

OSCE
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum

Unity and disunity in wider Europe: New approaches to European co-operation and integration in wider Europe?

The EU, Western Balkans and the Eastern Partners in wider Europe

Vienna, 29 October 2018

Keynote by OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Director Brix

Excellencies

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to take part in this very timely event.

In today's fast-changing world, our rules-based European security order has come under tremendous pressure. At the same time the space for East-West dialogue is contracting.

The deepening tensions in East-West relations since 2014 have reshaped security priorities throughout Europe and the wider OSCE region. But they present a particularly intricate challenge for those countries caught between competing and apparently mutually exclusive integration models.

In this climate, every step along the path that the EU's Eastern Partners take is contested. The pressure to align with one side or the other is strong. Internal divisions over value directions and political choices have become intertwined with geopolitical factors. And demands for democratization and reforms have in some cases become entangled with concerns over sovereignty and security.

Changing European security priorities and deteriorating East-West relations have also had significant implications for the Western Balkans. While attention shifted eastwards due to the crisis in and around Ukraine, EU integration in South East Europe stagnated. This has opened space for non-EU actors, who have become emboldened to challenge efforts to integrate South East Europe into Euro-Atlantic structures. Domestically too, questions have emerged in some circles about the benefits of European Union association.

These developments coincide with continued ambiguity, and if anything, greater scepticism towards further enlargement among EU member states and EU citizens. The growth of populism in the aftermath of the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the migration influx in 2015, Brexit, and the emergence of new security challenges, have all raised levels of uncertainty and anxiety about what the future holds.

I must admit that against this rather gloomy backdrop, promoting inclusive and co-operative approaches to security is challenging. But we cannot wait for the current turbulences in international politics to simply go away. This will not happen, unless we take active steps towards dialogue and co-operation.

Thanks to its comprehensive security concept and inclusive membership, the OSCE remains uniquely placed to address some of the current challenges to European security.

But it will be no surprise to you that constructive dialogue has also become a rare commodity within the OSCE. Mutual accusations and stock statements have replaced constructive criticism and a genuine search for common ground. This is particularly true for all of our formal dialogue at Ministerial Council, Permanent Council and Forum for Security Co-operation meetings.

Due to the general lack of trust, an incremental approach to cooperation is the most realistic way forward. That means seeking convergence where possible, and seizing opportunities to create space for informal dialogue.

One important such initiative is the OSCE's Structured Dialogue launched at the Hamburg Ministerial Council end of 2016. This OSCE flagship initiative focuses on political-military matters and is a noteworthy attempt to rebuild trust

and confidence. State-owned and state-driven, this informal process has stimulated useful exchanges on threat perceptions, force postures and military doctrines. It has also started to discuss practical steps to reduce military risks.

Managing and thus reducing incidents in the OSCE area could help prevent an unwanted escalation caused by accident – which is a very real risk. Enhancing the transparency of military exercises and restricting them near borders could alleviate some of the concerns. Through constructive engagement to address these urgent matters I hope the Structured Dialogue process may help to reinvigorate existing confidence- and security-building measures. But it is up to OSCE participating States to use the OSCE's inclusive platform to its full advantage.

Dear colleagues,

The crisis in and around Ukraine remains the main obstacle to restoring trust and co-operation in Europe today. Working toward a sustainable resolution of this crisis must be our top priority. When the crisis erupted, the OSCE was the only international organization accepted by all sides. Almost five years later, the OSCE continues to play a critical role, both through its Special Monitoring Mission on the ground, particularly in Eastern Ukraine, and facilitates political efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement in the Trilateral Contact Group negotiations.

I am convinced that achieving a peaceful settlement in Donbas is possible. I urge all who have influence on the sides to push harder to break the political stalemate and to get the signatories to comply with agreed measures. Ultimately, achieving sustainable peace in eastern Ukraine hinges on political will. This is also true for other conflicts in the OSCE region, not least in Moldova and the South Caucasus.

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. I am convinced that this positive dynamic will give new momentum to

resolving settlement-related issues. I also hope it inspires greater will among the parties to resolve other conflicts in the OSCE region.

The OSCE remains strongly engaged in South East Europe through its longstanding field presence and the active engagement of OSCE participating States from South East Europe in OSCE fora. With its proven track record of supporting work to strengthen institutions, consolidating democratic values, and fostering regional cooperation, the OSCE complements and amplifies the EU's efforts to consolidate reforms. We can work in such close partnership with the EU in South East Europe, because EU membership is a key priority that is espoused by all countries in the region.

And despite remaining challenges, we observe positive steps, not least the agreement between Skopje and Athens to resolve the name issue has the potential of creating new positive dynamics in the region.

Dear colleagues,

In these uncertain times, strengthening security and stability throughout Europe should be the key priority for all countries, East and West. This certainly means upholding the basic principles and the commitments that are the foundation of European Security since the Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Paris Charter and subsequent OSCE documents. We want to hold on to a collective, rules-based security order that benefits smaller as well as larger states in Europe. But it also means making use of the opportunities that currently exist to foster East-West dialogue.

At the OSCE, I am promoting the need for a “unifying agenda”. By this, I mean identifying issues where OSCE participating States have a common interest in joint action – for example on preventing violent extremism, dealing with large movements of refugees and migrants, cyber security, or combatting the trafficking of people, drugs, small arms and light weapons. These are but some areas of cooperation that could be built upon. There are others. Like the need for cooperation on climate change or sustainable energy.

More could also be done to encourage connectivity, particularly economic interaction. Economic diplomacy and connectivity across a wider Europe,

including EU and Eurasian Economic Union members, can foster inclusive economic growth and contribute to achieving our shared goals of peace and security. Also in this field, the OSCE offers a platform that participating States and organizations within the OSCE region may want to consider using more extensively in the future.

I am convinced that constructive approaches and seizing opportunities for dialogue and co-operation are without alternative. Europe's security depends on our ability to overcome the present tensions and build a new agenda that can take us forward with patience and perseverance, one step at a time.

No-one is more attuned to this than the countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership. I am again travelling to Minsk tomorrow to participate in a Munich Security Conference Core Group Meeting. One of the questions we will be discussing is whether substantive progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements could serve as a catalyst for building renewed trust among the principal actors in the region. I would like to answer this with an emphatic yes but am painfully aware that substantive progress in implementation has so far eluded us.

Yet, I am cautiously optimistic that reason will eventually triumph. Before we get there, we should not give up pushing for dialogue as the only way out of the current crisis, in Eastern Ukraine, the wider region and Europe as a whole.

Thank you for your attention.