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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
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RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS ON MILITARY
SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL, AT THE 1043rd PLENARY MEETING
OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION**

3 May 2023

**Agenda item: Security Dialogue
Subject: Black Sea region – security horizons**

Madam Chairperson,

The delegation of the Russian Federation has doubts about the ability of the Bulgarian Chairmanship to provide neutral and impartial guidance to the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC).

To begin with, at the opening of the current session of negotiations, for the first time in the history of the FSC, the Chairperson refused to act as a mediator and “broker” between delegations, which constitutes a blatant violation of the approach agreed upon by all 57 participating States to the work of our Organization, and of the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE, for which Bulgaria bears full responsibility.

We note Bulgaria’s attempts to use its elevated and responsible position as holder of the Chairmanship to serve the interests of a narrow group of Western delegations at the expense of unlocking the potential of the FSC on the basis of collective principles. There can be no other explanation for the fact that the latest round of negotiations will abound with topics that fall into the category of NATO and European Union “special interests” – climate change, “gender” equality and now also the security of the Black Sea, which those in Brussels view solely through the prism of countering Russia. It is not surprising that, under these circumstances, our Bulgarian colleagues preferred not to consult on the FSC agenda with the Russian delegation. Or were there some other reasons for this, Madam Chairperson?

Since the Chairmanship has arbitrarily designated “selecting relevant topics for discussion” rather than mediating between participating States as its main function, we should like to receive answers to the following questions: what specific steps is Bulgaria taking to organize the Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting on the Vienna Document 2011? Why has the agenda again been oversaturated with “soft” security issues to the detriment of the Forum’s politico-military mandate? Given the dangerous destabilization of the situation on the European continent, what reason is there for us to discuss ensuring equality between men and women? Lastly, what does ecology have to do with the FSC? We look forward to meaningful explanations.

In the meantime, we have come to the alarming conclusion that the Chairmanship has adopted as its guide to action former United States Secretary of State James Baker's formula that the "real risk to NATO is [the] CSCE". I should like to believe that this is only a first impression.

For the reasons mentioned, the Russian delegation decided to abstain from taking part in the opening ceremony of the Bulgarian Chairmanship. We know that this has particularly offended the representatives of the US Government, who have accused Russia of "undermining the work of the FSC". The US delegation has apparently forgotten that, during the thirteen weeks of the summer round of negotiations in 2022, along with other NATO and European Union delegations, it did not attend a single meeting of the Forum. I wonder how the United States assesses its contribution to the pan-European dialogue in this context.

Madam Chairperson,

The Russian Federation is of the view that security issues in the Black Sea region should be resolved exclusively by the littoral States and in strict compliance with the Montreux Convention of 1936. However, in recent years there have been provocative attempts by extraregional players to include the Black Sea in their destabilizing activities.

We view the drastic exacerbation of the politico-military situation in those waters through the lens of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's announced plans to reinforce NATO's presence "from the Black to the Baltic Seas". In fact, we are talking about the resurrection of the Polish concept of an "Intermarium" – an antagonistic paramilitary space to counter Russia. As a consequence, the aggressive actions of the North Atlantic Alliance will inevitably turn the Black Sea region into a zone of geopolitical confrontation.

The further reinforcement of NATO's "eastern flank", which is currently under way, is in actual fact setting the conditions for the formation of strike groups against our country in the shortest possible time. The number of the bloc's multinational battalion groups, including those in Bulgaria and Romania, has increased from four to eight. The United States is building up its military infrastructure in Greece. Active use will be made of the port of Alexandroupoli to rapidly expand the grouping of forces in the southern part of the "eastern flank". In fact, an alternative "window" is being created to move troops and military equipment to a potential European theatre of war, bypassing the Turkish straits.

Possible plans by the German authorities to deploy additional foreign troops on their territory, including in the eastern federal states, as part of their NATO commitments are also in keeping with this logic. Such a step would violate the Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany of 12 September 1990, in particular, Article 5, paragraph 3, which provides that foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons or their carriers will not be stationed or deployed in the former German Democratic Republic. We warn the German Government against taking a selective approach to the interpretation of the fundamental documents of the Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany under the pretext of strengthening the aggressive bloc on the "eastern flank".

It is clear to us that NATO's actions, be it the confrontational development over many years of military infrastructure close to Russia's borders or stepped-up activity in the Black Sea, are leading to a rise in tension and require an appropriate response on our part. Suffice it to recall that the creation of unacceptable threats to the national security of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine by the transatlantic allies, coupled with the feeding of the revanchist sentiments of the Kyiv regime, prompted the launch of the special military operation.

However, NATO does not wish to stop. In order to implement plans for the comprehensive "containment" of Russia in the Black Sea region, the Alliance is developing close co-operation with

Moldova and Georgia. The latter is under pressure to be drawn into open confrontation with our country in the Trans-Caucasus. The NATO militarists would do well to consider whether they really want to repeat or even expand on the lessons of “military geography” they have forgotten.

The fact that most of the littoral States obediently follow the course set by the West aimed at escalating the conflict in Ukraine and providing the Kyiv regime with full support is also having a seriously destabilizing effect on Black Sea security. We recall that former Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov boasted that, despite the parliamentary ban in place at the time, the Bulgarian Government was providing up to 30 per cent of the Kyiv fighters’ ammunition needs in the spring of 2022. But no amount of hypocrisy can cover up the blatant violation of the principles of responsible behaviour when transferring arms to conflict zones.

We draw the attention of the FSC to the sharp increase in the use in the Black Sea region of reconnaissance aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) by NATO States to gather intelligence on behalf of Ukraine. A correlation has been identified between the bloc’s air force activities in the region and attempted UAV strikes by the Ukrainian armed forces against facilities in Russian Crimea. In particular, we have information that, prior to a Ukrainian drone attack on the territory of an oil storage facility in Sevastopol on 29 April, a French Navy Atlantic 2 anti-submarine aircraft and a US RQ-4B Global Hawk drone had been carrying out reconnaissance in approximately the same area. Colleagues, you know exactly what we are talking about – the United States and France worked as spotters for the Ukrainians, without regard for possible civilian casualties.

Incidentally, Russian aerospace force assets have previously detected US MQ-9 Reaper UAVs violating the boundaries of the area of temporary airspace use over the Black Sea to conduct reconnaissance of the peninsula. Contrary to the unsubstantiated claims by the US representatives, our fighter planes, which were scrambled to identify the intruder, did not come into contact with the US strike drone or use on-board weapons – the drone went into an uncontrolled flight, lost altitude and fell into the water as a result of abrupt manoeuvring. This incident and the US Government’s hysteria over it are yet another example of direct US involvement in the conflict in Ukraine.

We also see serious risks in the fact that the increase in NATO air and naval assets in the region is likely to give rise to dangerous military incidents with unpredictable consequences, up to and including an escalatory spiral. We need only recall the unprecedentedly brazen provocation by the British destroyer HMS *Defender*, which violated our country’s borders on 23 June 2021. According to BBC correspondent Jonathan Beale, who was on board the ship, this was done intentionally: before entering our territorial waters, the ship’s crew was put on alert and weapons systems were loaded.

At the same time, when carrying out such provocations, the United States and the United Kingdom are well aware of the scale and volatility of their actions and have a good idea of the possible nature of Russia’s reaction.

It is clear to us that the United States and NATO have fallen into the illusion of impunity and have become carried away with such chimeras as “escalation control” and “escalation dominance”. In vain. There should be no doubt that all acts of terrorism organized and encouraged by the Alliance against the sovereign territory of the Russian Federation will be met with a resolute response.

Madam Chairperson,

Today’s discussion would not be complete without mentioning one of the most acute problems concerning Black Sea security – the creation of an increased mine hazard, for which Ukraine is to blame.

Ukrainian armed formations mined the Odessa region and part of the Black Sea back in 2022. According to the Russian Federal Security Service, anti-personnel mines have been buried in the sand along the coastline and some 420 moored anti-amphibious mines have been laid in the waters off the coast of Odessa, Ochakiv, Chornomorsk and Yuzhne. In March 2022, it was revealed that some of the naval mines had drifted into the Black Sea and had reached the Bosphorus Strait unimpeded. As a result, military and civilian vessels belonging to coastal States have been blown up by the drifting mines. All of this demonstrates once again the catastrophic consequences of the irresponsible and impulsive actions of the Ukrainian authorities. The Russian Federation is taking the necessary measures to ensure the safety of civilian maritime traffic in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

We categorically reject the unfounded statements by OSCE participating States today about the Russian Federation using the food problem as a “weapon”. We understand that our Western colleagues are not accustomed to referring to facts, but they speak for themselves: since 1 August 2022, some 29 million metric tons of food, including over 14.5 million metric tons of corn, almost 8 million metric tons of wheat, 1.5 million metric tons of sunflower oil and meal, 1 million metric tons of rape and barley, 742,000 metric tons of soya beans, 327,000 metric tons of sunflower seeds and 140,000 metric tons of sugar beet have been exported on 917 vessels from Ukrainian ports under the Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian Ports (Black Sea Grain Initiative). The list could, of course, go on.

The real “weapon” that threatens the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative to export agricultural products from Ukraine and the related commitment to Russia to remove the obstacles to grain and fertilizer exports is the Kyiv regime’s terrorist actions against the vessels involved in safeguarding the “grain corridor” and the failure to meet the terms of the deal as far as the Russian agricultural sector is concerned. So far, we have not seen any willingness on the part of the counterparties to truly do what is necessary to successfully implement the United Nations Secretary-General’s initiative on a package approach to agricultural exports from Ukraine and Russia.

Madam Chairperson,

It is obvious that the aggressive zero-sum games imposed by players from outside the region have already transformed the Black Sea region from a zone of peace into an area with serious conflict potential. Despite our appeals, also through bilateral channels, the United States and NATO member countries have shown no interest in reducing the threat of dangerous military incidents. We warn that continuing to add fuel to the fire in the region at the behest of these countries is fraught with the potential for great misery.

We remain convinced that the issue of ensuring Black Sea security can only be addressed through the collective efforts of the littoral States, building on existing co-operation mechanisms, including the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group, Operation Black Sea Harmony and the Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in the Naval Field in the Black Sea.

Thank you for your attention.