

Delegation of the Russian Federation

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**Opening session**

Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished colleagues,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this important forum.

As you know, there are two eternal Russian questions: who is to blame and what is to be done. It is impossible to answer the question of what is to be done without understanding the causes of the present crisis, and the passing of Helmut Kohl simply obliges us to do this.

Looking back it is impossible not to see all the missed opportunities. The legacy of the Cold War – primarily mental and political – has not been overcome. Western countries have proved to be unwilling to co-operate on really equal terms with Russia in areas of common interest or to construct a genuinely inclusive European security architecture without dividing lines. The OSCE has not been institutionalized. The cornerstone of European security – the arms control regime in Europe – has been destroyed for purely political reasons.

When we suggested concluding a Treaty on European Security several years ago, our initiative was perceived as an attempt to destroy NATO, as an encroachment on the convention that legal security guarantees can be received only by those countries that join NATO. This was further evidence of the failure to overcome the inertia of the NATO-centric mentality. It would be appropriate to ask why only members of NATO should be entitled to enhanced security.

We have long felt growing resistance to the consolidation of Russia's role and the dynamics of its movement towards integration with Europe. The European Union got scared by its own project of four common "spaces", including internal and external security, and put the brake on projects that played a key role in ensuring the quality of relations with us – negotiations on a new basic agreement, movement towards visa-free travel, the formation of a mechanism for joint decision-making in the area of security, and anti-crisis response. The Eastern Partnership became an instrument for driving a wedge between Russia and its historical neighbours. NATO and the EU turned their noses up at the Eurasian Economic

Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which emerged in the post-Soviet space.

Throughout all these years, NATO has been conducting a systematic, creeping expansion eastwards, which has led to deeper dividing lines in Europe and fuelled the ingrained Cold War instincts. Meanwhile, Russia has not been “moving” anywhere. Militarily, it has been “contracting”: in the early 1990s, it pulled out all of the former Soviet contingents from Eastern European countries and massively reduced its military capacity along its western borders.

After failed interventions in violation of the norms of international law and OSCE commitments, NATO, having found itself at a new fork in the road of history, chose to return to its roots, to the search for a big “enemy” in order to prove its relevance in the new security conditions. And this fell on fertile soil. The Ukrainian crisis has been used by the Alliance to justify the transition to deterrence schemes dating from an era of “confrontation”. If there had been no coup in Ukraine, they would have thought up something else. Former NATO leaders have spoken directly and publicly about this. Consequently, it banked again on military force and on gaining military superiority.

Things have reached a point where some Western officials regard geographical proximity to Russia as an “existential threat” to NATO. The question as to who created this “proximity” is, of course, being left aside. Western media, taking their cue from the RAND Corporation, are busily speculating how many hours – 60 or less – it would take Russian tanks to reach Tallinn.

Today, we are seeing all the signs of a new arms race. Despite the assurances that the steps being taken are not a provocation but a “defensive reaction” to changes in the security area, the military build-up in the NATO countries tells a completely different story. The Alliance’s forces have appeared where they have never been before and where they should not be on such a scale and for such a period of time according to the provisions of the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act. Central and Eastern Europe is being primed with units, weapons and equipment. A series of provocative military exercises has been held. To “appease” its allies, the White House has requested a 41 per cent increase in military spending compared with this year. It is clear in this context that we should expect the deployment of additional forces and infrastructure on European territory.

Today, the latest “propaganda bubble” concerns the Russian-Belarusian Zapad (West) exercises. At the same time, the NATO countries are planning to hold over 15 complementary military exercises on their eastern flank from June to November this year. They are being carried out within a single operational framework and are aimed at testing the entire range of tasks involved in so-called “containment”. As a result, the annual cycle of NATO operational and combat training events is aimed not only at maintaining a reinforced military presence of allied forces in direct proximity to Russia’s borders, but also at the intensive development of this theatre of operations, which includes beefing up the military infrastructure. United States anti-missile defence installations are being established. The unprecedented information campaign to discredit Russia continues.

The quality of security also depends on the ability of States to join forces to combat common threats over and above formal dividing lines. Yet here too, NATO is acting contrary to common interests. It has suspended all its practical co-operation projects. Within the

NATO-Russia Council (NRC) all working groups and contacts with the relevant specialists have been frozen. This co-operation was developing successfully until 2014, primarily to combat terrorism in all its aspects, in Afghanistan, to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destructions and to combat piracy. For example, we jointly trained Afghan technicians to service Russian-made helicopters and counter-narcotics police for Afghanistan (the NRC project was the largest of its kind and over 4,000 officers have been trained), Pakistan and Central Asian countries. We also worked on the Stand-Off Detection of Explosives (STANDEX) system for remote detection of explosives in vehicles, at critical infrastructure sites, and on persons moving through crowds. Under the Cooperative Airspace Initiative, we engaged in the real-time exchange of information on aircraft suspected of having been hijacked by terrorists. Co-operation was developed in combating piracy. These are just a few of the examples of how interaction within the NRC really helped to improve the safety of citizens of Russia and NATO countries. Furthermore, the NRC did not duplicate the work of other organizations, but through dialogue we managed to arrive at programmes of co-operation that not only strengthened the security of the Council's member countries but also protected their citizens from real threats. The tragic events in St. Petersburg, Brussels, Manchester and London will now always be a reminder of the wasted opportunities.

We are obliged to note with regret that today the NATO-Russia Council is becoming an empty shell. It has been deprived of a real agenda, although it was created to marshal the efforts of Russia and NATO countries in areas of common interest.

I believe that many in the Alliance know that this has affected their own interests, yet they have chosen to reject the possibility of returning to "business as usual" contrary to their real needs. However, if we are to talk seriously about finding ways of de-escalating tension and preventing dangerous military incidents, we have to understand that this cannot be done without restoring systematic military communications and involving military experts. NATO is not yet willing to do this, just as it is not willing to resume joint projects.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in and around Syria, requires co-operation. Considering the nature of the current threats and the conflict potential, no islands of security can be created despite the best will, whether within NATO or the EU. We firmly believe that in the current conditions it would be better to support one another rather than looking at each other as adversaries or "strategic rivals".

Russia does not need to prove that its intentions are peaceful. We did this long ago by dismantling the material legacy of the Cold War, which gave Europe a chance to cast off the shackles of the arms race and enjoy the "dividends of peace". NATO now appears to be planning to turn its back on these dividends and to go back to square one. It is a complete mystery why it is not satisfied with Europe's current military spending, which already stands at 250 billion euros.

But vital interests will eventually regain priority, and despite the institutional obstacles erected by NATO, we are not short of partners for dealing with shared tasks.

Russia has been doing its best to maintain a normal atmosphere in Europe, to build up trust and to prevent the situation from escalating into a conflict. We have not suspended any activities and are willing to work together. It remains to be seen when our partners will be willing to do likewise. Russian military officials have formulated a number of proposals on

how to move forward within the NATO-Russia Council. The Alliance has so far not responded to these initiatives.

I am convinced that sooner or later NATO will realize that systems for strengthening security without Russia, or worse still, against Russia, are unviable and counter-productive, that such systems create serious risks and do not meet the interests of the members of the Alliance themselves. We need to look for ways of de-escalating tension and to think about approaches to joint work and practical co-operation on a genuine collective, equal and mutually respectful basis. There is no other option.

Thank you for your attention.