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**STATEMENT BY
MR. SERGEY LAVROV, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE TWENTY-THIRD MEETING
OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Hamburg, 8 December 2016

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

Over the past year, the situation in and around Europe has remained unstable. The foundations of politico-military security have continued to be eroded rather than strengthened. The conditions for an arms race have multiplied. There have been numerous terrorist acts. Regional conflicts have not subsided. Diplomacy and economic ties have been replaced with increasingly crude rhetoric, propaganda and unilateral sanctions. Is this the Europe we want to see?

We have been talking about the reasons for this state of affairs for several years now. The problem is that the Euro-Atlantic region has not yet developed a common vision of equal and indivisible security. The euphoria that the West experienced after the end of the Cold War has not allowed the sides to develop an open political process and build a common security community.

Instead of eliminating dividing lines, a choice was made in favour of a closed NATO-centric system. NATO has adopted a policy of moving its borders, forces and military infrastructure eastwards and changing the military balance in its favour. The Alliance's leadership has rejected professional dialogue with Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization on the development of collective measures to counter real rather than mythical threats. As a result, the European space has fragmented into separate zones with different levels of security guarantees. Hard security and its constituent confidence-building measures and arms control regime have found themselves in a deep systemic crisis.

Nevertheless, this situation is not irremediable. We believe that our common long-term goal is to build an indivisible security community in line with the decision adopted at the OSCE Astana Summit in 2010. It remains an urgent task. However, today we should at least work to restore trust without attempts at opposing our own will and values on each another.

A first step should be to put an end to the bellicose rhetoric, to stop accusing one another and to move towards mutually respectful discussion based on equal rights. This will help to create the political atmosphere required for conducting an objective comparative analysis of military capabilities in Europe. Together we must take a map of Europe and see who has deployed what and where. We are confident that the results of such an analysis will convincingly dispel the myth of a Russian threat and, on the contrary, clearly demonstrate where the risks are actually coming from. Only then can we discuss what else should be done to launch a dialogue on confidence-building measures and arms control. That said, the first mandatory step is obvious: the NATO countries should stop their military activity and the deployment of infrastructure near Russia's borders and return the situation at least to where it was at the end of 2013. If not, the Alliance is creating a new military reality with respect to Russia and seeking to reach an agreement on that basis. This is not going to happen.

However, it is not only in the politico-military sphere that trust needs to be restored. Economic co-operation is no less important. We support the idea of developing confidence-building measures in economic affairs. These measures could become one of the pillars of a new European order without dividing lines and confrontational logic. We welcome the discussion on economic connectivity in the OSCE and the plans of the incoming Austrian Chairmanship in that regard.

It is also important to restore confidence in cyberspace. Over the past year, we have witnessed phone tapping and e-mail hacking scandals involving high-ranking officials. We have heard a lot of unsubstantiated accusations of cyberattacks used for political purposes. I would remind you that to prevent such occurrences the OSCE has created a mechanism for elaborating confidence-building measures in the use of information technologies. I believe that this mechanism should be made more effective.

We propose considering an action plan, which could include the following steps. First, it is imperative to identify ways to improve the role of the OSCE in dealing with cyber incidents. We are convinced that the OSCE can act as an intermediary, providing a platform for direct dialogue and preventing such incidents from escalating into confrontation.

Second, we should hold a special conference on information security. The event planned by the Austrian Chairmanship on this subject could play such a role.

Third, it is imperative to strengthen and regulate the activities of the working group on confidence-building measures in cyberspace. Fourth and last, a specialized information security unit should be established within the OSCE Secretariat.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The best way to restore trust is to work on a common project. One such task today is the fight against the terrorist threat. Terrorism is spreading to Europe, primarily through its ideology, which infects people like an epidemic. Therefore, the importance of preventive measures to combat this ideology and the incitement to acts of terror cannot be overestimated. Russia has prepared a draft United Nations Security Council resolution on this subject. For its part, the OSCE can make a solid contribution, aligning itself with the UN's efforts.

Terrorism is closely linked with the drug problem. Illicit drug trafficking provides the bulk of terrorism's funding. Afghan drugs police are trained in Russia under an arrangement with the OSCE. Training of drugs police from Serbia began this year in St. Petersburg. We reiterate our proposal of establishing a specialized unit within the OSCE Secretariat to combat drug trafficking.

It is extremely dangerous to sacrifice the common cause of fighting terrorism to geopolitical ambitions. It is time to stop dividing terrorists into good ones and bad ones. The ramifications of meddling in internal affairs, imposing democratization and toppling governments can clearly be seen in the Middle East and North Africa.

Such geopolitical engineering has had serious consequences in the region, while the various hotbeds of instability in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen have resulted in a sweeping migration crisis in Europe. The answer to this challenge has not yet been found. Russia has supported the dialogue on migration in the OSCE. We hope that it will help to find the necessary solutions.

Ukraine has also fallen victim to externally-induced experiments. The coup d'état in Kyiv has given rise to a civil war in Donbas, which has been going on for two and a half years now.

Russia, more than anybody else, is interested in bringing about a swift and peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian internal conflict on the basis of the Minsk Package of Measures, to which there is no alternative. Direct talks between the parties – Kyiv and Donbas – under the auspices of the Trilateral Contact Group and with the support of the Normandy format play a key role. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine is an important stabilizing factor. We hope that our combined efforts will help to bring about implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, including concrete steps to provide Donbas with a special status enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine, an amnesty and the holding of local elections. We call for an end to the harassment of dissidents, persecution of the Church and attempts to obstruct the investigation into the massive loss of life and political murders.

We sincerely hope that Ukraine will be able to overcome the drawn-out political and economic crisis as soon as possible.

A responsible approach is called for to facilitate the resolution of other complicated issues in the OSCE area. Russia supports the resumption of the negotiations in the "5+2" format on Transdniestria. We shall do all we can to facilitate a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, both as a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and in our direct contacts with the parties. We believe that all conflicts must be resolved peacefully within the agreed formats, with full participation of the parties and with account taken of their interests.

We shall continue to take part in the Geneva Discussions on Security in the Trans-Caucasus. The key issue here is the conclusion of agreements on the non-use of force.

The OSCE plays a positive role in helping to settle conflicts and has appropriate instruments to do so. The issue of reform needs to be dealt with sensitively. It is important to take into account the current mandates of the Chairmanship, the Secretary General, the

institutions and missions, their civilian nature and accountability to the decision-making bodies, where the participating States adopt decisions on the basis of the consensus rule.

As far as modernizing the arsenal of instruments is concerned, reforms are long overdue in the OSCE human dimension. Together with a number of other countries, Russia has long been putting forward proposals to redress the thematic and geographical imbalances in the work of the institutions and missions and to abandon the mentoring tone and attempts to impose values without considering the specific features of the various countries and regions of Europe.

Meanwhile, evident problems are being ignored – the rise of neo-Nazism, the situation of non-citizens in the Baltic States, harassment of national minorities, and human rights aspects of the migration crisis in the European Union.

Such double standards deal a blow to the universal values underlying modern civilization and all world religions. Adopting a declaration on combating anti-Semitism two years ago at the Basel Ministerial Council meeting, we agreed to draft similar documents on combating intolerance against Christians and Muslims. It is regrettable that this task is constantly being postponed.

The selective approach to the initiatives of the participating States is undermining the principles of dialogue and equality. This has happened with two Russian proposals: on pluralism of the media and the inadmissibility of discrimination in sports. The rule that sport should be above politics is being broken with increasing frequency. A flagrant example was the denial of entry to the United States of America of the President of the World Chess Federation Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, who was going to attend the opening ceremony of the World Chess Championship Match.

Ignoring these problems inevitably leads to crisis in the entire system of OSCE baskets. We have already become used to scandals at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. This year, two delegations had to walk out because of the aggressive behaviour of people convicted of criminal offences in those countries. More and more countries are dissatisfied with the work of the missions they are hosting and their interference in domestic affairs.

At one time or other, Russia and a group of co-sponsors have proposed various measures to rectify this situation: the adoption of an OSCE Charter, the establishment of election observation principles, procedures for the appointment of Heads of Missions, rules for the participation by non-governmental organizations in OSCE events, and improvement of programme and budget planning, for example. These proposals remain valid. We urge the Austrian Chairmanship to reconsider them.

We regard the OSCE as a major platform for discussing and agreeing on approaches to key European issues. Let me repeat that building a community of equal and indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic region and in Eurasia must remain our long-term goal, and our task at the present stage is to restore the trust that has been lost between States. This is possible only if there is political will and mutual respect and if the consensus rule and inter-State foundations of the OSCE are strengthened.

In conclusion, I should like to thank our German colleagues for their hospitality and the successful organization of the Ministerial Council in Hamburg. We very much appreciate their efforts to maintain the high profile of the OSCE in international affairs. We wish the future Austrian Chairmanship every success in developing a balanced OSCE agenda focusing on the resolution of issues of vital importance to our countries and peoples.