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**STATEMENT BY
H.E. MS. BEATE MEINL-REISINGER, FEDERAL MINISTER FOR
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA, AT THE 1539th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 October 2025

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As a representative of the participating State that has the privilege of housing the greatest number of OSCE institutions on its territory as a host country, I am delighted to be able to be with you today as your guest at the Permanent Council.

I am here today in order to do two things. First of all, I should like to make it clear once again that Austria is a firm believer in the multilateral system – a system based on universally recognized rules. Secondly, I am here to listen to you and to invite you to continue developing the peace project known as the OSCE that began 50 years ago.

I address you here in the hope of finding allies, specifically allies working together with us on preserving a world in which war is avoided, where the small and the big can prosper alike, where the welfare of everyone matters and where we save our planet from destruction. A world in which differences do not separate but, rather, prompt us to treat one another with respect and candour.

The “Ten Commandments” of the OSCE are in that regard our yardstick, our programme and our pledge – today no less than in the past. It is therefore not surprising that no one here calls their validity into question. This was also confirmed by the Helsinki+50 discussions organized by the Finnish Chairmanship.

But why, then, is one of the most horrendous wars ever experienced by Europe raging smack in the middle of the OSCE area? Russia’s brutal attack on the peaceful neighbouring country of Ukraine in violation of international law has left us in shock – until right before the start of the war, many of us had considered something like that to be unthinkable. Yet, the unthinkable became reality.

We must not accept this. The fact that Russia has broken a taboo does not invalidate the basic principles of our Organization. Russia has, plain and simple, placed itself beyond the pale of the international community.

Mr. Chairperson,

A strong gale is blowing in the OSCE's direction. It is being felt by other international organizations as well. However, we are hit particularly hard by the current crisis because countries with very divergent political views are represented here.

At the same time, through its practical operations, the OSCE continues to demonstrate its relevance. Thanks to its flexibility and its various instruments, it performs valuable work every day: whether through its field operations in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and in Central Asia, its three autonomous institutions, the Secretariat's programmes, or, last but not least, through the Support Programme for Ukraine.

We can take pride in the fact that the election observation methodology of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), for example, or the work of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings are regarded worldwide as the gold standard in their respective fields. But we must also be honest with ourselves: the OSCE is having to perform its essential work with ever fewer resources. That is not sustainable in the long run.

This is already the fourth year that our Organization has been without a budget. To make matters worse, the current budget level is the result of many years of decline. If one also takes the inflation of the past 15 years into account, then the decline is even steeper in real terms. The fact that expenditures every month may only be incurred using monthly allotments is further complicating the OSCE's work. A particularly critical issue is that an increasing number of qualified staff – especially in the field operations – are leaving the Organization.

Mr. Chairperson,

Austria, too, is having to contend with severe budgetary constraints. Nevertheless, we shall continue to provide our support as a host State. This includes hosting the OSCE Secretariat, the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the liaison office of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as well as defraying the costs of a significant proportion of the Organization's operational facilities in the Hofburg. Similarly, holding this year's Ministerial Council meeting in Vienna is also part of our commitment. In addition, the Austrian Court of Audit has been auditing the Organization's accounts for more than two years now, while the Austrian armed forces have for over a decade been training OSCE personnel for deployment to high-risk areas.

Having said that, we must not ignore the challenging situation. Let us therefore look, under the direction of our Chairmanship, for realistic and sensible solutions that would allow us to make the Organization more efficient and effective without destructive downsizing.

This will not be possible without painful cuts and compromises of a financial, structural and programmatic nature. However, we must be clear about the fact that security and co-operation are not to be had for free – they come with a price tag. But compared with the high military expenditures that are currently necessary, the OSCE budget is very modest.

The Helsinki+50 discussions have shown that the participating States are not yet ready for a comprehensive reform. However, with a little goodwill we can still implement some initial changes that will enhance the Organization's viability and show the way forward into the future.

Mr. Chairperson,

The OSCE offers a platform for both dialogue and accountability. It is an actionable security tool and an engine of reform, and it serves as a bridge spanning all the way from North America, through Europe, to Central Asia. Despite all this diversity, it generates an inclusive driving force that manages to combine political agendas and practical co-operation in a unique manner. When the political will is forthcoming, it is able to unfold its full potential.

Here I am above all thinking forward to the period following a ceasefire in Ukraine. For the fact is that the OSCE possesses the necessary expertise to effectively monitor a ceasefire. It already proved this with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine operating swiftly, flexibly, efficiently and effectively.

The OSCE is already at this stage making a valuable contribution – not only through the Support Programme for Ukraine, but also by documenting war crimes and human rights violations, as well as by assessing environmental damage caused by the war.

It therefore stands to reason that the OSCE can and, indeed, should play a specific role in the reconstruction of Ukraine. In that regard, the Organization can provide assistance above all in such areas as human rights, the environment, economic development, cross-border co-operation and building the capacity of State institutions. And in building bridges between civil society and the State.

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, there is not enough time today to do proper justice to all the topics on which, and all the regions in which, our Organization is active. I am aware of just how significant a role is played by the OSCE in, say, Central Asia, South-Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus or Moldova, and of what it is capable of accomplishing in the three dimensions, that is, the politico-military dimension, the economic and environmental dimension and the human dimension.

By no means do I subscribe to the narrative that the Organization is failing. It is, rather, up to us, the participating States, to give the OSCE the necessary mandates and resources. This also applies to such areas as early warning and risk and hazard prevention.

The key to success lies in how we treat the consensus principle. Consensus means, first and foremost, responsibility – responsibility towards the Organization, towards every single participating State and, above all, towards over a billion people across the OSCE area. These people rightly expect to be able to live in security, prosperity and dignity. Treating the principle of consensus with respect and a sense of responsibility is the *sine qua non* of the OSCE's viability. Consensus must not be allowed to imply that individual States can advance short-term or one-sided interests by force.

This insight is all the more important today, in a world marked by many challenges – by a great deal of them. For one thing is clear: natural disasters, wars, global crises, or assaults on democracy and human rights are all problems that we can only solve by working together. If we fail to do so, future generations will have to pay a heavy price for our failure.

Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I should like to thank Finland for its outstanding performance in the role of OSCE Chairmanship and to wish Switzerland all the best as it prepares for next year. I further thank the Secretary General and all of you for your exceptional commitment to the Organization, for your endurance and your patience.

As a host State representative, it is a matter of great personal concern to me that you and your loved ones should feel at home among us here in Austria.

I look forward in any case to the pleasure of seeing you all again in early December during the Ministerial Council meeting here in the Hofburg.

Thank you for your attention.