

Briefing of the OSCE Secretary General
UNSC Open Debate on
“The Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Conflicts in
Europe”

21 February 2017

Thank you Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start out by expressing my heartfelt condolences to the Russian Delegation for the passing away of its distinguished ambassador, Vitaly Churkin. Ambassador Churkin, whom I knew well from the time I served as Special Representative of the UNSG in Kosovo, will be remembered and missed by many inside and outside this chamber.

I would like to thank the Ukrainian Presidency of the United Nations Security Council for the invitation to address today’s open debate. As Secretary General Guterres pointed out, ensuring lasting peace and security in Europe remains a major objective of the United Nations. But it is also at the core of the OSCE’s mandate and activities. I am glad to say that both organizations are united in their shared priority to address conflict situations in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner.

After the end of the Cold War the promise of a common and indivisible security space from Vancouver to Vladivostok, outlined in the Charters of Paris and Istanbul, seemed within reach. The vision of a co-operative and rules-based order on the old continent appeared irreversible. Many across the Euro-Atlantic space looked to the OSCE with high hopes and great expectations.

But the conflicts that followed the violent break-up of Yugoslavia and the dissolution of the Soviet Union shattered that emerging security paradigm. Borders shifted and re-emerged, dividing peoples and minorities, engendering crisis and human suffering, sowing mistrust and creating different threat perceptions. The dire consequences of those conflicts are still with us today.

Looking back, we must recognize today that the order that materialized after the end of the Cold War failed to bring about full stability or balance. Trust and confidence in East-West relations quickly diminished. And if trust is lacking,

predictability in State behaviour becomes elusive. This is especially true in times when uncertainty and lack of transparency are intentionally used as political tools.

The OSCE has been a primary actor in addressing conflicts in Europe throughout the last two decades. The Organization was transformed in the wake of the optimism of the early 1990s and evolved again in response to the ensuing conflicts. It continues to change today in response to both traditional and emerging challenges.

But the fundamental characteristics of the OSCE remain the same. It offers a genuinely holistic view of how different elements of security interact and must be addressed together. It can provide a bridge between sides which sometimes have radically different visions of what security means. And it continues to invest in efforts to prevent destabilization and conflict, and to deal with the consequences when they appear.

Throughout its history, the OSCE has played a clear and active role as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. In some cases the relationship with UN structures has been explicit. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo was linked to Security Council Resolution 1244 and was assigned the lead role in matters relating to institution-building and human rights, as a distinct but constituent component in the framework of UNMIK. It had a clear lead in establishing key democratic institutions such as the Kosovo Judicial Institute, the Central Election Commission, the Ombudsperson, and the Kosovo Police Service School. And it continues to play an active role today.

Since the first OSCE field operations were established, the Organization's role in South East Europe has adapted and changed in response to changing needs and persistent challenges. This remains the region where the Organization continues to maintain its largest field presence, which, along with the OSCE Institutions, works for stability, dialogue and security. We have long focused on supporting election systems in which people have confidence, and promoting peaceful inter-ethnic relations.

Today the OSCE also focuses on new areas, including youth. We need a new generation able to act as a positive force for change and stability; to question old, divisive messages; and to call for accountable and transparent government and institutions.

In South East Europe, as elsewhere across the OSCE region, we face increasing threats from violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism. The challenge of countering these threats transcends old dividing lines and national interests. The

OSCE will continue to work with a wide range of partners to support our participating States in confronting this challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The crisis in and around Ukraine continues to be a major source of tension and instability in Europe. Sadly, it has marked the return of geopolitics on the OSCE agenda and it is challenging our model of co-operation. Inter-state relations are now more than ever before governed by a zero-sum mentality that we hoped we had left behind. In too many parts of the OSCE region, we still find conflicts and competition continuing, re-emerging and developing, both locally and regionally.

Our swift and flexible response to the unfolding crisis in and around Ukraine in 2014 is the most visible example of the OSCE's ability to live up to its Chapter VIII responsibilities and take collective action to address a crisis at both the political level and on the ground. We established and continue to run a Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine that is larger than any we have run before. Although unarmed and civilian, the Mission is performing quasi-peacekeeping functions such as monitoring and verifying the ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. As such, it has broken new ground in the area of peace operations. I am pleased to highlight that the Mission has established productive working relationships with various UN bodies, including the Security Council. On a number of occasions, both the Chief Monitor in Ukraine, Ambassador Apakan, and the OSCE Representative in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Sajdik, have briefed this very Council.

However, progress towards a peaceful resolution continues to elude us. Despite huge efforts to work for peace, recent increases in fighting remind us of the very real risk of escalation, and we are looking at the suffering of the populations affected by the conflict. The Special Monitoring Mission remains closely involved in supporting adherence to the ceasefire and the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. In this connection, I am concerned at the recent announcement of Russia's recognition of documents issued by the self-proclaimed republics since it will complicate the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. The SMM cannot prevent ceasefire violations or force the withdrawal of weapons that have returned to the line of contact, or even ensure to the Mission the security and freedom of movement it needs to do its job. We are now monitoring the recently announced ceasefire and are ready to observe the much-needed withdrawal of heavy weapons, a key step towards de-escalation.

More generally, we are drawing on lessons from our current operation in Ukraine to develop a framework for future missions and crisis response. As the Special Monitoring Mission moves into areas of work new to the OSCE, we have also appreciated the UN's expertise and advice, not least on the use of technology, including UAVs.

Currently, we are in negotiations with DFS to conclude an agreement in order to utilize UN System contracts and to purchase from the Strategic Deployment Stocks in Brindisi. This agreement will be modelled on similar arrangements the UN has with the African Union, and we intend to conclude it soon.

Although the crisis in and around Ukraine continues to dominate the OSCE agenda, we should also keep in mind the protracted conflicts in the OSCE area. The OSCE has played an active role in their negotiating processes since the 1990s. We support and facilitate contacts through institutional support and the work of representatives of the annual OSCE Chairmanship. That role is bolstered by the OSCE's inclusive and consensus-based nature. As we step up efforts to prevent further crises and facilitate the resolution of the protracted conflicts, the readiness of the parties to these conflicts to take responsibility for resolving them remains key to breaking out of the current stalemates.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has seen a worrying deterioration on the ground. The hostilities that erupted in April 2016 contributed to the highest number of soldiers and civilians killed and wounded in a single year since the May 1994 ceasefire. The use of heavy weapons and the clear targeting of villages set a disturbing precedent. And the risk of further fighting remains high.

The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs continue to seek a way to retreat from violence and work toward a negotiated settlement. So far they have not been able to secure agreement to implement even modest confidence-building measures. Their work keeps open a space for discussions and helps to manage the conflict. But it is for the parties to choose to use that opportunity to take a step forward towards peace.

The Transdniestrian settlement process may be less fraught with the risk of violence, but in this too we need a fresh determination to move forward. Last year Germany, as OSCE Chairmanship, achieved renewed activity in the 5+2 format. The Berlin Protocol last June marked an encouraging commitment by the sides to work for agreements. We need to maintain and build on this momentum.

Following the conflict in 2008, we have not managed to return our presence on the ground in Georgia. However, the OSCE's track record of strong relations

with the UN and its agencies provides a solid basis for further development of our relationship. We work closely together with the UN and with the EU as co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, and as co-facilitator of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meetings in Ergneti. The OSCE also contributes to confidence-building in the region through targeted initiatives on the ground.

Secretary-General Guterres,

You have sought to launch a “surge in diplomacy for peace” and to adopt a comprehensive approach in conflict prevention that marries peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. I strongly support your initiative and look forward to working with you to achieve that. Effective conflict prevention and resolution require building strong coalitions not only among international organizations, but also with civil society and the private sector. The inclusion of women in all stages of the conflict cycle is key. The OSCE has developed structures and policies to help its membership implement UNSC Resolution 1325 and ensure that women form a natural part of our peace-building efforts.

We appreciate your interest in mediation and share your view of it as a priority. In particular, I look forward to your launch of the Mediation Initiative to enhance capacity both in the field and in headquarters. We have pursued the same goals, within our modest resources, and I look forward to further developing co-operation between the UN and regional organizations in this area.

The OSCE has already established a Joint Strategic Work Plan with UN DPA, including an exchange of experts from our Mediation Roster and the UN Standby Team. There will certainly be lessons we can learn and share from UN and OSCE experience as we try to close the gap between early warning and early action.

The OSCE will continue to nurture and bolster this valuable relationship with the UN by making full use of the potential of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which continues to be underutilized. During my tenure as OSCE Secretary General, I have strived to operationalize UN-OSCE co-operation not only in mediation, conflict prevention and resolution, but also in other equally important areas such as the fight against transnational threats and in the economic and environmental sphere. The establishment of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Vienna is a tangible outcome of these efforts.

Looking ahead, I would like to encourage the Secretary-General to pursue the practice of retreats with heads of regional organizations. In this connection, we could look into ways to establish a follow-up mechanism to exchange best practices and promote co-operation among regions in the field of conflict prevention and resolution.

Mr President, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today and look forward to an interactive discussion.

Thank you.