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**STATEMENT BY THE OSCE CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE
AND FEDERAL MINISTER FOR EUROPE, INTEGRATION AND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA, HIS
EXCELLENCY SEBASTIAN KURZ, AT THE 1127th (SPECIAL)
MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 January 2016

Mr. Secretary General,
Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to be here with you today for the first time as Chairperson-in-Office of our Organization. The success of our work together has an immediate and direct impact on the security of all of us.

Austria, as an active participating State and the host country of the OSCE, has always attached the utmost importance to the Organization. Austria traditionally sees its role as a bridge-builder and a place of dialogue. We seek transparency as an honest broker. More than ever in times of great challenges, in which our continent is reverting to the bloc-based thinking of the past, this is important to us. We therefore agreed to assume the Chairmanship for the second time following our Chairmanship in 2000 in order to make a contribution to restoring stability and security.

I should like first of all to congratulate and thank the outgoing German Chairmanship for its efforts over the past year. The results of the Ministerial Council in Hamburg give direction to the work of our, and future, OSCE Chairmanships.

In recent years, we have witnessed a resurgence of mistrust and instability. In the OSCE area, in addition to the crisis in and around Ukraine, which is a root cause of this loss of trust, there are also other conflicts that we thought belonged to the past.

Our Chairmanship will therefore deal particularly with those challenges in the OSCE area that currently pose the greatest threat to the common OSCE area values:

1. Military conflicts persist and have resulted in thousands of victims, displacement and destruction over the past few years. We want to make a contribution to strengthening co-operative security and defusing existing conflicts.
2. We are confronted with major challenges to internal security through increasing threats of terrorism and a growing radicalization, especially of young people. We shall work towards strengthening security within the participating States, with a particular focus on

combating radicalization and extremism. For this reason, we have appointed Professor Peter Neumann of King's College London as the Special Representative of the Chairmanship on combating radicalization.

3. We are experiencing an increasing loss of trust among the participating States, but also a loss of confidence among citizens in State institutions and international organizations that are meant to safeguard peace and our common values. Therefore, through confidence-building measures in a range of areas – from military transparency and co-operation to communication channels during cyberattacks, and through economic co-operation and connectivity between the participating States and specifically in co-operation in the human dimension – we want to rebuild trust and confidence.

Conflicts and other current challenges are largely transnational. Thus, the responses can generally not only be national. Strong regional co-operation is the way forward. The OSCE, as the largest regional organization under the United Nations, is the forum in Europe in which to begin rebuilding trust and resolving conflicts. The 57 participating States meet here as equals; the OSCE offers all parties a place for dialogue and discussion, even in difficult situations and conflicts.

The OSCE, with its structures, institutions and, in particular, its field operations, has a unique and comprehensive array of instruments at its disposal. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Parliamentary Assembly all make a huge and admirable contribution to ensuring that the values of the OSCE are implemented and its concerns are dealt with. It is the goal of the Austrian Chairmanship to benefit from and strengthen these instruments and deploy them in a targeted manner. This does mean that we need to achieve consensus as soon as possible on the relevant appointments in order to guarantee the smooth functioning of the Organization. In this connection, I should like to stress the great importance of the urgent adoption of the outstanding mandates for some missions and call on all delegations to help find a solution here.

The OSCE area, with its 1.2 billion inhabitants, offers enormous potential for co-operation, which we must use. Austria intends to do this during its Chairmanship year.

Strengthening external security in the OSCE area

Military conflicts pose a particular challenge and threat to peace in the OSCE area.

For this reason, immediately after assuming the Chairmanship last week, I travelled to Ukraine in order to see for myself the situation with the crisis in and around Ukraine. This crisis demonstrates how essential the OSCE is in ensuring security and improving the lives of the people on the ground. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) plays an important role in stabilizing the situation, even when this situation is anything but satisfactory, in particular because of the ongoing ceasefire violations.

In the framework of our Chairmanship, we will therefore focus on supporting and further expanding the work of the SMM in Ukraine. The OSCE's Trilateral Contact Group makes an important contribution and we support the invaluable work of our Special Representative, Ambassador Sajdik. Co-operation with the Normandy format in finding a

solution to the conflict will be essential throughout the year and I am relying on close collaboration with the countries of the Normandy format.

On the one hand, Austria will specifically endeavour to defuse other existing conflicts in the region, but will also continue discussions on how best to prevent conflict in the OSCE area.

We will support the ongoing conflict-resolution mechanisms, processes and dialogue formats; my Special Representatives for each of the conflicts will play an important role.

Concrete progress and tangible solutions are the primary objective. The well-being of the populations and communities must once again be at the forefront of all political endeavours. To this end, Austria will be open to co-operation with all parties.

There can be no military resolution of the existing conflicts in the OSCE area. We need dialogue and political solutions in order to make progress in the various formats.

In the Republic of Moldova, Austria will continue the German Chairmanship's policy of taking small steps, and see to it that further progress, *inter alia* in economic participation or freedom of movement, can be achieved in the Transdniestrian conflict settlement process.

Ambassador Heim will support the Austrian Chairmanship as its Special Representative for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. I will travel to Moldova in two weeks' time to personally assess the situation on the ground there.

Ambassador Bächler is an experienced Special Representative for the South Caucasus. Here we should strengthen trust and confidence through projects at the local level, for example in the environmental sphere. As the country chairing the OSCE, we should like to strengthen the Geneva International Discussions and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). I will soon also pay a visit to Georgia.

Also regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, efforts to resolve the conflict should aim at strengthening dialogue and trust. This morning, the first monitoring of the new year on the line of contact is being conducted by the team of the Personal Representative of the Chairmanship, Ambassador Kasprzyk, with the participation of officers from the High-Level Planning Group.

The Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, my Personal Representative Ambassador Kasprzyk and the Austrian Head of the High-Level Planning Group, Colonel Lampalzer, can count on our full support. Likewise, we expect full willingness to co-operate from all the parties involved.

In the Western Balkans and Central Asia, Austria will also contribute to strengthening regional co-operation through our own initiatives and support for the work of the field operations and projects. For this purpose, work in the second dimension can contribute to economic connectivity, as well-established co-operation in the area of border management contributes to an atmosphere of trust. Regional collaboration and cross-border co-operation, as well as reform agendas are at the forefront in this context.

The first dimension of the OSCE is an essential pillar in strengthening external security. We will continue to work on the dialogue on joint measures in the military sphere and thus make a contribution to confidence-building in the sense of military transparency, predictability and security. The decision adopted in Hamburg on a structured dialogue will also contribute to strengthening security in the OSCE area and requires full commitment from all of us.

Specifically, the focus will be on the modernization of the Vienna Document and its comprehensive confidence- and security-building measures, as well as the dialogue on conventional arms control, along with efforts to implement the Code of Conduct, intensify military-to-military contacts and facilitate security sector reform. Together with other participating States and Partners for Co-operation, we will conduct awareness-raising seminars. We also want to promote co-operation between the police and border police through specific events. High points of the first half of the year will be the Counter-Terrorism Conference in May and the Annual Security Review Conference at the end of June.

The participation of women is essential for the sustainability of efforts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts. Peace processes can only be successful in the long term if the voices, views and needs of society are taken into account. The Austrian Chairmanship supports projects to increase the participation of women in peace, mediation and dialogue processes, as well as in the field operations. In addition, we have planned a series of activities on the role of the media in implementing United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, with the goal of fostering in the OSCE area gender-sensitive reporting on conflicts.

Internal security and combating radicalization

Internal and external security are increasingly interlinked. Along with military conflicts, we must devote our full attention to the threats to the internal security of our States emanating from terrorism and organized crime, and radicalization leading to violence particularly in young people, as well as from the massive migration flow threatening to cause enormous problems for many participating States.

The OSCE ensures the synergy of internal and external security. In response to the challenges to our internal security, Austria will emphasize work on preventing and combating radicalization. The causes and triggers for increasing radicalization must be identified and prevented. My Special Representative on combating radicalization, Professor Neumann, will actively support us in this.

Young people in particular are the focus of this problem. Therefore, we should listen carefully to young people. Innovative approaches to dealing with this problem are to be developed at four regional workshops on the radicalization of youth in Western Europe, the Black Sea region, Central Asia and the Western Balkans, with the participation of youth representatives. For the most part, the causes of radicalization are not fully known and also differ from region to region. The ideas generated will contribute to the Counter-Terrorism Conference in May 2017. The Ministerial Council in December 2017 will also consider the outcomes. In addition, a joint conference with the Czech Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers should raise broader awareness of the topic of the radicalization of young people.

Rebuilding trust and confidence-building measures as instruments of improved co-operation

Increased security can only come with increased trust. The OSCE is the forum in which co-operation on a wide range of topics can lead to increased trust and confidence. The fact is, however, that tension has increased while arms control efforts have waned, and rearmament has occurred. This has been accompanied by confrontational rhetoric, further eroding mutual trust. The OSCE's instruments offer many opportunities for collaboration to further our common interests, when we emphasize common ground over division. This is another reason why I have decided to convene an informal ministerial meeting in Vienna.

The first dimension naturally plays a key role in overcoming division, as noted above. Close collaboration with the Forum for Security Co-operation and its Chair will also guide our Chairmanship in this respect.

The economic and environmental dimension in particular offers many opportunities for co-operation. Intensive work will continue on the topic of economic connectivity, with regard to improving economic relations throughout the OSCE area and the concrete impact on the populations affected by conflict.

The high points will be the preparatory meetings for the Economic and Environmental Forum in January and June as well as the Concluding Meeting in September in Prague and a Business Conference on 25 January. Events that bring together experts from the academic and business communities should initiate dialogue processes, provide inspiration based on best practices and contribute to confidence-building.

In the area of cybersecurity, Austria plans to further develop confidence- and security-building measures and strengthen their implementation. In this regard, we are already preparing to hold a conference on 15 February on the protection of critical infrastructure.

Respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy are prerequisites for and an integral part of security, stability and prosperity. They are therefore particularly important to me. They are not antithetical to sustainable stability and security, but rather underpin them. In accordance with the Charter of Paris, respect for human rights is the basis of a peaceful and secure Europe. The comprehensive concept of security nurtured by the OSCE therefore also substantially depends on progress in the human dimension.

Consequently, in the human dimension, Austria will pay particular attention to ensuring freedom of expression and freedom of the media, protection of vulnerable groups and the rights of national minorities, and freedom of religion or belief and tolerance and non-discrimination. Our focus on human rights and democracy is an integral part of the priorities of the Austrian Chairmanship, as is the prevention of radicalization. A series of events will give us the opportunity to explore these topics in depth, starting with a conference on 27 February on freedom of media in the Western Balkans.

In the area of human trafficking, Austria will address a wide range of issues including migration, foreign terrorist fighters and radicalization. A conference is planned in October on the occasion of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

Equal rights and opportunities for women and men are an important prerequisite for comprehensive security, stability and prosperity. Austria will therefore mainstream a gender perspective into all of its Chairmanship activities. In order to take into account progress made to date and to identify gaps in the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, Austria plans to hold a Gender Equality Review Conference on 12 and 13 June.

An effective organization

The OSCE requires adequate resources in order to carry out its activities – qualified and motivated staff and the necessary funds. An effective organization needs an appropriate budget. The amount of 144 million euros is certainly “good value for money” for an organization with 17 field operations, three independent institutions and numerous important activities and projects in all areas of work.

I therefore call on all participating States to work together constructively and without further delay on an agreement on the 2017 Unified Budget.

Outlook

Our world has grown more complex, difficult and insecure. The OSCE is a unique organization; with its structures and institutions, and in particular with its field operations, it possesses a comprehensive array of instruments. We must make the most of these instruments and deploy them in a targeted manner, so that through increased co-operation we can re-establish more trust, more predictability, and more tangible solutions. In order to do this, we need a strong, capable organization which can effectively, efficiently and quickly fulfil all the tasks assigned to it by the participating States. Austria will endeavour in this regard to advocate not only a strong organization, but also the emphasizing of the common interest over the divisions.

Trust, dialogue, listening to one another, exchange of information – this is what we need in order to work together to resolve the challenges facing all of us. Consensus is only possible when we emphasize the common interest over division. It is our common duty to ensure the rule of law, freedom, peace and security for our societies and our citizens.

In conclusion, I should like once again to thank the German Chairmanship and Foreign Minister Steinmeier for the excellent leadership of the OSCE over the past year.

The informal ministerial meeting in Potsdam, in my opinion, helped to improve dialogue. I should therefore like to invite the foreign ministers of the OSCE participating States to an informal meeting on 11 July 2017 in Austria.

Austria will live up to its reputation as a bridge-builder and a place of dialogue and will act with transparency as an honest broker during its Chairmanship. Only together can we guarantee the security and stability of our region. Through my trip to Kyiv and Moscow in the coming week, I should like to make yet another contribution in light of our common concerns in 2017.

I look forward to our collaboration and to the joint work under the Austrian Chairmanship. Only the joint engagement of all 57 participating States can lead to progress and contribute to meeting the expectations of our citizens.