



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council Malta, 5 - 6 December 2024**

### **EU Opening Statement**

**Delivered by EEAS Managing Director for Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Asia, regional cooperation and OSCE  
Mr. Michael Siebert**

1. The European Union extends its gratitude to the OSCE Chair, Deputy Prime Minister Borg, for hosting this year's Ministerial Meeting in Malta. The EU commends the Maltese Chairpersonship for its efforts to lead the organisation through this challenging year.
2. By launching its war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia has flouted the core norms, principles and commitments on which European security is built, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, and the UN Charter. Although Russia has been trying to subvert them for years, including in Georgia since 2008 and in Ukraine at least since 2014, these principles are neither negotiable nor subject to revision or re-interpretation. The EU supports the OSCE's contribution to ensuring full accountability for all violations of international law, including international human rights law, and for all those responsible, including in leadership positions.
3. Today in Malta, we want to reaffirm that Ukraine's security is Europe's security. The EU will stand unequivocally with Ukraine and its people. The EU's commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders remains steadfast. We will continue to contribute, together with partners, to future security commitments to Ukraine, which will help it defend itself, resist destabilisation efforts and deter further acts of aggression in the future.

4. Russia's external aggression, with Belarus' complicity, is mirrored by unprecedented internal repression of dissenting voices, as documented, inter alia, in the OSCE Moscow Mechanism reports. We condemn Russia's systematic crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Russia must immediately and unconditionally release all those imprisoned on politically motivated charges in Russia and arbitrarily and illegally detained in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the three OSCE staff officials - Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov.
5. The EU reiterates its firm support to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova within their internationally recognised borders. The EU will continue to support the Republic of Moldova in addressing the challenges it faces as a consequence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.
6. The EU will continue to stand with the Georgian people. In recent days, we have heard alarming reports of arbitrary detention, violence and ill-treatment against protesters, politicians, journalists and civic activists. We urge the Georgian authorities to stop using excessive force and ensure freedom of assembly. All acts of violence must be investigated immediately.
7. The EU underlines its continued support for advancing a sustainable and lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, based on the principles of recognition of sovereignty, the inviolability of borders and territorial integrity. The EU calls on the parties to finalise the negotiating process shortly.
8. The EU encourages and promotes the OSCE engagement in Central Asia with a focus on regional security and resilience, preventing and countering transnational threats, women's and girls' empowerment, addressing climate change, cybersecurity, and the different sectors of sustainable connectivity, as identified also in the EU's Global Gateway strategy.
9. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders are an indispensable element in the system of checks and balances in a healthy democracy and in holding participating States accountable for the commitments we have made in the OSCE. We will continue to support them.
10. The OSCE is a key component of the European security order. The EU wants to ensure that the OSCE's unique approach to security remains effective. To achieve this goal, we will continue to support the implementation of the OSCE

principles and commitments in all three dimensions and strengthen the OSCE's capacities and field activities. This is in particular reflected in a number of EU-funded projects implemented by the OSCE and its autonomous Institutions across the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership and Central Asia.

11. We look forward to the formal adoption of the necessary decisions for the appointment of the new Secretary General and the heads of the three autonomous institutions. The EU is ready to engage in fruitful cooperation with all four of them for the benefit of the organisation. However, there are still important outstanding decisions to take in order to ensure the OSCE's effective functioning under challenging circumstances.
12. It is imperative that the organisation is adequately funded. The prolonged absence of an agreed Unified Budget highlights how urgent the financial situation is. We commend the chair for his efforts to find a solution to this issue and invite all participating States to support these efforts. We also call for prompt decisions regarding the Chair-in-Office after 2025, and we welcome Cyprus' bid for the OSCE Chairpersonship in 2027.
13. We look forward to working closely with the 2025 Chairperson-in-Office, Finland, particularly in reaffirming the principles and commitments of the Helsinki Final Act, which remain more relevant than ever amidst current challenges. On the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, our aim is to preserve and enhance the OSCE's role as a platform for good-faith dialogue on peace, security and accountability.

Thank you for your attention.