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Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all express my deepest condolences to the victims and loved ones of those killed and injured in the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, and to the people and the Delegation of France. The time is very gloomy.

Mr. Chairman,

A year has passed since I last addressed the Permanent Council on behalf of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. In addition to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, we are now faced with other crises, as you well know. Allow me to address some of the challenges we face today from our perspective – what should we do, in general, and what should the role of the PA be, in particular.

First, the situation in Ukraine, which has been the top priority for the OSCE. I had a good opportunity last week to see with my own eyes the situation on ground and the difference between the image and the reality. The threat here is that the great challenges and suffering that are still part of everyday life for so many Ukrainians will be brushed aside by other imminent threats we face.

The truth is that the ceasefire has been largely holding, as the saying goes today, but at the same time the trend is worrying. One of the key issues in order to bring more stability and normality to the eastern part of Ukraine is, of course, border control. In a longer perspective, it is imperative that Ukraine regains control of the state border. In the meantime, there should be a stronger role for the OSCE to mitigate the negative effects of the situation at hand. In this context, I call on all the OSCE participating States to work towards,

firstly, ensuring full access to the SMM monitors towards the border, and secondly, to strengthen the embryo of a border mission that exists today.

On building confidence, let me say that postponing central provisions of the Minsk Agreements is not necessarily a deal-breaker. What matters most is getting there as soon as possible, without any further delay. In this context, I would like to commend the efforts of the Serbian Chairmanship, as well as Ambassador Sajdik, for doing their utmost in order for this to happen.

It is highly unfortunate that Ukraine was unable to administer elections last month in all of Ukraine. While I welcome the decision of the illegal separatists to postpone their own so-called elections, it is clear that unless elections take place under Ukrainian legislation, in accordance with the Minsk Agreements, and observed by the OSCE, those elections will not be considered legitimate or constructive. All the OSCE participating States have a responsibility to support this position.

Coming back to my own visit to the Donetsk region last week, I would have liked to see the situation in the areas not controlled by the lawful, central authorities. Unfortunately, given the current circumstances, that was not possible. Nevertheless, and especially with winter approaching, I call on the separatists to allow all aid, especially humanitarian aid, into the areas they currently hold. This would be for the benefit of the population as well as being a major confidence-building measure.

Despite the serious challenges, I do believe that there is also cause for optimism today for the situation in the east. That is due in no small part to the OSCE's efforts in facilitating the withdrawal of light weapons. To be sure, all of us are hoping for and working towards the full withdrawal of heavy weapons also. In this respect, I cannot stress enough the importance of all sides to provide full access to SMM monitors to do their job in responding to the situation in Ukraine.

Let me highlight what the Parliamentary Assembly has done in responding to the situation in and around Ukraine. As I have already indicated, the Assembly continues to execute one of its most valuable roles in the OSCE by fostering people-to-people contacts through our representative membership. We also continue to raise a clear voice on Ukraine in our Annual Declarations, including our recent Helsinki Declaration. It is an ambitious document, reflecting the voice of the OSCE area's elected officials and the people they represent.

The PA also continues its work to promote dialogue between Ukrainian and Russian parliamentarians, as the core value of the Parliamentary Assembly is, of course, that communication must continue. We have organized some of the only direct talks between Russian and Ukrainian MPs since this crisis began and

plan more in the near future. Dialogue is, and should be, the key word that should not be forgotten when we consider the ways in which our organization should be reformed and renewed.

When I last addressed you we were anticipating the 40th anniversary year of our founding document, the Helsinki Final Act. I believe that the PA has contributed significantly to the Helsinki +40 process, producing an excellent report with concrete recommendations on what this Organization should do to stay relevant and effective.

I will highlight just a few recommendations that it makes:

The participating States should reaffirm, in a Ministerial Council Declaration, the significance of, and their respect for, all ten principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and identify concrete mechanisms for putting into practice the commitments undertaken. That could possibly be through the development of a binding code of conduct for the OSCE participating States in the most problematic areas.

There is a need for more, not fewer, OSCE field presences, with multi-year budgets and mandates. As an example, I and many of my colleagues urge the reopening of OSCE missions in both Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The crisis of migrants and refugees is clearly one of the biggest challenges facing Europe today -- and not just Europe or the EU, but the OSCE area as a whole. We can and must do more as an organization to help not only to find policy solutions, but also do more to help on the human level. From border management to the treatment of minorities to means of promoting human rights and tolerance, the OSCE has many tools at its disposal that can be used in this crisis.

Let me also note that in our Helsinki Declaration, parliamentarians called upon the participating States of the OSCE to improve mechanisms for co-ordination and co-operation of immigration policies. The parliamentarians of the OSCE area are, of course, eager to debate this crisis. I look forward to presenting some forward-looking ideas to the Ministers gathered in Belgrade.

A few words on terrorism and the spread of radicalism:

In the past several months alone, we have seen the sheer inhumanity of terrorists and the scars they have left on the OSCE area and its people. There was a horrible attack on a peace rally in Ankara, a terrorist atrocity brought down a plane flying from Egypt to Russia, and, of course, last week's brutal and indiscriminate attacks in France. Our Helsinki Declaration highlights the need for countries to improve their legislation and do more to cut off the financing of terrorism, among other steps. The OSCE is perfectly

positioned to help countries better co-ordinate their anti-terrorism efforts and help implement best practices. Our collective security is very much at stake.

As you certainly know, the PA has no shortage of recommendations for the OSCE and its participating States. We need to support the addendum to the 2004 Gender Action Plan with concrete, actionable items that promote equality in the OSCE area. Three words: Women, peace, security.

There is the continued need for intensified co-operation between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE executive structures. I am convinced that the OSCE PA can further contribute to the OSCE's work across the conflict cycle.

I also note that this year is not just the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, but a year of many landmark anniversaries. It is the 70th anniversary of the UN Charter and the 20th anniversary of the Dayton Accords. We should consider how our work in the OSCE supports, and can do better in supporting, the best of both documents.

And of course this is also the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Paris. The Charter called for the establishment of the PA as an OSCE Institution and affirmed the place of democratic values and human rights at the centre of this organization. Marking this anniversary and recommitting to the Charter is just as important as doing the same for the Final Act. Democracy and human rights are never finalized projects, and must always be defended.

Finally, a word on elections:

As you know, OSCE parliamentarians play a vital role in the Organization's election observation missions. The technical and analytical expertise that ODIHR provides is complemented by the political judgment and experience that elected parliamentarians bring to bear. We, the OSCE parliamentarians, always try to play a large role in making the OSCE's work known and visible to the world.

Our co-operation with ODIHR has gotten better and better and we must continue to stand together in refusing to accept restrictions placed on our election monitoring.

Many OSCE participating States have long ways to go on meeting their OSCE commitments. But our door remains open – always – to constructive communication in this respect.

With that, I'd like to thank you all very much for your attention. I look forward to seeing you soon in Belgrade.