



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Speech at the Minsk Dialogue Forum

Secretary General Thomas Greminger

24 May 2018

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here. I am impressed by the comprehensive programme and the presence of so many prominent speakers. As a Track II initiative, the Minsk Dialogue Forum provides an excellent and most timely platform for informal discussion of the many complex challenges that confront us today.

Inside the OSCE, “Minsk” has a decidedly familiar ring to it – and one very much associated with dialogue. As the regular venue for meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group, Minsk has become synonymous with OSCE efforts to facilitate a diplomatic solution to the crisis in and around Ukraine. I am grateful to President Lukashenko and his Government for hosting these meetings on neutral ground.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dialogue is always the first step towards building relationships. In the current situation, there is a pressing need for re-building relations based on mutual understanding and trust. And that’s why dialogue will be the main theme of my remarks this morning.

How we engage with each other matters. The formats we choose help define the scope for positive change. Today, too often, discussions on European security lead to mutual accusations and a repetition of well-known positions – the exact opposite of what is required. Unless we find a better approach, we are at risk of further entangling ourselves in a web of preconceived and self-reinforcing ideas – about ourselves and about our supposedly ill-intentioned opponents.

Without meaningful dialogue, we will not be able to address the current breakdown in trust. Nor will we be able to counter growing skepticism about the viability of our co-operative security order. We need to act now. Otherwise, mistrust and unilateralism will continue to feed on each other, pushing us further down into a deep hole, from which it will be increasingly difficult to extract ourselves.

So what can we do? Let me give you a few pointers from an OSCE perspective.

First, we should make better use of existing dialogue platforms. In the OSCE context this means creating more space for informal dialogue to complement increasingly sterile discussions inside our standard institutionalized formats.

Second, we need to prioritize. Some issues are more urgent than others. For example, it is imperative that we agree on practical measures to reduce military tensions and to prevent military incidents or accidents from spiraling out of control.

Inside the OSCE, a start has been made to re-engage on political-military matters through informal but structured discussions. The so-called Structured Dialogue, launched at the OSCE's Hamburg Ministerial Council in December 2016, has stimulated useful exchanges on threat perceptions, force postures, and military doctrines. Now, I hope that the process will allow us to agree on military risk reduction measures and to reinvigorate existing confidence- and security-building measures. The constructive engagement in the Structured Dialogue to date gives grounds for cautious optimism.

Third, we should seek engagement where our interests converge. In essence, this concerns challenges that can only be tackled together: violent extremism, terrorism, cyber threats, trafficking in drugs and human beings, and large flows of refugees and migrants. Fostering incremental progress on these and other interconnected challenges can help us to gradually restore predictability and trust.

Fourth, we need to intensify efforts to resolve the protracted conflicts in the OSCE region and use the existing mediation formats to work together constructively. As we see in the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, co-operation is possible and can lead to practical results even in a protracted conflict – provided that the key international stakeholders pull together, and the

sides develop sufficient political will to take calculated risks that allow for progress to be made.

Fifth, we must overcome a situation in which countries, for reasons of geography, find themselves in the impossible position of having to choose one side over the other. Countries that today find themselves wedged “in between” should be able to remain open for co-operation in both directions, and to develop their natural vocation as bridge-builders.

Finally, and most importantly, we must draw closer together to resolve the currently biggest obstacle to European security and co-operation – the crisis in and around Ukraine. We urgently need a new political impulse to break the deadlock and get the parties to finally start implementing the Minsk agreements – and believe me, there is no way around implementing the Minsk agreements. I hope that recent high-level meetings in the Normandy-4 framework are an indicator that things could again start moving in the right direction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need to roll up our sleeves and engage on these multiple tracks. It will take time and many small steps to patch up our differences and re-establish mutual trust through dialogue and practical measures. Doubtless there will be setbacks along the way. But we must start moving in this direction.

The OSCE can provide a comprehensive platform for engaging in meaningful dialogue, de-escalating tensions and taking joint action against common threats and challenges. But we will only succeed in re-establishing a security order based on mutual trust and shared rules if we intensify our efforts to protect and uphold OSCE principles and commitments.

When the timing is right and once sufficient momentum is reached, we will also need to think about how to initiate a more wide-ranging and comprehensive dialogue format. Given the OSCE’s heritage, it is certainly worth considering the idea of a new Helsinki process as just referred to by President Lukashenko.

As an organization born out of a successful attempt to twin deterrence with détente during the Cold War, the OSCE would be the right place for such an effort. It would allow us to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel, but return to a

common understanding of what these principles mean. Such a process could provide a wider framework for dialogue – and potentially put us back on track towards the 2010 Astana vision of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

Dear colleagues,

As a neighbor to Ukraine and Russia, as well as EU member states, Belarus thrives on co-operation and good-neighborliness. What is true for Belarus is ultimately true for all of us: that comprehensive and co-operative security offers the best guarantees for a safer future.

Mr. President, Belarus is playing a commendable role in seeking to ease regional tensions. As such, it is becoming a hub for regional diplomacy. I appreciate your commitment to peace and security, and I know that many others do, too. And Mr. President, I also very much appreciate your strong support for the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.