Statement by Estonia at the first substantive session of the 2021-2025 UN Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security

Discussion under agenda item 5 in relation to confidence-building measures, 16 December 2021

Delivered by Ms Britta Tarvis, Cyber Diplomacy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia

Thank you, Mr Chair, for giving me the floor.

Confidence-building measures (CBMs), closely tied to the other three pillars of what has come to be known as the framework for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, are a crucial and practical way to enhance trust and limit miscommunication and misunderstanding between states. We have been encouraged to hear many of the statements delivered during this week recognise this as one area where the OEWG could direct its focus and explore results. As the consensus report of the previous OEWG report aptly puts it, CBMs „are a concrete expression of international cooperation.“ And as the latest GGE report reminds us, „building confidence is a long-term and progressive commitment requiring the sustained engagement of States.“

One of Estonia’s priorities during the OEWG is to ensure that the regional dimension is adequately taken into account. In our view, regional organisations can be particularly well equipped to develop and implement confidence-building measures, allowing for practical, long-term activities to build trust in smaller settings, all the while contributing to global peace and security. While we recognise that not all states belong to a regional organisation, we believe that considering emerging practice at regional and sub-regional level can be of broader interest and benefit.

Since 2013, following successful GGE outcomes, the 57 participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) have developed and agreed on 16 Cyber/ICT CBMs which offer concrete tools to enhance interstate transparency, communication, and co-operation in cyberspace. The operationalisation of these CBMs have been supported by the “Adopt a CBM” programme of the Chair of the OSCE Informal Working Group which has permitted activities under a number of the CBMs to be spearheaded by specific participating States on a voluntary basis. For example, Estonia, together with Austria, Belgium, Finland, Italy and Sweden, co-adopts CBM No 14 and is dedicated to developing opportunities to exchange best practices and enhance the use of public-private partnerships in the field of cybersecurity within the OSCE region. We are encouraged by the emphasis on the role of the private sector in CBMs by a number of delegations, such as in the joint statement by Switzerland, Serbia and Germany.
Important developments in relation to CBMs are also taking place, for example, in the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Organization of American States, as has been highlighted by other delegations.

Mr Chair, in your guiding questions you ask how could the OEWG further facilitate the exchange of lessons and good practices on confidence-building measures. Regional players follow these global discussions closely and it will be important to ensure that this would be a two-way street, as often this is how new practical ideas are made. The regional consultations held as part of the latest GGE, but involving also the Chair of the previous OEWG Ambassador Lauber, set a good example, as they allowed to bring UN-level complementary deliberations closer to home for many and draw in more voices dealing with regional confidence-building day-to-day.

It is positive that cross-regional information sharing, as recommended in the GGE reports and the latest OEWG report, is already happening — for example, the meetings of the OSCE Informal Working Group regularly invite participants from other regions, some of whom are not members of any regional organisation. Such initiatives are encouraging and are a direct result of recommendations made at the UN level. We also believe that this OEWG could offer a further platform for further cross-regional sharing of experiences and the identification of synergies, such as through supporting the possibility of regional roadmaps or toolboxes to further enhance the role of the regional dimension in the implementation of globally accepted agreements. In relation, we support the remarks made by Germany on the importance of harnessing multistakeholder expertise in our endeavours to build confidence and ensure transparency.

Mr Chair, transparency has been strongly in focus during this first substantive session.

Estonia has already highlighted the UNIDIR Cyber Policy Portal as one positive example where states can share their own cybersecurity policies, initiatives and positions, as well as learn from others. Estonia updated its profile earlier this year. We wanted to take the opportunity to thank UNIDIR for their enthusiastic support throughout this process, and recommend other States to submit their updates, too. We welcome the statements by delegations this week regarding further modernising the portal.

As our Singaporean colleague and several others have already elaborated, we would also do well to pay further attention to the nomination of Points of Contact. The idea of establishing a global repository of Points of Contacts (PoCs) was discussed during the 2019-2021 OEWG and was included in the Chair’s Summary. Estonia has experienced the broad benefits of the OSCE CBM 8 Points of Contact network which includes both technical and policy contacts, uploaded to the OSCE POLIS platform and maintained by the OSCE Secretariat. The network regularly conducts communications exercises, enjoying wide
participation from OSCE participating States, as well as has facilitated for a number of dedicated training events and table-top exercises. We also draw attention to the helpful guidance provided by the latest GGE report for establishing PoCs or engaging in PoC networks. With this in mind, Estonia supports the further consideration of a global repository of PoCs and believes we could allocate time in the OEWG to draw in lessons learnt from different regions both to inspire more States to allocate Points of Contact as well as to explore the establishment and maintenance of such a repository.

Thank you, Mr Chair.