

POLISH OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP 2022
ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
H.E. ZBIGNIEW RAU
AT THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL,
VIENNA, 13 JANUARY 2022

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Madam Secretary General,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have gathered today in Vienna, a wonderful city with a splendid history, to enter into another year of work, which has one overarching aim: to bring peace to the people, living in the area from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

It is my honour to officially **launch today the Polish Chairmanship in the OSCE**. I look at the work ahead of us with a sense of responsibility.

Let me here express my appreciation and gratitude to the Swedish Chairpersonship for the successful pursuing the OSCE agenda during the last year. Strong and effective leadership of my good friend Minister Ann Linde was key in accomplishing this goal. I look forward to working with our Swedish and North Macedonia's friends in the Troika, and to cooperating with all participating States, and all partners.

I believe that history matters. Only through **understanding well the past** can humanity avoid **repeating disastrous decisions**, which brought suffering, destruction and death to millions of people.

Particularly we, the participating States of the OSCE, should all be aware of the fact that the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the Paris Charter for a New Europe, as well as the norms and values enshrined in them, were not drafted by accident or in the wake of some momentary international circumstances.

Instead, they were shaped through a centuries-long process of evolution in international relations and by the persistent efforts of states and nations to bring peace and security to Europe.

Here, in Vienna, the leaders of their times attempted in 1815 to establish an international system, which was by definition based on inequality and oppression. Known as “concert of powers”, it had one goal - to advance interests of some states at the expense of other nations, which were **deprived of a right to freely choose their future**.

The decades that followed the “dancing Congress” brought tragic consequences to their construct: the suppression of peoples’ drive for freedom and enforcement of the great powers paradigm, which governed international relations, had finally led to the cataclysm of the Great War.

I can’t stop thinking about historical experiences of my country. Poland, as well as the entire region of Central Europe, has been a **victim of the logic of power politics and imperialism** for too long.

Tearing down the Iron Curtain 30 years ago was for my nation and all Central Europeans the moment of regaining sovereignty and statehood.

We are one of the oldest nations in Europe, we were not orphaned, thus our traditions are no mere collection of intellectual or material artefacts stored in archives or museums. Rather, they reflect the sum of our political experience and difficult history, including resistance to our neighbours’ imperial aspirations, and the experience of subordination to the foreign power.

That was exactly the moment when very tragic episodes in our history took place when the Communists authorities opened fire to demonstrating workers, members of the same nation, in Gdańsk and Gdynia in 1970 and in 1981 at the Wujek Coal Mine in Katowice.

This lesson should be studied carefully today by all those who may think that using force against own people is a good option and will bring lasting solutions.

Although both protests were suppressed, in a longer term, it turned out to be a milestone towards the collapse of the authoritarian system in Poland and, ultimately, to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

Since we are a nation with a traumatic history that has greatly benefited from peace in Europe, we know very well which proposals serve peace and which threaten it. We will share this experience during our OSCE Chairmanship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As of today, the participating States face a particularly grave mix of challenges to peace and security. Protracted conflicts, military confrontation, radicalization, terrorism, together with ongoing erosion of arms control regimes, effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and **profound violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals** are leading to rising

uncertainty, unpredictability, fragmentation and growing fears in our societies. It seems, that the risk of war in the OSCE area is now greater, than ever before in the last 30 years.

And only this is enough of a challenge for this Organization, whose goal is precisely to **banish war from Europe**. A tool for that is the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter, Helsinki Final Act and Paris Charter for a New Europe, which are meant to govern both **relations between states and the way through which authorities interact with their people**.

Let me than begin my Chairmanship in the Organization by recalling our Helsinki Decalogue, as it provides the guidance both for the Chairmanship and for all participating States.

The Helsinki principles apply “equally and unreservedly, each of them being interpreted taking into account the others”.

This means, that these fundamental principles **are not mutually exclusive or interchangeable**. Consequently, the concept of comprehensive and indivisible security within the OSCE, as illustrated by the fundamental principles taken as a whole, takes into account various aspects of both: policies of states and human conditions and needs.

This approach translates to two observations:

First, if the international law principles, including provisions of the United Nations Charter, Helsinki Final Act and Charter for a New Europe, are observed, no other guaranties are required to preserve peace, as no country would look for additional measures to improve their own security. It is rather **the lack of compliance to these fundamental principles, what makes states seek security guarantees**, for example through membership in alliances.

Second, it means that while authorities exercise a monopoly on the use of power to enforce internal order, they **do not enjoy a mandate to break human rights and fundamental freedoms** in their enforcement actions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This OSCE can be considered a symbol of the pursuit for a more democratic relations between states. The principles of this Organization as well as the whole institutional and legal system, that regulates cooperation in the OSCE area and provides the basis of today’s European security architecture, is not the result of a transitory or fleeting whim.

It took centuries for political systems and laws to take the current shape. They evolved influenced by reflection and political thought on the questions of war and peace, nature of the social contract, guarantees of civil liberties, and potential of human entrepreneurship.

Ultimate renunciation of war as an instrument of international policy together with the right to self-determination became the driving force behind processes and arrangements that helped to establish peace and stability on the European continent.

The same is true with regards to the evolution of human rights and fundamental individual freedoms. From feudal and autocratic systems of governance to the belief, that every human being possesses inalienable rights, which cannot be waived or taken away.

This is the journey we have taken, and which made us, who we are today. This Organization, I would argue, is the **pinnacle of a long political, legal and philosophical processes**, which sought concepts for a sustained peace among nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, the members of OSCE, are obliged to follow the commitment that security is indivisible when human rights and the rights of nations enjoy the same level of guarantees, when states are equal, comply with international law and universally apply the fundamental principles with regards to both their internal and external policies.

I would like to quote the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. In his “Karamazov Brothers” one of the characters, Ivan, says, that “harmony”, I quote “is not worth the tears of one tortured child.” And I believe, we must ask this question today to ourselves: can there be real harmony between states, if we ignore the suffering of people who live in the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok? **I would strongly say: No!**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For several weeks we have been faced with a possibility of a major military escalation in Eastern Europe.

Military analysts have pointed to a major military build-up in the region. We have recently heard a demand of security guarantees related to an important part of the OSCE area and a renewed discourse about spheres of influence.

All those aspects require a serious international assessment and a proper reaction. This response must be guided by the principles of international law and the principles and commitments that all participating States subscribed to in the Organization.

The problem is not related to one or two countries, but poses a challenge to the stability and security of the European system that has been developed over the course of more than three decades.

We are not indifferent to security objections voiced by participating States.

I believe that the OSCE is the right platform to discuss every aspect related to the concept of comprehensive security, including confidence and security-building measures.

The Polish Chairmanship, in consultation with participating States, will ensure that the OSCE plays a role in addressing the current security challenges in Eastern Europe.

We will be open to dialogue and ready to present initiatives aiming at reaching mutual understanding and easing tensions in the OSCE area.

We need to reinvigorate the debate about European security. Let us start a process that will help us to uphold the Helsinki principles in full conformity with international law.

I am fully committed to advancing this goal.

Excellences,

We want to pay special attention to improving the security situation in the OSCE area, especially by contributing to finding peaceful solutions to regional and protracted conflicts.

The OSCE is well positioned to help to mitigate existing disputes while fully respecting various points of view, providing that all interested parties approach dialogue in good faith.

In this vein, we should focus on a peaceful resolution of the conflict in and around **Ukraine**, in compliance with the Minsk Agreements and in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

We appreciate and highly value the contribution of the **Special Monitoring Mission** to Ukraine (SMM). I am fully convinced that we should act in unison to extend the mandate of the SMM beyond March 31. Moreover, the SMM should be able to fully and effectively carry out its mandate throughout Ukraine.

We should spare no effort to advance the process of the resolution of the conflict in **Georgia**, also keeping in mind its impact on the conflict affected population.

We will offer our support in bringing the **Transdnestrian** settlement process closer to its resolution.

Following the cessation of the hostilities in and around **Nagorno-Karabakh**, we have to renew and strengthen our efforts aimed at establishing lasting peace and promoting prosperous development in the region.

Also, the latest developments in Kazakhstan gave us serious reasons for concerns.

We should be better prepared in the future to use all OSCE assets and instruments in ensuring peaceful resolution of tensions, in full respect of the OSCE commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It will not come to you as a surprise if I say, what I underlined during the Ministerial Council in Stockholm in December - the OSCE project in its current state, with its norms and a set of tools demands our **proactive and positive approach**.

Our focus will be on improving the quality of debate in a steadily deteriorating atmosphere.

Conflicting interests require working towards solutions instead of mutual accusations. A solid effort is needed, if we want to revert to a “Helsinki culture” of cooperation.

I very much hope for a joint effort from all participating States, but also for redoubled commitment from the parties to the conflict.

Our success will stem from the adherence to the OSCE principles and commitments.

The long-term effort in respect of **confidence and security-building measures** deserves our special attention. We have to put into practice all OSCE’s available instruments and return to codes of best conduct in existing platforms.

One of the options worth pursuing is the updating of the **Vienna Document**, which remains one of the main confidence and security-building measures developed by the OSCE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Economic and environmental aspects remain crucial components of the **OSCE comprehensive concept of security**.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on many aspects of our economic and social life.

Therefore, we are looking forward to facilitating the experience and best practices sharing between OSCE participating States, which will help to reduce risks and boost entrepreneurship.

We also believe that OSCE is well placed to contribute to advance **climate and energy policies** that are key to the security and stability of the participating States.

One of the goal of our Chairmanship will be to share our joint experience in the energy transformation process.

In this vein, we are looking forward to contributing to the preparatory process before the **Concluding Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum** in Prague later this year.

Excellences,

It is time to put **humanitarian consideration** into the centre of our attention. Behind every protracted conflict there are people that suffer the most.

It is our obligation, as the OSCE, to protect and support the weakest, civilians, women and children from consequences of conflicts. To effectively ease their plight, we should be guided as much by political consideration as by moral imperatives.

The OSCE will not succeed unless we recommit ourselves to human rights, values of freedom and democracy, and the projection of power by good practices rather than resorting to threats of using military means.

We should assist and support the **OSCE autonomous institutions** as they have a unique potential to deal with conflict situation.

To further advance the human dimension of our important agenda, let us work towards organizing the **Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are right to ask ourselves questions whether or not we have fully used the OSCE acquis to make sure that we hand over a more secure and prosperous future to the next generations.

We do not always have to be faced with negative scenarios as long as we recommit our work and our priorities to the **United Nations and Helsinki founding principles**, which are universal and irreplaceable.

It is not a lack of rules or legal frameworks that we are facing. It is rather a lack of commitment to respect and follow the legal path that causes us trouble.

On a practical level, there is an important step that we should take immediately.

Without **effective financing** we are putting at risk our ability to carry out our vision of a more peaceful and stable European environment. We all should be actively engaged in seeking a consensus to adopt the realistic budget.

The OSCE will not be more efficient if too much time is spent on budgetary discussions at the expense of action.

The OSCE's top officials and heads of operations, whom we have entrusted important tasks, need resources to implement them and should deserve our full confidence.

The message we heard in Stockholm was about giving this Organization a boost by solid financing. It is time to implement this mandate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The strength of the OSCE lies in its potential. Its effectiveness is a function of the readiness to implement its legacy, enabling engagement in the area of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitations.

The Polish OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office will do its utmost to promote and advance the rational, smart and flexible use of OSCE's unique tools and negotiation formats.

Actions within the OSCE must be based on the commonly agreed principles and commitments.

Effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts always depends on the political will of the participating States, and above all, on the will of the parties to settle disputes.

We will seek to introduce a mid-term perspective into the work of the OSCE, while being guided by both common and diverse expectations with regard to the jubilee year 2025.

Our ambition is to picture at the Ministerial in Łódź what is feasible and what has a realistic potential to grow and make the OSCE stronger.

Let me conclude by stressing again, that OSCE is not merely a platform for cooperation of 57 states. It is **a common commitment to our people and to each other to build peace and future without conflict and war**. The Helsinki Decalogue with its fundamental principles is our lodestar. If we live up to the obligations we undertook, we will succeed in replacing war with peace, anxiety with trust, fear with freedom and suffering with hope. And failure should not be considered an option.

Thank you very much for your attention.