

**ADDRESS BY MR. JEFFREY FELTMAN,
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TO THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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THE UN AND THE OSCE – PARTNERS IN AN “UNFREEZING REGION”

It is a great honour to address you at a time when the realities of and our assumptions about the state of peace and security in the OSCE region have been seriously called into question.

For the United Nations, your region does not only stand for stability and strategic partnership, it also stands for an unprecedented – in breadth and depth – largely peaceful, transformation to democracy.

And like the United Nations, the OSCE and its Participating States in all your diversity are united in shared values and principles.

Many of our Member States often turn to you for guidance and assistance when facing similar challenges to the ones you have mastered.

Yet today, sadly, while never entirely off, Europe has resurfaced as a frequent and highly unsettling matter before the Security Council.

There appear to be two main questions that we should pose ourselves:

1. What are the shifting realities and challenges in the OSCE Area of Responsibility (AoR)?
2. And how should the UN-OSCE partnership evolve to address them?

What are the shifting realities and challenges in the OSCE AoR?

Conflict in Europe had been assumed to have become an obsolete form of expressing differences. The remnants of past conflicts – while not resolved – appeared frozen. Whereas this frozen status has never managed to extinguish the danger of reigniting and a life in insecurity for many people, it had led us to believe that peace and stability in Europe had become unshakable and irrevocable.

Regrettably, what we have been witnessing in Ukraine – and Assistant Secretary-General Simonovic will provide more details on the findings of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission – suggests how ill-founded our assumptions have been.

It is what I call the “unfreezing”: divides and differing interpretations of post-Cold War realities have come more violently to the fore now than ever since the Yugoslav wars. What “constructive ambiguity” had silenced or relegated in favour of pragmatism and a common interest in peace and stability, has resurfaced as a major obstacle to concerted action in the Security Council and elsewhere tackling today’s global challenges.

All sides and Participating States continue to pledge that they want to see Ukraine return to peace. This is a common understanding that we need to build on. Yet we need more: we need action confirming the stated commitment to a diplomatic solution.

Blueprints and action plans exist – President Poroshenko’s peace plan, as well as the 17 April Geneva or 2 July Berlin declarations stipulate what needs to be done. Yet we need to see it done.

We are encouraged by Friday’s ceasefire agreement and hope full implementation follows. We applaud the OSCE’s role in achieving this agreement.

Welcoming Friday’s announcement, the Secretary-General updated his call on all to do their part to contribute to the peaceful resolution of this conflict, in a manner upholding Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is the responsibility of all Member States to protect and uphold the UN Charter, our common foundation of international peace and security. He expects all those with influence to exert it, including as part of the ceasefire calling on the armed groups to disarm and retreat.

It is equally critical that all people in Ukraine feel heard and that legitimate grievances are taken seriously. In this vein, internal dialogue is essential, as is that the elections scheduled for 26 October can take place throughout Ukraine and become a unifying and reconciliatory mechanism.

You have provided the OSCE with demanding responsibilities and a clear mandate – ever since the eruption of the crisis, we have been in close contact with Secretary-General Zannier, Head of Mission Apakan and Ambassador Tagliavini, to allow for our full support whenever deemed beneficial by the OSCE. For the current agreement to succeed, we know how important OSCE’s monitoring and verification will be.

And Secretary-General Ban remains personally fully committed to doing his part: Lives have to be saved. Peace in Ukraine means peace in the region and beyond.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unfortunately, we see more “unfreezing” elsewhere in the OSCE AoR: the security situation in the South Caucasus remains precarious. Recently, we have seen the worst upsurge in tensions along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border for more than a decade. The UN welcomes and fully supports the OSCE Minsk peace process on Nagorno-Karabakh. We hope that the negotiations can be accelerated in the coming months.

It is a stark reminder that “frozen” does not mean “resolved”. With this in mind, it will also be important to find a way to reinvigorate the Geneva international discussions.

In Central Asia, linkages between our two Organisations have been increasing year by year. The possible impact from the ongoing transition in Afghanistan on Central Asia is an area we must not neglect. Coordinated efforts to foster regional cooperation, strengthen the rule of law and promote respect for human rights should result in more resilient states that are more easily able to withstand external pressures.

The progress made by the Western Balkans region speaks convincingly about the ability of countries to leave their divisive pasts behind and work together towards greater prosperity and long term stability, guided by shared goals and aspirations.

We are looking forward to working closely together with Serbia as it takes the helm of this Organisation, building on the strong ties established with the current and previous chairmanships of the OSCE.

All of these regions and situations, while very different, underline the importance of supporting the “unfreezing”: we must coordinate efforts in pursuing sustainable and irreversible political solutions to conflicts, differences and aspirations.

This brings me to my second question:

How should the UN-OSCE partnership evolve to address this “unfrozen” new reality in the OSCE AoR?

While the crisis in Ukraine is not only a tragedy, daunting to resolve and fraught with challenges, it also is an opportunity and a responsibility to rethink the European and international security architecture.

The Helsinki Final Act is not only your founding document and a reference point for the power of freedom and equal rights, it also provides the framework for Europe’s security architecture.

Your current reflection and assessment within the Helsinki+40 process under the Chairmanships of Ukraine, Switzerland and Serbia of how the OSCE’s role could be strengthened and address the security challenges of the 21st century has gained even more relevance.

When calling it “an opportunity”, I am far from calling into question the unshakable principles of the international and OSCE security foundations. There are red lines that must not be crossed. Rather, I am referring to reconsidering how to find common answers on how to guarantee these principles.

It must not be “either or”, or a return to decisions guided by fear. It should be about building on what all of you have shaped over the past 20 years of shared history to further nurture relationships and reliability based on trust, common understanding and mutual guarantees.

Both the OSCE and the UN, by the very nature of our memberships, are well placed to bridge divides. While the principle of consensus can be challenging, it also entails an irrevocable strength and sense of purpose.

We especially welcome your initiative to further operationalise Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. In New York, we also perceive an ever-growing recognition by Member States of the importance of further articulating the partnership between the UN, regional and sub-regional actors in order to improve our capacity to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts.

Two recently-adopted resolutions – one by the General Assembly on “strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution”, and one by the Security Council commemorating the 100-year anniversary of the onset of the First World War – reaffirmed the role of regional organisations under the framework of Chapter VIII.

The Secretary-General intends to explore further this imperative with heads of regional organisations at the third retreat early next year.

At the same time, we encourage regional arrangements to seek cooperation with one another. They share, in many cases, many more commonalities - e.g. mandates, size and scope - than the UN does. I commend Secretary-General Zannier for his leadership in co-organising a meeting of regional organisations in Saudi Arabia with a follow-up in Cairo.

Given the multiplicity of actors that may be involved in a particular crisis, strategic coordination is key.

We have jointly taken a number of steps to institutionalise our relationships and make them more predictable. We have established liaison offices, created joint agreements, conducted joint trainings and analyses, and deployed joint envoys. With respect to the OSCE specifically, the UN has established various mechanisms to share information, best practices and expertise, and conducted joint training of staff, such as over this past summer on reconciliation, as a tool of post-conflict rehabilitation but also, very much, of prevention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The most promising path implementing Friday’s ceasefire plan to resolve the crisis in Ukraine, and to reinvigorate the European security architecture in times of its “unfreezing” appears to be our strategic and pragmatic engagement.

We need to be demanding and critical with ourselves to ensure that Ukraine does not slide deeper into the abyss and our common values with it. We have to live up to our responsibilities under the UN Charter and seek the opportunity to reinvigorate solidarity, security and cooperation in Europe and beyond.

The Swiss-hosted informal meeting of Foreign Ministers in the margins of the General Assembly later this month in New York under the theme “The Ukraine Crisis, the OSCE, and the Future of European Security” demonstrates our shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the future of UN-OSCE cooperation.

I look forward to finding answers with you.

Thank you.