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40 years Helsinki agreement: No time for celebrations

S&D Group in the EP call for a revitalised Helsinki process

40 years ago, men and women representing the people of Europe as well as the USA and Canada, decided that after a period of growing tensions between East and West, the time had come to enter into serious political dialogue promoting security, economic cooperation and human rights throughout Europe.

40 years later, Europe faces a severe security crisis.

The hope that after the fall of the Berlin wall and with the reconfirmation of the Helsinki principles in the Charter of Paris, Europe would see a longer period of democratic development and intense cooperation working for a common future, has been shattered by growing tensions between the EU and Russia due to the Ukraine crisis as well as by the growing impact of anti-democratic forces throughout Europe.

European Socialists and Social Democrats in government, in opposition and, in the European institutions have always been crystal clear, then and now. We will confront any forces in and outside the European Union undermining the basic values of freedom and tolerance. In the case of Ukraine we reject the annexation of Crimea and reconfirm the crucial importance of the full implementation and full respect of the Minsk agreement by all sides, with the aim to reach a definitive political solution so as to restore peace and stability in Ukraine and thus being able to remove sanctions.

In the early seventies Social Democrats such as Willy Brandt and Olaf Palme played a leading role in designing the security architecture of the Helsinki agreements based on the concept of common security. This initiative gave a push for change towards peace, stability, the elimination of tensions, democratic development and respect for human rights. It is in their spirit that the Socialists and Social Democrats in the European Parliament declare that the time has come to avoid permanent division of Europe and revive the Helsinki process by again bringing opponents together at the same table. We demand a Europe wide dialogue to reassess the previous commitments regarding the three Helsinki priorities: European security, building up economic relations and promoting human rights. In this framework, urgent issues such as supply and demand of energy should also be discussed.

This renewed Helsinki process dialogue should assess the present situation in Europe with the aim to restore solid political relations while ensuring full compliance with international law and the commitments as laid down in the Helsinki final act, based on respect for human rights, minority rights and fundamental freedoms, independence, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of states, inviolability of borders, equal rights and peaceful resolution of conflicts. We want to reinvigorate the role of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

We are now in a situation where political, diplomatic, but also people to people contacts have decreased to a minimum. The S&D Group in the European Parliament proposes the following three concrete steps:

1 The EU should contribute to efforts for increasing cooperation and confidence building by promoting free movement of people throughout Europe with visa facilitation and liberalisation.

2 In the short term, as a first step of good will and in order to promote dialogue, we urge both the European Union and Russia to remove from their sanction lists all those who are members of Parliament.

3 We urge the European Union and its member states to put their weight behind the initiative to bring together all countries and successor countries having signed the Helsinki act 40 years ago, to prepare for a renewed dialogue at the highest possible level in the framework of the OSCE by 2016 at the latest. A "standing conference" should be set up in order to prepare for this OSCE summit.

On November 17th the S&D Group will organize a top level conference on 40 years Helsinki. In the run up to this visits are planned to Moscow and Washington.