

Statement
by H.E. Mr. Gabrielius Landsbergis,
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At the Reinforced Permanent Council of the OSCE
26 September 2023

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this reinforced Permanent Council and would like to thank the North Macedonia's OSCE Chair for all its efforts.

We meet as Russia continues its ruthless aggression against Ukraine, seeking to destroy a sovereign state, grab its land and subjugate its people. Yet there is also another war that Russia is waging right now. A war against the very international order that was built to protect peace and prevent wars from happening ever again. The OSCE has long been a part of this security architecture, so there is little surprise that Russia's assault is also directed at this Organisation.

We must be frank – our defences have not been holding up that well so far.

First, the OSCE lost its ability to act, as the consensus rule was turned against it. The paralysis started with Russia sabotaging the OSCE human rights dimension, but soon spread across the board.

The Organization that was created to promote security and cooperation stood helpless in the face of Russia's ruthless aggression against Georgia in 2008 and, for the last ten years, against Ukraine.

Without a meaningful response, this cancer continues to spread. Because of Russia's obstruction, we are now unable to approve the OSCE budget, extend leadership mandates or even agree on the next year's Chairmanship.

Thus, there is a very good reason why we meet at this extraordinary council – things just cannot continue this way. We have reached a fork in the road and have to make a choice.

We can, of course, continue making concessions to the aggressor. We have been going down this road for quite a while– and can already see where it leads. It is not a happy place, with a hollowed shell of the organization whose role in the European security architecture shrinks to insignificance. Consequently, new formats dedicated to European security would naturally emerge, since in today’s unpredictable environment there are issues that need urgent resolution, not just endless debate without any hope of tangible outcome.

Yet there is also an alternative path. We can stand-up against the blackmail and defy the assailant. A participating state that acts in complete disregard of our values cannot be allowed to dictate the agenda of our work and compromise our principles.

In this regard, we strongly support Estonia for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2024, as the only credible candidate put forward in a transparent and orderly way. Having completed a term at another troubled body – the UN Security Council – not so long ago, Estonia is well prepared to steer the Organisation during these stormy times. We should also roll-over the mandates of the Secretary-General and the heads of OSCE’s autonomous institutions, as proposed by the North Macedonia’s OSCE Chair.

As we move towards these decisions, one thing should remain clear – none of them can remain hostage of Russia's blackmail or require a blessing from a country hell-bent to ruin this Organization.

When it comes to a decision-making, it has long been clear that while consensus can be a useful principle when applied to a work of states adhering to the same set of fundamental values, it plunges us into a paralysis when at least one country turns rogue. Thus, we should seriously consider moving away from the consensus rule and taking decisions by a qualified majority. Or we should take a step further and evict the aggressor from our midst, just like the Council of Europe did in response to Russia’s aggression.

Finally, as we discuss these unquestionably important points, like the OSCE Chairmanship, budget and leadership, we should never lose sight of the fundamental issue at hand. Can the OSCE, founded to defend the Helsinki Final Act and its principles of non-use of force, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity still deliver on this task? Does it still contribute to European security? An honest response to those questions should be guiding our next steps.

Thank you.