport to Russia for reconstruction and operation, the illegitimate establishment of polling stations for Russian presidential elections in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia in March 2024, and the so-called parliamentary elections in the South Ossetia region of Georgia in June 2024 without

Georgia's consent. We are concerned over Russia's hampering of the activities of international organizations operating on the ground and restricting the confidence-building efforts. We urge Russia to reverse its steps to incorporate Georgia's regions into its own government structures.

We are concerned over the continuous discrimination against Georgians on the grounds of ethnicity in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We are also concerned about abuses, including severe restrictions on rights related to freedom of movement, education, residence and property, particularly in connection with the destruction of the houses of IDPs. We condemn the restriction of education in the native Georgian language and its replacement with Russian in schools and kindergartens in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We also condemn the obliteration and alteration of Georgian features of the Georgian cultural heritage monuments in both occupied regions.

We are particularly concerned over the ongoing installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the administrative boundary lines and the lengthy closure of so-called crossing points, which have led to severe humanitarian consequences for the local population. We also condemn the unexpected closure of so-called crossing points of administrative boundary lines during the period around Georgia's 26 October parliamentary elections preventing Georgian citizens from casting their votes and disrupting commerce and freedom of movement for the affected population. The partial and temporary reopening of the so-called crossing points cannot be viewed as satisfactory. All so-called crossing points in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia must be reopened for all Georgian citizens residing on both sides of the administrative boundary lines.

Isolation and continuous restrictions on freedom of movement have further destabilized the situation on the ground and severely impacted the security, safety, well-being and humanitarian conditions of civilians in conflict-affected areas, preventing their access to family, property, agricultural lands, religious sites and cemeteries as well as Georgian government-issued pensions and the free healthcare services and education available in Georgian government-controlled territory. This creates a risk for further depopulation of both regions.

We condemn the killings of ethnic Georgian citizens Davit Basharuli, Giga Otkhзорia, Archil Tatumashvili, Tamaz Ginturi and Vitali Karbaia, and express concern for the death of Irakli Kvaratskhelia in illegal detention at the Russian military base in the Abkhazia region. We urge Russia to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we reiterate our support for Georgia's preventive steps aimed at eradicating impunity and note the Otkhзорia-Tatumashvili List adopted by the Government of Georgia.

We remain deeply concerned by ongoing arbitrary detentions around the administrative boundary lines involving vulnerable groups, and in some cases people with severe health problems. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of Irakli Beua, Kristine Takalandze, Giorgi Mosiashvili, and all those under arbitrary detention.

We note the January 2021 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in the case concerning the armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Georgia in August 2008 and its consequences, including its findings that Russia exercised effective control over Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the 12 August 2008

ceasefire agreement, including through its military presence. The Court also ruled that Russia, in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights: tortured Georgian prisoners of war; arbitrarily detained and killed Georgian civilians; was responsible for their inhumane and degrading treatment; and prevented the return of ethnic Georgians to their homes. Moreover, the European Court of Human Rights adopted another judgment in the case “Mamasakhlisi and Others v. Georgia and Russia” on 7 March 2023, which confirmed the effective control of the Russian Federation over the Abkhazia region of Georgia even before Russia’s war against Georgia in August 2008, and its full responsibility for human rights violations in the occupied region. We recall the decision of the ECHR of 28 April 2023, which ordered the Russian Federation to pay up to 130 million euros in favour of conflict-affected Georgian citizens. We note the two ECHR judgments of 19 December 2023 – one defining the responsibility of Russia for the killing of Georgian citizen Giga Otkhozoria, and the other affirming Russia’s responsibility for the illegal detentions of Georgian citizens in the Abkhazia region of Georgia. In its latest ruling on 9 April 2024, the ECHR confirmed multiple violations of the European Convention on Human Rights caused by unlawful “borderization” by the Russian Federation. We call on the Russian Federation to fully comply with these judgments, including by allowing IDPs to return to their homes in safety and dignity.

We also note the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) of 2022 that issued arrest warrants for war crimes committed against ethnic Georgian civilians during Russia’s invasion in 2008 and noted the alleged role of a now deceased Russian military official uncovered by the investigation. We call on Russia to co-operate with the ICC.

We support the effective functioning of the Geneva International Discussions as the only format of negotiations between Georgia and the Russian Federation to address implementation of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement, as well as the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from Russia’s invasion of Georgia in August 2008. We underline the necessity of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including withdrawal of Russian forces and the establishment of international security arrangements in Georgia’s regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as stipulated in the ceasefire agreement, and on ensuring the safe, dignified and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees in accordance with international law. We regret the permanent disruption of the Geneva International Discussions rounds due to walk-outs by participants from Russia and its *de facto* authorities at the agenda item on IDPs and refugees. We strongly support applying the women, peace and security agenda in the Geneva International Discussions in order to facilitate inclusive and sustainable peace and security on the ground.

We express our support for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms in Ergneti and Gali and emphasize the important role they can have in preventing any escalation and in helping to protect the safety and security of people on the ground. We express our great concern over the lengthy suspension of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism and urge its resumption without further delay or preconditions, in line with the ground rules.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and call upon Russia to allow the EUMM to implement its mandate in full, including by enabling the EUMM’s access on both sides of the administrative boundary lines. We condemn the recent incident in which Russian forces temporarily held the EUMM monitors in Georgian government-controlled territory while the monitors were fulfilling their duties. At the same

time, we call on Russia to enable full and unhindered access by international human rights organizations to Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We support the comprehensive de-occupation and peaceful conflict resolution policy of the Government of Georgia. We support the Georgian Government's "A Step to a Better Future" initiative and its "Peace Fund for a Better Future", aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and at fostering confidence-building among divided communities and stand ready to support.

We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Georgia conflict. We regret the closure of the OSCE Mission to Georgia in 2009 and encourage the OSCE participating States to decide on the reopening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the administrative boundary lines. The reopening of the mission would strengthen considerably the OSCE's engagement in the Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms. Furthermore, the re-establishment of a field mission would support the OSCE's work in every phase of the conflict cycle.

The Group of Friends of Georgia will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and of developments on the ground, hold Russia accountable for meeting its obligations and commitments, and advocate for the conflict's peaceful resolution.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF SWEDEN
(ALSO ON BEHALF OF ALBANIA, BELGIUM,
BULGARIA, CANADA, CROATIA, CZECHIA, DENMARK,
ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY,
ICELAND, ITALY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG,
MONTENEGRO, THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH MACEDONIA,
NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA,
SLOVENIA, SPAIN, TÜRKIYE, THE UNITED KINGDOM
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)**

(Annex 11 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Mr. Chairperson,

This statement is delivered on behalf of the NATO Allies.

Russia's illegal, unjustifiable and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered peace and stability in the OSCE area. It is a blatant violation of international law including the UN Charter and contravenes OSCE principles and commitments. We also remain concerned about the challenging security situations in the OSCE area and beyond.

We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to a free, democratic, independent and sovereign Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We fully support its right to self-defence and to choose its own security arrangements, as enshrined in international law, the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and the Istanbul Charter for European Security. As Ukraine continues its vital work on democratic, economic and security reforms we will continue to support Ukraine on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership.

There can be no impunity for abuses of human rights, war crimes and other violations of international law. Russia bears responsibility for the deaths of thousands and for extensive damage to civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. Russia's war has also profoundly jeopardized nuclear safety and food security.

We urge all countries not to provide any kind of assistance to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We condemn all acts, such as by Belarus, the DPRK and Iran, facilitating, or supporting and thereby prolonging this war. We call on the PRC to cease all material and political support to Russia's war effort.

Russia remains the most significant and direct threat to our peace, security and stability. Russia seeks to establish so-called "spheres of influence" and direct control through coercion, subversion, disinformation, aggression and illegal attempted annexations. Russia is rebuilding and expanding its military capabilities and continues its airspace violations and provocative activities. We stand in solidarity with all Allies affected by these actions. Russia's military build-up including in the Baltic, Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea regions and the High North challenges our security. Russia's posture, intensified hybrid actions, including through proxies, and its use of force violate the rules-based international order. We condemn Russia's behaviour, and we call on Russia to uphold its international obligations.

We condemn Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and coercive nuclear signalling, including its announced stationing of nuclear weapons in Belarus, which demonstrate a posture of strategic intimidation.

Russia has instigated conflicts in the OSCE area and inhibited efforts to resolve them. We call on Russia to withdraw all of its forces and equipment from the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, stationed there without their consent. We firmly support their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders. We remain committed to supporting our partners to counter malign influence and aggression.

We reject Russia's claims that NATO is escalating tensions. NATO is a defensive Alliance. We remain willing to maintain channels of communication with Moscow, including in the OSCE, to manage and mitigate risk, prevent escalation and build trust and confidence, based on key principles of transparency, compliance, verification, reciprocity and host nation consent. We remain united in our commitment to effective arms control as a key element of the security in the OSCE area, taking into account the prevailing security environment and the security of all Allies. Allies continue to enhance NATO's deterrence and defence against all threats and challenges.

Russia continues to demonstrate disregard for arms control. Russia has violated and withdrawn from long-standing obligations and commitments, thereby weakening the global arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture.

Ahead of the Helsinki Final Act's 50th anniversary, we reiterate the key importance of the OSCE as a unique forum for dialogue, for advancing comprehensive security and for political accountability. We will continue to support the OSCE's work across all three dimensions, and advocate for its effective and unimpeded functioning, including the autonomous institutions and field presences.

Russia must immediately stop its war of aggression against Ukraine and completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its forces. We welcome and support Ukraine's continuous commitment to advance a comprehensive, just and lasting peace through President Zelensky's Peace Formula and the Peace Summit process.

The participating States subscribing to this statement request its attachment to the journal of this Ministerial Council meeting.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF AZERBAIJAN**

(Annex 12 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Madam Chairperson,

The delegation of Azerbaijan welcomes the adoption of the decisions on the appointment of the leadership of the “top four” positions, which will contribute to strengthening the functioning of this Organization at a critical time.

At the same time, we express our regret that it was not possible to adopt the decision on the approval of the 2024 Unified Budget.

In this regard, we would like to state for the record that we support the early adoption of the Unified Budget.

We proceed from the understanding that the Organization’s scarce resources must be allocated where they are needed the most, to fund the programmatic activities that are relevant and around which there is consensus. This would ensure the proper functioning of the Organization in an efficient, transparent and accountable manner and would allow the OSCE to deliver and to offer added value.

For this purpose, obsolete, dysfunctional and irrelevant OSCE structures such as those related to the former Minsk Process must be removed from the budget.

We regret that the budget proposal for 2024 falls short of this objective and was designed with serious inconsistencies with the OSCE Unified Budget process as envisaged in the OSCE Financial Regulations and relevant decisions.

However, in a spirit of compromise, the delegation of Azerbaijan was ready to consider joining consensus on this particular proposal on the basis of the understanding that the present draft decision includes significant reductions of the above-mentioned funds as a first phase in the process of their discontinuation, which will be reflected in a declaration of the Chairmanship supported in identical statements from incoming Chairmanships and other participating States individually or collectively.

We regret that this proposal was not acceptable to some participating States, which made the adoption of the decision impossible.

While we express our disappointment with this situation, the delegation of Azerbaijan urges the Secretariat and the incoming Finnish Chairmanship within the 2025 Unified Budget process to prioritize the work of the OSCE across the three dimensions in those areas where it has a comparative advantage, and to this end, to continue consultations and to expeditiously prepare a plan that defines the main parameters and determines the tasks, timelines and administrative arrangements enabling the closure of the structures related to the dysfunctional Minsk Process.

This will ensure the collective support of all participating States for the timely adoption of the Unified Budget will restore the functionality of the Organization and will put the financing of the Organization on a sustainable path.

We are ready to engage constructively in the budget discussions.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA**

(Annex 13 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Madam Chairperson,

We believe that the OSCE as the largest security Organization still has the potential to deliver on its core mandate and against this backdrop Armenia will continue to be guided by the urgency of upholding and preserving our Organization's functionality, integrity and the ability to continue its mandated work based on our common principles.

Madam Chairperson,

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the recent discussions on the adoption of the Unified Budget of the OSCE occurred under unprecedented and highly challenging circumstances, where the Organization's future, its proper functioning, and its operations have been largely at stake.

These circumstances placed an enormous burden on participating States. Armenia was no exception.

We supported the draft decision on the 2024 Unified Budget as it was tabled. We did our best to contribute to this end by adopting a highly constructive approach and making significant compromises. This has been the reflection of our political will and we regret that the Unified Budget was not adopted.

At the same time, we believe that the Minsk Process mechanisms should remain in place until an agreement on peace and normalization of inter-State relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is achieved. Armenia is convinced that such an agreement is within reach.

In closing we welcome the decision and readiness of Cyprus to serve as Chairmanship in 2027, which Armenia strongly supports.

We thank Malta for the warm hospitality.

We request that this statement be attached to the journal of this Ministerial meeting.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF TÜRKİYE**
(Annex 14 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

First, we would like to express our appreciation to His Excellency Minister Borg and his dedicated team led by Ambassador Meli Daudey for steering the OSCE in this very challenging year.

I also wish to extend our gratitude to Malta for the warm hospitality.

We welcome the adoption of the decisions on the appointment of the leadership of the “top four” positions. This is a positive sign for the future.

For the first time, a Turkish official – a highly experienced Turkish diplomat – will assume the position of Secretary General. Key executive structures are designed to support the Organization’s mission of promoting security, co-operation and stability across the OSCE area by means of implementing our decisions and common commitments. We firmly believe that with their outstanding careers and extensive experiences, the top four officials will provide concrete contributions to the functionality of our Organization.

Yet, we still have burning issues before us that need to be solved for the proper, effective and sustainable functioning of the Organization. The lack of the Unified Budget negatively impairs the overall capability of our Organization since 2022. We believe that it would be possible to reach consensus on this issue as well – with creative and acceptable solutions, taking into account the realities and the expectations of all participating States.

To overcome the problems before us, we sincerely need to prioritize the OSCE. Prioritizing the OSCE, above all, necessitates an honest grasp of its essence.

We should always keep in mind that the OSCE’s spirit has been based on a strategic vision. This vision entails that all participating States embrace a co-operative approach with the aim of advancing common interests through dialogue. The constant efforts to achieve consensus itself is the basis of the OSCE which is often described as an Organization of “non-like-minded” States. Therefore, the “consensus rule” must remain at the core of our decision-making.

Dialogue, compromise and confidence-building form the very basis of our Organization. If only we make use of these indispensable features at all times, the OSCE will be able to assume its well-deserved strategic role in a multilateral system.

At a time of an increasingly volatile and rapidly deteriorating geopolitical situation, we need to revitalize our Organization to serve its core purpose of existence which is to manage properly the security and threat perceptions and challenges of and among the participating States.

Ultimately, this is not only an obligation for all of us but also a necessity for our common and comprehensive security.

Having a culture of engagement is essential to overcome the current deficit of trust in the OSCE. As we are approaching the anniversary of the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, we should all reaffirm the OSCE's commitments and principles.

To conclude, dialogue is indispensable for evaluating the existing problems in the OSCE area.

We look forward to supporting Finland as the Chairmanship-in-Office in 2025, marking 50 years of the Helsinki Final Act.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF FINLAND**
(Annex 15 to MC(31) Journal of 5 and 6 December 2024)

Thank you very much Mr. Chairperson, Deputy Prime Minister Borg,

Let me start by thanking you personally and your able team in Valletta and in Vienna for this successful Ministerial Council meeting. You have navigated the year with exceptional skill.

Finland commends you for keeping your first overarching priority, Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, at the top of the OSCE agenda.

With your leadership, we reached consensus on the appointment of a new OSCE Secretary General and the heads of institutions. You left no stone unturned to get the budget for 2024 approved. Your work is a true example of commitment to multilateralism – an element so much needed today.

Mr. Chairperson,

This Ministerial Council meeting has set the stage for Finland to take on the OSCE Chairmanship in 2025, a year that also marks the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act.

The message from this Ministerial Council meeting has been loud and clear on three key issues.

First, Russia must end its war of aggression in Ukraine and Russia must be held accountable for this devastating war.

Second, the Helsinki Final Act must remain the bedrock of our security and all States need to reaffirm the OSCE commitments and principles.

Reaching consensus often requires concessions, but the agreed OSCE core principles – enshrined in the UN Charter – are not negotiable.

Third, participating States attach great importance to the work of the OSCE across the area – particularly through its twelve field operations and three autonomous institutions: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

As Chairmanship in 2025, Finland will put particular focus on those three areas that this Ministerial Council meeting has highlighted – support to Ukraine, the Helsinki principles and strengthening the OSCE.

Mr. Chairperson,

I will present the Finnish Chairmanship programme in January, but let me highlight a few questions that will guide our activities as Chairmanship.

Supporting Ukraine remains our top priority, in all dimensions. At the same time, Finland is committed to working across the OSCE area toward the settlement of conflicts, easing of tensions and building of trust.

The overarching topic of our Chairmanship programme is resilience – both of the participating States and of the Organization. We aim to enhance the Organization's operational capacity and empower people in our neighbouring areas to live in democratic States governed by the rule of law.

Resilience, the ability to respond to and recover from crises, has gained increased attention among participating States due to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

However, it covers also challenges beyond military threats, from responding to various types of malign activities or addressing climate change, to making us immune to disinformation.

A resilient participating State is a democracy that promotes equality, respects human rights and the rule of law. Broad participation rights and plurality of voices are part of a resilient society, and therefore we emphasize inclusion during our Chairmanship.

The OSCE, with its comprehensive concept of security, is well placed to tackle these issues. We will tap into those areas where the OSCE adds most value.

We will work under three guiding principles: "respect", "respond" and "prepare". This means respect for the OSCE's principles and commitments, responding to current challenges and preparing for the future.

I would like to thank you and all other ministers and heads of delegation for the encouraging words to the incoming Chairmanship and our team.

Finland will assume the Chairmanship with a sense of responsibility and determination. We will aim to have an open dialogue with all participating States and Partners for Co-operation.

We will serve as a constructive Chairmanship, listening attentively and collaborating closely with all States committed to promoting co-operative security through the OSCE.

Mr. Chairperson,

On behalf of Finland, let me once more congratulate you for an excellent stewardship of the OSCE this year. We will continue close co-operation as part of the OSCE Troika.

The Organization now also has a perspective beyond 2025. We warmly welcome the readiness of participating States to respond to the demand and step up for future Chairmanships of the OSCE.

We look forward to welcoming you all to the next Ministerial Council meeting. I am glad that it will be held at the seat of the OSCE – in Vienna.

I thank you.

**CLOSING STATEMENT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE**

(MC.DEL/69/24 of 11 December 2024)

Madam Chairperson,
Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This Ministerial Council meeting has demonstrated the strengths and complexities of our Organization.

Together we have brought home an important achievement that strengthens one of the two pillars of this Organization's functionality: its leadership.

We are marking the successful adoption of the critical decisions on the appointments of the new OSCE Secretary General and heads of institutions.

I welcome this decision and congratulate our new Secretary General Feridun Sinirlioglu; our new Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Director Maria Telalian; our new High Commissioner on National Minorities Christophe Kamp; and our new Representative on Freedom of the Media Jan Braathu.

The road to this decision was bumpy, to say the least.

Months of inclusive dialogue, painstaking negotiations, and ultimately, compromises were made to breathe life into the OSCE's future.

To all who contributed to this successful outcome, I extend my deepest thanks.

The appointment of the new Secretary General and heads of institutions is a necessary but not sufficient step for the full restoration of the OSCE's functionality, agility and role in the European security architecture.

We deeply regret that, despite extensive good faith efforts, consensus could not be reached on the approval of the 2024 Unified Budget.

We also stress our continued commitment to ensuring the Organization's endurance and effectiveness by facilitating consensus on future OSCE Chairmanships.

I thank Cyprus for coming forward with its bid for 2027 and encourage those considering a bid for 2026 to do the same as soon as possible, so that we can end the year on a positive note.

As participating States, we have a duty to apply the rules of the OSCE for the purpose they were designed.

Collective decisions should not be at the mercy of individual political considerations or bilateral issues.

The dearth of political will to put this Organization first is restricting progress in effecting the much-needed changes within it.

Yes, we must initiate discussions on long-term reform. But first, we must also make immediate changes in our attitudes and behaviours.

This is a difficult but necessary conversation. We are convinced that it must take place if we are to turn a page in this Organization's future.

I want to pay special tribute to my entire Chairmanship team in Vienna and Malta.

Dear Natasha, as you have said so many times, hope is the last thing to die in your team.

The relentless drive, energy and tenacity you brought to our mission this year have made this successful year possible, despite the impossible obstacles you found along the way.

I also express my gratitude to the officers-in-charge for their diligent service and leadership during this challenging transition period, as we worked towards today's successful adoption of the OSCE's four leadership positions.

Finally, I thank all my colleagues across the Maltese Public Service who made this meeting possible. Your work enabled the largest international ministerial gathering in Malta's history. You have done your country proud.

Colleagues,

This year, we have faced extraordinary challenges.

Our discussions took place against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, an evolving security landscape, and a crisis in multilateralism.

We have demonstrated that consensus is not an obsolete relic of the past.

The decision we have taken today is more than an administrative milestone.

Yet, we must be honest with ourselves.

Without a budget, the OSCE's capacity to respond to the pressing security challenges of our time is significantly weakened.

From addressing the human cost of Russia's war against Ukraine to mitigating global challenges like climate change, media freedom, and digital threats, the OSCE's relevance has never been clearer.

Yet our ability to tackle these issues and serve the people who rely on this Organization hangs in the balance.

Dear colleagues,

The decision we have taken today is an important first step in the right direction.

But it is not a silver bullet for all the difficulties facing our region and Organization.

Russia's aggression continues to inflict immense suffering on the people of Ukraine, posing a fundamental threat to European and global security.

Just as the deadliest, longest wars in history came to an end, so too will this one. But how, when, and at what expense?

How many more innocent lives will be cut short or traumatized forever?

And once peace prevails: will we finally learn from our historical mistakes?

These questions, and the need for strategic leadership in focusing our energy on meeting the needs of our people, are not beyond our collective capabilities.

But first, the killing must stop.

The people of Ukraine, and of all participating States, must be allowed to live in peace within the internationally recognized borders of their country, and without the spectre of war looming over their every day.

As for the OSCE, the amount of time spent this year on resolving the institutional issues we have decided on today has meant that we have not had the latitude to fully harness the utility and potential of the OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox.

This Organization's future – with all its implications for the security of our region – depends on our collective will to give it the resources it so urgently requires.

Nevertheless, in reaching this important decision on our new Secretary General and heads of institutions, we have laid the first brick of stability.

In doing so, we have achieved, if only partially, our objective of ensuring that we leave this Organization more resilient than we found it.

In this context, I welcome the fact that Finland, like Malta, has made strengthening resilience a central pillar of its priorities.

But let me be clear: resilience should not mean firefighting.

As we look to the future, we must not settle for mere survival. We must look beyond resilience.

The author Nassim Nicholas Taleb coined the idea of anti-fragility – the quality of growing stronger when harmed, not just resisting shock and enduring adversity.

This year, as Chairmanship, Malta sought to uphold the OSCE's founding principles – most notably the respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the non-use of force.

We have done so in an environment that was not conducive to forward-looking discussions on the Organization's future.

As we approach 50 years since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, we must remember that this Organization was born out of a similarly divided and uncertain security landscape.

By design, it is meant to increase in relevance and importance during difficult times, not simply survive.

We look back on those who created the OSCE with admiration for their vision and courage in seemingly impossible circumstances.

It is now up to us to determine whether we will fulfil the Organization's intended purpose.

To do this, and to ensure that the future we choose will be in the interest of our rules-based international order, we need imagination, we need hope, and we need political will.

But more importantly, we need peace.

Colleagues,

On behalf of Malta, I thank you for the trust you have placed in us during our Chairmanship.

It has been an honour to serve in this role and to work with each of you in advancing the OSCE's mission.

This Ministerial Council meeting is coming to an end, but our work as Chairmanship is not done.

In our final three weeks in this role, and as a member of the Troika in 2025, we will continue to leave no stone unturned in securing the future of this Organization.

We remain firm believers in the OSCE's role as an essential contributor to the peace, security and prosperity of the people it serves.

I thank you.

STATEMENT BY THE OSCE TROIKA

(30 December 2024)

We, the OSCE Troika members – Malta, North Macedonia and Finland – recognize that the 31st Meeting of the Ministerial Council was held at a critical juncture. Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine continues to erode European security and undermine the shared system of norms and values on which our predecessors built their vision of international peace, security and prosperity. Against this backdrop, we reassert our steadfast commitment to the preservation and enhancement of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue and an essential contributor to the security and stability of the entire OSCE area.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, we call for a return to full compliance with the OSCE's principles and commitments, to which we have all freely agreed. Our resolve to stand by these shared multilateral values must not be allowed to falter when it is needed most. In the face of mounting challenges to our shared security, it is incumbent upon all participating States to persevere on the multilateral path with courage, integrity and conviction.

We condemn Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. We call on Russia to cease its aggression and demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russia's armed forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Relations between OSCE participating States are based on respecting the rights inherent in sovereignty, refraining from the use of force, and respecting the inviolability of frontiers and the territorial integrity of States. These core pillars must never be undermined.

We mourn the innocent lives lost in Russia's war against Ukraine and condemn all actions aimed at inflicting death, devastation and trauma on civilians, including attacks on critical infrastructure and other civilian targets. Recognizing the increased vulnerability of women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities in times of conflict, we reiterate our deep concern about reports of conflict-related sexual violence, and about the well-being of Ukrainian children who are victims of forcible transfer and deportation and re-education.

Recalling our shared commitments under international human rights and humanitarian law, we call on the Russian Federation to release all persons illegally detained in the context of the war against Ukraine. We demand the immediate release of three OSCE officials – Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov – who remain detained in Donetsk and Luhansk in violation of the principles and commitments made by all the participating States of our Organization.

We condemn the executions and the use of torture and other inhumane treatment against Ukrainian prisoners of war by the Russian armed forces. This runs counter to the protections and provisions outlined in international law and reaffirmed in the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. We further encourage the accelerated exchange of prisoners of war.

We are deeply concerned by the wider adverse impacts of the war against Ukraine on food security, nuclear security and safety, energy security, cultural heritage, and the environment. These have consequences in Ukraine and for our whole region and beyond.

We call on Belarus to stop enabling Russia's war against Ukraine. We are also deeply concerned by the recent deployment of troops from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to Russia and the escalation it represents.

We commend the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people and stand firm in our support for a just and lasting peace based on full respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We underline that the immediate cessation of attacks is imperative to creating conditions for a just and durable resolution to this war. We reaffirm our support for all diplomatic efforts, including the Peace Formula presented by President Zelenskyy, aimed at achieving and implementing a peaceful settlement that is fully compliant with the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. All such efforts and talks must be underpinned by the pursuit of justice for Ukraine and accountability for crimes committed.

We reassert our commitment to continued OSCE support to Ukraine for the duration of the war and in eventual post-war recovery, including through evidence-gathering and accountability mechanisms. As demonstrated by the work of the OSCE's Support Programme for Ukraine, OSCE tools and expertise remain of vital importance in mitigating the impact of the war and in realizing our shared vision of a peaceful and prosperous future for Ukraine. We thank the former Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office – Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, Ambassador Marcel Peško, for his important work and affirm our support for the new Special Representative, Ambassador Petr Mareš.

We remain committed to all OSCE efforts to enhance the security of all participating States for the benefit of our people. We reaffirm the centrality of the OSCE conflict cycle toolbox in facilitating a broad spectrum of conflict prevention and resolution efforts across the wider OSCE area.

We welcome ongoing negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan toward a final peace settlement and emphasize that inclusive dialogue is the sole path for resolving disagreements and disputes. We strongly reject the use of force in addressing differences and urge all parties to engage sincerely in negotiations to build the agreements that are necessary for lasting peace and stability in the region. The OSCE stands ready to support the implementation of confidence-building measures among all parties.

We reiterate our strong support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We note the significance of the Geneva International Discussions and support the continued emphasis on the delivery of tangible results for conflict-affected communities, which was in focus in 2024. We remain committed to sustaining established efforts and initiatives, including the work of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms.

We commend the resilience demonstrated by the Republic of Moldova in light of Russia's war against Ukraine and recognize the impact of the war on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. We commend the sides on their commitment to a peaceful settlement and welcome the progress made in 2024. We encourage further and continued engagement to resolve outstanding issues with the support of the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the Chairmanship's Special Representative. We also call for a return to the established practice of

regular 12-month mandate extensions, which is in the best interests of the Republic of Moldova, the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, and the OSCE.

We highlight the vital work of the OSCE's field operations, which are the lifeblood of this Organization. Together with OSCE staff working across the OSCE area, they continue to facilitate important progress on our shared priorities by supporting ongoing domestic reform processes and reinforcing engagement with OSCE principles and commitments, including in South-Eastern Europe and in Central Asia. We encourage host authorities to make full use of OSCE tools and expertise. We urgently call on all participating States to foster the necessary political will to ensure prompt and adequate financial and human resources for OSCE field operations, ensuring that mandates can be fully implemented.

We emphasize that the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security underpins its work across the entire OSCE area. In this regard, we underscore the importance of ensuring integrity and constructive exchanges in all three dimensions of security.

We underline the continued importance of preserving the OSCE's role as a space for dialogue in the politico-military dimension of security in the context of current security challenges and instability. We stress the importance of ongoing implementation of the OSCE arms control and confidence- and security-building measures, including through adherence to the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, as we mark its 30th anniversary. We call on the OSCE and participating States to continue to address new and existing threats, including those stemming from emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, in order to strengthen resilience and enhance security.

We note the importance of discussions on economic and environmental security challenges across the OSCE area, including those stemming from Russia's war against Ukraine, where the OSCE has a vital role in monitoring environmental consequences of the war, paving the way for future accountability efforts. Recognizing the salience of the threat of climate change, we call for climate mainstreaming and for deeper co-operation and results-based climate diplomacy, especially through capacity-building efforts in areas such as risk assessment, resilience building and disaster response. We will also support continued joint action on economic and environmental issues, good governance and sustainable development, including through digitalization.

We note continued threats to human rights, democracy and the rule of law across the OSCE area, including violent actions against peaceful protests and the silencing of political opponents, human rights defenders and critical journalists, which constitute violations of our shared human dimension commitments. We call on all participating States to recommit to respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law as essential foundations for peace and security. We commend the indispensable work of the OSCE's institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media – and reaffirm our strongest support for their mandates. We also reaffirm the role played by the OSCE as a vital platform for dialogue with civil society, whose involvement is crucial in promoting transparency and holding governments accountable.

We reassert our continued commitment to inclusivity, to promoting gender equality and to ensuring that the perspectives of women and youth are mainstreamed in all our work across the three dimensions of security. In the year marking the 20th anniversary of the

OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, we call for continued efforts to support women's full and meaningful participation in all spheres of society and public life. This is not just our moral duty – it is also crucial for the creation of more peaceful, sustainable and inclusive societies.

We remain convinced of the added value of the OSCE's dialogue with Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation in the context of the interconnectedness of global challenges and the need to enhance mutual trust and stability for the OSCE and neighbouring regions. We will continue to support efforts to incorporate their perspectives and expertise in OSCE work and to increase the visibility of the results of their activities.

Malta, North Macedonia and Finland underscore their shared belief in dialogue as the engine of multilateralism. A return to the OSCE's fundamental principles and commitments will be essential to fully reinstate this dialogue, to fulfil the OSCE's potential contribution to the multilateral system, and to restore peace and security in our region and beyond.

To weather challenges present and future, the OSCE must remain a space where shared principles and commitments are adhered to, reinforced and translated into tangible action. The endurance of its value depends on the strength of the two pillars of its functionality: effective leadership and sufficient resources. In this regard, we welcome the successful appointment of Mr. Feridun H. Sinirlioglu as Secretary General of the OSCE, Ms. Maria Telalian as Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Mr. Christophe Kamp as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and Mr. Jan Braathu as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 6 December 2024. We further welcome the decision confirming Switzerland as the 2026 OSCE Chairmanship, effective today, 30 December 2024. We commend Switzerland for showing strong leadership and stepping forward to assume this role.

The appointment of the new Secretary General and heads of institutions and the decision on the Swiss 2026 Chairmanship are necessary but not sufficient for the full restoration of the OSCE's functionality, agility and central role in the European security architecture. We deeply regret that, despite extensive good faith efforts, consensus could not be reached on the approval of the 2024 Unified Budget, and we underscore the increasingly urgent need to find solutions to ensure the OSCE's financial sustainability. In light of this continued impasse, we reiterate that the principle of consensus, which is woven into all the decision-making structures of this Organization, must be used constructively, as a source of strength and resilience.

As members of the OSCE Troika, our focus remains on the road ahead. We stress that guaranteeing the OSCE's continued functionality is a shared responsibility and a long-term commitment for which current and future Chairmanships will continue to rely on the political will of all 57 participating States. As we prepare to guide the OSCE to Finland's stewardship for 2025, we reaffirm that it is our shared and abiding obligation to ensure the OSCE's continued role in securing a free, democratic and peaceful world for future generations.

III. REPORTS TO THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

**REPORT BY
THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE/OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL TO
THE THIRTY-FIRST MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

(MC.GAL/9/24/Corr.1 of 12 December 2024)

Deputy Prime Minister Borg, Mr. Chairperson-in-Office,
Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

Introduction

It is an honour to address this Ministerial Council meeting. I would like to extend my profound gratitude to the Maltese Chairmanship, which has worked tirelessly throughout the year to uphold and advance OSCE principles, including in the face of grave violations, and to ensure the continued functionality of our Organization. I would also like to acknowledge the enormous contribution in this regard of former Secretary General Helga Schmid, who fought incessantly to protect the staff and promote the OSCE institutionally.

With the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act fast approaching, this year we have found ourselves, yet again, in a situation where confrontation replaces conversation, where conflict replaces co-operation, and where relations between participating States have been severely eroded.

Despite this backdrop the OSCE, as a political community focused on comprehensive security in Europe and founded on common values, as a platform for dialogue and a stabilizing force with reach from Vancouver to Vladivostok, has continued this year to deliver both politically and programmatically on the ground, across, in and for your 57 countries and your one billion citizens.

The OSCE has done this with an overall annual price tag of 138 million euros, and 2,500 staff, over half of them in its field operations. It is not an expensive outfit. It is lean and agile, able to craft bespoke responses to complex requests quickly. It has the expertise, experience, tools, and importantly, relationships, to deliver on politico-military, economic, environmental and human dimensions of security.

Tour d’horizon

Allow me to share some of the highlights from our work in 2024. In Eastern Europe, we made significant strides through the extrabudgetary Support Programme for Ukraine, which helps Ukraine strengthen its institutional and social resilience. Thus, we helped build capacity of over 25 ministries and government agencies to address the acute short- and long-term consequences of the war. This ranges from contributing to the national humanitarian demining strategy, to enhancing investigative capacity for the national registry of persons, including children missing because of the war, to supporting the continued war-related environmental monitoring.

In Moldova, we continued working towards a comprehensive and lasting political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. We worked on all aspects of security, including

environmental and human security. This year, for example, we also facilitated the safe disposal of hazardous chemicals from Transdniestria.

In the South Caucasus, we remained actively engaged, supporting the Geneva International Discussions as Co-Chair, and as co-facilitators of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti. Here, we directly and on a very practical level address the humanitarian consequences of past conflicts and contribute to reducing tensions, demonstrating our relevance in long-standing conflict situations.

We also followed closely the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and stand ready to contribute upon the request of the sides.

In Central Asia this year we have continued to assist in enhancing border security in Tajikistan. We have removed hazardous rocket fuel in Kyrgyzstan. We have supported women's resource centres in Uzbekistan, enabling women to make full use of the rule of law in local communities and provide them a pathway to economic activity. Moreover, our efforts to manage the impact of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan continue to bolster safety and security across the region through a special extrabudgetary funding mechanism of over 30 tailored projects.

Finally, in South-Eastern Europe we continued supporting the regional arms control Article IV of the Dayton Peace Agreement established to build transparency, co-operation and confidence, and a verification regime. Through mutual respect and co-operation, this agreement has been essential for peace and stability in South-Eastern Europe and serves as an excellent example of security co-operation.

The above work would not be possible without our staff both at the Secretariat and in the field, and here I commend our thematic directors, heads of field operations, and their staff.

The OSCE is the only international actor with such an extensive field presence, local insight and unparalleled trust of governments and communities at all levels.

It would be remiss of me, when noting our staff, not to reference the plight of Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov, three OSCE officials who have been in detention in Donetsk and Luhansk since April 2022. We continued to work for their release this year. And the calls with their families are as distressing today as they were when they were first taken. It is time to bring them home. This new year, I ask, I beg for this humanitarian mercy.

Regional approaches

Part of what sets the OSCE's work apart is our ability to foster regional approaches to shared challenges.

The proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) is a scourge that affects the whole OSCE area, and our SALW work increasingly assumes a regional approach. For example, this year saw six jurisdictions in South-Eastern Europe and all five Central Asian countries now supported by OSCE SALW work, as well as Ukraine and Moldova. In

2024, we also built the capacity of law enforcement agencies in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Eastern Europe and supported standardization and interoperability.

The Regional Trial Monitoring Project on high-level corruption and organized crime in South-Eastern Europe – joined also by Serbia this year – has allowed us to address systemic challenges to eradicate pervasive corruption and deliver justice in the region.

Thematic

In terms of transnational threats, we continued supporting States to operationalize their cyber confidence-building measures, the creation of a point of contact network, which in 2024 has become an active community of experts that participating States regularly rely on and a model for the UN and others.

In countering human trafficking, our simulation-based trainings – which took place in Vicenza this year with a focus on trafficking in human beings in the Mediterranean – directly contributed to successful police operations, such as the Reykjavik anti-trafficking operation, which identified over 40 victims.

In 2024, we made significant progress in addressing both climate change and critical economic challenges, by fostering good governance and anti-corruption efforts. For example, our energy initiatives improved access to clean energy for over 1,000 people along the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border.

European security architecture

Though our web of interlocking arms control obligations and commitments has been weakened, the OSCE participating States in 2024 nonetheless conducted over 100 verification activities pursuant to the Vienna Document and Dayton Article IV. Military information exchange continued at a steady level, including through nearly 2,000 messages over the OSCE Communications Network.

Women

As we mark the 16-day campaign of activism against violence against women, we are also observing 20 years since the OSCE agreed its gender action plan. The OSCE has continued working with women as agents of change who are actively shaping their communities, particularly those affected by conflict, advancing peace and collaboration across divides. A standout example is the OSCE Dialogue Academy for Young Women from Belgrade and Pristina, implemented by our Missions in Serbia and Kosovo.

If you engage and involve women in decision-making about peace, you will have a better and more durable peace, and the OSCE does its part.

Resources

In order to continue delivering meaningful and impactful work, the OSCE needs to be equipped with the resources it needs. In recent years, the Organization has faced escalating financial challenges due to structurally inadequate resources. While we have managed thus far through temporary ad hoc solutions, we desperately need an approved Unified Budget at an adequate level – please be thinking in the region of a 25–27 per cent increase on the 2021 figure for 2025 – to ensure operational continuity and mandate delivery at the level of your expectations. The time to invest in this Organization is now.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the presence in the room today of so many ministers demonstrates that this Organization remains the essential platform of European security. We truly feel the increasing expectations that you place on us, and what more you might place on us in the not-too-distant future.

In closing, let me circle back to where I started.

The OSCE is a political community. Not of 27, not of 47, but of 57. The OSCE is a political community not of 300 million, not of 700 million but of one billion. The OSCE is a political community, a political platform for dialogue with a strong programmatic element and a fierce focus on comprehensive security and peace.

We manifest this through the principles and commitments made – by all 57 – in the Helsinki Final Act. Its Decalogue – ten inextricably linked foundational principles – acts as both our touchstone and lodestar.

We have the tools. We have the mandates. We have the principles. With your political guidance, and your political will, we are at your disposal to do even more for comprehensive security in 2025. With those, let us be the stabilizing force in the world that we know we can be.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

**LETTER FROM
THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FORUM FOR SECURITY
CO-OPERATION TO THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
MALTA, CHAIRPERSON OF THE THIRTY-FIRST MEETING OF
THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE OSCE**

(MC.GAL/5/24 of 2 December 2024)

As Chairperson of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC), I have the honour to inform you about the Forum's work in 2024.

In preparing this letter, I have consulted the other 2024 FSC Chairmanships, namely Cyprus and Croatia. In 2024, we worked in close co-operation to ensure continuity and efficiency in the implementation of the Forum's annual work programme.

This year marked the third year of FSC operations under the unprecedented security situation and geopolitical tensions arising from the unjustified and unprovoked war launched on 24 February 2022 by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The war continues to negatively impact the whole security architecture in Europe and beyond, jeopardizing the Organization's underlying concept of co-operative security. In response to the severe security situation, the FSC Chairmanships, in close co-ordination with the Chairperson of the Permanent Council (PC) and the OSCE Secretariat, have led the FSC's work in the spirit of protecting and preserving the FSC as a platform for mandated dialogue focusing on the current security challenges. All three FSC Chairmanships continuously highlighted the role of the FSC in upholding peace, security and democracy by the promotion of sustaining the dialogue amongst all OSCE participating States.

Regrettably, the work of the Forum for Security Co-operation has been affected by increasingly frequent and wide-ranging blocking of meetings. For two years running, one participating State made it its practice to disrupt the good order and smooth running of FSC meetings. This continuously escalated, to the point that the situation deteriorated and during the second trimester of 2024, one participating State was regularly blocking even the meetings with only standing items on the agenda. In this situation, the Chairmanship of Denmark took much-needed steps aiming to preserve the mandated dialogue in the Forum at future meetings.

Moreover, in 2024, the security situation precluded the conduct of the FSC-related politico-military annual meetings. Despite the best efforts, the respective Chairmanships concluded that there was no agreement on the conduct of these meetings in light of the current security situation.

By maintaining the FSC as an important platform for dialogue, in addition to the exchanges on the war against Ukraine, in total, eleven Security Dialogues including three joint meetings of the FSC and the Permanent Council were planned and eight took place.

In the context of ongoing conflicts in the OSCE area, the FSC Chairmanships of 2024, with a focus on the war against Ukraine, prioritized the topics related to international humanitarian law and the principles guiding inter- and intra-State relations in the OSCE area with a special emphasis on armed forces. In this regard, the FSC Chairmanship of Cyprus

planned a Security Dialogue on “Human security in armed conflicts”, but since the agenda of the meeting could not be agreed upon, organized a side event on this topic focusing on protection against gender-based violence. Furthermore, the FSC Chairmanship of Croatia organized a Security Dialogue on “Military education and the changing roles of military academies”, and the FSC Chairmanship of Denmark organized Security Dialogues on the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and a joint FSC-PC Security Dialogue on the Helsinki Decalogue.

All three FSC Chairmanships prioritized the importance of the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda and UN Security Council resolution 1325, with several Security Dialogues dedicated to this topic that were planned in total, including one joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council under the Chairmanship of Croatia, on the topic “Women’s contribution to peace and security: Lessons learned and challenges ahead”. Moreover, a side event on “Women, peace, and security – UN Security Council resolution 1325 – gender equality in conscription” was organized under the FSC Chairmanship of Denmark. In addition, the Cyprus Chairmanship together with the Maltese Chairmanship-in-Office organized a side event on the role of men in gender equality. Furthermore, throughout the year, the FSC Chairmanships supported the 2024 OSCE Scholarship for Peace and Security training programme on conflict prevention and resolution through arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation for youth, especially women. Thus far, amongst 785 graduates of the training programme, 88 per cent are women.

In order to increase awareness of the destructive impact of war and its consequences, in particular when it comes to mine contamination and explosive remnants of war, the FSC Chairmanship of Cyprus organized a Security Dialogue on “Humanitarian mine action – victim assistance”, and the FSC Chairmanship of Croatia organized a Security Dialogue on “Humanitarian demining – scope, challenges, and the way forward”.

Recognizing the need to widen the understanding of cross-cutting security issues related to the politico-military dimension and the impact of conflict, the FSC Chairmanship of Cyprus organized a joint meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council on “Environment and security”, drawing attention to the evolving role of military forces in responding to natural and man-made disasters and looking into ways to reduce the impact of military activities, including in conflict situations, on the environment and climate change.

All three FSC Chairmanships continued to support the OSCE’s work in the politico-military dimension of security on practical assistance in the area of the small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SCA) controls. The OSCE’s assistance projects on SALW and SCA continued to provide steady support in 2024 with a portfolio of 19 assistance projects in worth of 55.5 million euros. Several projects are aimed at ensuring the secure and safe management of stockpiles through infrastructure, material and equipment upgrades at storage sites, as well as establishment of laboratories for chemical analysis of SCA stability and its surveillance. A significant element of the projects was providing support to the efforts of combating illicit trafficking in SALW across the OSCE area. The assistance projects in Central Asia continuously provided support for countering the threat and risk of potential SALW, ammunition and explosives trafficking from Afghanistan, as well as strengthening life-cycle management of conventional ammunition. In the context of disposal of stockpiles, the last remaining toxic obsolete rocket fuel was removed from Kyrgyzstan. After successful implementation of assistance projects in South-Eastern Europe and Ukraine, they were reassessed to provide tailored assistance to the

beneficiaries for the next phase, 2025–2027. Further information and details are available via the OSCE SALW Portal (<https://salw.osce.org/>).

In 2024, the OSCE contributed with a report on the OSCE's efforts in the field of SALW to the 4th United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects held from 18 to 28 June 2024 in New York. Furthermore, the OSCE organized a side event to present the OSCE's holistic and comprehensive approach when implementing critical assistance projects aimed at reducing risks related to uncontrolled spread of SALW/SCA and showcased achievements with the enhancement of SALW and ammunition management capacities in the Kyrgyz Republic. A similar side event was also held on the margins of the 12th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on 15 October 2024 in Vienna, highlighting the OSCE's efforts in through-life management of weapons and ammunition in Central Asia.

The military information exchange remained at a high rate, although some participating States decided to continue not to exchange the information at all or not to provide it to all participating States in light of the current security situation. In recognition of the importance of the topic of information collection, the FSC Chairmanship of Croatia planned a Security Dialogue on "Emerging technologies and military data collection and open-source intelligence (OSINT)", but since the agenda of the FSC meeting could not be agreed upon, organized a side event on this topic instead. The OSCE Information Management and Reporting System (iMARS) was successfully expanded to support the States Parties to the Dayton Peace Accords in implementing the Sub-Regional Arms Control Agreement under Dayton Article IV. The iMARS-Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) Dashboard was developed to manage the confidence- and security-building measures databases of exchanged military information to allow the CPC to update them in real time as of the first quarter of 2025.

The FSC Chairmanships commend the work of the CPC in developing both introductory and in-depth e-learning modules covering FSC-related topics, which are aimed at systematizing the transfer of knowledge on, *inter alia*, military information exchanges pertaining to conventional arms control. In 2024, the new FSC e-learning modules on military information exchange, the Vienna Document and conventional arms control in the English and Russian languages, as well as the module "Rules of procedure for FSC meetings" in English were launched. Thus far, over 140 participants from 18 OSCE participating States, including 32 per cent women, have taken part in the new modules. Overall, 915 participants from 51 participating States have participated in the introductory and in-depth FSC e-learning modules.

In 2024, on average 31 per cent women and 69 per cent men participated in the FSC plenaries. The panellists providing expertise for the Security Dialogues and FSC Chairmanship side events in 2024 were comprised of 46 per cent women and 54 per cent men.

Finally, the FSC Chairmanships would like to thank the Chairmanship of Malta for the professional and outstanding co-operation as well as the Secretariat for their invaluable support.

In conclusion, against the security challenges in the region and the unprecedented deterioration of a constructive approach at the FSC, the Forum for Security Co-operation remains committed to serving as the key OSCE body for dialogue and decision-making in the first dimension, providing participating States with a platform to discuss politico-military security issues, raise security concerns, and keep each other accountable for adherence to the OSCE principles and implementation of their commitments.

**REPORT BY
THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE ASIAN PARTNERS FOR
CO-OPERATION GROUP TO THE THIRTY-FIRST MEETING OF
THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

(MC.GAL/10/24 of 30 December 2024)

Following the regular practice, in January 2024 North Macedonia, as an outgoing Chairmanship of the Organization, took over the steering of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group (APCG).

Aiming to maintain our Chairmanship's approach, based on transparency and inclusivity, and in line with the commitment to support Malta's Chairmanship goals in 2024, North Macedonia approached the new task with enthusiasm, creativity and dedication.

The work with the Group began with regular consultations, both in-person and via a video link. North Macedonia took into consideration the components and suggestions submitted by the Partners in the non-paper at the beginning of the year, thus engaging in enhanced thematic co-operation, engagement at the political level and increased visibility of the results of the Asian Partners' activities.

The consultations produced a draft programme of activities for 2024, composed of five APCG meetings, one interregional conference, the 2024 OSCE Asian Conference and a study visit programme for OSCE Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.

Reflecting on 2024, we are pleased by the fact that we conducted all planned activities, as well as an additional engagement: a joint Asian and Mediterranean Partners meeting on cyber/ICT security (10 September) on the margins of the Interregional Conference on Cyber/ICT Security. Thanks to the activities of the Asian Partners in 2024, the inseparability of Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific security is increasingly being recognized and the value of the OSCE partnership has increased.

The first meeting of the OSCE APCG in 2024 was held on 7 May in collaboration with Japan. The meeting focused on "Women's meaningful participation from norm to practice – Good practices and experience in Asia."

The meeting commenced with opening remarks from H.E. Mr. P. Avirovikj, Chairperson of the OSCE APCG and Permanent Representative of North Macedonia, H.E. Ms. N. Meli Daudey, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Malta, Ambassador R. Mizuuchi, Permanent Representative of Japan, and H.E. Mr. B. Dzhusupov, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. The main thematic discussion centred on "Women's meaningful participation from norm to practice" and was moderated by Ambassador J. Kinnear, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE.

The panellists Ms. Y. Matsuoka, Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Kobe Office, Ms. K. Wijayanti, Project Management Officer at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, Ms. T. Rudenko, Senior Co-ordination Adviser at the OSCE Office of the Special Representative, and Ms. L. Scarpitta, Senior Adviser on Gender Issues, Office of the OSCE

Secretary General, highlighted the gap between commitments and practice regarding women's participation in peace and security in the light of the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000. The OSCE has consistently promoted gender equality and women's involvement in peace and security through various frameworks and action plans. These underlined the importance of inclusive peacebuilding and the OSCE's commitment to promoting women's leadership in peacebuilding and mediation, to providing a networking platform in terms of initiatives such as the Networking Platform for Women Leaders, which was launched to support women's involvement in peace and security efforts, and to cross-regional co-operation – with an emphasis on sharing experiences and lessons learned to strengthen the women, peace and security agenda. Ms. Matsuoka shared the good practice of women, peace and security being incorporated into national action plans in disaster-prone Japan, since this is important not only during conflict, but also in disaster prevention and recovery/reconstruction after disasters.

The meeting addressed several key questions, including: the impact of women's participation on democracy and peace; challenges in promoting women's participation across different contexts; effective areas for cross-regional co-operation; the risks faced by women in crisis situations and how their participation can mitigate these; and the contribution of women's economic and environmental participation to societal stability.

The OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation Group meeting successfully facilitated an interactive discussion on enhancing women's roles in peace and security. The exchange of good practices and experiences from Asia will serve as a foundation for further strengthening the women, peace and security agenda both within and beyond the OSCE area. The event underscored the importance of addressing existing gaps and fostering inclusive peacebuilding processes through active female participation.

The second meeting of the OSCE APCG took place on 3 June 2024. The Permanent Mission of North Macedonia to the OSCE, United Nations and other international organizations in Vienna hosted a special meeting on “Afghan women's rights – regional problem with global impact. Can we do more?”

The meeting commenced with opening remarks from H.E. Mr. P. Avirovikj, Chairman of the OSCE APCG, H.E. Ms. N. Meli Daudey, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council, Ms. H. M. Schmid, Secretary General of the OSCE, and Ambassador M. Bakhtari, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the OSCE.

The central theme addressed the severe challenges faced by Afghan women since the return of the Taliban regime, including restrictions on education, healthcare, employment, and basic freedoms. The discussion was moderated by Ms. L. Scarpitta, OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues.

Panellists included Mr. R. Bennett, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, Ms. H. Barr, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch (via a video link), Ms. M. Meetra, women's rights activist, researcher, poet and journalist (in person), Ms. H. Ibrahimkhel, women's rights activist, and Ms. E. Kohistani, from Afghanistan, WIN Project (WIN for Women and Men – Strengthening comprehensive security through innovating and networking for gender equality).

The meeting underlined the following issues: the importance of gender inequality and violations, as well as the marginalization of Afghan women as a regional issue with global implications for stability and development; the need for empowerment and support in terms of vocational training, microfinance access and entrepreneurial opportunities for Afghan women; the needed investment in healthcare infrastructure; legal reforms to protect women's rights and support survivors of violence; and the international community's role, pinpointing the importance of global solidarity in supporting Afghan women's rights and achieving sustainable peace and security.

The APCG meeting underlined the importance of OSCE involvement in advocating for Afghan women through various platforms and programmes, such as the OSCE Networking Platform for Women Leaders, focusing on peacebuilding and mediation efforts, the commitment to gender equality as a central element of the OSCE's comprehensive security approach, and promoting democracy and sustainable development.

This meeting aimed to identify obstacles to women's political and social engagement in crisis contexts, as in Afghanistan, raising awareness of challenges to their human rights and exploring solutions. It was concluded that the OSCE and its partners should continue their efforts in empowering Afghan women, advocating for their rights, and promoting gender equality as a cornerstone of peace and prosperity. The meeting underscored the urgency and necessity of international co-operation for addressing these pressing issues.

The third meeting of the APCG, co-organized by North Macedonia and Thailand, focused on enhancing human security by protecting youth and children from online exploitation and trafficking. This meeting, held on 21 June 2024 in Vienna, brought together representatives from various countries and organizations to discuss challenges and solutions related to the online safety of youth and children.

The session began with opening remarks from key representatives Ms. A. Marku, Deputy Permanent Representative of North Macedonia, Ambassador V. Mangklatanakul, Permanent Representative of Thailand, Mr. M. Cluett, Head of Policy and Planning, OSCE Chairmanship of Malta, and Ms. K. Johnstone, Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

The meeting's thematic discussion was entitled "Enhancing human security: Protecting youth and children from online exploitation and trafficking" and was moderated by Ambassador H. Demirer, Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the OSCE. Panellists included Mr. W. Roujanavong, Thailand's representative to the ASEAN Commission, Mr. R. Hoving, Director of the NGO "Offlimits" and Ms. M. Angvik, Executive Programme Officer, Office of the Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

The discussion highlighted the increasing risks posed by misuse of the Internet and other technology which facilitates child exploitation and trafficking. It also underlined that the Internet's rapid expansion has increased the vulnerability of youth and children to online exploitation and trafficking. The discussion showed that the proliferation of online platforms has led to a significant rise in child sexual abuse material cases, so there is an urgent need for co-ordinated international responses.

Thailand has been proactive in safeguarding youth and children through several measures: designation of a National Internet Safety Day, formation of a Safe Internet

Coalition, utilization of AI-driven tools for support and prevention, and educational initiatives on digital literacy and cyber threats. Thailand's regional leadership in ASEAN has also been pivotal in promoting co-operative strategies to combat online exploitation.

This APCG meeting aimed to raise awareness about online exploitation and its socio-economic impacts, share best practices among OSCE participating States and Asian Partners, and foster a whole-of-society approach to strengthen protective measures. The misuse of technology by traffickers remains a significant challenge, with a noted increase in cases during the pandemic. In addition, the meeting emphasized the importance of international co-operation and the role of civil society in addressing these issues. The OSCE APCG meeting successfully brought attention to the critical issue of online exploitation and trafficking of youth and children. By fostering dialogue and sharing best practices, the meeting set the stage for enhanced international collaboration and policy development to protect vulnerable populations.

The fourth meeting of the OSCE APCG, held under the Chairmanship of North Macedonia in collaboration with Australia, took place on 11 October 2024. The meeting focused on "Global economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific for peace, prosperity, and security."

The session commenced with opening remarks delivered by Ms. A. Marku, Deputy Permanent Representative of North Macedonia to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Group, Ambassador I. Biggs, Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations and other international organizations in Vienna, Ms. E. Abela-Hampel, Representative of the OSCE Chairmanship and Mr. R. Ernst, Deputy Co-ordinator/Head of Economic Activities, Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA).

The discussion was moderated by Ambassador F. Raunig, Permanent Representative of Austria to the OSCE. The panel included Mr. S. Armstrong, Director of the Australia-Japan Research Centre of the Australian National University, who participated virtually, Ms. C. Bandhukul, Executive Director of the Bureau of America, Pacific and International Organizations, Ministry of Commerce of Thailand (virtual), Ms. L. Viltrakiene, Counsellor of the External Economic Relations and Economic Security Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, and Mr. G. Malkoun, Director, Countering Foreign Interference and Foreign Arrangements Scheme (Outreach Section), Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The meeting gathered representatives from OSCE participating States and Asian Partners for Co-operation, who emphasized the growing importance of economic security in the Indo-Pacific region and its role in reinforcing global peace and stability. The thematic discussion moderated by Mr. F. Raunig focused on how collaborative economic engagement in trade and governance between countries in the Indo-Pacific region and OSCE participating States can enhance regional and global peace while strengthening the economic security of both regions. The panel discussed the challenges and opportunities of strengthening economic resilience and supply chain diversification in an increasingly interconnected global economy. It stressed that geopolitical tensions pose risks to global trading systems and economic stability, and that there is a need for co-ordinated, transparent economic security measures to prevent adverse impacts on global governance.

The discussion during the meeting focused on how to encourage the sharing of best practices concerning resilient supply chains, strategies for increasing economic resilience through diversification, convincing businesses of the benefits of export market diversification, and measures promoting economic governance and transparency.

The meeting successfully generated an interactive discussion on enhancing economic security in the Indo-Pacific region. It highlighted the importance of international co-operation and shared strategies to enhance the economic security of the interconnected OSCE and Indo-Pacific regions.

The fifth meeting of the OSCE APCG was held on 11 November 2024; it was co-organized by North Macedonia and the Republic of Korea. This meeting aimed to discuss the outcomes of the 2024 Seoul Responsible AI in the Military Domain Summit (Seoul 2024 REIAM Summit). The meeting also aimed to foster dialogue among OSCE participating States and partners on the responsible development, deployment and use of AI technologies in military applications.

The APCG meeting commenced with opening remarks by Ms. A. Marku, Deputy Permanent Representative of North Macedonia to the OSCE, Ambassador S. Ham, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the OSCE, Lieutenant Colonel C. Z. Cordina, Head of Politico-Military Dimension, Maltese OSCE Chairmanship 2024, and Colonel (retired) R. Mossinkoff, Chief of Communications and Technology Unit, Conflict Prevention Centre.

The thematic session moderated by H.E. Ms. V. Pepin-Hallé, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE, began with the keynote addresses delivered by Ms. J. Yun, Director, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, and Ms. E. Bötger, Senior Policy Officer for New Technologies, Security Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The panel included Mr. N. Davison, Senior Adviser, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Ms. C. Wörgötter, Head of Unit for Conventional Weapons and Disarmament-Related Aspects of New Technologies, Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, and Mr. J. Ganschow, Ministry of Defence of Germany.

The meeting centred on the implications of AI for the military domain, including humanitarian, legal, societal and ethical concerns. Discussions highlighted the need for international co-operation to establish appropriate normative and governance frameworks for military AI applications. Additionally, the meeting highlighted one outcome of the Seoul 2024 REAIM Summit: the Blueprint for Action, a roadmap for establishing AI norms and governance in the military domain, which was adopted. It also stressed the importance of international co-operation and multi-stakeholder dialogues involving government, industry, academia and civil society, and pointed to the opportunities, challenges and benefits of AI in enhancing military operations while acknowledging associated risks.

The discussions focused on the international peace and security implications of AI for the military domain, on how different regions approach military AI applications and on what should be prioritized when establishing AI governance in the military domain.

The meeting successfully facilitated discussion on responsible applications of AI in the military domain, highlighting the need for collaborative efforts to address the challenges

and opportunities presented by AI technologies. The outcomes of the Seoul 2024 REAIM Summit serve as a foundation for future actions and international co-operation in this critical field. Participants agreed on the necessity for continued dialogue and co-operation to advance the responsible use of AI in military applications, thus ensuring that technological advancements do not compromise international peace and security.

In 2024, North Macedonia and the Partners, with the support of the OSCE Secretariat, organized two conferences.

The OSCE 2024 Asian Conference, co-organized by North Macedonia and Japan, was held in Vienna on 15 and 16 October 2024, on the topic “Towards stronger partnerships for sustainable peace and security.” The conference emphasized strengthening partnerships for sustainable peace and security, facilitating dialogue among participants from different regions, and highlighting the importance of collaboration between the OSCE and its Asian Partners. It provided an opportunity for countries from both the OSCE and Asian regions to address common interests and identify areas for deeper co-operation.

The conference was the result of a consensus reached through an inclusive and transparent consultation and negotiation process with OSCE participating States.

Introductory speeches by high-level guests opened the conference, setting the tone for further discussions on fostering co-operation. The opening remarks session, moderated by H.E. Mr. P. Avirovikj, Permanent Representative of North Macedonia to the OSCE, featured two high-level speakers: the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of North Macedonia, Mr. Z. Dimitrovski, who expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to chair the OSCE APCG in 2024 and reiterated its commitment to partnerships and multilateralism; and Japan’s State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Y. Tsuge, who emphasized that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions had become even more critical, as well as the importance of partnerships and dialogue in finding common solutions to shared challenges.

Three thematic sessions followed. The first session focused on enhancing synergies between the OSCE and Asia in advancing the women, peace and security agenda, building on the APCG meeting in May 2024 and underscoring the irreplaceable role of women in peace processes. Experiences and best practices that emphasized the integration of gender perspectives into security frameworks were shared. Ms. T. Matsuzawa, Director for International Co-operation on Women, Peace and Security, and gender adviser to the Japanese Ministry of Defence, a panellist from Japan, introduced the four pillars of the Ministry of Defence’s efforts to promote women, peace and security: raising awareness, developing organizational systems, international co-operation and reflecting gender awareness. Being a strong supporter of the women, peace and security agenda, North Macedonia contributed a panellist to this thematic session: Ambassador K. Ilioski, Director for Multilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of North Macedonia.

The second thematic discussion addressed effective OSCE-Asia co-operation in tackling the challenges of climate change, emphasizing the significant security risks that it represents. Speakers also discussed the environmental impact of landmines and strategies for climate adaptation and resilience.

Another panellist from Japan, Mr. K. Ono, a senior researcher at the Socio-Economic Research Office, National Institute for Defense Studies, presented the impact of climate change on security risks in the seas around Japan and the co-operation of various countries in responding to climate change.

The third session highlighted the importance of human rights and the rule of law as essential factors for sustainable peace and security. One panellist, Mr. H. Matsuo, Vice-Dean of Keio University Law School, Japan, used the example of Japan's past legal assistance in Asia to illustrate the importance of establishing the rule of law in a way that reflects the diversity of countries and flexible assistance to that end. He affirmed that respecting human rights and the rule of law is vital for peace, security and sustainable development, aligning with OSCE commitments.

The conference had an excellent turnout, with 46 OSCE participating States in attendance and all five partners from the OSCE APCG. At the same time, in accordance with the commitment to gender mainstreaming, the conference achieved gender balance as regards the panels' moderation and participation, with an equal number of male and female panellists.

Overall, the 2024 OSCE Asian Conference was a success, demonstrating the importance of collaboration in addressing global security challenges. Also, the conference highlighted the fact that security in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions is inseparable and that the value of the OSCE partnership has also increased. The content of the conference – the crucial role of women's participation in peace processes, the impact of climate change, and the importance of human rights and the rule of law – was highly valued.

Being aware that cyber/ICT security is one of the most topical themes in contemporary security challenges, North Macedonia supported the organization of the 4th Inter-Regional Conference on Cyber/ICT Security, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea in collaboration with the OSCE. This conference took place on 9 September 2024 in the Hofburg in Vienna. The event brought together experts and officials from various regions to discuss pressing issues in cyber/ICT security, focusing on international law, capacity-building, and gender aspects.

The opening remarks dealt with the cyber/ICT security environment in the Asian and OSCE areas. Notable speakers included: H.E. Mr. P. Avirovikj, Chairperson of the OSCE APCG; Mr. R. Dong-yeol, Ambassador for International Cybersecurity Affairs of the Republic of Korea; H.E. Ms. N. Meli Daudey, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council; H.E. Mr. C. Kamp, Chairperson of the OSCE's cyber/ICT security informal working group established by Permanent Council Decision No. 1039, and H.E. Ms. A. Kupchyna, OSCE Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats.

The first session addressed the applicability of international law in cyberspace, an area requiring further exploration. Discussions focused on how regional organizations might contribute to the United Nations' work and how States might develop national positions on international law in cyberspace. The session was moderated by Ms. L. Vihul, Founder and CEO of Cyber Law International, Estonia. The panellists included Ms. S. Shin, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Korea; Ms. K. Raleigh, U.S. Department of State; Mr. Y. van Haaften, European External Action Service; Mr. K. Ahmed Usmani, African Union; and Ms. A. Aagten, Clingendael Institute (via a video link).

The second session emphasized the significance of cyber/ICT security capacity-building and explored regional specificities and the sharing of good practices. It dealt with the ways in which regional experiences might inform United Nations discussions and was moderated by Ambassador R. Dong-yeol, Korea. The speakers included Ms. J. Pawelek-Mendez, Poland, Mr. A. Andreu, France, Ms. Y. Zhalilkhanova, Kazakhstan, Mr. W. Yi, Korea Internet and Security Agency, Mr. K. Tsegmid, Mongolia, Mr. W. Wisitsora-at, Thailand, Mr. N. Jokić, Serbia, Ms. M. Jaramillo, Organization of American States (OAS).

The final session built on previous discussions about the role of women in cyber policy. It focused on promoting gender equality to enhance cyber stability and resilience, presenting concrete examples of gender aspects in cyber/ICT security confidence-building measures. This session was facilitated by Mr. A. David, Global Affairs Canada, Ms. S. Anastasovska, North Macedonia, Ms. A. Pytlak, Stimson Center (via a video link) and Ms. A. Hye-yeon, Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (WISET), Korea (via a video link).

The closing remarks were delivered by Ms. K. Lee, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the OSCE, and Ms. S. Toth, Cyber Security Officer from the OSCE Transnational Threats Department.

The conference provided a platform for valuable discussions on cyber/ICT security challenges and opportunities, which emphasized the need for international co-operation, capacity-building and gender inclusion in cyber policy. The insights and strategies that were shared are expected to inform future regional and global cybersecurity initiatives.

On 10 September 2024, North Macedonia and Finland, in their capacity as Chairmanships of the Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, organized a side event on the margins of the Interregional Conference entitled “Strengthening Cyber/ICT Security Trust-Building and Co-operation: OSCE and its Partners”. The event took place in the Hofburg and aimed to explore the role of confidence-building measures in enhancing collaboration among the OSCE, Asian, and Mediterranean regions in light of the evolving landscape of cyber/ICT security and its current challenges.

The event sought to investigate the importance of confidence-building measures in fostering collaboration, address best practices and lessons learned in cybersecurity, and provide a platform for dialogue on co-operation opportunities and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening cyber resilience mechanisms.

The event’s introductory speech was delivered by H.E. Mr. P. Avirovikj, Permanent Representative of the Republic of North Macedonia to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, Lieutenant Colonel C. Z. Cordina, Head of Politico-Military Dimension of the Maltese OSCE Chairmanship, and Ms. M. Twardowska, Head of External Co-operation at the OSCE Secretariat. The session was moderated by Ms. G. Atanasova-Gjorevska from the OSCE’s External Co-operation Section. The panel discussion, moderated by Ms. S. Toth, OSCE Cyber Security Officer, featured two notable experts: Mr. S. Hashem, Professor of Information Sciences and Technology at George Mason University, representing Egypt, and Mr. W. Yi, Principal Researcher at the Korea Internet and Security Agency, representing the Republic of Korea. The panellists addressed critical cyber/ICT security challenges faced by participating States and OSCE partners, emphasizing

how interregional co-operation could help tackle these issues. They discussed confidence-building measures and highlighted the necessity for trust and collaboration among OSCE participating States and partners in the field of cybersecurity. The role of the OSCE in enhancing cyber resilience and promoting responsible State behaviour in cyberspace was also discussed.

Panellists pointed out that mechanisms such as information sharing, capacity-building and technical assistance played a vital role in improving cybersecurity outcomes. They shared several successful examples of cybersecurity initiatives that promote co-operation and co-ordination between the OSCE and its partners.

The side event underscored the importance of collaborative efforts and confidence-building in addressing the complex challenges of cyber/ICT security. Through shared experiences and initiatives, participating States and partners can enhance their resilience against cyberthreats and foster a safer digital environment.

North Macedonia, in its capacity as APCG Chairmanship, also supported the 2024 OSCE Study Visit Programme for the Partners for Co-operation organized by the Office of the Secretary General/External Co-operation Section, by sponsoring a networking event together with Finland as the holder of the 2024 Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group. This programme provided a unique opportunity for young diplomats and experts from OSCE Partners, including from Australia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, to deepen their understanding of the OSCE's vital mandate and activities. This initiative embodies the OSCE's commitment to fostering diplomacy and collaboration among the OSCE and its Partners for Co-operation. Participants, through a series of briefings and presentations, gained invaluable insights into OSCE values, principles and commitments. They also engaged directly with OSCE work and had the chance to visit key OSCE Executive Structures, including the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Vienna office of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; finally, they were privileged to attend the concluding session of the 31st OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, held in Prague.

The programme not only enhanced individual knowledge but also strengthened ties between the OSCE and its Partners for Co-operation, ensuring that the next generation of leaders will be well equipped to navigate the complex landscape of international relations.

The actions taken in the course of 2024 showcased North Macedonia's strong support of and dedication to multilateralism and co-operation among OSCE participating States and our Partners.

In terms of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, 2024 was a successful year. The value of OSCE partnerships is also being recognized as resulting in a growing understanding of the inseparability of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security within the OSCE.