



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**Secretary General Thomas Greminger**

**Report to the Ministerial Council**

Milan, 6 December 2018

Mr. Chairperson, Minister Moavero,

Thank you for your warm welcome today. I would like to express my appreciation for the Italian Chairmanship's leadership of the OSCE this year. In particular, I would like to thank your dedicated teams in Vienna and Rome led by Ambassadors Azzoni and Mati. You did a great job.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today our security environment is more polarized, more unpredictable, more unstable – in short, more dangerous – than it has been in decades.

Our fundamental principles have been violated.

Our security order is breaking down.

Trust has rapidly faded, and we see growing unwillingness to engage.

Tensions are rising. Tit-for-tat reactions are increasing.

At the same time, many of the complex and interconnected challenges we now face are too big for States to handle on their own. They demand co-operative responses.

Yet even here, in confronting common threats to our security, there is reluctance to work together.

Dear Ministers,

We share a common future. But we no longer seem to have a common vision for our future.

What kind of world do we want to live in? Do we want it to be peaceful?

I trust no one wants war.

Our situation today is precarious and unpredictable. It would not take much for the dynamics of confrontation to spiral into a larger conflict.

So we must find a way out of this dangerous situation.

We must reduce tensions.

We must rebuild trust and, step by step, restore a sense of common purpose.

The first step toward trust is dialogue. I would even argue that dialogue is fundamentally the most powerful instrument we have at the OSCE.

We can learn from our Cold War predecessors. Adversaries came together for dialogue with the clear aim of preventing war. They looked for common ground through constructive engagement, and they found their way to compromise.

The outcome was a set of principles that gave us a common security framework. Principles that all participating States are committed to.

Although these principles have since been violated, they remain valid.

Indeed, the instability created by their violation confirms that we need to return to a rules-based system.

So we must re-commit to our principles.

But we must also return to the path of constructive engagement.

Dear Ministers,

This is not a contradiction. Constructive engagement does not mean forgetting about our principles. It means results-oriented dialogue and selective co-operation on issues that affect the security of all participating States. Our principles should underpin our efforts.

The OSCE, thanks to its rare platform for inclusive dialogue and joint action, has great potential to help de-escalate tensions, rebuild trust and confidence, reduce the risks of misunderstanding, and foster pragmatic co-operation in our region. So I urge you, the participating States, to make better use of this Organization.

We are already successfully fostering engagement and co-operation in a number of areas where interests converge, including preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism, and combatting trafficking in people, drugs and weapons.

Cyber-security is another good example. The OSCE's 16 confidence-building measures to reduce the risk of conflict arising from cyber-threats show that States have an interest in co-operating to prevent tit-for-tat retaliation or escalation to conventional military responses.

I also see potential in the economic and environmental dimension, and around some issues in the human dimension – like protecting the safety of journalists, combating violence against women, or promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. After all, we are all proud of our comprehensive approach to security.

Given the current level of tensions, we should focus on incremental progress. Rebuilding trust takes time, so we must be patient, but persistent.

Although the OSCE's formal bodies have become politicized, I am encouraged by the growing willingness of participating States to engage in informal dialogue platforms – and in particular the Structured Dialogue.

Since its creation two years ago, this state-driven process has considered threat perceptions, force postures and military doctrines. More recently, it has begun to discuss practical steps to reduce military risks, including by promoting military-to-military contacts. This is a key step to preventing an unwanted escalation caused by accident – which is unfortunately a very real danger today.

I remain hopeful that the Structured Dialogue might help to revitalize existing confidence- and security-building measures, enhance critically needed military risk reduction mechanisms, and eventually revive interest in conventional arms control.

Ministers,

Seeking a peaceful and durable resolution to the crisis in and around Ukraine remains the OSCE's most urgent priority.

I am concerned about recent developments. I call on the parties to observe restraint, and to settle their differences through diplomacy. The OSCE is ready to provide its good offices and conflict prevention tools to help ease tensions.

I am equally alarmed by the growing humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine. Every week civilians are killed or injured by shelling, by landmines or explosive remnants of war. Damage to essential infrastructure has reduced access to basic services, and in some cases risks environmental disaster.

Ministers,

The Trilateral Contact Group needs to be given more room for maneuver. The sides must engage to make progress toward a sustainable ceasefire and to reduce the human cost of the conflict.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine – the SMM – is doing everything it can to improve conditions for people in the conflict zone – including reporting on landmines, facilitating critical repairs, and easing civilian transit across the line of contact.

This year alone, the SMM facilitated about 1,000 localized ceasefires to enable repairs to water, electricity, gas and communications infrastructure serving people on both sides of the line of contact.

While we can be proud of the SMM's achievements, every "success story" of this kind signals the failure of the sides to protect civilians.

A new political stimulus is urgently needed to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The OSCE can facilitate the process, but the sides need to muster the necessary political will. So I appeal to all those with influence to push the sides to take concrete steps to implement the Minsk agreements, which remain the best route to achieving sustainable peace.

I also remind the sides of their obligation to respect and protect both SMM monitors and SMM assets – and this includes UAVs – and to provide full and unfettered access throughout the conflict zone.

Political will is the key to resolving the crisis in and around Ukraine, as well as the protracted conflicts in the OSCE region. In Moldova, the OSCE helped broker agreement on a package of eight confidence-building measures that is improving life for people on both sides of the Dniester River. These concrete steps by Chisinau and Tiraspol show that, even after many years of stalemate, co-operation is possible. And co-operation can lead to practical results – provided the international stakeholders take a unified stance, and the sides marshal the political will to allow progress.

I do hope Moldova's example will inspire the parties to other conflicts in our region to take steps toward peace. The OSCE remains ready to support them.

Ministers,

The OSCE has repeatedly proven that it has the flexibility, the tools and the expertise to be an effective instrument for promoting security and stability. I am convinced that we have the most robust toolbox for preventing and resolving conflicts of any regional organization.

Since our instruments are especially important when tensions are high, I welcome continued efforts to strengthen our toolbox.

But the Organization must also be prepared to face new kinds of challenges – and to seize opportunities for co-operation.

Opportunities like the new spirit of regional co-operation in Central Asia. Or growing interest among our Mediterranean and Asian Partners to confront shared challenges together.

In these and other promising areas, we need to take a more strategic perspective and focus our energies where we can have the greatest impact. The Secretariat has been working closely with the Troika to develop more coherent and co-ordinated approaches. We have also enhanced our ability to provide strategic support not only to the Troika, but to all of you.

Leveraging partnerships can also help us make the most of opportunities. Given our limited resources, we can strengthen synergies that multiply the impact of our efforts.

The Secretariat has been working hard to enhance co-operation with other regional organizations, and to further operationalize our relationship with the United Nations.

We continue to align our work more closely with the global agenda. UN Secretary-General Guterres has called for a “surge in diplomacy for peace,” with special focus on prevention and on peacebuilding. These are both areas where the OSCE has decades of experience. So we are well placed to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda – and in particular SDG 16 – in our region.

Dear Ministers,

In recent months, as tensions have continued to mount, I have sensed a growing realization that we need the OSCE now more than ever.

Last year in Vienna, I promised you I would strive to ensure that our Organization is fully prepared to deal with today’s critical security challenges. Since then, the Secretariat has been looking at ways to preserve and to strengthen the Organization’s flexibility and responsiveness despite shrinking resources. I am grateful for your support for these efforts.

We have also been looking at how we can enhance our impact in the field, and integrate women and youth across the three dimensions of our work.

And we are studying how to reform our cumbersome budget process; attract and retain high-quality staff; make better use of technology; and more effectively promote the Organization and the impact of our work.

Dear Ministers,

Ensuring that the OSCE is fit for purpose is our shared responsibility. I will continue to look for ways to improve our Organization. But I am counting on



you to provide the political vision and the strategic priorities to guide us, and the resources to enable us to fulfill them.

The OSCE is already extremely lean, inexpensive and efficient. And we have repeatedly shown that we can deliver. But the Organization can only be as effective as you enable us to be. Continuing a policy of Zero Nominal Growth will undermine our Organization's capacity to achieve its full potential.

Next year our region will continue to face enormous challenges. I look forward to working with the incoming Slovak Chairmanship, and pledge the Organization's continued commitment to assist participating States in implementing your decisions and to support your efforts to strengthen security and stability in our region and beyond.

In closing, I would like to thank the OSCE staff for their dedication, and praise the excellent co-operation among the Secretariat, field operations, Institutions and Parliamentary Assembly.

Thank you.