Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

"The future of European Security"

Keynote by OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, Princeton University

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Professor Danspeckgruber,
Ambassador Strohal,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,

Thank you for the invitation to speak at this prestigious institution.

I'm in the U.S. for the annual opening of the UN General Assembly, which offers an important opportunity for me to meet with some of the OSCE's key stakeholders and to raise the profile of the Organization.

They say that multilateralism is in crisis. But the UN still manages to gather all these world leaders in one place to inaugurate the General Assembly. And no other international organization epitomizes multilateralism like the UN.

And yet it is true that times are tough for multilateralists. The fundaments of international politics and diplomacy are being undermined like never before.

Unilateral action and bilateral dealings are challenging broader multilateral forms of governance. Transactional approaches are challenging a rules-based order. All too often the focus now is on narrow parochial interests at the expense of common concerns.

At the same time, relations between states, even among longstanding allies, are increasingly in flux. The resulting uncertainty and instability also affects the institutions where these states interact with each other.

Some of the world's most powerful leaders now openly display their distrust of international institutions; oppose international governance; and are increasingly tempted to conduct foreign relations with unilateral and often confrontational approaches.

Such behavior may offer short-term benefits for those with the greatest bargaining power, but it is often detrimental and costly in the longer term. And it further erodes the trust and confidence that binds states together and allows them to co-operate on common challenges.

Paradoxically, the space for multilateralism is shrinking just when dialogue and co-operation are needed more than ever.

As one of the few remaining platforms for East-West dialogue, the OSCE takes on a special role in managing current tensions. But constructive dialogue has been a rare commodity in recent years there as well.

In the OSCE's formal bodies, security discussions are often oriented toward public diplomacy. Mutual accusations and the repetition of well-rehearsed positions have replaced constructive criticism and a genuine search for common ground.

So seizing opportunities for informal dialogue is ever more important.

One key OSCE undertaking in this regard is the so-called Structured Dialogue which is mostly focused on political-military matters – once again a pressing issue on the agenda of the Euro-Atlantic security area. This flagship OSCE initiative is a noteworthy attempt to overcome divergent threat perceptions and rebuild trust and confidence.

The Structured Dialogue has stimulated useful exchanges on threat perceptions, force postures and military doctrines. We have started to discuss practical steps to reduce military risks. Avoiding, or at least better managing incidents in the OSCE area could help prevent an unwanted escalation by accident, a risk that is alarmingly real and needs to be better controlled. Enhancing the much needed

transparency of military exercises and restraining such activities near borders could alleviate some of the concerns.

These are urgent matters that can be tackled through constructive engagement and I hope the process will help to reinvigorate existing confidence-and security-building measures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Complex security challenges demand co-ordinated and co-operative responses. Transnational threats, terrorism and violent extremism, global challenges like climate change, mass movements of people – no state can handle these alone.

Rapid technological change brings additional vulnerabilities and security issues that are difficult to tackle, simply because we are moving in uncharted territory.

So, revitalizing multilateralism is essential to addressing these issues effectively.

What can we do – what should we do – in this situation?

First, international organizations and institutions need to get our act together. We clearly cannot wait until the pendulum swings back, as it often does, hoping to sit out the current crisis in the expectation of better times. Disaster could well strike before we know it. So we need to start reviving a sense of common purpose and a culture of co-operation.

Second, we need to modernize and adapt our multilateral toolbox, so that states regain confidence that they can effectively address today's challenges together. This involves reforming our institutions and ensuring that they are "fit for purpose". While upholding the common good, we also need to be more responsive to the needs of individual states, their governments and the public. Partly, this is a communication challenge. To win support, our added value must become more apparent.

Finally, we must promote and engage in genuine dialogue. Dialogue is where it all begins. It is at the core of multilateralism, and at the heart of the OSCE's work.

The OSCE practices one of the most basic and oldest forms of multilateralism. We don't work by majority rule, or by natural convergence among the like-minded. We work by consensus.

Consensus makes it much harder to reach decisions, especially in a tense and politicized environment. But it is also a powerful tool because it ensures that decisions are co-owned.

Take Ukraine. The deployment of the Special Monitoring Mission in 2014 is the most visible example of the OSCE's ability to launch collective actions even during a highly divisive crisis. The OSCE response to the crisis in and around Ukraine vividly demonstrates that international institutions have not become obsolete. They can be very effective if participating States rally the necessary political will, and if the organizations demonstrate flexibility and innovation.

In Moldova, the OSCE has contributed to brokering agreement in the settlement process for the Transdniestrian conflict. Thanks to patient, incremental negotiations, the parties have agreed to a package of confidence-building measures that can make life better for people living on both sides of the Dniestr River. These concrete steps between Chisinau and Tiraspol shows that progress is possible even after many years of deadlock. I hope this positive dynamic will give new momentum to the settlement process – and inspire greater will among the parties to resolve other conflicts in the OSCE region.

Today's volatile and unpredictable security climate means we cannot be complacent. Rather, it imposes a certain pragmatism on all of us. Without losing sight of the principles that remain the foundation of the OSCE, we urgently need to seek engagement and co-operation in areas where interests converge.

These are many: from preventing and countering violent extremism, to fighting terrorism, and promoting joint approaches to climate change.

Cyber security is another good example. I mention it because all 57 OSCE participating States have agreed to 16 pioneering "cyber-CBMs". Measures designed to reduce the risk of misperception and miscalculation associated with the use of ICTs by States. In this case, as in many other areas of OSCE engagement, it is in every state's interest to co-operate to prevent tit-for-tat reactions, or a dangerous escalation that risks triggering conventional military responses.

The OSCE provides a truly comprehensive platform for engaging in meaningful dialogue, de-escalating tensions and taking joint action against common threats and challenges.

Seen from the United States, Europe may seem far away, but our security is connected in many ways. A gradual re-militarization of the Euro-Atlantic area would be costly and could increase the risk of conflict. Reviving arms control mechanisms, including those developed within the OSCE framework, would be one effective way to reduce such risks.

But there are other issues at stake in this context.

Resolving the crisis in and around Ukraine is a major U.S. interest. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the Trilateral Contact Group are vital tools that are helping to manage a difficult situation.

Other OSCE-related mechanisms are helping to manage crises and to prevent violent conflict, for instance in the South Caucasus, giving diplomats the chance to sort things out peacefully. OSCE conflict prevention is effective, even if under-reported in many parts of the OSCE area.

More broadly, the OSCE Secretariat, institutions and field operations offer numerous avenues for engagement to strengthen co-operation on a wide range of transnational threats and global challenges; and to promote good governance, the rule of law and human rights as an integral part of comprehensive security.

So, I think the U.S. motivation for being part of this Organization remains strong for good reasons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Trust and confidence may be at low point, but the OSCE has a natural ability to do something about it. After all, the OSCE's compelling heritage goes back to the negotiations of the Helsinki Final Act during the height of the Cold War. Deterrence alone will not work. Dialogue is essential and co-operation in imperative in a world where security is increasingly connected in so many ways.

For the OSCE, and for international institutions more broadly, rebuilding trust and confidence through meaningful dialogue is therefore one of the main

challenges today. We will have to take this agenda forward with patience and perseverance, small step by small step, but I am confident that we will succeed.

Thank you for your attention.