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**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF FRANCE AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH
MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Vienna, 7 and 8 December 2017

Mr. Chairperson,
Secretary General,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

The stability of our continent and our collective capacity to meet global challenges, which is at the heart of the OSCE's mandate, can no longer be taken for granted. We still have to deal with the consequences of the erosion of confidence and security in Europe. To counter the cynical recourse to force, unilateralism and destabilization, there is a need to re-establish respect for the letter and spirit of the founding principles of the OSCE, so as to restore the trust and understanding that are indispensable to ensuring long-term security in Europe.

It is in this belief that France, together with Germany, contributes within the Normandy format to resolving the abiding conflict in Ukraine, which continues to produce new victims every day. The ceasefire must be respected. An enduring resolution of the conflict is contingent on the full implementation by the parties of the Minsk agreements.

The OSCE has demonstrated its usefulness through its mediation capacities and its role in the Trilateral Contact Group, and I should like here to pay tribute to the efforts of the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office. The Organization has also demonstrated this on the ground through the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and the Observer Mission at the Russian border. France supports the continuation of the indispensable work of the SMM. It condemns the access restrictions, intimidation and threats to the safety of the monitors, which resulted in the death of one of them in April, whose memory I should like to pay homage to here. These violations should be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. The safety of the monitors must be ensured by the parties, as they have undertaken to do.

It is vital to settle the long-term conflicts in the OSCE area. Along with its fellow Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group from the United States of America and Russia, France remains fully committed to finding a negotiated and durable settlement to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. We are continuing in our efforts to enable us to build on the results of the constructive summit meeting in Geneva on 16 October this year and make progress in the conflict settlement process.

France also supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Moldova within their internationally recognized borders and welcomes the tangible progress achieved last month in the “5+2” format towards a settlement of the conflict in Moldova.

Mr. Chairperson,
Dear colleagues,

The OSCE is an important actor in the response to the main security challenges confronting Europe today. It plays a major role in promoting arms control, transparency in military activities and the prevention of incidents. This aspect of its work is paralysed today, but the abandonment of arms control instruments or resigned acceptance of their obsolescence would have serious consequences for our strategic stability.

In the face of this strategic context dominated by uncertainty, mistrust and instability, the Structured Dialogue process launched in Hamburg has made it possible this year to embark on frank initial discussions. We must find the means through transparency and high-level exchanges to reduce the ambiguity of postures, minimize risks and lessen misunderstandings that could cause tensions. France calls for a continuation of the highly effective arms control regime in Europe.

We must also join together to confront the major challenge posed by the malicious use of cyberspace. With regard to cybersecurity, it is important for all participating States to commit themselves in a concrete and constructive manner to the implementation of the confidence-building measures recently adopted in the OSCE.

Our Organization must also remain faithful to its role of promoting the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are an integral component and the aim itself of the OSCE’s inclusive security.

Human rights violations foster instability and it is vital to fight to defend and promote them. This requires absolute vigilance in a context in which, within the OSCE area itself, fundamental freedoms are stifled and the scope of civil society limited, sometimes on the pretext of security itself. Respect for commitments in the human dimension that we have undertaken freely together is imperative.

In view of the facts and the risk of breakdown of our commitments, we must remain more than ever united and defend the universality of human rights and the commitments we have undertaken. There can be no exception to the universal nature of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The same applies to the condemnation and combating of all forms of discrimination and intolerance, which should not be segmented.

France will remain firm in the face of those who attempt to exploit certain fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular for the purpose of disinformation. Similarly, it will continue to fully support and defend the mandates and means of the autonomous human dimension institutions. Russia is aware that the attitude of Russia Today and Sputnik pose specific problems for a number of democratic countries attached to freedom of the press. The President of the Republic has stated this clearly in the presence of his Russian counterpart. The problem is known.

Mr. Chairperson,
Dear colleagues,

The combating of terrorism alongside our allies is a priority for France. It is only by way of a united front that we can defeat this scourge that threatens us, because it also targets our values of open, tolerant and democratic societies based on the rule of law and the rights of the individual. Our fight will not be legitimate and effective unless it respects fundamental rights.

The OSCE can make a contribution to this, and I welcome its initiatives supporting the implementation of the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and strengthening our joint commitments to combat radicalization and violent extremism. The OSCE's work to heighten public awareness of the hate speech disseminated by terrorist groups is one effective means of prevention. The international community must also mobilize more to combat the financing of terrorism. France is organizing a major international conference in spring 2018 on that subject. Finally, combating illicit trafficking in small arms of all kinds and the OSCE's endeavours in this regard should be stepped up to prevent terrorist networks or organized crime from benefiting from it.

The OSCE can also play a complementary role to that of other organizations in helping our countries meet the new security challenges. This applies in particular to the response to the unprecedented flow of migrants and refugees in Europe, to combating trafficking networks, and to collective responses to the security risks posed by climate disruption.

France has repeated for several years that the time has come to reform the OSCE's governance by endowing the Organization with a long-term financing and management instrument based on economic realities and the contribution capacities of the participating States. The political responsibility of States within the Organization should be matched by a financial responsibility by each one in that regard. The European Union and its Member States, including France as one of the leaders, account for 70 per cent of the OSCE budget. This situation is untenable. France will not agree to any new financial contribution without an in-depth revision of the capacity to pay of everyone.

In conclusion, I should like to congratulate Austria on its Chairmanship and particularly on the appointment of new Heads of the three autonomous institutions and of the Secretary General so as to ensure the continued operation of these institutions. I can assure the incoming Italian Chairmanship of the full support of France for the year to come.

Thank you.