**Istanbul, 5 October 2015**

**Keynote Remarks on the Situation in Ukraine**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to address such a distinguished audience on the crisis in Ukraine. In this context, I would like to share with you some thoughts on comprehensive security and on how organisations like the OSCE can contribute to foster peace and normalisation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The crisis in Ukraine puts some of the core- values of European and global security at stake. Principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act an in the United Nations Charter are being put in question. Let me offer you some snapshots from the conflict.

Ukraine had been peaceful ever since its independence in 1991. Ukraine had never experienced ethnic or religious conflict. Through the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, Ukraine voluntarily had given up its nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees.

Nevertheless, the time since independence had been difficult for the country. Unfinished reforms had blocked economic development. Structural issues such as corruption and economic inequality caused deep public discontent and resentment.

These were also the root causes for the Maidan revolution in 2004, as well as for the violent mass protests in the Maidan square in November 2013, which then led to the ouster of Viktor Yanukovich and the establishment of a new government, which pledged closer association with the EU.

But even at that point, when subsequently a movement called “Anti- Maidan” emerged in Eastern Ukraine and public buildings were already under occupation by armed men, violent conflict or even war were beyond the imagination of most residents of Donetsk and Luhansk.

In March 2014, as the Security Council did not reach a decision on Ukraine, the OSCE’s 57 participating States decided to deploy a civilian Mission to Ukraine with the aim of reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security, and to monitor and support the implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments. [This happened also right after the events in Crimea, which had aggravated the situation.]

The concept for the Mission was to be mainly a monitoring instrument for potential violations of human rights, including the rights of minorities. The topics in Ukraine were the aftermath of the “Maidan” movement and the emerging protests in the east of the country.

In the following months, however, the SMM was overtaken by political and military events as they occurred. Armed violence erupted and spread in the East of Ukraine. A new type of conflict emerged. Internal and external factors played a role.

Where initially there had been sticks, there were now guns, artillery systems and heavy weapons. Foreign fighters were on the ground. The Mission was suddenly operating in the middle of an armed conflict, our Monitors were working in a warzone. It was hard to keep up with the emerging military escalation of the conflict. Eight of my colleagues were abducted and taken hostage by armed groups, and only released a month later.

Soon later, certain regions of Eastern Ukraine became a stronghold of irregular armed groups. These regions were surrounded by Ukrainian armed forces; millions of people were forced to leave their homes. Fear among the remaining civilian population still prevails; the humanitarian situation became increasingly difficult. More than 8.000 people, including many civilians, have died in the fighting up to now. There are 1,4 million IDP’s, hundreds of thousands of refugees, more than seven million people are directly affected by the conflict.

SMM is now entrusted with semi- peacekeeping tasks, it now has more than 540 international Monitors from more than 40 participating states and closely cooperates with the UN. We monitor the situation, facilitate dialogue and reconciliation, and try to engage with civil society, women, youth and the elderly. We report to the OSCE’s Permanent Council and to the public. The Mission has also repeatedly reported to the Security Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After intense negotiations conducted in the “Normandie Format”, and also under the auspices of the OSCE, weapons in Ukraine have now been mostly silent since 1 September. In addition, on 29 September, the sides finalised their work on an addendum to the Package of Measures agreed on 12 February: They found agreement on the withdrawal of tanks and certain weapons. The agreement is an addendum to the Minsk documents and envisages a withdrawal of tanks, artillery pieces up to 100mm in calibre, and mortars up to and including 120mm in calibre. The withdrawal should be implemented in two stages. This is an important step in implementation of what has already been agreed in the Minsk document and strengthens the peace process as a whole. The agreement is an important step forward.

But many challenges remain. Ukraine remains extremely fragile. The situation in the region is shaky and unpredictable.

The ceasefire on the ground still needs to be made permanent and sustainable, and the signature of the latest agreement is just one of the steps needed to make it more robust and sustainable.

Despite the recent decrease in fighting, there is a clear and present danger of re-escalation. No one is yet ready to talk about substantial disengagement of forces. There is still uncertainty as to how to fill the vacuum that will be created as a result. However, such disengagement is needed, as well as serious, joint consideration of measures aimed at stabilising this volatile situation, including through direct communication and problem-solving.

Perhaps of greatest concern is the significant risk posed by heavy weapons. In mid-February, signatories to the Minsk Package of Measures agreed that these would be withdrawn within two weeks. And yet, seven months later, many of these weapons have not been withdrawn and remain where there should be a security zone. The absence of trust between the sides makes the situation more difficult.

Also the humanitarian situation in the East of Ukraine remains cause for grave concern, and actions by the sides make it increasingly difficult to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The conflict in Ukraine poses risks to neighboring countries as well as to the security of the entire Black Sea Region. It is a new type of conflict and challenges the crisis- solving capacity of the international community. Some people see an emerging conflict between East and West that plays out in a country that is seen as a buffer zone.

First and foremost, the sides need to consolidate the ceasefire, and make it sustainable and comprehensive. Heavy weapons should be withdrawn.

Humanitarian and military demining are an important part of the process of de-escalation. Sides need to act on this now, before the problem of mines becomes one that haunts future generations.

Moreover, additional measures must be undertaken to increase trust between the sides. Towards this goal, confidence building measures need to be undertaken. Such measures do not only include actions in the sphere of the military, but should also include members of the civil society, notably including youth and women.

But this is only part of the solution. The full implementation of the Minsk agreements, including its political, economic and humanitarian provisions, is now more important than ever.

No ceasefire and no withdrawal of heavy weapons can – in the long term- substitute a joint political understanding among all factions how Ukraine will function as one united country in the future. The political working group of the TCG is exploring possibilities for such an understanding, which would include self- rule inside Ukraine for some regions.

However, such a political understanding inside Ukraine also should include an understanding on the international level. Ukraine should not be a buffer zone between East and West, but rather a space for peaceful cooperation.

No new dividing lines should emerge on the map or on the ground, a “frozen conflict” is a dangerous scenario. In the very populous and highly industrialized region of Eastern Ukraine such a frozen conflict is bound to lead to economic degradation and further displacement and suffering. The entire region including the Black Sea would be threatened by a permanent risk of a renewed outbreak of violence.

President Poroshenko and the government are doing what they can in this respect. Moreover, legitimate presidential and parliamentary elections have taken place, even while the conflict was ongoing, and local elections will take place on 25 October, monitored by the international community. This reinforces Ukrainian institutions. Reforms are taking place inside the country, and despite all difficulties, there is a spirit of hope and optimism. And there is a strong civil society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to share with you some lessons that could be learned from the crisis in Ukraine.

Firstly, more political engagement and preventive diplomacy are important. Early warning mechanisms can help to become active when it is not yet too late. There are international tools for that purpose.

At the same time, there also needs to be more contingency planning. Even if early- warning takes place, the international system must be in a position to act and react quickly and decisively. There needs to be stronger institutional capacity on behalf of the international community. This includes also regional security organizations such as the OSCE. Should the political will for a general reset in the relationship between East and West emerge, the OSCE can certainly play a significant role in that process. I should emphasize that we need a more focused political and diplomatic engagement and discussion on Ukraine between East and West. In that respect, Normandy powers are playing an instrumental role.

As another point, we also have learned the lesson of the importance of descent statehood and functioning institutions delivering rule of law and justice basis along with basic services for its people.

We also need to promote the emergence of a resilient society within states: a strong civil society is probably the single most effective internal tool for the prevention of violent conflict. Where mechanisms exist to solve conflict through dialogue and established means, violence will be less relevant.

Before concluding,

People are tired of war and are looking for an end to the violence, and for a durable peace.

Recent developments have brought about a wind-down of violence, a certain tranquillity has returned to Eastern Ukraine. Now all efforts have to be undertaken towards peace and normalisation. What is needed now more than ever, is strong political will from all sides to continue on this path.

Thank you.