



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!

**Statement by Ambassador Barbara Žvokelj,
Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the International Organizations in Vienna,
at the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Meeting on
“Post-COVID 19 recovery: Opportunities and Challenges for security and regional co-operation”,
Vienna, 15 March 2021**

Mr. Chairperson,

I would just like to make a couple of comments in my national capacity, besides the statement presented by the EU.

As others, I would like to thank to Polish Chair of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group for the first meeting that is dedicated to such an important topic as well as to Sweden for the excellent work they did last year. I would also like to commend the interesting presentations of the speakers.

Slovenia, as a Mediterranean country, and as an active partner in the Union for Mediterranean, highly values the Mediterranean Partnership and is willing to increase its footprint in the cooperation in the region. Cooperation and dialogue among partners from both shores of the Mediterranean in different formats is essential in addressing numerous challenges that we are facing today.

Entering into second year of COVID-19 pandemic, which has major impact on global cooperation and security as well as on our societies, we need to keep partnerships alive, interactive, dynamic and operational. Multilateralism matters!

This crisis has so many aspects and consequences. One of the lessons we have learned is to be aware of security vulnerability. In Slovenia, we are of the view, that while we concentrate on recovering from the pandemic, we should focus also on the improvement of efficiency and responsiveness to future crises. This is why the resilience to crises will be the first priority of our EU presidency in the second half of this year, especially regarding health related crises and cyber threats.

The OSCE, for its part, could make an important contribution by providing early warning. With its comprehensive approach to security, OSCE offers a unique platform to exchange practices and to assist in finding solutions and proactive steps towards the region-wide multilateral dialogue and the implementation of confidence-building measures.

Focusing on gender issues in March and on who has been affected most by pandemic, we have to acknowledge the disproportionate and negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and on gender equality. With women making vast majority of the global workforce in the healthcare and social sectors, they have been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic and disproportionately affected by job and income losses, labour

exploitation, school closures and an increase in unpaid care work. They have also suffered increased domestic violence.

Let me conclude, Mr Chairperson,

The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security rests on the recognition that conflicts may arise not only from political and military threats, but also from economic tensions, environmental degradation, social insecurity and gross violations of human rights.

The Mediterranean region has so many potentials and resources. To unleash those potentials we need to efficiently address COVID and non-COVID related unemployment and social disparities, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, limited resources like water, environmental degradation, and other challenges. Only by enhancing economic development through investments, and more importantly through education as well as capacity building, promotion of good governance, confidence building and respect of human rights, fostering gender equality, a new sustainable development paradigm may emerge within OSCE, including the Mediterranean region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.