



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Multilateral Responses to Contemporary Security Challenges:

What the OSCE Can Offer

Address by OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Centre for Resolution of Intractable Conflict

Harris Manchester College, Oxford University

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Lord Alderdice, dear John,

Thank you for the invitation to speak at this prestigious institution. The work of your Centre is of particular interest to me, given its focus on the resolution of so-called “intractable conflicts.” Your emphasis on learning from direct engagement with communities in conflict, as well as your comparative approach, is extremely valuable.

I encourage your scholars to consider the OSCE’s on-the-ground experience with conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation. In addition to our efforts to de-escalate the crisis in and around Ukraine, we have decades-long experience in South East Europe, Moldova and the South Caucasus that could offer valuable lessons and practical examples to researchers and practitioners alike.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It should come as no surprise that I am here to make the case for multilateralism. And in the process, I'll tell you about some of the ways that the OSCE demonstrates the value and potential of multilateralism.

But I must admit that in the current security climate, promoting multilateralism is no easy task.

Geopolitical tensions are rising. Relations among states – even among longstanding allies – are in flux.

We see an accelerating trend toward unilateral action and transactional approaches.

National self-interest increasingly trumps shared concerns.

Some states have begun to reject multilateralism and co-operative approaches. Playing on their citizens' fears, their leaders blame others – including international organizations – when they fail to solve problems on their own.

Such tactics may produce short-term wins for those who play this game, but in the long term we all lose out.

Because all of these trends reflect – and feed – a growing breakdown in trust. Trust between states. Citizens' trust in their governments. Trust in a rules-based international order. Trust that enables states to work together on common challenges.

Dear colleagues,

There is no doubt that multilateralism is under threat.

Yet today's complex security challenges demand co-ordinated and co-operative responses.

Transnational threats, terrorism and violent extremism, global challenges from climate change, mass movements of people – no state can handle these alone.

Meanwhile, rapid technological change and increased connectivity are creating new vulnerabilities that traditional approaches to security cannot adequately counteract.

So we face a critical paradox: support for multilateralism is diminishing just when dialogue and co-operation are needed most.

What can we do – what *must* we do – to reverse this situation?

First, we need to demonstrate the positive impact that multilateralism can have on peace, stability and development. International and regional organizations must make our added value more visible. While upholding the common good, we also need to be more responsive to the needs of individual states, their governments and people.

Second, we need to modernize and adapt our existing multilateral toolbox, so that states regain confidence that they can effectively address today's challenges together.

Our multilateral institutions were created in a different era. They were not designed to deal with today's complex challenges. So we need to reform them to ensure that they are "fit for purpose."

In practice, this means international and regional organizations like the OSCE need to be more focused and strategic. We should concentrate on our core strengths and longer-term objectives. And we should leverage partnerships to optimize complementarities, maximize resources, and amplify our impact.

Finally, we must promote and practice genuine dialogue. Dialogue is the engine of multilateralism. It is the key to rebuilding trust and reviving a sense of common purpose and a culture of co-operation.

Dialogue is at the heart of the OSCE's work. We practice one of the oldest and most basic forms of multilateralism. We don't operate by majority rule, or by natural convergence among the like-minded. We work by consensus.

Consensus makes it much harder to reach decisions, especially in a tense and politicized environment. But it is also a powerful tool because it ensures that decisions are co-owned.

The deployment of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in 2014 is the most visible example of the OSCE's ability to launch collective action even during a highly divisive crisis. *[I'll say more about our work in Ukraine in a minute.]*

As one of the few remaining platforms for East-West dialogue, the OSCE takes on a special role in managing current tensions.

But genuine dialogue has become a rare commodity in the OSCE's formal bodies. Mutual accusations and stock statements have replaced constructive criticism and a genuine search for common ground.

So seizing opportunities for informal dialogue is ever more important.

The OSCE's Structured Dialogue initiative, which focuses on political-military matters, is a noteworthy attempt to rebuild trust and confidence. State-owned and state-driven, this informal process that was launched by the Hamburg Ministerial Council end of 2016 has stimulated useful exchanges on threat perceptions, force postures and military doctrines. It has also started to discuss practical steps to reduce military risks.

Avoiding, or at least better managing, incidents in the OSCE area could help prevent an unwanted escalation caused by accident – which is a very real risk today. Enhancing the transparency of military exercises and restricting them near borders could alleviate some of the concerns.

These urgent matters can be tackled through constructive engagement. I hope the Structured Dialogue process may help to reinvigorate existing confidence- and security-building measures. Reviving arms control mechanisms, including those developed within the OSCE framework, would also reduce risks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now I'd like to say a few words about conflict prevention and resolution.

Although today the OSCE may be best known for our work in Ukraine, the Organization has a long history of preventing conflict and promoting stability.

The OSCE is well equipped to respond to crises, with a sophisticated toolbox for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts.

The OSCE's rapid and flexible response to the unfolding crisis in and around Ukraine vividly demonstrates our added value – and that international institutions are not obsolete.

When the crisis erupted, the OSCE was the only international organization accepted by all sides. Almost five years later, we continue to play an important role as honest broker and conflict manager.

We put our entire toolbox into action – including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

We rapidly launched two civilian missions in Ukraine and the Russian Federation to monitor the situation on the ground. And we amped up the work of our existing Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine.

The OSCE also supports the political process, including co-ordinating the Trilateral Contact Group that meets in Minsk on a bi-weekly basis. And our Special Monitoring Mission helps to de-escalate tensions on the ground, including brokering local ceasefires to create windows of silence for much-needed humanitarian repair work.

Dialogue is essential to all these efforts. Indeed, dialogue is fundamentally the most powerful instrument we have.

I am convinced that it is possible to reach a peaceful settlement to the crisis in and around Ukraine. But ultimately achieving sustainable peace hinges on the political will of the sides. This is also true for the protracted conflicts in the OSCE region – and elsewhere.

In Moldova, the OSCE has contributed to brokering agreement on a package of confidence-building measures that can make life better for people living on both sides of the Dniestr River. These concrete steps by Chisinau and Tiraspol show that co-operation is possible, even after many years of deadlock. They also show that co-operation can lead to practical results – provided the international stakeholders pull together, and the sides muster the political will to enable progress.

Since the beginning of year, the two sides have implemented agreements on licence plates allowing Transdnistriean vehicles to enter international traffic; access by Moldovan farmers to the so-called Dubasari farmland; Latin-script schools on the left bank; the apostilization of Transdnistriean university diplomas; and the re-opening of the Gura Bicului – Bychok bridge. Work continues on issues related to the freedom of movement, criminal cases and the implementation of a telecommunications agreement. The expectation is that the sides will have met their commitments by the end of 2018.

I hope this positive dynamic will give new momentum to the Transdnistriean settlement process. I also hope it inspires greater will among the parties to resolve other conflicts in the OSCE region.

Efforts to work together constructively in all the existing mediation formats must be intensified – including by bringing more women to the negotiation tables.

After all, the evidence is indisputable that the meaningful engagement of women in peace processes leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes. A failure to include women is a waste of resources and a missed opportunity to use all possible factors to achieve peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My last point is that in today's volatile and unpredictable security climate, we cannot be complacent.

Rather, we must be pragmatic. Without losing sight of our fundamental principles, we urgently need to seek engagement and co-operation in areas where interests converge.

These are many: from preventing and countering violent extremism, to fighting terrorism, and promoting joint approaches to climate change.

Cyber security is another good example. I mention it because all 57 OSCE participating States have agreed to 16 pioneering “cyber-CBMs”. Confidence – building measures designed to reduce the risk of misperception and miscalculation associated with the use of information and communication technologies by states. It is in every state's interest to co-operate to prevent tit-for-tat reactions, or a dangerous escalation that risks triggering conventional military responses.

When cyber incidents take place, attribution tends to be extremely difficult. OSCE CBMs enable states to communicate with each other and seek clarification instead of further escalating the situation. In such tense situations, our CBMs provide a unique platform for transparent communication.

The OSCE provides a truly comprehensive platform for engaging in meaningful dialogue, de-escalating tensions and taking joint action against common threats and challenges.

More broadly, the OSCE Secretariat, the three institutions and 16 field operations in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia offer numerous avenues for engagement to strengthen co-operation on a wide range of transnational threats and global challenges; and to promote good governance, the rule of law and human rights as integral components of comprehensive security.

Trust and confidence may be at low point, but the OSCE has a natural ability to do something about it. After all, the Organization's compelling heritage is rooted in the negotiation of the Helsinki Final Act during the Cold War. Back then, our leaders understood that deterrence alone will not work. Dialogue is essential and co-operation is imperative in a world where security is increasingly connected in so many ways.

For the OSCE, and for international institutions more broadly, rebuilding trust and confidence through meaningful dialogue is therefore one of the main challenges today. We will have to take this agenda forward with patience and perseverance, small step by small step. But I am confident that we will succeed.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions and comments.