

**Address of the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. George Tsereteli,  
to the 1173<sup>rd</sup> Permanent Council Meeting**

January 25, 2018

Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chairperson.

*Ambassadors, friends of the OSCE PA!*

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address you today. It has become a good and useful tradition for the President of the OSCE PA to speak to you on various occasions and in different formats. I am grateful to the Italian Chairmanship for giving me this opportunity for an additional address to the Permanent Council at this early stage, almost immediately after their own opening session, with the purpose of outlining the OSCE PA's planned activities for this year. This complements very well the autumn address by the PA President, intended to convey and reinforce OSCE PA recommendations at a time when you are considering preparations for the Ministerial Council.

Cooperation between the parliamentary and the governmental sides of our organization is best exemplified by the active participation of my fellow PA members in meetings and conferences that you have witnessed over the past year and, also, just this current week, when the Chairperson of our Economic and Environmental Committee, Nilza de Sena, participated in the first Preparatory meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum.

I would also like to thank the Austrian Chairmanship and, in particular, the committee chairs, for their readiness to join our efforts. This is in the interest of our citizens. It has been and will hopefully further create important synergies. I am also grateful for the sense of openness and cooperation that you all have demonstrated towards our Special Representative in Vienna and the Vienna Liaison Office. This is making their valuable work much easier.

It adds to the excellent cooperation we have enjoyed with the Secretary General and the Heads of the autonomous executive institutions. All of them – Thomas Greminger and Harlem Désir here in Vienna, Lamberto Zannier in The Hague and – last, but certainly not least - Ingibjörg Gísladóttir in Warsaw have been great partners for the PA and wonderful friends.

When I say this, I want to also thank the Heads of the OSCE field presences who give tremendous support to us when we conduct visits to countries that host field missions. It is always a pleasure to work with them and all the other dedicated women and men that serve in various positions in the OSCE's executive structures.

We can all benefit from the OSCE's work, and I regret that some see an OSCE presence or co-operating on a project as a stigma. Our Secretary General Roberto Montella, with his ten years of experience in the field, keeps reminding us parliamentarians that there are plenty of beneficiaries, end users of the "OSCE products," in all the countries where OSCE missions operate.

As a Georgian, I can attest to the valuable work the mission has undertaken in my country. Especially in times when the situation is aggravated because of a deteriorating unresolved conflict, the presences can lend their precious support to the affected people and to the host country.

The PA has recommended on several occasions that field presences that have been closed should be re-established. All-in-all, from our perspective as parliamentarians, with our direct and daily connection to our citizens, the value the presences add to the OSCE's work is unquestionable.

This organization has an enormous potential, not only as a toolbox for the leaders in our capitals, and deserves to be used more often and receive more support. What we and, more importantly, what the taxpayers that we represent expect is first and foremost results, and results again. I fully agree with Chairman-in-Office Alfano that our citizens do not want us to discuss problems, they want us to solve them.

Just over a month ago I appealed to the Ministerial Council to take diligent care of the OSCE, stating that “in increasingly critical times, governments should make the best use of the OSCE. It is a unique platform that does no less than serve our collective security which deserves to be nurtured, supported and provided with the necessary financial, human and material resources.”

The result we are trying to achieve is an OSCE space and a world that is more secure. Not delivering concrete results could potentially contribute to further the fatigue of our citizens towards international organizations and to a wider sentiment of unfulfilled promises. This fatigue is one among the many reasons for the present surge in aggressive nationalism and populism.

The priorities that the Chairmanship has listed under its motto “Dialogue, Ownership, Responsibility” merit all our support. If we agree on this, we should all honor these good intentions and the engagement of the Chairmanship, which – like the Secretariat, the Institutions and the Field Presences – deserve to be sufficiently equipped with the resources necessary to do their work.

Our capitals should ensure the effective functioning of the OSCE, which – as we all know - is one of the leanest and most flexible organizations in the world. It is somehow unfair to add tasking after tasking and then be petty with the allocation of funds. I know that we, as members of national parliaments, must equally do more to convince our own budget committees of the immense value of this organization, and I will continue to raise the awareness of my fellow parliamentarians to this issue.

Also, the budget must be adopted on time for our organization to be able to live up to your taskings. The late approval of last year’s budget should serve as a deterrent rather than a precedent. The failure to meet the December deadline is again worrying. I appeal to you to conclude your discussions soon.

*Ambassadors, dear friends,*

As I stated at the beginning of my address, I want to focus on what we are putting on the top of our PA agenda this year. Of course, there are our statutory meetings and our election observation missions, which structure the year. As to the latter, we will again not be able to observe all elections, but we will continue to be focused and balanced. The next elections on our calendar of observations will take place in Italy and Russia. And our next big statutory meeting will be our Winter Meeting here in Vienna on February 22nd and 23rd. This will be another opportunity for close interaction between you and my fellow members. We are looking forward to the presentations that we will receive – as every year – from important representatives of the governmental side.

Soon we will start preparing for our Annual Session, which will take place in July in Berlin and adopt political recommendations under the theme “Implementing OSCE Commitments – the Role of Parliaments”. It is my firm belief that it will further improve our preparations if we cooperate even more closely during this phase. We have a lot of common ideas and interests that need public debate and promotion. We are now looking at how we can make our debates even more interesting for our members and for the public and have set up a working group for that purpose. Your suggestions and ideas can help us focus the main messages that we want to transmit. At the same time, as a very lively and diverse forum for dialogue and debate, we can have almost unrestricted exchanges over the most critical issues we have to deal with. You are invited to make even more frequent use of this unique platform.

I think that we have a broad common understanding of many of these issues. We will continue our work on pressing problems like migration, the prevention of and combat against terrorism, the current division within Europe, which is, to a substantial extent, linked to the crisis in and around Ukraine, and gross violations of OSCE commitments, without forgetting about other conflicts that we have not yet been able to resolve.

Last week, I paid my first visit in my new capacity to Kyiv, where I visited the premises of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and had good talks with political leaders. It was, of course, not a coincidence that my first visit was to Ukraine. I wanted to signal that we are ready to work against fatigue amongst the International Community regarding the crisis in and around Ukraine. My meetings included the Speaker of Parliament, Andriy Parubiy, and Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic

Integration Ivanna Klympush. Additional meetings with high-level diplomatic experts – both from the host country and from the International Community, provided excellent insight into the situation.

I reiterated the Parliamentary Assembly's steadfast support for Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders, and renewed calls to reach a sustained ceasefire. The human cost of the conflict is simply unbearable. With hostilities taking place daily, we must step up efforts to create a safe environment for the people in the Donbas.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly stands side-by-side with the Ukrainian people, and we are determined not to let the situation become the 'new normal'.

I also reiterated our staunch support for the work of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. I had the opportunity to personally thank Amb. Apakan for the magnificent work that he and all other mission members are doing under extremely difficult circumstances. We hope that the Mission will be granted all necessary funds and security guarantees, as well as full access to Ukrainian territory, including everywhere along the border with Russia.

The OSCE PA has a range of tools that we are prepared to use for the benefit of the Ukrainian people, whether through contributions of expertise in the field of mediation, engagement with Ukraine's ongoing reform agenda, or examination of the many humanitarian challenges facing the country. This is dealt with by PA Special Representatives for Eastern Europe, Kent Härstedt, and on Mediation, Ilkka Kanerva, and well as the Chairman of our Humanitarian Committee, Ignacio Sanchez-Amor. Further PA engagement planned for this year is under preparation.

The ad hoc Committee on Migration chaired by Filippo Lombardi will continue to work intensively on the issue of migration, in collaboration with you and, for instance, the OSCE Coordinator and Special Representative on Trafficking in Human Beings. It will also conduct field visits to countries of destination in order to study best practices. It was not so long ago that he briefed you about our respective activities here in the Permanent Council. As our most recent Annual Session Resolution put it: It is all about ensuring a coherent, shared and responsible governance of migration and refugee flows. In general terms, the PA strongly supports more engagement by the OSCE on migration issues.

Our ad hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism will continue to raise awareness about the need to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism through comprehensive, effective and human rights-based responses. It intends to promote the implementation of the international counter-terrorism framework and of relevant OSCE PA recommendations. In addition, it will facilitate the exchange of lessons learnt through targeted initiatives, also by leveraging on strategic partnerships with key stakeholders such as UNODC and the International Institute for Justice & the Rule of Law (IIG). Under the leadership of Chairman Makis Voridis we hope to be able to develop new forward-looking policy recommendations.

The next committee meetings are planned for Brussels in early February and then during the Winter Meeting here in Vienna. The committee also plans to pay visits to field operations in South East Europe and Central Asia, which will add visibility to their work. Finally, this issue will also figure on the agenda of my upcoming visit to the UN in New York and to Washington D.C. in the first week of February. The visit will include meetings with representatives of the United Nations, among them General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, and Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, to discuss ways the OSCE and the UN can complement each other's work.

Regarding other regions with unresolved conflicts, I am, for instance, together with the PA's International Secretariat, preparing for my visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan, and I am also considering a possible visit to Moldova.

Very naturally, Central Asia will also be in our focus this year, as we will hold our Autumn Meeting in Bishkek.

Over the past two years, we have heard good and, unfortunately, also very worrying news from South East Europe. Together with my Special Representative on the region I have the intention to pay a visit to several countries there, most probably in June.

We will also continue to pay close attention to the need for updating confidence and security building measures, as well as our arms control regimes. We are witnessing a rise in armament everywhere, which is linked to the present situation, but should not lose sight of the benefits of mutually balanced arms re-

ductions. One specific issue we have been dealing with intensively is cyber security. We had a good and instructive debate in Andorra last year, and we will continue discussing the topic in May in Portugal on the basis of an invitation by our Portuguese friends.

We will continue our Leinsweiler talks. They have proved to be a great opportunity for dialogue between members with confronting opinions and to consider parliamentary contributions to OSCE efforts in addressing conflicts. This time the talks will take place in a slightly different environment, in conjunction with our Annual Session in Berlin, and have another look at minority issues, continuing the excellent work done by my predecessor Christine Muttonen in Villach last year.

We will continue to lobby for a strong environmental element in the second dimension, including the grave problem that humanity faces because of climate change. We will also address initiatives that deal with trade between Europe and Asia. Topics such as enhancing trade and economic cooperation are expected to be prominent on the agenda of a “Silk Road Support Group” conference to be held in March in Baku, which OSCE PA Members will participate in.

And we will not forget about the citizens that are suffering from grave human rights violations and unacceptable limitations of their rights as citizens. This is particularly true for people in conflict-affected areas or occupied territories. Among those worrying developments is the situation of media freedom in an environment which - for instance - according to Freedom House continues to deteriorate in many countries. It is only by upholding our values and commitments that we will make the OSCE space more secure. Needless to say, this includes upholding our commitments on gender.

In all of these events, participation of Civil Society is crucial, and we encourage further engagement with their representatives on all levels. Only a broadest possible contribution from Non-Governmental Organizations will ensure a full and unrestricted exchange of information and opinions. Individual governments should therefore not be able to veto their participation.

As OSCE PA, when we talk about the OSCE space, this includes also our relations with our neighborhood, and specifically with our Partners for Cooperation. All of them are important; all of them can cooperate with us to make our countries more secure. But I also share the Italian Chairmanship’s conviction that we have to redouble our efforts regarding the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE. Like the Baltic or the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, while being a pool of water physically separating neighbors, should serve to unite them. After all, their future depends on their will and ability to cooperate closely on so many issues.

*Ambassadors, dear friends,*

We live in very volatile times. Security needs to be regained every day. We see that a growing amount of confusion, also among our citizens, regarding the benefits of the values of liberal democracy. We see the reappearance of the ugly heads of intolerance, racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and destructive populism. In these times, how could we do without the OSCE? Let us continue to join our efforts in making it stronger and more effective!

I thank you once again for your cooperation and right now for your patience. I look forward to hearing your comments on our work plan now, and we look forward to a genuine debate in autumn on the recommendations adopted by the Assembly during our Berlin Annual Session.