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Annual Security Review Conference

**Opening Speech by the
Special Representative of the Federal Government
for the OSCE Chairmanship 2016
Dr. Gernot Erler**

Vienna, 28 June 2016

Lamberto Zannier,
prezado Presidente Ramos-Horta,
Mr Møller,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister Steinmeier, let me bid you all a very warm welcome to the ASRC 2016.

“Annual Security Review Conference” – it’s not a very catchy title and, if you ask me, it’s maybe even a bit misleading these days. As if we could just inspect security in the OSCE area once a year, like a safety inspection on an elevator or a kitchen gadget – and then slap a safety-check sticker on the side, job done!

We can’t expect that – especially not at a time when our shared security is by no means assured or to be taken for granted.

We therefore mustn’t see our meeting as a ritualised duty. Our focus in the days ahead must be dialogue, its tone characterised by mutual confidence and its content, while honest, scrupulously constructive.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are experiencing a period of uncertainty and political upheaval. The latest example is the decision taken by the people of the United Kingdom on 23 June – a decision that we must respect but that many, including myself, find extremely regrettable and a cause for serious reflection.

However, these are not only uncertain times that we have to deal with together; they are also times in which peace on the European continent is not only threatened but is actually being violated on a daily basis.

This is unacceptable, and we are unequivocally clear about what is going on:

- Fundamental principles and shared values have been and are being called into question, and
- our shared security is under threat – from within and from outside.

Comparison with the Cold War, though repeatedly cited, doesn't cover it. The situation in security policy today is much more multi-faceted. We find ourselves confronted with such a confusing array of diverse challenges, full of synchronicities and parallels, that we can no longer think in terms of simple categories. That's not an exaggeration; it's an objective and realistic observation.

However, we can't just accept that status quo and carry on unthinkingly fuelling an uncontrolled and dangerous spiral. The security challenges of today are too great for individual countries and their citizens; the transnational threats of the 21st century are too complex, both in the digital sphere and elsewhere.

These threats are no longer contained by national borders; they are not even restricted by intercontinental borders or the limits of our institutions.

So we have to keep rethinking and talking about our options and intentions for joint approaches to those common challenges. And we need to build on our collaborations; the OSCE, for example, should expand its cooperation with our partners in the Mediterranean region and in Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can no longer allow ourselves to believe that key questions of territorial integrity, self determination, minority rights, counterterrorism, cyber-security and migration management can be answered with the same old way of thinking from inside our protected cocoon.

If we want greater security – the basis of lasting peace – then we need negotiated, collective and sensible approaches that are equal to the heightened complexity of these new challenges.

Let me read you a quote: “There are no short-cuts to peace; peace is a journey that must be reached step by step, a foundation that has to be built bloc by bloc.” End of quote. These are the words of our guest today, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate José Ramos-Horta. Peace is possible, if we pull together in one direction – if we behave, in the truest sense of the word, constructively.

That strategy – stepping up to the plate and renewing or building on offers of dialogue and cooperation – is the strategy Germany’s OSCE Chairmanship has been pursuing consistently for half a year; that has been our aim, at least. We intend to do the same at this ASRC.

We need to leave our diplomatic comfort zone and learn to call a spade a spade when it comes to the conflicts and differences of opinion that divide us. In the interests of constructive dialogue, we should also be prepared to see things from the other side’s point of view, though it may be difficult and uncomfortable. I believe we will only make progress if we put empty compromise and lip-service behind us, as well as the stubborn insistence that our position is the only true and right one.

In view of all that, I very much welcome the first ever inclusion on the ASRC agenda of a frank and unequivocal point about unresolved regional conflicts in the OSCE area. This gives us an opportunity to engage in open dialogue to discuss joint ways of coming through those crises and resolving conflicts.

More than ever, those conflicts represent a considerable challenge for all of us, particularly for the directly affected local populations. We should not adopt the kind of fatalism that labels many of these conflicts as “frozen”. The label does nothing to suspend the human suffering they cause! People are bearing the brunt in their everyday lives year after year, their basic freedoms and human rights curtailed while development in the affected regions regresses or, at best, stagnates.

Our priority ought to be to work for small but meaningful steps towards stabilisation. That is the only way to make everyday life easier for people and work towards robust long-term solutions.

Dedication and a commitment to the art of the possible – that is also the strategy guiding Germany’s Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, on the trip he has just embarked on to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

- In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, fatal incidents along the line of contact have been legitimated for decades; that legitimation needs at long last to be abandoned. We welcome and fully support the intensification of negotiation efforts within the OSCE framework.
- In Georgia too, the situation remains anything but satisfactory. Nevertheless, some progress has recently been made as regards practical cooperation between the conflict parties. We need to maintain this momentum; we need to underpin and safeguard it with confidence-building measures and humanitarian action.

Similar points apply with respect to the Transdnistria conflict. Our Special Representative Cord Meier-Klodt will go into more detail on our efforts in the region this afternoon.

In the Ukraine conflict, all sides need to live up to their responsibilities. The ceasefire in eastern Ukraine keeps being violated, and the political process is faltering.

Continually passing the buck in the almost ritualised way we have been seeing so much lately will not help; we are all sick of the blame game. What needs to happen is that obligations which have been entered into need to be fulfilled. And the framework conditions that will make it easier to do so must be established for the long term.

First and foremost, that means upholding the ceasefire unconditionally and granting the Special Monitoring Mission full access free from obstacles and threats. Lamberto Zannier talked about that earlier.

There also has to be a stop to the obstruction and destruction of technical equipment like drones and cameras. The SMM must not be made blind! We need the SMM if the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine is to be stabilised long-term. One major obstacle to stabilisation is the fact that infringements of the Minsk agreements tend not to incur consequences. We need to think about whether that can be allowed to continue.

As the Ukraine conflict in particular has demonstrated, the OSCE can make the crucial difference. Its capacity to respond to situations and its experience of similar observation and mediation missions are a real asset to the European security architecture.

Our core objective as OSCE Chair is to enhance the organisation's capabilities and to make the best possible use of its potential for crisis management, both independently and in collaboration with other international players – above all the United Nations. This applies in relation to the entire conflict cycle, from early detection and conflict prevention to conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding. It also involves ensuring that appropriate staffing and funds are in place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An improvement to security in Europe can only be effective if it actually reaches all of us. The OSCE has always stood for the cooperative approach and the comprehensive concept of security, and we need to redouble our efforts in that regard. We all have an interest in achieving more security for the long term with fewer weapons, with more military restraint, with transparency and with balanced limits on capabilities. In this phase of fresh uncertainty in Europe, we need to think hard about how to make that happen.

Disarmament and arms control have played a crucial role in improving security on our continent. It is undeniable that they benefit all of us. However, the regimes for conventional arms control and confidence and security-building measures agreed post-1990 are no longer sufficient to meet all the challenges we face.

We therefore need to update our existing tool-kits to reflect the challenges of today. We need more crisis resilience, more transparency, more effective verification, prevention of the kind of dangerous military incidents that are constantly looming these days – in short, we need more, genuine cooperative security. Concrete proposals are on the table; we should discuss them in a spirit of mutual trust and focused endeavour. We do need to have achieved real progress at the end of the day. Pretty speeches won't help us in the long term; words have to be followed up with action!

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the world's largest regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE has taken on special responsibility for peace and stability. However, it – we – can only live up to that responsibility if we find joint responses to new challenges while, crucially, remaining true to our principles and standing up for our convictions.

Standing up for his convictions – i.e. for human dignity and the rule of law; for the freedom of his country and his people; by peaceful means; with perseverance – that was the path José Ramos-Horta chose, and he succeeded.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am convinced that it does us good to take a moment sometimes to engage with other people's experience. Without wishing to draw comparisons, I feel the resolution of the Timor-Leste conflict can be a source of both inspiration and ideas – for post-conflict peacebuilding, internal and external stabilisation efforts, conflict management within society or reconciliation work.

President Ramos-Horta,

We are looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

Thank you very much!