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Permanent Mission  
of the Republic of Poland  
to the Organization for Security  
and Co-operation in Europe  
in Vienna



**ADDRESS BY THE OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE  
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
H.E. ZBIGNIEW RAU**

**OPENING SESSION OF THE TWENTY-NINTH MEETING  
OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL  
(Łódź, 1 and 2 December 2022)**

*Distinguished President Duda,*

*Distinguished Madam President Cederfelt,*

*Distinguished Ministers,*

*Madam Secretary General,*

*Excellencies,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In the moment when Russia unleashed its military aggression against Ukraine **our comfort disappeared.**

But I am confident that this awful tear in the fabric of our cooperation, the painful hole ripped in our trust and confidence can be repaired.

We are living in a time of trial.

The hard won **world of multilateralism has been trampled underfoot** by unilateral choices and deeds against the multilateral framework we had designed and nurtured for decades.

Those choices put into question what we had known as our world with:

- its carefully crafted and interconnected treaties,
- and a raft of skilfully worded international law that codifies and describes our highest aspirations for respectful, peaceful co-existence within and beyond the OSCE.

Since 24 February the international community and its institutional networks have been constantly tested.

Tested by an aggressive Russia, supported by an autocratic, subservient regime in Minsk. A Russia following an ill-advised policy of the **primacy of power over peace for its own people**.

This strategy seems to have failed, as of course it must.

The international community has stood up to the test.

Voting outcomes at the United Nations General Assembly are proof of that failure, as are the decisions of the Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe, several other institutions, and the most recent example – the vote in the European Parliament.

And so, while working in and for the OSCE we must **watch our compass, and the beacons that have served us well** – those of Helsinki, Paris, and those following – to preserve our orientation and resist the turn toward chaos.

Our response to such disrespect of our rules of behaviour must, and has been, immediate, firm, loud and clear.

Faced with an unprecedented crisis, I and my Chairmanship team, have shouldered the **responsibility of defending the OSCE's principles and**

**protecting its assets**, namely its institutions, activities, projects, and – not least – its achievements.

I could not have chosen any other course.

We were and are guided by the spirit of the Helsinki Accords.

Our initiative for a Renewed European Security Dialogue was framed and informed by that wisdom.

However, the gap between our aspirations and the actual state of play grew, reaching a point of no return due to the Russian leadership's imperial ambitions.

Those ambitions did not leave room for negotiation.

The Russian plan was to revert to war. And they did.

And then, when their *Blitzkrieg* did not work, their aggression became increasingly brutal, cruel, and inhumane, tragically but inevitably leading to the committing of war crimes.

It is our legal but also moral **obligation to hold both the perpetrators and the decision makers accountable.**

The OSCE leadership, supported by the vast majority of participating States, has responded to the challenge in a responsible and thoughtful way, **standing up in defence of our values, our principles, and the Organization itself.**

To our credit we have, together, left our comfort zone driven by the imperative to protect humanity.

The OSCE is not a wartime Organization.

Holistic approaches like **comprehensive concept of security, and ideas like arms control and confidence building must be put on hold** when the fundamental principles that support those activities are under existential threat from a war of aggression.

And, of course, consensus-based decision making is sadly only workable in times of peace.

Our **response to the Russian turn towards violence has been based on a few simple considerations:**

- firstly, the broker's role expected from a Chairmanship can only be conducted **honestly** if it is shaped by one's principles.

This means that a perpetrator of violence and their victims cannot be treated equally.

- secondly, the idea of doing nothing because action might create a risk for the Chair or the organization must be rejected.

The **need to act** using the available tools is all too evident, **however often unfounded accusations of bias** and non-compliance with procedures are repeated.

- thirdly, we chose an approach described as **no business as usual** to ensure that the OSCE focused all of its attention on the most demanding security challenge for decades.

But also, to pause, and so preserve as much of the OSCE's other activities as possible, for the benefit of their stakeholders and the Organization itself.

One might say that the OSCE has failed to prevent this war. And, perhaps it could have done better.

But the **gradual erosion** of arms control compliance and the ever more **disingenuous engagement** in confidence building has been happening for the last 10 years at least.

It was one participating State that was slowly degrading the OSCE's available tools in Ukraine – by dismantling its working methods and questioning its presence in the field.

Signals were sent in an attempt to prevent the war by many. By some well in advance, by many more as the threat of war increased.

And all were rebuffed by one. **Once so decided by the aggressor the war could not be stopped.**

Some might also be tempted to claim that the Chairmanship has failed to build consensus around the OSCE agendas, the adoption of a budget, or the nomination of the 2024 Chair, to name just a few unresolved issues.

If you are so tempted, I would ask you to pause for a moment and consider what sort of consensus could be possibly achieved?

**A consensus that ignores the existence of a violent belligerent at the table?**

**A consensus that subverts the principles** that were agreed at the outset, and are enshrined in the founding OSCE documents?

My response to this, our response, is 'No!'.

No, we will not compromise on those things we hold to be important, in order to reach a fraudulent, superficial agreement with those who do not negotiate in good faith.

Rather we have the courage and the resolve to defend the OSCE's fundamental principles. And we have the quiet strength to be firm and stick to that choice.

We have often articulated our view that the **OSCE will be as strong as participating States want and allow it to be.**

It seems that Russia has chosen to pursue its political discourse by directly applying the nineteenth century formula espoused by Clausewitz in the twenty-first century.

Wilfully and dangerously ignoring the horror of two world wars and – to stay with a nineteenth century metaphor – driving a coach and

horses through the carefully developed rules for peaceful coexistence agreed upon in the twentieth century.

In this regard **it is astonishing to hear some of the accusations made about Poland's conduct of the OSCE affairs in 2022.**

I would even say, it is outrageous to hear Russia accusing the Chairmanship of „pushing the OSCE into the abyss”, “destroying its foundations”, and breaking its procedural rules.

Rather than disinformation and fake philosophy, let me offer you some facts:

- In February it was Russia that rejected the Renewed European Security Dialogue.
- It was Russia in March that rejected the extension of the mandate for the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.
- In May it was Russia that blocked the consensus on holding the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.
- It was Russia in June that rejected the extension of the mandate for the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine.
- It was Russia that blocked the appointment to the 2024 Chairpersonship without providing any reason why Estonia might be an unacceptable candidate.
- And finally, over this year Russia has constantly blocked the adoption of the OSCE budget.
- What else will be blocked by Russia?

I would respectfully suggest it is not Poland that is the wrecking ball swinging indiscriminately around the halls of the OSCE.

We are **handing over the leadership of an OSCE in a completely different shape** from the one it had when it was handed to us on 1 January.

This is not a matter of the Organization's leadership philosophy or priorities, but of Russia's attempts to hold the OSCE hostage.

Let me be clear. We **do not support in the long term an OSCE run in the emergency mode** we were forced to put in place throughout 2022.

But that there can be no return to 'business as it was' is clear.

And the need for the Organisation to keep as its **primary focus the war in Ukraine, for as long as that appalling tragedy continues, is also for us non-negotiable.**

For me there is some small satisfaction, and perhaps some small hope, in the OSCE discussions led by Poland, at which – time and again – states have reiterated their commitment to the principle of conducting our international relations without ever resorting to the threat or use of force.

The OSCE is still an effective and necessary, if for now limited, forum.

I believe it can in the future become again a comprehensive and important institution in the support of peaceful coexistence.

Unfortunately, this seems a rather distant perspective.

Confidence has been burnt to ashes. It is all the more important then, **for all participating States to rebuild trust based on firm premises. No matter how long it takes.**

Whatever strategies and working programs we will design for an OSCE of the future, they must have in common a reference to our founding principles.

I make no apology for repeating these to an audience that knows them well. These are **security and co-operation.**

We must **not get tired of repeating that.**

**Our security and co-operation are based on principles** that all of us have agreed upon.

We, the OSCE community of States, are the guardians of those universal values, of commonly accepted rules of conduct, and of the complete **rejection of any idea that 'Might is Right'**.

I ask you all to join me in a determination to discharge the responsibility we each have to our citizens: to be the agents of peace, prosperity, and the defenders of their human rights.

Agents determined to do all we can to **ensure civilized peaceful co-existence where the rule of force cannot replace the rule of law.**

If we choose to hold on to our values, and to renew our determination to be the agents of peace, then I know we can prevail.

And I know that the OSCE will have a place in preserving and maintaining that future peace.

*Thank you!*