



Statement by the OSCE Chair-in-Office and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, H.E. Dr Ian Borg Opening Session of the OSCE Permanent Council, 25 January 2024

Madam Chair,

Madam Secretary General,

Representative on Freedom of the Media

Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

High Commissioner on National Minorities

Excellencies,

It is an honour to be present today on such a momentous occasion, as Malta assumes the Chairpersonship of the OSCE for the first time in our history.

My warmest thanks go to my predecessor, Minister Bujar Osmani of North Macedonia and his team. Their determination and success in finding pragmatic solutions will serve as inspiration for our efforts to ensure that this organization arrives in Helsinki more resilient and ready for the future.

The trust bestowed upon us by all participating States during these challenging times is a responsibility we embrace with profound commitment, humility, and pride - fully mindful of the critical juncture at which we assume this role.

I affirm my resolve, and that of my Government and our able diplomats, to reciprocate this trust by tirelessly working to safeguard and uphold the principles and commitments set out in the Helsinki Final Act and Charter of Paris.

Let me remind you that these are not optional – they are shared obligations to which we have all collectively agreed.



Malta accepted to Chair the OSCE because we believe in its relevance and place in the international rules-based system. Our engagement in this organization and on the world stage is not governed by self-interest but by three core considerations.

Our engagement is governed by our conviction in the imperative need of restoring our planet to a state of peace.

Our engagement is governed by our sense of purpose to serve as a bridge in the world around us, inspired by Malta's unique position at the crossroads of East and West, of Europe and Africa.

Our engagement is governed by our steadfast commitment to multilateralism, which underpinned our decision to step in as Chair-in-Office at the eleventh hour while also serving in the UN Security Council.

It is this spirit – of principled engagement, bridge-building, and dedication to collaborative diplomacy, which Malta brings to this endeavour, and which will be reflected in the **overarching priorities** of our Chairpersonship.

The first of these is our unequivocal commitment to keeping **Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine** at the top of the OSCE agenda. The challenges faced by Ukraine will be addressed throughout our programme.

I, and the Maltese Chairpersonship will continue to demand Russia's full, unconditional and immediate withdrawal from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

I reiterate my strongest condemnation of the intensified attacks witnessed in the last weeks.

Colleagues,

Let us do everything possible to break the chain of relentless violence, anguish, and suffering we are witnessing, not only in this war but in conflicts around the world. Let us halt all deliberate destruction of vital infrastructure and all civilian



deaths. Let us reverse the normalisation of this callous indifference to human life.

What we do for peace today will help determine whether we live in war tomorrow.

Next week I will visit Kyiv to demonstrate our unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

I am convinced that our Organization has a pivotal role to play in Ukraine. We commend the important work of the Support Programme for Ukraine's team and pledge our support for even more engagement.

We will also join the Secretary General in her call for the release of the three illegally detained staff members of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

This Chairpersonship will not tire in repeating: this war must end. Until then we will engage pro-actively, condemn breaches of our commitments, and help ensure accountability.

Excellencies,

We will also prioritise the OSCE's role in helping to resolve the protracted conflicts across the OSCE region, preventing escalation, and restoring stability. This requires our full attention and active engagement.

Our Chairpersonship will rely on the OSCE's comprehensive toolkit and expertise to support peace by facilitating dialogue towards durable and sustainable political solutions in Eastern Europe – I refer to the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in particular – and the South Caucasus. Preventing any human suffering must be the guiding principle for these efforts, in line with our responsibilities and the OSCE's purpose.

We will also work to provide support to our Field Operations in Eastern Europe, South Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. We will sustain their engagement with host authorities in line with OSCE principles and commitments, and support work in the field to strengthen national capacities and capabilities.



Colleagues,

Another overarching priority of Malta's Chairpersonship is to ensure the **OSCE's functionality and find solutions for its leadership.**

The Ministerial in Skopje provided a glimmer of hope, but we are not out of the woods. We must build on this positive outcome to secure a sustainable and predictable future for this Organization.

I mentioned earlier Malta's readiness to serve as a bridge, in this case a rather long one between Skopje and Helsinki. Any bridge, however, must be built on strong foundations if it is to endure the waves that will inevitably come its way.

The Maltese Chairpersonship's mission is to strengthen the resilience of the OSCE and our people, in pursuit of a secure and peaceful future. We will do this by reinforcing the pillars of this Organization and upholding the principles and commitments on which it stands.

Colleagues, no organization can function without a budget and leadership. We count on the collaboration of all participating States in demonstrating the necessary political will to finally give this organization the foundations it needs for a secure and resilient future. If we don't, then why are we here?

Our first priority is to reach consensus as early as possible on a solid Unified Budget. We will then work to ensure that the organization and its four institutions have predictable and durable leadership beyond September 4th, 2024. Our collective aim must be to arrive in Malta without these decisions hanging over the Organization.

I would like to repeat that these are all critical issues requiring our collective engagement.

Excellencies, colleagues,

Our Chairpersonship will build on North Macedonia's success in keeping the over one billion **people** in our region at the centre of OSCE initiatives.



In particular, we will look to incorporate an inclusive approach to security by effectively mainstreaming **gender** and increasing the meaningful engagement of **youth** in the discussions that take place.

Ladies and gentlemen, I assure you that as Chair of this organization, Malta will spare no effort to harness the capabilities of its tools and mechanisms and maximise its potential as a platform for comprehensive and cooperative security.

Our parallel Chairpersonship of the OSCE and elected membership of the UN Security Council provides a unique opportunity to identify constructive synergies between these multilateral institutions dedicated to promoting peace and security.

Therefore, our Chairpersonship will also build on Malta's diplomacy in New York on the **Women, Peace, and Security** agenda.

We will also renew the OSCE's efforts to strengthen resilience against **cyber threats**, address **transnational threats**, and promote compliance with **conventional arms control commitments**.

The security of our people is inextricably tied to their economic prosperity and the environment in which they live.

Recognising this link, the Maltese Chairpersonship will pay particular attention to bridging digital divides and promoting wider access to **digital** technologies and skills. We will also pursue closer **cooperation on climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation** as well as on **combating corruption** and **enhancing food security**.

Colleagues, no country is perfect. Yet, it is not idealism to look to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law as the basis of a peaceful and secure world. This is especially true in the important election year ahead of us. We call on all participating States to honour their commitments and invite ODIHR to observe their elections.



Neither is it idealism to stand against any form of exploitation of the weak by the strong.

At a time when media freedom is more under threat than ever before, Malta's Chairpersonship will push forward initiatives on **media literacy** and the **safety of journalists**, particularly female journalists, both online and offline. We will also actively engage in efforts to **combat violence against women** and **trafficking in human beings**.

Excellencies,

Malta's leadership in the OSCE goes back to Helsinki, where we insisted that there could be no European security without Mediterranean security. This principle, enshrined in the Final Act's Mediterranean Chapter and later extended to Asia, has facilitated the Organization's relations with 11 Partners for Cooperation. The Maltese Chairpersonship will seek to honour and sustain this strategic vision, including by hosting the Mediterranean Conference.

In 2024, Malta commemorates three proud milestones – 60 years as an independent nation, 50 years as a Republic, and 20 years as a member of the European Union.

Throughout this time, we have always sought to meaningfully engage in finding solutions to challenges affecting the global community of nations. While we approach our Chairpersonship with this attitude, we humbly recognise that it will not be enough.

This Organization must remain anchored in the principles and commitments to which we all agreed 50 years ago - not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. And that end is to restore peace and security in our region.

Until then, we must maintain the Organization's principled engagement across the three dimensions of its comprehensive approach to security. We must also strengthen its resilience to prevent the organization from drifting away with the next wind of instability.



In the words of Martin Luther King Jr, “If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.”

Let me conclude by assuring that I and the Maltese Chairpersonship will leave no stone unturned in strengthening the resilience of this Organization and our people, in pursuit of a secure and peaceful future.

I thank you.