



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## **ASRC offers a welcome opportunity to go back to diplomacy at the OSCE**

**Statement by Ambassador-at-Large Dr. Andrej Benedejčič, Special Envoy of the Foreign Minister, at the Opening session of the 2020 Annual Security Review Conference, 23 June 2020**

*Mr. Chairperson,*

We seem to be living in a Dickensian universe. It is both the best of times and the worst of times. It is the best of times because we have shown how modern technology can be used to overcome a challenge such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that some of us are participating in this Annual Security Review Conference through video linkup is proof of this, a veritable example of "tech-for-peace" in practice, if I may quote the OSCE Secretary General. It is also the best of times because of the examples of international solidarity as a reaction to the crisis. Slovenia, for instance, engaged at the regional level in providing assistance to countries of the Western Balkans.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 period has also brought about some less welcome developments. The flare-up in violence in eastern Ukraine is one of them. Another is a reduction of military contacts and the suspension of verification activities. We are also coming out of this crisis wondering about the future of the Open Skies Treaty, which is a landmark arms control mechanism. Slovenia chaired the Open Skies Consultative Commission in 2017. We are therefore well acquainted with the challenges in implementing the provisions of this important Treaty. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to reiterate what was said on this issue by the Managing Director of the European External Action Service on behalf of the European Union.

*Mr. Chairperson,*

It is no secret that Slovenia, like many other OSCE participating States, is also a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. As such, we take seriously our collective commitments and security concerns of fellow Allies. It is also for this reason that our troops are taking part in the reassurance measures on the Alliance's eastern flank. I am mentioning this in order to underline the importance that we attach to the OSCE and to meetings like this one. If NATO currently represents the spearhead of defense and deterrence, then the OSCE represents the spearhead of dialogue.

In that sense, Slovenia has been a consistent supporter of the OSCE Structured Dialogue process. We think it can further contribute to cooperative security by promoting greater openness and mutual understanding. However, the process can work only if there is engagement from all sides. I am mentioning this because one participating State – the Russian Federation – refused to take part in the discussion on hybrid threats that took place during the recent, 10th meeting of the Informal Working Group on Structured Dialogue in

the Capitals Format. Our side found this disquieting, because we believe such threats are real and need to be properly addressed.

To be quite clear, to us these threats are as tangible as terrorism. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to commend the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship for the importance it has given to the issue. The regional conference on addressing challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters, jointly organized this February by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, the OSCE, and Switzerland, in co-operation with the Chairmanship, represents an important event. The lessons learned will be taken into account next year by the forthcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which will also focus on the challenge of reintegrating foreign terrorist fighters, especially in the Western Balkans, which has the highest concentration of returnees in Europe.

I would also like to express appreciation to the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship for the attention it has been paying to the issue of equal opportunities. This is especially important this year, as we mark the twentieth anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Women's rights are inextricably linked to security. We therefore support efforts at promoting a gender perspective also in the politico-military dimension of the OSCE. This is not only the right thing, but also the smart thing to do.

Let me conclude by saying that we need to relearn how to have a dialogue and how to recognize the insecurity of others and not only our own. In other words, we need to focus on restoring trust and avoid a replay of *A Tale of Two Cities*. And there is no better place to go back to diplomacy than the OSCE.

*Thank you.*