



Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

H.E. Mr. Bjarni Benediktsson

Thirtieth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council

Skopje, 30 November 2023

Mister Chair,

Honorable Ministers,

Madame Secretary-General of the OSCE,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Iceland wishes to wholeheartedly thank Mr. Bujar Osmani and our North-Macedonian hosts, for leading our organization through these incredibly challenging times. We are grateful as well to our Secretary General, Heads of the OSCE Institutions and OSCE staff.

We also wish to thank Malta for taking on the immense responsibility of chairing our organization in 2024, at the eleventh hour, and we assure Minister Ian Borg of Iceland's full support.

Mr. Chair

The OSCE was founded to protect peace and security, and foster justice and co-operation.

And for a long time, our organization has been a strong platform for dialogue, diplomacy, co-operation, and trust building in the OSCE region. It has laid the foundations for democracy, rule of law, human rights, and peaceful coexistence.

Yet here we are, almost 50 years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, with the Russian Federation having brutally invaded another OSCE participating State.

For over 21 months Russia's unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, has caused devastating suffering, loss of life, damage, and destruction, and shaken the European security architecture to its core. Russia's war of aggression is a direct attack on the multilateral system, democratic values, and the rule-based international order.

And let me make this clear: Iceland remains unwavering in its solidarity with Ukraine in the face of Russia's brutal aggression and are united with allies and partners to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Mr. Chair,

Russia is also directly undermining this very organization by blocking consensus on decisions of critical importance for its future and functioning.

It is especially disturbing – but also revealing - to see that Russia's attacks are directly targeted at those institutions tasked with protecting and promoting democratic values and human rights.

And that is not all - Russia's withdrawal from the CFE-treaty and de-ratification of the CTBT-treaty are yet another example of Russia's aggressive behaviour aimed at undermining European and global security.

Russia's conduct is unacceptable and in stark contradiction to the OSCE commitments that each participating State represented in this room, including Russia, has agreed to respect.

Mr. Chair

In times like these, strengthened multilateral cooperation is of the utmost importance.

We must not shy away from the challenges we face, be it war in Europe, the effects of climate change, or democratic backsliding.

Instead, we must push back against this downward spiral, and be relentless advocates for democracy, freedom and peace that is built on justice.

As an integral part of the multilateral system the effective functioning of this organization is our joint responsibility – a responsibility we must all take to heart.

Let me assure you that for our part, Iceland remains convinced of the value of the OSCE, its field missions and independent institutions. We are fully committed to continuing to support its work.

I thank you, Mr. Chair