

Address by OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt

Ministerial Council of the OSCE

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AS DELIVERED

Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson-in-Office,
Madam Secretary General,
Ministers and Ambassadors,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you here in Stockholm! I am especially privileged to address you from my own constituency.

Unfortunately, we meet as tensions are building up across the OSCE region. Just beyond the Baltic Sea, thousands of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are pawns in a geopolitical struggle. The situation in and around Ukraine risks further escalating a conflict that will soon enter its eighth year. But I would underline that Ukraine's right to its internationally agreed territory is still relevant and important. Border clashes between troops from Armenia and Azerbaijan have raised the specter of renewed hostilities one year after a deadly conflict. I do kindly ask the parts to get together and agree for a long-lasting peace agreement. Throughout the OSCE, there is an urgent need to de-escalate and promote greater solidarity and unity.

Ministers,

On numerous occasions, you have turned to our Organization to deal with such challenges. You have trusted the OSCE as the most effective instrument in our arsenal to create the conditions for dialogue and co-operation.

Why? Because you know the OSCE can be reactive, flexible, and inclusive. Yet, we know that the OSCE itself is not perfect. Despite our best efforts, the OSCE has not prevented every war. It has not solved protracted conflicts. It has not delivered the full promise of the Helsinki Final Act or the Paris Charter. We need to acknowledge these collective failures.

But, Ministers, these are not failures of the OSCE as a concept. They are not an excuse to block the agendas of meetings, to delay the adoption of a budget, or to ignore our principles. These failures are only a symptom. Deep down, they reveal a lack of mutual trust, a lack of mutual

understanding, and a lack of political will. There can be a strong change on this if there is willingness.

Excellencies,

Clearly, we cannot agree on everything. Our assessments can sometimes be polar opposites. But there is a lot to gain today by finally meeting in person after two years, by considering each other's point of view, and - hopefully - by inching closer to each other.

One year ago, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly launched a Call for Action. With your support, we must continue building partnerships to improve the way the OSCE operates and responds to our common challenges in the OSCE region.

Madam Chair,

It is rare to have both the OSCE Chairperson and the OSCE PA President coming from the same country. It is even less frequent that women lead both the executive and the parliamentary dimensions of the OSCE at the same time! Together with Ms. Schmid leading the OSCE Secretariat, I find it encouraging that there are women that have a seat at this table. I appreciate the good co-operation that we have achieved together. I look forward to collaborating closely with the Polish Chairmanship next year.

We need to continue fighting for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in our Organization and in all peace processes across the OSCE region. I recently visited Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where I had the opportunity to see the positive work done in local communities, with OSCE support, to empower women and youth, and promote more peaceful and just societies. My conversations with community organizers were a touching reminder of the very concrete impact that the OSCE can have on the lives of all our citizens.

They were also a clear illustration of the positive contributions of civil society to build security at the grassroots level. It is damaging that, in Belarus and elsewhere, civil society and opposition work under great pressure.

In this context, we need to address another failure: not being able to hold the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting this year, again. Let me be clear: this situation is a crisis for human rights. It is a crisis for democratic protection and monitoring in our region. This needs to be addressed. It cannot be ignored. I have therefore asked all Members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to question their Ministers about the steps you have taken to avert or rectify this situation. A reaction

is needed, dear Ministers. We must prevent a permanent crisis of the OSCE's human dimension, including our election observation efforts.

All three dimensions are interrelated. If we are serious about achieving lasting security in Europe, we have to give them equal care and equal commitment. We cannot let the OSCE become an organization "à la carte". This is also true when it comes to the long-neglected economic and environmental dimension. On the heels of the COP26 conference, we must address the climate crisis to realise the OSCE vision of comprehensive security.

Ministers,

As I alluded to earlier, I have had the opportunity to witness the life-changing work that OSCE Field Operations conduct every day in many of our participating States. These minutious and invisible efforts are essential to defuse tensions and prevent conflicts. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly remains a strong supporter of the OSCE's work on the ground, where it is most needed.

In this context, I am especially alarmed that the activities of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine continue to be impeded. As our ears and eyes on the ground, the SMM is an essential tool for impartial and factual monitoring and reporting. But for them to remain relevant, monitors have to be able to do their job. For this, they need to have safe, secured, and unhindered access throughout the territory of Ukraine. Full support is needed on all sides to guarantee this without delay. The current situation in Ukraine calls on us to find ways to de-escalate tensions and prevent additional human suffering.

Excellencies,

In the midst of the many challenges directly facing our countries, I am deeply concerned by the degradation of the situation in Afghanistan. Taliban rule is a direct threat to the lives and livelihoods of women, of minorities, and of anyone who disagrees. It has raised the threat of violent extremism and terrorism. It has dramatically increased the risk of trafficking of persons, of weapons, and of drugs. With winter taking hold, there is a need to prepare for a calamitous humanitarian crisis.

The potential spillover of instability should concern all of us. And once more, international solidarity is urgently needed to avoid a disaster. We cannot let a few countries bear the brunt of a new exodus. Turkey, in particular, is already host to the largest refugee community in the world. If we are truly committed to collective security, we need to be serious about sharing responsibility.

Ministers,

It is an immense privilege for me to speak to you today and to carry the voice of hundreds of parliamentarians. Despite all the constraints of the pandemic, we have remained strong advocates of the OSCE delivering as a whole. I thank you for recognizing this crucial role in the texts that have been negotiated ahead of this meeting.

In the coming months and years and looking ahead to the fiftieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, rest assured that the OSCE PA will carry on with our mission. The OSCE PA will continue to support principles-based dialogue. We will continue to build trust and respect. We will contribute to define a strategic vision for the OSCE. And we will continue to generate the political support necessary for our Organization to reach its full potential. We do this in support of the three dimensions to promote a secure life for those who have elected us as members of national parliaments and it is our obligation as MPs.

You can count on us. The OSCE PA is ready to support your work and co-operate with you.

Thank you very much, I wish you two fruitful and successful days here in Stockholm.

Thank you, Madam Chair.
