

United Nations Security Council

**Statement by Gernot Erler, Special Representative for the OSCE
in the Open Debate on Conflict in Europe**

New York, 21 February 2017

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to first extend, on behalf of Germany, my most sincere condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Ambassador Churkin of the Russian Federation.

Mr. President,

I would like to thank the Ukrainian Presidency for convening this debate.

To politicians of my generation, the term “conflicts in Europe” is historically charged. The UN, after all, was founded as a reaction to World War II – starting with Germany’s aggression against its neighbors in Europe.

The hopes the UN stood for were initially not fulfilled in Europe. During the Cold War, Europe was divided and this Council was paralyzed more often than not, when numerous conflicts persisted all over the world. The fault lines in Europe, however, were frozen.

But conflict returned to Europe, paradoxically at the very moment the Cold War ended, with wars breaking out over the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

Our initial reactions were too slow. We had to re-learn how to cope with refugee crises, humanitarian challenges, war crimes, ethnic hatred and shifting lines of conflict.

In the Western Balkans, we have been succeeding eventually, thanks to the co-ordinated efforts of the international community, including the EU, OSCE, NATO, and, of course, the UN with a Security Council working together. The region is now heading towards a better future. And the UN and regional organizations now have a much better toolbox to deal with crises of the kind.

In other parts, however, too many conflicts persist in Europe: In Ukraine, in Georgia, in Moldova and about Nagorny-Karabach. And it is there that the UN and the OSCE must be at the forefront of conflict resolution.

Germany took on the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016 with a special focus on conflict resolution. We sought to strengthen existing conflict resolution formats, to contribute to confidence-building and to improve the lives of populations affected by conflict. As a current

member of the OSCE Troika, we will continue to give our full support to the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship.

And after one year at the helm of the biggest regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, I can confirm – if proof was needed – that the OSCE is particularly well suited to support conflict resolution in Europe.

But our experience is also that we need to continue to develop the OSCE's capacities throughout the entire conflict cycle, granting the OSCE international legal status and enabling it to fulfill its potential. We also need to continue to deepen co-operation between the OSCE and the UN.

Mr. President,

The year 2014 accorded the term “conflicts in Europe” a new quality, calling into question the founding principles of the UN, in particular the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity of UN member states. The territorial integrity of Ukraine is being violated, most strikingly by the illegal annexation of Crimea. In Eastern Ukraine, numerous cease-fire violations continue to take place on a daily basis.

The Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE is on the ground, but facing many obstacles. It is essential that the mission enjoy full freedom of movement throughout its mandated area of operation. Last Saturday, in the framework of the Munich Security Conference, together with our French, Russian and Ukrainian friends and colleagues, we met in the Normandy format to discuss how to advance the Minsk agenda. France and Germany continue to be fully committed to their diplomatic efforts and to supporting the process in the framework of the Normandy format.

The Minsk agreements provide, despite all difficulties, the only roadmap for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The ultimate aim is to reinstate Ukraine's territorial integrity and control of its external borders, with full respect for the rights of minorities. All sides need to adhere to the agreements. And most importantly: All sides have to commit to military de-escalation.

Other conflicts in Europe, in Georgia, in Moldova and about Nagorny-Karabach, equally need to be solved on the basis of international law and OSCE commitments.

Especially in Georgia and Nagorny-Karabach these conflicts are not “frozen” but continue to destroy lives, threaten our security, and deny the affected populations the benefits of peaceful development.

In particular, we fully respect and support the undivided sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We also encourage all stakeholders

of the Geneva International Discussions, a genuine team play of the OSCE, the EU and the UN, to make concessions and raise the level of trust through confidence-building measures.

We must not relent in our efforts to solve these crises. Germany stands ready to contribute to this end.

Mr. President,

Permit me to conclude with three points:

First. When it comes to the hard and grinding work of conflict prevention, stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction, the close co-operation of all actors, among them the UN and regional organizations, is of the essence. The OSCE with its expertise and credibility is currently at the forefront of efforts at resolving conflicts in Europe.

Second. This Council needs to work in a spirit of co-operation and unity that is a prerequisite for its effective action, and which alone justifies the trust the UN Charter places in this Council.

Third. We need to return to the founding principles of the UN. Now more than ever, in Europe and worldwide, we need to preserve and strengthen the multilateral, rules-based international order that the UN epitomizes. Germany will continue to tirelessly work for these very values.

Thank you.