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Foreword by the Chairperson-in-Office

Italy has started its 2018 Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at a critical time for European security, when conflicts in the OSCE area and crises unfolding around the Mediterranean region were deemed the most urgent challenges.

During our tenure, we have always kept in mind our goal to strengthen the OSCE as a platform for dialogue and co-operation among its 57 members.

We deeply believe that the real “added value” of the Organization is in its ability to promote a positive agenda based on consensus among its members and partners, rather than only focussing on crisis management.

During our Chairmanship, we have worked to put the Mediterranean dimension at the heart of our action in order to contribute to the global management of migrations.

We have built on the success of the Palermo Conference, organized by Italy in 2017 as Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group. The 25th Ministerial Council in Milan reinforced the OSCE commitment towards contributing to security in the Mediterranean, a principle enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. I personally addressed the Permanent Council in August 2018, echoing the words of the founding fathers of the OSCE and calling on the Organization to step up its engagement with its Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation as a way to stem emergencies and security threats that originate in that region. The declaration on security and co-operation in the Mediterranean adopted in Milan mandates the OSCE to adopt a strategic approach in dealing with Mediterranean-related issues, including by mainstreaming a Mediterranean perspective throughout its work.

Beyond the Mediterranean, our Chairmanship also focused highly on conflict management. The crisis in and around Ukraine and protracted conflicts in the OSCE area – Nagorno-Karabakh, Transdnistria, Georgia – have been on top of our agenda. In all regions affected by armed fighting, the humanitarian situation remained our main concern. Particularly so in eastern Ukraine, where more than four years after the signing of the Minsk agreements hundreds of thousands of civilians still have limited access to basic goods and services. We have extended our political support to the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, also through the tireless work of the Chairmanship’s Special Representative. We have established frequent and effective channels of consultation with the Trilateral Contact Group mediators, also and above all to confirm our political support to a complex exercise, which sees no alternatives for now. Likewise, we have intensified our efforts to promote a solution to

protracted conflicts in the OSCE area, reaffirming our commitment to a negotiated solution to both the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the conflict in Georgia.

With regard to the Transdniestrian settlement process, we have worked together with the parties to sign the Rome Protocol in the 5+2 format in May 2018. Thanks to the work of our Special Representative, we reached a breakthrough on international road traffic through the establishment of the first Joint Vehicle Registration Offices in Ribnita and Tiraspol. We were particularly glad to see much positive progress in the Transdniestrian settlement process in 2018. The opening of the Joint Vehicle Registration Offices can be considered a milestone achievement for civilians: The inhabitants on the left bank of the Nistru River will now have the opportunity to register their vehicles and travel on international roads.

We also focussed our efforts on the human dimension of the OSCE, succeeding in adopting the first new commitments in the human dimension since 2014 in Milan, therefore signalling the determination of all participating States to continue mutual engagement even in these difficult years.

Guided by the principles of transparency and collective ownership, we have strived to restore mutual trust in military matters. Within the framework of the Structured Dialogue on current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE (established in 2016 under the German Chairmanship and activated in 2017 by the Austrian Chairmanship), Italy has brought together senior officials from capitals, and ambassadors of the Organization's 57 participating States in the format of an informal working group. The Structured Dialogue enabled discussions on the challenges in the wider politico-military sphere, explored possibilities for overcoming divergences and reversing the negative developments that have marked European security in recent years.

Other political developments in the OSCE region reminded us that new crises could unexpectedly and abruptly emerge at any moment. Our experience shows that we need the OSCE. Its consensus-based decision-making, broad membership and flexibility make it uniquely suited to intervene in different scenarios and de-escalate crises, including of a military nature, to seek their resolution through peaceful means. Its in-house expertise in field operations and autonomous institutions render the Organization one of the most advanced and reliable tools at our disposal to effectively address the conflict cycle.

We need this Organization today more than ever. We need to build on the common ground that unites all participating States, as the founding fathers of this Organization did in 1975, when they signed the Helsinki Final Act.

During our Chairmanship, we consistently sought this common ground among all our countries, in all three dimensions. We found broad support in our attempt to reinforce our response to new security threats, as no country is equipped to tackle them alone. This is particularly the case for terrorism or cyber warfare and cybercrime. We also found a common ground in the desire to break the link between various forms of illicit trafficking and terrorism or

organized crime, activities that fuel corruption and money laundering and thus undermine trust in our institutions. We need genuine partnerships and cooperation to tackle them in the most effective way.

Strengthening the OSCE and our collective security, however, also requires rediscovering the concept of “comprehensive security”, the common ground and basis for the creation of the CSCE in 1975.

I remain convinced that shared challenges require a collective effort based on joint responsibility and solidarity. This is the true spirit of Helsinki and the true added value of OSCE multilateral efforts, which we must continue to spread in the OSCE area and beyond.