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Foreword by the Chairperson-in-Office

“Renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust, restoring security” – this was the motto under which Germany – in the midst of a serious crisis – assumed responsibility for security and co-operation in Europe in 2016. We took the helm of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in turbulent times and faced many challenges during our Chairmanship. Two years after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, in breach of international law, the ongoing conflict in the east of Ukraine remains one of the greatest challenges for the European security architecture. Meanwhile, the resurgence of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016 showed that the unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area always remain capable of escalating. The brutal attacks in Nice, Paris, and Brussels; Ankara and Istanbul; Würzburg, Ansbach, and Berlin; and elsewhere reminded us painfully that, today, our security is subject to many threats that do not stop at the frontiers of the participating States.

These challenges call for the OSCE to act, and the Organization remains indispensable. This is true with regard to crisis and conflict management, but even more so in respect of the OSCE’s role as one of the last remaining platforms for dialogue and co-operation in times of deepening mistrust, widening political divides, and growing unpredictability and risk of escalation in international relations. Like no other institution, the OSCE stands for a peace order on a foundation of shared values, fundamental freedoms, and human rights. And thanks to the consensus principle, it offers – irrespective of differences in social organization, culture, languages, and yes, even opinions – a forum for dialogue between East and West, North and South. Not despite but precisely because of the current crises and conflicts, the OSCE, its co-operative approach to security and co-operation, and its comprehensive understanding of security in three baskets (politico-military, economic and environmental, human rights and fundamental freedoms) are more crucial now than ever.

In short: We need the OSCE today – an OSCE that has awakened from the virtual hibernation of recent years to set a powerful agenda for the future. Together with my Austrian and Italian colleagues, Sebastian Kurz and Paolo Gentiloni, I have, for precisely these reasons, committed myself to taking a stand for continuity in times of crisis and conflict and avowing the key role of the OSCE in the fraught arena of security and co-operation in Europe. With our agenda for the future “A strong OSCE for a secure Europe”, we seek to continue to pursue and support this goal together with Austria and Italy. To achieve this, we need to arm the OSCE for the tasks and challenges that lie

ahead. As members of the future OSCE Troika, therefore, we have defined five areas for action:

First, new forms of dialogue: The OSCE has proven that it is a reliable partner for dialogue even across sharp dividing lines. High-level encounters such as informal meetings of foreign ministers (such as took place in Potsdam in 2016), and ad hoc discussions (as were held on the margins of the 2016 session of the United Nations General Assembly) provide a solid basis for intensifying political dialogue. In the future, parliamentarians, young people, and representatives of civil society, academia, and the business community should be involved more closely in these debates to raise the OSCE's potential to act as a mediator and bridge-builder. We are absolutely convinced that, if we want to keep political communication channels in Europe open in difficult times, the Organization has to play a central role at the heart of multilateral diplomacy in Europe again.

Second, sustainable conflict resolution: Numerous crises and conflicts are currently rocking our European security architecture. As the world's largest regional security organization, the core task of the OSCE is to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict and to find sustainable solutions to existing conflicts in the OSCE area.

However, the conflict in and around Ukraine has also shown us that the OSCE needs to adapt itself to new challenges that arise from complex multi-dimensional conflict situations. To that purpose, we should continue to develop our instruments along the entire conflict cycle to ensure that we are capable of taking action at any time: whether in conflict prevention, mediation, monitoring, or post-conflict rehabilitation.

Third, greater security for all: Confidence-building measures and arms control play a central role in creating transparency, minimizing risks, and restoring security in Europe. In the light of recent military and technological advances, we are committed to the modernization of the Vienna Document and the revival of conventional arms control in Europe. I have already received a great deal of encouragement from OSCE participating States for my initiative to revive arms control. It is particularly satisfying that the go-ahead was given in Hamburg for a structured dialogue on current and future challenges and security risks in the OSCE area.

Fourth, overcoming global challenges together: Today, our states and societies are confronted with an unprecedented range of global challenges that no country can tackle alone. The OSCE can make a vital contribution to finding common responses to challenges such as terrorism, extremism, cyber-attacks, and the consequences of mass movements of refugees and migrants – frequently working closely with its Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. Closer co-operation on economic and environmental issues can also help to build confidence – the Connectivity Conference in Berlin in May gave this a key initial boost.

We will seek to continue these efforts in all dimensions of our security in the future, since it is clear that we can only overcome common challenges by working together. Democracy and human rights will remain the foundation of our co-operation.

Fifth, an OSCE that is capable of acting: The OSCE is only as strong as its participating States allow it to be. We call upon all OSCE States to live up to their responsibility and to give the OSCE the political and financial support it requires to perform its tasks – that includes the Secretariat in Vienna, the Organization's field missions, and the OSCE's autonomous institutions.

The Ministerial Council in Hamburg showed that, even in turbulent times and despite many differences of opinion, we, the OSCE participating States, are still capable of achieving compromises on specific issues and preventing the vital dialogue on peace and security in Europe from stalling. On many other points, however, for instance, with regard to the conflict in and around Ukraine, or new challenges in the human dimension, it is clear that the OSCE family proved incapable of finding a common language, let alone consensus on matters of substance. Further important issues, including the long-term development of the Organization's capacities for civil crisis management and conflict prevention, also remain unresolved. Yet this should not dishearten us. It is precisely because the times are turbulent and consensus is so hard to achieve that we should invest in upholding political dialogue. Only by doing so will we restore the confidence that has declined and rebuild lasting comprehensive security and stability in the OSCE area.

During our OSCE Chairmanship in 2016, we devoted ourselves heart and soul to this goal, and we will continue to do this in co-operation with Austria, which holds the Chairmanship in 2017, and with Italy thereafter. Germany's Chairmanship in 2016 also taught me that the work and the commitment to peace and security in Europe fall on many shoulders – particularly in times of crisis and conflict. My review would be incomplete without a word of thanks to my many colleagues, supporters, and fellow travellers, both in Germany and throughout the OSCE family. My gratitude therefore goes out to everyone who supported the German Chairmanship with their counsel, co-operation, and assistance.