Mr. President,

At the outset, let me congratulate you, distinguished Ambassador Bencini, on your able chairmanship and thank you for guiding us towards achieving a substantive outcome of the Conference.

Montenegro aligns itself with the EU statement and, therefore, I will highlight some of the pertinent points in my national capacity.

Montenegro remains a staunch supporter of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and reiterates its firm commitment to its strengthening, full universalization and implementation.

We consider the Convention as one of the key pillars of the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. During almost five decades of its existence, the Convention has constantly reaffirmed its relevance in preventing the development, production, stockpiling and usage of biological agents and toxins as weapons. The COVID-19 pandemic has alarmingly shown how quickly infectious diseases spread and how dangerous and devastating they can be, further emphasizing the importance of strengthening the Convention and its implementation. Likewise, universal adherence to the Convention. In this regard, the Convention’s dimension related to international cooperation and assistance in biological sciences and technology for peaceful purposes is of vital importance.

That is why we should take advantage of the unique opportunity offered by the Ninth Review Conference to adopt forward-looking decisions and recommendations to strengthen the Convention and its implementation and to improve biosafety and biosecurity globally, but also to advance assistance, cooperation, response and preparedness of the States Parties.
To that note, Montenegro supports the development of practical initiatives for strengthening implementation of the BWC regime such as a scientific advisory mechanism, a set of voluntary guiding principles for scientists, and others.

Montenegro notes with gratification a record number of reports on confidence-building measures (CBMs) submitted by States Parties in 2021. Montenegro will continue to regularly report on CBMs and support further measures such as peer reviews, voluntary visits and other initiatives that contribute to enhancing transparency. While welcoming these achievements, we emphasize the centrality of verification to a complete and effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime, including the BTWC. Therefore, we reiterate our readiness to explore the verification issue in more detail.

As for our horizontal priorities, Montenegro continues to strongly advocate the integration of gender perspectives in all non-proliferation, disarmament, and arms control frameworks, including the BWC and other disarmament fora.

We also emphasize the importance of the financial stability of the Convention and call on all States to fulfil their annual financial obligations on time and in full.

Mr. President,

We note that Russia has invoked procedures under Articles V and VI of the Convention as part of one of its disinformation campaigns related to unsubstantiated and unfounded claims about the alleged development of biological weapons in Ukraine. As known, in that case, the procedures laid down in Articles V and VI have been concluded, confirming the importance of resorting to their invocation only on well-founded grounds. Otherwise, ill-founded efforts and allegations only weaken and undermine legitimate research related to health and capacity building, as well as to the prevention, detection and control of possible disease outbreaks. In short, such efforts weaken the Convention and undermine international cooperation for peaceful purposes under Article X.

Regrettably, the said developments, as well as this long-awaited Ninth Review Conference, are taking place against the backdrop of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest terms.

By concluding, we echo the calls to the States Parties to focus on the important tasks ahead of us and adopt forward-looking decisions and recommendations that will provide a clear roadmap for the next review cycle, including a robust intersessional programme.

Finally, Montenegro reiterates its commitment to fully comply with the BWC and to promote its strengthening, full implementation and universalization.

I thank you.