



Check against delivery

**ADDRESS BY THE OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
H.E. MR. BUJAR OSMANI**

**OPENING SESSION OF THE 30th MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
Skopje, 30 November 2023**

Your excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

I am honored to welcome you to the 30th Ministerial Council of the OSCE. I have invited Minister Borg to join me at the head table, as on Monday at the Permanent Council, we reached consensus for Malta to serve as 2024 Chair. According to the agenda, we will formalize this tomorrow.

I am particularly glad to welcome you all to Skopje, a city known as a crossroads of cultures, faiths and civilizations.

I hope you will have a chance to explore the historical and cultural heritage of our capital and feel the sense of diversity and coexistence it nurtures.

Sixty years ago, when 80% of our city was destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake, the world rallied for support. In times of dramatic Cold War divisions, Skopje became the symbol of global unity and solidarity. Ideology and geopolitical competition succumbed, humanity prevailed.

Days after the tragedy, Jean Paul Sartre stated: “Skopje is not a film, not a thriller where we guess the chief event. It is a concentration of man’s struggle for freedom, with a result which inspires further struggles and no acceptance of defeat.”

Let us hope and strive that Skopje can once again provoke the best in us, in spite of differences and divisions. The complex challenges of war and confrontation in the OSCE area, the blatant violation of our values and commitments, the crises and enormous human suffering around us – they all oblige us to do more, to do better... to be inspired to aim higher... they all spell Sartr's words "no acceptance of defeat". At the finish line of our Chairpersonship, I send the message of hope that we won't miss our meeting with history, that we will respond responsibly to the gravity of the moment and that we will ensure a predictable and constructive future for the OSCE.

I will focus my intervention as Chairman in Office on three key messages:

Number one: The OSCE has endured and continues to deliver

North Macedonia took over the OSCE Chairpersonship in a year of active war with unprecedented threats to the European security and to the international rules-based order.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine flies in the face of all that this organization holds dear, the Helsinki Final Act, and other key documents that underpin the European security architecture and its unwavering commitment to human security.

This war undermined trust, dialogue and our capacity to deliver. Above all, it devastated the lives of ordinary people, their right to live freely, trembling with fear of war and warlike circumstances.

Within the OSCE, the dialogue on cooperation, has been replaced with a dialogue of division and polarization.

Consensus, often instrumentalized for achieving national political objectives rather than serving collective interests, has been weaponized, making even prudent initiatives distant and difficult to attain.

This complex backdrop created a uniquely challenging operating environment for the Chairpersonship. Despite this extremely difficult context, we remained resolute on our course to serve as a devoted guardian of OSCE values and commitments.

Backed by the vast majority of participating States, we managed to avoid defeatism and convene disparate voices and critical energy to address varied challenges to the OSCE's existence together.

I feel free to say that we managed to maintain our Organization's relevance and utility. All of us together managed to preserve the OSCE.

Dear colleagues:

The OSCE pivoted successfully and stands forbearing and resilient in the face of all challenges and trials.

Our Organization continues to apply its mandates where possible and when necessary. As Chairpersonship, we have engaged in all three dimensions of the OSCE portfolio, organizing the conferences the OSCE is known for, as well as, numerous relevant events that added to OSCE's visibility, sharpening the optics that the Organization continues to fulfill its mission of cooperative security.

Against all odds, OSCE continues to deliver.

The field missions continue to make a difference, offering essential practical support to all regions on the map and strengthening capacities in different participating States.

We actively engaged across regions, offering our good offices and an indispensable platform for dialogue. Despite the dark realities of conflict faced in Ukraine and the Middle East, multilateralism remains the best tool to prevent conflict and overcome differences and disputes. The OSCE, as world's largest regional security Organization, is recognized and valued as a needed and reliable partner for peace and stability.

With an eye to the future, we have prioritized and engaged in several important areas, including climate change, cyber security, anti-corruption, gender, and youth. As the world changes, so has the OSCE, and we will continue to adapt to better serve the people and live up to the Helsinki Final Act, come what may.

Number 2: We must reinforce the OSCE for the future .

While underlining the continued relevance of our work and the importance of upholding our values, our organization faced an additional burden with the lack of agreement on its leadership, including the 2024 Chair and executive structures, and its budget.

To continue building an OSCE for the future, we need strategic clarity, not strategic confusion.

As Chairpersonship, we left no stone unturned to seek and offer solutions to these critical challenges. First among these remains the Chair for 2024.

I am grateful that many participating States joined us in this quest and that the Republic of Malta has assumed the important responsibility, and with the agreement of all participating States, stepped up to fill the vital role of 2024 Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE.

Minister Borg, I salute your leadership in the OSCE's hour of need. North Macedonia, in its capacity as a Troika member together with Finland, will provide its support and experience to help make your term as Chairperson-in-Office the success we all need and want it to be.

We would like to congratulate all participating States for joining consensus in Vienna.

At the same time, I am confident that Estonia would have served as a competent and dedicated Chair and that their righteous commitment to serve as a Chair of the OSCE will come forth soon.

This organization, like any other, needs and deserves leadership. In addition to a Chair, the OSCE requires a Secretary General, a Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, a High Commissioner on National Minorities, and a Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The participating States have demonstrated their strong support for the OSCE, its structures, and mandates, but this commitment is still necessary to resolve these key questions. Without a budget, chair or executive structures, the OSCE will struggle mightily to deliver the solutions and outcomes our people expect.

The OSCE's programs, field missions, and mechanisms create confidence and trust in our common region, paving the way to greater security and stability for all of us. We cannot allow these tools, that have made a difference in the lives of so many, to lie unused due to internal inability to wield them. That is paradoxical and unacceptable, and, most of all, a betrayal of the people we serve.

Last year in Lodz, I emphasized that the weight of today's uncertainty lies on our shoulders. So, does the burden of responsibility. I underscored that if we are serious about our very own and the future of our Organization, we must act accordingly in line with our values, common purpose, and entrusted mandate.

What the OSCE offers is simply too valuable for us to fall short of our people's demands and expectations. Instead, we need a strengthened organization, refreshed, reinforced, and ready to continue meeting the real challenges we face now and beyond the immediate horizon.

We must deliver. Let me repeat: We must deliver; we are here to serve the interest of the people.

Number three: The OSCE exists for the People

As Chairman-in-Office, I have said since day one that "It's About People." Throughout the year, we spared no efforts to promote the message that the OSCE exists and functions for the benefit of its people. Our focus was indeed on the people of the OSCE region, acknowledging the OSCE's role and responsibility in facilitating human security. This concept has guided our minds and hands and is here to stay. Building an "OSCE for the people" narrative will be North Macedonia's legacy for the future of our Organization and I am glad that it has been embraced by so many.

For us as the Chairpersonship-in-Office, this choice of a narrative was neither a coincidence nor a PR stunt. When we said "It's About People" we actually paid tribute to our challenges, our history and our experience with OSCE. We have managed to build a resilient multiethnic state against all odds, in a decade and region defined by war and hostilities, due to our determination and courage, but also due to OSCE's relentless and constructive support in the most sensitive areas of human security, interethnic dialogue, rule of law, human rights... We can proudly say that OSCE has really worked for the people of North Macedonia. As we begin our Ministerial Council, I implore all of us to remember this motto, to assert its relevance and to keep our focus where it belongs: on the people of the OSCE region and what is best for them,

regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, race, color, religion, gender, sexuality, or creed.

It is our responsibility, and our duty, to uphold and implement the Helsinki Final Act. We owe this to our people, to hold each other accountable on their behalf, and ensure that their rights and security are protected and ensured.

We have seen the devastating effects of the ongoing aggression on the people of Ukraine and have witnessed the unacceptable carnage caused by a government abandoning the values and principles of the OSCE and pursuing its political goals through the use of force.

The OSCE must serve as an active platform for accountability in times when tensions and conflicts are on the rise.

The shocks are felt across far and wide, with diverse ramifications over human lives.

This year, we have also observed humanitarian challenges elsewhere in the OSCE region, as over 100,000 Karabakh Armenians fled their homes and homeland, with no sense of if or when they would be able to return. Safeguarding their rights and security is in line with the OSCE commitments.

The Chairpersonship supports the continuation of political processes towards a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Sustained, constructive, and inclusive dialogue in good faith is the only path toward durable peace.

The OSCE offers that platform today, tomorrow, and for the foreseeable future. We should not forget that the OSCE is engaged across the region and works towards solutions for the immediate needs of the people. We have been entrusted valuable mandates in promoting compliance and continued adherence to OSCE principles and commitments, while addressing different challenges in Eastern Europe, South East Europe and Central Asia.

As a trusted partner, through its executive structures and autonomous institutions and field missions, OSCE remains active at all levels of our societies, contributing to the comprehensive security for all.

Distinguished colleagues:

Conflict's negative impact on human security only validates the need for the OSCE, its values, and unique toolkit, mechanisms, and institutions, which exist to not only prevent conflict, but to also address its consequences.

As I stated on many occasions in the past, the OSCE can do a lot during war, but it can do even more to prevent conflicts and mitigate the fallout of armed conflict.

For these reasons, we need this Organization to foster multilateralism and facilitate cooperation, so people can live freely and enjoy normal lives.

Our discussions will be difficult. But, if I have learned something from my many years in politics it is that the most difficult discussions are the most important ones. And they can be the most rewarding ones – if we engage in them with the needed resolve and humility.

Let us answer this call together, because it comes not from me as Chairman-in-Office, but from the people of the OSCE region – the people and citizens of our countries.

Let me repeat again, It's About People. It is only about people.

Our deeds of today are the legacy of our tomorrow.

Thank you.