



Deutschland 2016

Conference “The OSCE as Mediator”

**Keynote speech by the Special Representative
for the German OSCE Chairmanship
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Mr König, thank you very much for your kind welcome and introduction,
Ms Thors,
Professor Tomuschat,
Ms Wieland-Karimi,
Dr Ropers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the German OSCE Chairmanship in 2016 I would also like to give all of you a very warm welcome to this conference – “The OSCE as Mediator”.

Several years ago, in February 2008, I received an unexpected phone call from the German Foreign Minister, who sent me to Nairobi. Some of you may remember that at that time a brutal power struggle was raging in Kenya, a country which up until then had been a role model for democratic stability in Africa.

The opposition was not willing to recognise the victory of the President of the time, who had surprisingly won the election. Violent clashes erupted, resulting in more than 1000 deaths and 300.000 refugees, rape and pillaging before the African Union took steps to resolve the conflict and the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan assumed the role of mediator.

And Kofi Annan – one of the most experienced and skilled mediators I have ever known in the course of my foreign policy career – on the brink of a breakthrough following his efforts, was looking for someone who could explain to the conflict parties how a grand coalition worked – as a way out of their conflict by the German example.

That was the reason for the phone call and also the reason why I was able to assist the conflict parties for a few days as a snap mediator, if you like, under the supervision of Kofi Annan, by fielding questions on programme, functioning, decision-making and the distribution of posts

in a grand coalition of this kind. This was actually successful and the peaceful cooperation in Kenya worked out fine for a couple of years.

The two main tasks in Kenya on that occasion, but also in most other efforts to mediate and resolve conflicts peacefully, were first to restore trust between the parties and second to foster awareness that long-term conflict resolution is only possible on a peaceful basis and only if there is a real willingness to compromise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Kofi Annan was and is evidently not alone in his view that this way of resolving conflicts peacefully and finding political compromise is particularly deeply rooted in Germany.

Over the last two years the Federal Foreign Office has conducted a broad-based dialogue on our foreign policy entitled Review 2014 – A Fresh Look at German Foreign Policy.

One of its most important insights, in my view, was clear support for the idea that Germany should assume greater responsibility at international level, especially in the fields of conflict prevention and peaceful conflict resolution.

This result gives the Federal Foreign Office both a responsibility and an incentive! For several years now we have set ourselves the goal of focusing more closely on mediation in cooperation with the Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland.

Some of you may remember the conference “Germany as mediator” that we organised in 2014, which provided us with a range of very specific recommendations for action. For example, we have firmly anchored mediation in our attachés’ training, significantly expanded our project activities in the area of mediation and developed our contacts in this field at both bilateral and multilateral level. Some of our involved partners are here today – thank you very much for coming.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me point out again:

Peaceful conflict resolution through mediation requires trust and a willingness to compromise on the part of the conflict parties. Yet, as the example of Kenya shows, it also needs experience, professionalism, authority and working structures on the part of the mediators.

For more than 40 years now, the OSCE has played an indispensable role in confidence-building, conflict prevention and conflict resolution in Europe. Mediation is almost a part of the organisation’s DNA – and this has been the case ever since it was founded, in the middle of the Cold War.

Keeping communication channels open, providing platforms for dialogue, taking account of others’ positions and working together to find viable solutions and compromises for all sides – that is the day-to-day activity of the OSCE.

And it needs to continue to do this in future – more effectively and, if necessary, more frequently. That is why we are using our Chairmanship to strengthen the OSCE's instruments in all phases of the so-called conflict cycle.

I just want to mention the most important of these instruments:

The OSCE is present on the ground in many participating States, often also outside the capital cities, through its field mission network. Its Mediation Support Team at the Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna supports ongoing mediation processes. Many OSCE workers both in the field missions and in Vienna often have many years of expertise in mediation.

The independent institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media – are also involved in dialogue promotion, conflict prevention and conflict resolution processes.

Through the quiet diplomacy of the High Commissioner on National Minorities or the project work conducted by the field missions in the area of reconciliation, dialogue and confidence building, the OSCE is active at all stages from conflict prevention, through acute crisis management right up to post-conflict peacebuilding.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also helps to prevent and resolve conflicts by intensifying parliamentary contacts and pursuing its own dialogue promotion initiatives. What is little known even to experts is that the OSCE even has its own Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, which participating States may call upon to resolve their disputes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Given the multitude of conflicts in these times, the skills and experience of the OSCE in mediation and conflict resolution are needed now more than ever before. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, for example, the OSCE, with the Minsk Group and three Co-Chairs, has the only mediation format recognised by all sides.

In other mediation initiatives, such as the Geneva talks on the conflict in Georgia, the OSCE assumes lead responsibility together with other international organisations such as the EU and the United Nations.

In the Transdnistria conflict or the conflict in and around Ukraine, the OSCE is the key mediator in talks between the conflict parties. And wherever possible, if the conflict parties are in agreement, the OSCE's mediation efforts are enriched and reinforced by civil society activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is good to have instruments like the OSCE, but it is not enough. At the moment we are observing a worrying loss of trust and willingness to compromise, both within our societies and at international level.

A friend-foe mentality, the tendency to turn political decisions into matters of principle, the insistence on one's own subjective perceptions and assessments – all this makes it difficult to

achieve compromise and has latterly even resulted in the return of war to Europe – take Crimea and eastern Ukraine – and the violent eruption of long-simmering conflicts, such as Nagorno-Karabakh.

I think we need to make sure that we don't lose the ability to mediate and resolve disputes peacefully in the OSCE area. Other regions of the world envy us for this ability with this great historic experience.

But the OSCE can't use these abilities on its own. We need the willingness of the participating States to make use of its instruments, to work constructively on resolving conflicts and above all to comply once more with the agreed rules and principles. Yet the OSCE, with its tried-and-tested skills and institutions, can make a key contribution to mediation in the individual conflicts and thus foster confidence-building as a whole.

We have therefore deliberately chosen the motto "Renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust, restoring security" for our OSCE Chairmanship.

It is no coincidence that this threefold strategy also describes the central elements of any mediation process. Reinforcing mediation and the OSCE's other skills throughout the conflict cycle is one of the priorities of our Chairmanship. We want to learn from past experiences, strengthen reliable instruments and at the same time make the organisation structurally fit for the future.

We want today's conference to be a step in this direction. Our goal is to join with you to take a look at individual aspects, methods and tried-and-tested experiences and to draw benefit from them.

We also want to identify additional approaches that could be relevant to the OSCE and adapt them to give the organisation fresh impetus for developing its range of instruments.

The questions we need to pose in this context include:

How can we confront challenges such as status issues more effectively?

How can we make best use of additional potential such as insider mediators?

How can we make mediation processes more inclusive? One necessary factor in this connection is the inclusion of women. And finally, how do all the various players and approaches connect with one another, how can we dovetail our instruments and mediation efforts in the face of the highly complex, interconnected conflicts of our times?

Ladies and gentlemen,

the past months and years have shown us that Europe is not – or no longer – the haven of peace we perhaps rather too complacently took it to be for so long. We ought now to have realised that here, too, the eruption of violence and the use of force to resolve conflicts is a possibility.

Let us therefore work together to strengthen and develop peaceful conflict resolution in the OSCE as well as the OSCE as a whole. To this end I wish you and all of us inspiring discussions and plenty of ideas from this conference.

Thank you very much.