

Statement by the Chairperson in Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Presentation of Priorities

OSCE

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Secretary-General Greminger,

High Commissioner on National Minorities Zannier,

Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Gísladóttir,

Representative on Freedom of the Media Désir,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues.

It is an honour to be here with you for the opening of the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship.

Perhaps, as the incoming Chair, I am expected to start this speech in a certain way.

But, I don't want to do that.

I don't want to tell you that the state of European security and stability is alarming. Because, as Ambassadors to the OSCE, you are more aware of this than anyone.

I don't want to sound the alarm about rising intolerance and widening divisions. Because, we can already hear it ringing, in our day-to-day.

And, I don't want to make wide, sweeping calls for cooperation. Because, many such calls have been made before - and they have gone unanswered.

Instead, let's take an honest look at our organization and the state of our relations.

This is not the first time Slovakia has taken the helm of a multilateral platform.

But this OSCE Chairmanship certainly has many "firsts" for us.

Firstly, it is the first time we will chair this organization while there is a crisis on our doorstep.

From where we sit today, in Vienna, we are less than 60 kilometers from Slovakia's capital city - Bratislava. And, from there, it is only around 380 kilometers to the border with Ukraine. And what is happening there – and I'm speaking about the crisis in and around Ukraine - is simply unacceptable. So I assure you, Slovakia strongly feels the urgency of the matter.

Secondly, it is the first time we will start a chairmanship with so much uncertainty for the future.

There is no doubt about it: we are living in a rapidly changing world. The signatories of the Helsinki Final Act were not thinking of cyber security or climate change, when they put their pens to paper in 1975.

But that doesn't mean *we* shouldn't. The OSCE must be capable of addressing not only present, but also future, challenges. And for this to happen, we must keep our fingers on the pulse, and start planning for the threats of tomorrow.

Thirdly, *it is the first time we are starting a Chairmanship* in times of dire straits for multilateralism – which is the *raison d'être* of the OSCE.

The major challenges facing the OSCE region today - and, indeed, the wider world - demand more cooperation and more dialogue than ever before. Yet, as the demand for multilateralism rises, we are seeing it come under increasing threat.

So, dear colleagues, we took an honest look at this picture. We saw that 2019 will be a year of many 'firsts' for us. And, that it will contain numerous challenges.

But, we believe that all the tools we need to overcome them *already* exist. And, in fact, many lie right here, at the OSCE.

We will dedicate our Chairmanship to their use and development. And, it is with this in mind that I will outline Slovakia's three main priorities for the year ahead.

First, we intend to focus on how conflict is mediated, resolved and prevented - as well as on the people who are living through it.

What is happening on the ground is alarming. As I mentioned, the crisis in and around Ukraine, and the illegal annexation of Crimea, continues. The situation in the Kerch Strait and the wider area is a major cause for concern. Meanwhile, many people within - and outside - Europe continue to suffer from the effects of protracted conflicts.

This is a bleak situation. There is no doubt about it. But condemnations, alone, will not change anything.

Instead, we need to look at the tools that are available to us. And, we need to use them better. This includes existing practices and mechanisms - for example, the Structured Dialogue or Security Sector Governance and Reform. It also means spotting opportunities which we need to do much more to optimise, like gender mainstreaming and greater participation of women in the security field.

We must also use the tools that are closer to the ground. In particular, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine needs us to listen - and to support.

During its chairmanship, Slovakia will try to put our ears to the ground. We see many opportunities to be harnessed in the field.

From the recent recommitment to the ceasefire in Ukraine ...
to the positive momentum in the Transdniestrian settlement process ...
recent intensification of dialogue and the decrease in ceasefire violations and casualties in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict ...
or the resumption of the *Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism* meetings in Ergneti.

Just next week, I will travel to Ukraine. And I will focus on opportunities for dialogue. If there is any way to immediately alleviate the situation for people on the ground, we must take it.

Further trips to all other OSCE regions in the coming weeks and months will also help us in ensuring that our work is led by perspectives from those most affected by conflict.

However, we cannot talk about our existing tools without acknowledging their limits. Because, they are designed for the challenges of today. And that is why we need to start planning for the threats of tomorrow. Which brings me to our second priority, on a Safer Future.

The truth is, we don't know what the future will bring. We are still in the dark about the role communications technologies, artificial intelligence or energy innovations will play in our security landscape, years from now. But one thing is certain: we need to start thinking about it - and talking about it - more.

And, young people must be at the table. There are young people in our region today who share the same objectives as this very Organization. They are coming up with ways to prevent radicalisation, counter climate change and spur sustainable development. We need to start listening to them.

Slovakia also intends to use its platform to generate dialogue about a Safer Future on a regional and international scale. We will use major conferences - dealing with issues from anti-Semitism to cyber security - to call attention to worrying trends, and look for opportunities for further cooperation.

Dear colleagues, the signatories of the Helsinki Act gave us this organization - but it is our job to move it into the future.

Now, finally, I will outline our third priority: effective multilateralism.

Just look around this room today. Look at the diversity among the 57 countries represented. Yet, we are all experiencing common phenomena. And, for every challenge we want to overcome - from terrorism to climate change - none of us can do it alone.

However, at a time when we are in urgent need of cooperation, we are seeing our multilateral systems coming under increasing threat. Our rules-based international system is under mounting strain. And, the lessons we have learned from history - which tell us that compromise and cooperation are the only way forward - are being ignored.

It is the people on the ground who stand to suffer the most.

That is why we need a recommitment to multilateralism.

We cannot, however, achieve it from impassioned speeches or statements alone. It must, instead, come through action.

And on that note, I want to pause for a moment. To address the elephant in the room: the OSCE budget.

Slovakia was dedicated to approving a 2019 budget before the new year. And, we did the best job that we could do. In fact, on New Year's Eve, a budget seemed to be in reach.

Ultimately, however, approval was blocked by one delegation.

And, the price will be paid by the whole OSCE.

Already we have heard that the capacity of ODIHR to prepare for two important election monitoring missions will be affected.

We need to move forward on this – *urgently*.

These budget negotiations are not, simply, a matter of procedure. Instead, they are a chance to show our willingness to compromise. To demonstrate our commitment to the value of this organization. And, to put our words of support for the OSCE into real, concrete action.

During its Chairmanship, Slovakia will do whatever it can to strengthen multilateralism. We have to start *within* – by using our existing channels for dialogue, and finding new ones. But, we also have to look *outside*.

We aim to promote cooperation between the OSCE and other multilateral partners. From the United Nations and the European Union and the OECD.... to think tanks, women's groups, youth networks and non-governmental partners.

We will also look for opportunities for closer engagement between international and regional actors in the field. This is particularly true in the area of conflict prevention. Because, if we don't put our ears to the ground, we will not hear the tremors which tell us that trouble is ahead.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

The principles and commitments at the heart of the OSCE have stood the test of time. And, from what I heard at the Ministerial Council in Milan, many of us believe they are more crucial today than ever before.

Now, it is up to us to recommit to them - not just in our words, but in our actions.

Let me assure you: Slovakia takes the responsibility of this chairmanship very seriously. We are determined to be impartial, fair and honest in our role as partners and mediators. And I am glad we will not be alone. I look forward to close cooperation with our colleagues from participating States, as well as Secretary-General Greminger and the OSCE's institutions, executive structures, and field operations.

My team greatly appreciates the work of Italy during its 2018 chairmanship – and we intend to cooperate closely with our Albanian colleagues, who will take over the mantle in 2020.

Now, I think if I speak any longer, my messages on dialogue and on people will seem hypocritical! So, I want to hand the floor over to *other* people - *you*, the Ambassadors of the OSCE, for your feedback and comments.

Let me finish by saying thank you again, on behalf of Slovakia, for this honour. I look forward to working closely with all of you in the year ahead.