



“Esteemed High Representative of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,
Esteemed Minister Rinkēvičs,
Dear colleague ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to greet you and express my satisfaction at the holding of our ministerial meeting today which, I am confident, will contribute to better cooperation between EU Member States and candidate countries, through an exchange of views on the most topical themes concerning Europe and its neighbourhood. For Serbia, as a country working its way towards EU membership, this is a valuable opportunity to familiarize itself first-hand with the roadmap for defining a new European neighbourhood policy. I also wish to express my gratitude to our host Latvia for its generous hospitality.

At the beginning, I would like to underline that EU membership is the foremost strategic priority of the Republic of Serbia on which there is widest social and political consensus. We see the road to our EU membership as a historic opportunity for modernization and change, in accordance with European values and standards.

Although enlargement policy is not the theme of our respectable meeting, I must emphasize how important this issue is for our region and for my country, and to call for your support to the effect that the first chapters in the accession process be opened as early as possible. May I recall this time again the results of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, and the important political decisions adopted and implemented by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, recognized by the EU as well. I would also like to thank in particular High Representative Federica Mogherini for her determination to become personally involved and to assume the intricate facilitator role in this process.

The Republic of Serbia attaches particular attention to the enhancement of regional cooperation and prosperity. It is encouraging for us indeed that the EU has charted a new course of action towards our region as well, aimed at strengthening interconnectivity, first and foremost, in the economic and infrastructural areas and attracting investments that are so essential to development.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to make a reference to the OSCE Chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia, which is taking place at a moment in time particularly difficult for Europe.

Since the assumption of the Chairmanship of the Organization at the beginning of the year, my agenda has been and continues to be dominated by the conflict in and around Ukraine. Over one million people have been displaced, and more than 5,500 killed and 12,000 wounded.

It is high time for peace to take hold. The Package of Measures agreed in Minsk on 12 February is the best available roadmap to bring about calm to the east of the country.

Ukraine is at the critical juncture. Even though some armed incidents are still being recorded in the conflict zone, the ceasefire is currently being more or less observed, though additional effort is yet to be invested by all parties to make it sustainable and durable. In numerous statements our Chairmanship has called upon the parties to persist in respecting the ceasefire, in order to enable implementation of other elements of the Package, first of all the withdrawal of heavy weapons and equipment. I would like to underline the significant role of the Trilateral Contact Group, of my representative Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini in particular, for the continuation of the peace process. In the past days the Trilateral Contact Group has held a number of video conferences with the aim to ensure the respect of ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons and the verification process. The parties taking part at these meetings, including representatives of the Special Monitoring Mission, have noted certain progress regarding withdrawal of heavy weapons. Special Monitoring Mission commends the progress made so far but is unable as yet to verify it, for it requires a completely unhindered approach to the entire territory and certain locations, including buildings. We hope that some progress regarding this issue will be made in the coming days, in order that we could pay full attention to the implementation of the political part of the Minsk Package of Measures. We commend the continuous efforts made by the Normandy Format leaders. We expect the agreement on the establishment of 11 flashpoints to make significant contribution for the fulfillment of the tasks of the Special Monitoring Mission.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Special Monitoring Mission has proved to be a unique and invaluable asset in terms of the international response to the crisis. OSCE monitors are working under considerable operational constraints and in an extremely volatile environment. I salute their courage and dedication. Their safety is our primary concern.

Our Chairmanship is currently fully engaged in the strengthening of the Special Monitoring Mission in terms of providing the necessary personnel, funding and technical equipment. Secretary General Lamberto Zannier informed you yesterday in greater detail of the current needs of the Mission. The mandate of this Mission expires on 21 March and negotiations on its extension are underway. It has been agreed in principal to extend its mandate for another 12 months, but some issues regarding its financing are still open. In order to ensure strengthening and providing funds for the Mission, as OSCE Chairman-in-Office, I have just addressed letters to Foreign Ministers of the OSCE Participating States and partner countries. In this capacity, I take also this opportunity to appeal to you to adopt, as soon as possible, a decision on the extension of the SMM mandate, which will contribute to the stability and predictability of its

funding and functioning. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to the European Union and its Member States, financing around 70% of the SMM budget along with extending other forms of aid, for their overall assistance and support to the Special Monitoring Mission.

Concerning border-related issues, I would like to emphasize the current importance of the OSCE Monitoring Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk. Despite the limited scope of its operations, this Mission remains the only international presence on the international Ukrainian-Russian border. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission will continue to conduct patrols to locations on the Ukrainian side of the border, but increased border monitoring activities will be dependent upon the security situation on the ground.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to briefly inform you that, along with the Ukrainian crisis as a pre-dominant issue, the Serbian Chairmanship is also devoting considerable attention to the resolution of protracted conflicts. All parties should step up their efforts within the agreed formats in order to overcome the current status quo and display a higher level of political will for making progress towards a peaceful solution. We believe that small, yet concrete steps will contribute to the promotion of trust and confidence among parties and pave the road to an effective solution of the problem. We stand ready to invest additional efforts in order to generate the political will and support necessary for their solution. To this end, in my capacity as the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, I plan to visit all the countries of the South Caucasus region (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia), as well as Moldova.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the OSCE Chair, Serbia is particularly aware that security in Europe and the broader OSCE area is also significantly dependent on the situation in the neighbouring regions. In this context, I would like to underline the importance of the "Declaration on Cooperation with OSCE Mediterranean Partners", adopted by the Ministerial Council in Basel. Our Chairmanship attaches due importance to issues relevant for six OSCE Mediterranean Partner Countries which are, at the same time, countries of Southern Neighbourhood of the European Union. These issues unavoidably include terrorism and the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon, posing a serious security threat not only to the OSCE region, but its wider neighbourhood as well. We therefore decided that, during our Chairmanship, the theme of the OSCE conference concerning the first, military-political dimension should be fight against terrorism, focusing in particular on the problem of foreign terrorist fighters. We believe that, following the tragic events in Paris and Copenhagen due attention should be devoted to this phenomenon, as important for European security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are making every effort to rebuild confidence and trust among participating States. The OSCE has been continuously engaged in trying to find a diplomatic solution to the current crisis. Our highest priority is to protect the inclusive and co-operative nature of the OSCE's work, and to prevent the crisis from escalating into a larger confrontation. Both the OSCE and European

security are at a critical juncture. Serbia as the Chair is fully committed to working with the main stakeholders to restore peace and stability in Ukraine.”