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

Skopje, 30 November 2023

Mr. Chairperson-in-Office,
Madam Secretary General,
Colleagues,

In just over a year's time, the Helsinki Final Act will mark its 50th anniversary. In that connection, I have to note with regret that the OSCE is approaching this anniversary in deplorable shape, and its prospects remain uncertain.

After the Cold War and the associated ideological confrontation came to an end, there emerged a historic chance for the OSCE's unifying potential to be used to the full and for the Organization to become a platform for the broadest-based pan-European co-operation and a central element in shaping an inclusive architecture of equal and indivisible security in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area across all three dimensions.

Within the framework of the politico-military "basket", the participating States adopted a number of fundamental documents aimed at creating a Europe without dividing lines in the broadest sense of the term and stipulating the unacceptability of strengthening one's own security at the expense of the security of others. These documents included the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990), the Charter for European Security (1999) and the Astana declaration (2010).

Russia, for its part, did all it could to achieve the aforementioned noble goals. Our numerous initiatives, including the conclusion of the Treaty on European Security and the creation of a common space of co-operative security, were focused on precisely that.

Unfortunately, the Western political elites, who have arrogated to themselves the right to decide the fate of humanity, have made a short-sighted choice not in favour of the OSCE, but in favour of NATO. In favour of the philosophy of containment, zero-sum geopolitical games and the "master-slave" logic. One of the key components of this policy was the bloc's reckless expansion to the East, which began after the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Although it seemed that the end of the bipolar confrontation had deprived the North Atlantic Alliance of its *raison d'être*.

Through their actions, the member States of NATO and the European Union have destroyed the politico-military dimension of the OSCE. In 1999, NATO committed an act of unabashed and brutal aggression against Yugoslavia, a member of the OSCE and the United Nations. In 2008, in violation of

United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and the principle of the inviolability of borders in Europe enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, Kosovo was torn away from Serbia without any kind of referendum.

At the Alliance's 2008 Bucharest Summit, the NATO countries, which are also OSCE participating States, lured Georgia and Ukraine with the prospect of NATO membership. Their goal was simple and straightforward – to pit them against Russia. Mikheil Saakashvili, who came to power as a result of the Rose Revolution supported by the West, immediately used the *carte blanche* given to him in Bucharest – in August 2008, he ordered the bombing of South Ossetian cities and an attack on peacekeepers, who were stationed there with the OSCE's consent. The United States of America, which sometime earlier had launched its “train and equip” programme in Georgia, was behind this provocation. Saakashvili obediently carried out what the United States had taught him.

It took significantly more to create an anti-Russian bridgehead in Ukraine – a bloody coup d'état in 2014 and eight years of Western-backed punitive operations against the population of Donbas, carried out in violation of the Minsk Package of Measures endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. I should like once again to remind you of the cynical admissions of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, ex-President of France François Hollande and ex-President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko to the effect that they did not need the Minsk agreements for the sake of peace in Ukraine, but only to give the Kyiv regime time to build up its military capability against Russia.

Among the sabotaged attempts to solve, on the basis of OSCE principles, our continent's acute problems is the Kozak Memorandum, which could have reliably resolved the situation in Moldova 20 years ago. At that time, NATO and the European Union unceremoniously torpedoed the document that had already been initialled by the authorities in Chişinău and Tiraspol. Now they are killing off the “5+2” format too – the last remnant of the joint efforts to reach a Transdniestrian settlement.

In fact, Moldova is destined to be the next victim in the hybrid war unleashed by the West against Russia. Every country where Western emissaries, foundations and so-called non-governmental organizations are now active should think about this.

At the instigation of the United States, NATO members blocked the entry into force of the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and ignored Russia's specific proposals for restoring the viability of the conventional arms control regime in Europe. Through its actions, the United States also buried the Treaty on Open Skies and undermined a host of other fundamental documents aimed at strengthening mutual trust in the field of security.

The true intentions of the Western politicians once again became apparent when Washington and Brussels rejected the proposals put forward by Russia in December 2021 on legally binding security guarantees in Europe. They did not even want to talk to us. I did not even receive a response to my message of 28 January 2022 to the Foreign Ministers of the United States and other NATO member countries, in which I asked them how they interpreted the commitments undertaken at the OSCE summits not to strengthen their security at the expense of the security of others. Instead, we were sent meaningless scraps of paper from the European External Action Service and the NATO Secretary General, to whom the message was not even addressed. The gist of the West's position is as follows: they could not care less about what their presidents and prime ministers signed at the OSCE. Only NATO can provide legal security guarantees. That is how a group of countries led by an “exceptional” power treats our Organization for which it has clearly lost all respect.

The situation in the OSCE's “second basket” is just as deplorable. In a bid to bring down the Russian economy, the United States and its European satellites have introduced thousands of sanctions against

Russia, thus putting an end to the broad practical co-operation between East and West in what was once our common region. The Kyiv regime is Washington's investment in its selfish interests in containing Russia and resolving its own problems at the expense of others, including the elimination of economic competitors, first and foremost the European Union. In spite of everything, the European Union continues obediently playing the unenviable role assigned to it, bearing the brunt of the consequences of the US adventure in Ukraine and meekly abandoning the forms of economic partnership that have ensured its prosperity for decades. One gets the impression that the European Union has cast aside the original goals of its founders to enhance the welfare of its Member States' citizens and has turned – largely through the efforts of the Brussels bureaucracy – into an aggressive geopolitical project.

When talking about the fate of the OSCE, one cannot but dwell on the human dimension. This “basket” was filled with a large set of commitments addressed, and I emphasize this, to all participating States.

Here too, however, the problem of equality and objectivity arises. Without any rules and procedures, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has focused its work exclusively on the countries “east of Vienna”. OSCE observers go to elections with conclusions that have been prepared in advance. Meanwhile, the ODIHR closes its eyes to the numerous human rights violations in the West. The Moscow Mechanism, with its biased experts, is also diligently carrying out political orders. The Representative on Freedom of the Media remains silent when non-Western media are subjected to repression.

We have not been able to agree on the agenda of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting for several years now, partly because some delegations stubbornly oppose the inclusion of the issue of neo-Nazism. It is revealing that this is being done at a time when Nazi ideology and practices and other forms of racial and religious intolerance are on the rise in Europe, especially in Ukraine and the Baltic States. They are glorifying Nazi collaborators, tearing down monuments to soldier-liberators and enshrining these criminal actions in law.

The ruling neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv has surpassed even the Baltic countries in its efforts to eradicate everything Russian through legislation. The very existence of Russians and their decisive contribution to the history of Ukraine are denied. People are prohibited from communicating, reading or being taught in their native language, and from having access to Russian-language media and culture. Examples abound, but the OSCE and its relevant institutions remain silent. They were also silent when the Kyiv regime made exceptions to its blatantly discriminatory legislation on the State language only for EU languages, and not for Russian. “Enlightened Brussels” also remained silent and said nothing about the need to respect numerous United Nations, UNESCO and Council of Europe conventions guaranteeing equal rights to all ethnic minorities.

A few days ago, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament), Ruslan Stefanchuk, did not even blink when he said that “there are no Russian national minorities” in Ukraine “nor can there be”. It appears that the head of the Ukrainian Parliament has never read the following text: “Free development ... and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities ... shall be guaranteed [...] The State shall promote the consolidation and development of the ... nation, its historical consciousness, traditions and culture, ... linguistic and religious identity of all ... national minorities [...] The content and scope of the existing rights and freedoms shall not be diminished [...] There shall be no privileges or restrictions based on race, ... political, religious and other beliefs [...] Citizens belonging to national minorities shall be guaranteed ... the right to education in their native language ...” These are just a few quotes from the current Constitution of Ukraine, which no one has repealed and on which Volodymyr Zelenskyy and, before him, Petro Poroshenko, took the oath of office to applause from the West.

But once again everyone remains silent – the OSCE, the Venice Commission, the European Union and the United States, failing to notice the violation of Ukraine’s Constitution.

Emboldened by the silence coming from the West, the Kyiv regime has unleashed an abhorrent campaign against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, including the seizure of places of worship, the persecution of believers and physical violence against the clergy.

Please note that all these crimes against human rights did not begin in February 2022, but immediately after the bloody coup in February 2014, when the neo-Nazis seized power, having torn up the settlement agreement that had been signed the day before under the guarantees of Germany, Poland and France, which quickly reconciled themselves to this humiliation.

Against this background, the Brussels leadership’s incantations to the effect that Zelenskyy “defends European values” in all his actions are striking in their cynicism. Now they also want to fast-track the opening of the doors to the European Union for the Kyiv regime. Nazis are being moved to the front of the line, as it were. It is shameful.

Hence, the question: why do we need flawed human rights institutions that are turning into a tool of those who are set on privatizing the secretariats of international organizations to suit their own needs? What interests of pan-European security and co-operation are served by such an OSCE?

The current situation is a direct consequence of the persistent attempts by our Western neighbours to ensure their dominance by shamelessly using the OSCE to aggressively promote their parochial interests and by deliberately destroying the fundamental principle of consensus and the very culture of diplomacy. It is clear to any unbiased person that it will not be possible to resolve European security issues seriously and honestly in this way. However, the Western capitals demonstrate enviable obsessiveness as they deal a final blow to the chances for the OSCE’s revival. They have already created the European Political Community without Russia and Belarus. In this way, yet another dividing line has been drawn on our continent, destroying the OSCE area. The instigators of this venture should think hard about how their brainchild correlates with the noble ideals that guided the founders of the Helsinki process and indeed the authors of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

Traditionally, it is customary to conclude statements at our meetings on an optimistic, positive note. However, there are no particular reasons for optimism at present. The OSCE is essentially being turned into an appendage of NATO and the European Union. The Organization, it must be acknowledged, is on the edge of a precipice. A simple question arises: does it make sense to invest in its revitalization? Will it ever be able to adapt to the objective realities of global development and once again become a platform for addressing regional security issues on the basis of the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, primarily the principle of the equality of all participating States? For now, there are far more questions than answers.

Meanwhile, life does not stand still. The processes of Eurasian integration and equitable co-operation on the basis of a fair balance of interests are developing on our continent in constructive formats, irrespective of the OSCE’s ever deeper immersion in the confrontational agenda that has been imposed on it.