



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Bjarni Benediktsson,
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland,
at the 1462nd (Reinforced) Meeting
of the OSCE Permanent Council
Vienna, 23 February, 2024**

*Mister Chairman in Office of the OSCE,
Madame Secretary-General of the OSCE,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies.*

I would like to thank my colleague, Mr. Ian Borg, Chairman in Office of the OSCE and the Foreign Minister of Malta, for convening this Reinforced Meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE.

Mr. Chair,

Tomorrow marks the day none of us can forget.

On the 24th of February 2022, we woke up to a world that seemed to rapidly head in the opposite direction of peace, security and stability and the progress made in the decades before.

It's been two years since the start of the Russian Federation's unlawful, unjustified, and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine – an invasion that marked a sad watershed in our post-world war history.

Mr. Chair,

Russia's invasion has deeply altered the security situation in the OSCE region. Russia's illegal and unjustified war against Ukraine is also an attack on the multilateral system and undermines security in all three dimensions. It is a blatant violation of international law, including the UN Charter, and our OSCE principles and commitments, enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

What future lies ahead for our European project? How can we strengthen democratic security on our continent? How can we ensure that Russia is held accountable for the crimes committed and the damage caused?

Mr. Chair,

Accountability for international crimes committed within the context of this war, including the crime of aggression, is vital to ensure justice and reparations. Impunity for the perpetrators is not an option. Russia will face consequences for its unlawful and brutal actions. The first steps towards accountability have already been taken, including by the Council of Europe with its Reykjavik Summit decision in 2023 to establish the Register of Damage for Ukraine.

It is not only Russia's invasion of Ukraine that is a violation of its commitments. So is its brutal crackdown and intolerance of any dissent or diverging views. We were saddened to learn of the passing of Alexei Navalny and I offer my sincerest condolences to his family and supporters. Putin and the Russian government bear ultimate responsibility for his death and his imprisonment and untimely death reflect the cowardice and cynicism that governs the Kremlin.

Mr. Chair,

Iceland continues to condemn, in the strongest possible terms, Russia's brutal and unprovoked attack on Ukraine.

We demand the Russian Federation immediately pull back its military forces and cease its invasion. Innocent civilians have suffered and continue to suffer. Lives have been lost and continue to be lost. The consequences of Russia's unhinged brutality are horrific for Ukraine, and tragic for the whole of Europe and the world.

We urge Russia to comply with its international obligations, including the obligations under the Helsinki Final Act, and immediately cease all hostilities and withdraw its forces fully and completely from the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine.

It is exactly now, during times of war and instability, that we need a system based on the peaceful coexistence of states within the framework of international law.

Iceland reiterates its unwavering support of the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We stand with the people of Ukraine, the people that are now fighting a war to defend our common values.

I thank you, Mr. Chair