



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Remarks by H.E. Thomas Greminger, OSCE Secretary General

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Thank you, Mr. President, dear George. Thank you for your kind introductory remarks on my behalf.

Minister Lajčák, dear Miroslav,
Secretary General Montella, dear Roberto
Distinguished Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Thank you for inviting me to address this distinguished meeting. I appreciate this opportunity to speak with Members of the Parliamentary Assembly. I am going to provide you with an update on developments within the Organization and in the OSCE region.

Last December the OSCE family celebrated its 25th Ministerial Council in Milan, culminating a successful Italian Chairmanship. Although the participating States could not find common ground on a political declaration, the quantity and quality of the documents adopted provide some doses of optimism, given the polarized political environment.

For the first time since 2014, participating States adopted an important decision in the human dimension – on the safety of journalists. The decision recognizes that journalists are exposed to intimidation, harassment and the risk of violence simply for doing their work. It calls on participating States to take effective measures to protect them and their families.

The Ministerial Declaration on security and co-operation in the Mediterranean calls for strengthened dialogue and co-operation with our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in key areas of common interest, including terrorism, energy security, trafficking in human beings and gender equality. It also gives political direction to put relations with our Mediterranean Partners higher on our agenda.

Participating States also adopted important texts on the role of youth in contributing to peace and security efforts; on digitalization; on combatting violence against women; and on combatting child trafficking. The overall outcome was more positive than many expected.

There have also been some positive developments in our region.

The successful diplomatic process between Skopje and Athens has opened new possibilities for increased regional co-operation and integration in South East Europe. This inspiring exercise deserves recognition and praise! Their achievement underscores that, even after many years without progress, solutions are still possible and statecraft and diplomacy can prevail over populism and nationalism, producing practical outcomes that reinforce security and stability.

We have also seen progress on the Transdniestrian settlement process. I hope this will encourage the sides in other conflicts in our region to take steps to improve conditions for people on the ground, which could help prepare the path for a peaceful settlement. The OSCE remains strongly committed to our role in co-chairing the Geneva International Discussions, and we also hope to see progress in the Minsk Process working towards a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The commitment by the leadership of Armenia and Azerbaijan to prepare their populations for peace is a very promising signal.

Here I would like to stress the need to intensify our efforts to work together constructively in all the existing mediation formats.

I should also mention Central Asia, where a new era of increased regional co-operation and connectivity has begun. This will have a positive impact on the people of the region. And it will enhance security and stability in Central Asia – and for us all. I hope the OSCE is ready to seize this opportunity and support these historic developments.

But despite all these positive developments, the bigger picture remains worrying. The security situation in the OSCE region remains tense, and it is dominated by distrust and increasing uncertainty. Last week at the Munich Security Conference, the atmosphere seemed particularly gloomy. As the Conference's overarching theme so brilliantly put it, the pieces of the international order's puzzle seem to be scattered. Someone will have to put them back into place. I am convinced that the only possible solution will have to be co-operative and include all stakeholders. In other words: multilateral. And I am equally convinced that the OSCE could offer a solid frame for putting the puzzle pieces together: When I think of the principles and commitments this organization stands for; the inclusive platform for dialogue and joint action this organization offers; the tools to prevent, manage and resolve conflict!

Unfortunately multilateral institutions are increasingly under attack by a wide range of actors, including prominent world leaders and decision-makers. The very idea of multilateralism is in question. But it should be obvious to us all that the extraordinary complexity of today's international security challenges and the accelerating speed of change caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution will require joint and co-ordinated action.

Excellencies,

Finding a peaceful resolution to the crisis in and around Ukraine remains the OSCE's top priority. The OSCE continues to help de-escalate tensions on the ground and support efforts to find a peaceful solution. I am concerned that growing distrust between the sides hinders implementation of the Minsk agreements, which remain the best and, for the time being, only path we have to achieving peace.

Tensions over the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait are deeply worrying. On 26 November, I issued an early warning to participating States in the Permanent Council, calling for restraint and measures of de-escalation. Meaningful dialogue is the only way out.

Meanwhile, civilians in eastern Ukraine continue to pay the highest price. The Chairperson-in-Office has taken a keen interest in identifying targeted and deliverable measures to help alleviate civilian suffering. So, with the support of the Secretariat, the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine – the SMM – is increasing its efforts to improve humanitarian conditions. This includes brokering local ceasefires on the ground – more than 1,000 in 2018 – to enable repairs to critical infrastructure serving people on both sides of the contact line, and preventing further escalation of local ceasefire violations.

Distinguished Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

It's often said that international organizations should be more efficient and effective. I share this assessment, and agree they need to be reformed. In the OSCE context, we need to ensure that the Organization remains fit for purpose to address critical 21st-century security challenges.

One way we are doing this is by stepping up efforts to achieve gender equality by enhancing the role of women in preventing and managing conflict, promoting women's contribution to the economy and combatting all forms of violence against women and girls. I am pleased to announce that on 8 March we will present the main findings of a comprehensive OSCE-led survey on violence against women.

We are also looking at ways to strengthen the Organization itself. The Secretariat has been improving its ability to provide strategic support to the Chairmanship, Troika and participating States by the creation of a Strategic Policy Support Unit. And in an effort to enhance the Secretariat's effectiveness, we have undertaken a comprehensive Management Review with the support of Ernst & Young. We have identified multiple areas where we can improve business processes and make better use of scarce resources. In November, we began to implement changes, and the transformation process is already yielding concrete results. Successful completion of this transformation process will modernize OSCE management policy and practice and ensure that our structures meet contemporary needs.

We are also looking at ways to reform the Organization's cumbersome budget process; to attract and retain high-quality staff, with a specific focus on gender parity; to better mainstream gender and youth in our policies and activities; to make better use of technology; and to more effectively promote the OSCE and the impact of our work.

A number of initiatives have been tabled for the approval of participating States, including reform of the OSCE budget process and improvements to the OSCE secondment system. Consensus is still to be reached. I am confident that with your support in advocating for reforms like these we will better position the Organization for the future.

The OSCE's ability to cope with both old and new challenges largely depends on the availability of human and financial resources. Although threats to our common security continue to grow, some participating States still insist on Zero Nominal Growth for the Organization's Unified Budget. ZNG does not mean that you simply have the same amount of resources available as of last year; ZNG means that you have 2-3% less in real terms. This is not sustainable.

Continued ZNG budgets will result in a substantially reduced ability to support participating States to improve elections and strengthen the rule of law and human rights protection; to effectively monitor, prevent and respond to complex crises in the OSCE region; and to tackle transnational threats to security. In short, it will diminish the OSCE's flexibility and undermine its comprehensive approach, shrinking our Organization's ability to contribute to peace and security. So, please, help us reverse this trend. I ask for your support in ensuring that the OSCE receives the resources it needs to succeed.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude.

The unique potential of the OSCE is made stronger thanks to close co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly. Just think of the excellent co-operation the PA has with ODIHR, particularly on election observation missions.

Relations between the OSCE Secretariat and the Parliamentary Assembly are also strong and constructive, and have intensified during the last year. I often meet with President Tsereteli and Secretary General Montella. Our teams ensure smooth and productive co-ordination in harmonizing messages for meetings with key stakeholders. Recently a delegation of the PA's Second Committee visited Vienna and met with the Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities. And in November, the Chair of the PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism addressed our Security Committee and held a number of meetings with Secretariat staff.

Thank you, President Tsereteli, and thank you, Secretary General Montella, for your dedicated efforts to make all this possible.

I look forward to continued close collaboration with the PA in the months and years to come. And I am particularly looking forward to meeting with your Bureau in Copenhagen on 8 April.

Thank you for your attention.