



EUROPEAN UNION

30th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council Skopje, 30 November-1 December 2023

EU Opening Statement

1. The European Union expresses gratitude to OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Osmani, for hosting the 30th OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Skopje, as well as for the hospitality extended. The EU commends the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia for its efforts to lead this year the organisation in challenging times, marked by Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. We strongly condemn the ongoing blatant violations by the Russian Federation of international law and OSCE principles and commitments, which also impede the regular work of the Organisation. We once again call on Russia to immediately stop its war of aggression against Ukraine, and completely and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.
2. The EU's support for the OSCE stems from our strong commitment to effective multilateralism, firmly rooted in the respect for the rule of law and international law. In light of Russia's ongoing brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU supports the OSCE's contribution to ensuring full accountability for all violations of international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and for all those responsible, including in leadership positions.
3. 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 underpinned in the UN Charter: refraining from the use of force, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Although Russia has been trying to subvert them for years, including in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine at least since 2014, these principles are neither negotiable nor subject to revision or re-interpretation. They remain at the

- heart of the OSCE and are central to the EU's efforts to promote multilateralism and defend a rules-based international order that Russia is attempting to upend.
4. Today in Skopje, we want to reaffirm that Ukraine's security is Europe's security. The EU will stand unequivocally with Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes. The EU's commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders remains steadfast. The EU and its Member States have been at the forefront of the solidarity effort with the Ukrainian people. We have already mobilised 85 billion € in financial, economic, humanitarian, and military support for Ukraine and its people. In the longer term, we will 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. We will support Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction, in coordination with international partners, including the demining process.
 5. The EU and its Member States will also continue their intensified diplomatic outreach efforts and cooperation with Ukraine and other countries to ensure the widest possible international support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and the key principles and objectives of Ukraine's Peace Formula, with a view to a Global Peace Summit being held.
 6. As our fundamental principles and OSCE commitments continue to be violated on a daily basis, the human dimension of the comprehensive security concept proves to be more important than ever. Russia's external aggression, with Belarus' complicity, is mirrored by harrowing, unprecedented internal repression of dissenting voices, as documented, inter alia, in the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report. 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 members. We also call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate all political prisoners and meet the demands of the people for free and fair elections.
 7. 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.

8. 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. We also welcome the efforts of the OSCE to increase the resilience of the Republic of Moldova in such challenging times. The EU will continue to work closely with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia and support their reform efforts on their European paths.
9. 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 underlines the importance of ensuring the rights and security of the Karabakh Armenians, including those who wish to return to their homes. The EU calls on the Parties to engage in good faith in the Brussels normalisation process and to finalise this process by the end of this year.
10. The EU encourages synergies with the OSCE engagement in Central Asia and promotes such engagement, 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 in the Global Gateway strategy.
11. The EU continues to support the OSCE's crucial work in addressing the environmental degradation/climate change/biodiversity loss nexus and its impact on security across all dimensions of security.
12. 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.
13. 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. Our aim is to preserve and enhance the OSCE's role as a platform for good-faith dialogue on peace, security and accountability. An organisation that has the capacity to deliver for European security for its participating States and its people through the valuable work of its autonomous institutions, structures and field operations, such as the Support Programme for Ukraine, to which the EU and Member States contribute substantially.

14. In order to maintain its ability to act under these difficult circumstances and to allow for its effective functioning across all three dimensions, the organisation needs to be funded adequately and have the necessary leadership in place. Therefore, we fully support the nomination of Malta for the Chairpersonship-in-Office for 2024 and the joint, undifferentiated extension of the mandates for the current Secretary General and the Heads of the three autonomous institutions beyond 2023.
15. To conclude, let me reiterate again our firm commitment to the OSCE and the values it represents. We want to thank you once again, Chairman Minister Osmani, for your tireless efforts to keep the organisation functioning in one of the most difficult periods for European security in decades.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.