



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**Report to the 30<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Council**  
**Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid**  
**Skopje, 30 November 2023**

Prime Minister, Mr Chair, Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues

This is my third Ministerial Council as Secretary General of the OSCE and it is an honor to deliver my report to you. And as we are gathered here in Skopje, the security environment we face across the OSCE region and beyond weighs heavily on us all. We have just heard from the Prime Minister Kovacevski, from Minister Osmani, and from President Kauma about the serious challenges we face – from all-out war to simmering tensions to terrorism, from organized crime and corruption to climate change, from human trafficking to gender-based violence to intolerance and discrimination.

And this organization – based on principles and commitments agreed by all participants in Helsinki nearly 50 years ago – is meant to not only address a range of security challenges but also to hold its participants to account.

I have served under three chairs – Minister Linde of Sweden, Minister Rau of Poland, and our current Chair Minister Osmani of North Macedonia. All of them have worked tirelessly to uphold and advance OSCE principles – including in the face of grave violations. I am deeply proud of having worked to serve these principles as well – as have my colleagues, Teresa Ribeiro, Matteo Mecacci, and Kairat Abdrakhmanov.

Take the work of Teresa Ribeiro – our Representative on Freedom of the Media – and her team. They provide staunch support for freedom of expression, free media, and the safety of journalists – all vital for free and fair societies.

Or Matteo Mecacci and his staff at ODIHR. They promote and stand up for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. They help reinforce good governance and provide support and expertise that bolsters a broad range of OSCE principles.

And Kairat Abdrakhmanov – the High Commissioner on National Minorities – and his team in the Hague help prevent conflict by promoting inclusive dialogue and strengthening consultative mechanisms within and between participating States.

From the beginning, we have worked in the spirit of a whole-of-the OSCE approach, and I am grateful for the excellent co-operation – including with the Parliamentary Assembly – now President Kauma and Secretary General Montella.

As I conclude the third year of my tenure as Secretary General, I want to share with you what I have learned about the Organization in these most tumultuous of times.

I have seen the stranglehold that consensus-based decision-making can bring when not paired with the spirit of compromise.

I have seen the hardship posed by the lack of an approved budget and the impact of insufficient resources based on more than a decade of zero nominal growth.

I have felt the weight of responsibility for our staff in Ukraine on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February last year: the urgent work to relocate or evacuate them; the devastation of having lost a member of staff to shelling; and the ongoing anguish over three of our colleagues who continue to be detained for their work – despite the functional immunity to which they are entitled.

There is much that might lead to disillusionment.

And yet, through all of this, I have seen how very much this Organization has to offer. I have seen how, through dedication and ingenuity, our staff have managed to deliver against the odds. And I have seen how unique and remarkable the value of what we deliver truly is to governments and communities across our region.

Part of what sets the OSCE's work apart is our ability to foster regional approaches to shared challenges. Take for instance our work in Central Asia. In Stockholm in 2021, I put forward suggestions of how to support our participating States in Central Asia in dealing with the implications of the brutal Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. You tasked me with developing a plan that addresses a broad range of the challenges across the region. So we developed a programme in the Secretariat – in co-operation with our Field Missions. And thanks to several donors, including partners, we are currently implementing 77 million euros worth of extra-budgetary projects in this context that ultimately serve us all.

The local expertise that we have built through our field presence – including here in South-Eastern Europe – is another key aspect of the OSCE's added value. For instance, while armed conflict once tore apart Majevisa in Bosnia and Herzegovina, today, thanks to the help of the OSCE mission there, the mayors of Majevisa's five municipalities are working together on economic and ecological development.

This is just one example. I could give many more. But the point is that we are delivering unique value through a regional approach. And our work has more buy-in and greater impact because of how we work with governments and due to the local knowledge and expertise we have developed over decades. And here let me pay tribute to our excellent local staff who are a key part of what makes the OSCE so effective.

We need to remain effective so that we can respond when participating States request support. In Ukraine, while we had to close both of our missions last year, we continue to support the government and society to address the impact of the war as well as to support the country's democratic institutions. This is possible due to the wholly extra-budgetary work that is being done there, with funding from 30 participating States and the European Union and a dedicated Special Representative on the ground. This supports 20 projects to address issues from the impact of landmines and the environmental effects of the war to trafficking in human beings.

I was in Yerevan last week for the Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Among other issues, I addressed the humanitarian situation facing the Karabakh Armenians who fled their homes nearly two months ago. We have followed that situation closely and stand ready to support a sustainable solution for all. Our years of experience with the conflict cycle, including in relation to confidence-building and reconciliation, can be of service here.

We offer solutions that are tailored to local circumstances and we also address challenges that affect every one of our participating States. There are an estimated 25 million victims of human trafficking per year and most perpetrators are never held to account. This is not only a human rights issue but a security issue as well, which is why – across the whole of the OSCE region – we are working with governments and parliaments to take more consistent action against human trafficking. I am proud that the OSCE is a global leader in this fight.

On the security impacts of climate change – which you all agreed in Stockholm that the OSCE should do more on – we are playing a truly unique role.

At the high-level conference I hosted in July, this was underscored by Ministers who spoke about how the OSCE has been a game changer for fostering cooperation across their regions. And by collaborating with actors from other International Organizations and by involving all parts of society, not least women and youth, we are ensuring that our efforts are not only efficient but sustainable.

I am very proud of the work we do to engage those who might be under-represented – including national minorities, youth, and of course women. We are not only combatting gender-based violence, but also promote women as agents for change, whether in water management or community policing. And through a network I launched last year, we are supporting women peace-builders and mediators from across the OSCE region as well as Afghanistan. We are helping them to improve their skills and expand their networks, because we need more women at all levels of decision-making.

There are many more examples I could offer – on cyber security, connectivity, anti-corruption, and so much more. But you know the value of the OSCE, and you know that despite the challenges we face, we continue to deliver tangible results.

As Secretary General, I am the OSCE's Chief Administrative Officer. And I am tremendously proud of the staff we have in the Secretariat, Field Missions, and Institutions. It is truly thanks to them that we are able to deliver so much value so consistently – despite the difficulties.

I have persistently sought to improve ways of working in the Secretariat and with the whole of the OSCE. And as promised at the outset, I have modernized internal policies with a focus on effectiveness, including on results-based management and evaluation. And in line with my duty of care, we revised the OSCE's internal justice system, implementing a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of harassment.

We have also finalized the Secretariat Functional Review, a comprehensive two-phase change process that involved contributions from a significant portion of the Secretariat staff. The results include many improvements to processes, systems, structures and the organisation of work across the Secretariat. All of this was delivered without additional cost to the Organization.

Where it is within our remit, we are finding ways to improve how the OSCE operates, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. Yet there is a real need for reforms that depend on you – the participating States.

When it comes to resources, we are seeing record amounts of extra-budgetary contributions; these have doubled during my tenure. And while I take this as a sign of trust and I am truly grateful to all who generously contribute, it cannot substitute for a fixed budget. And as you know, there has not been a Unified Budget adopted since 2021.

As a result, the level of resources we have been operating with has become truly unsustainable. This year, to compensate for inflation and other rising expenses, we had to set up a special fund to supplement our core operating costs. I am truly grateful to the participating States who have contributed to this fund – which is the only way we could avoid insolvency in 2023. This is no way to run an organization.

And while we are meant to align our salary scales with the UN – something participating States agreed – we are not able to do this. In some of our Field Missions, the alignment rate is barely 60%. The fact that we still have such tremendous staff is remarkable, but not sustainable. We are losing staff across the organization – people who want to support the work of the OSCE but simply cannot afford to do so.

There are ways to address these and other challenges, but we need your support.

Dear Ministers, Dear Colleagues,

As I conclude my report to you, I am more convinced than ever that the OSCE is an essential part of the security architecture.

The need for our unique contributions is greater than it has ever been.

I am proud of the work we do, the results we deliver, and the ways in which we make a difference across the OSCE region. This Organization has key instruments needed to support peace and security. This Organization brings all those relevant to security in Europe and Eurasia together around one table – including our Partners for Co-operation. Thank you again, dear Chair, dear Bujar, for hosting us all here. And thank you also for your dedicated leadership throughout this year.

The OSCE has been and remains a quietly powerful force for change for so many of our citizens across the OSCE area. It is, indeed, about people. With your support, the OSCE can be a crucial contributor to a better future.