



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Report to the Ministerial Council

Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Bratislava, 5 December 2019

Mr. Chairperson, *Dear Miroslav,*

Thank you for your warm welcome today, and thank you for your outstanding leadership of the OSCE throughout the year. I would also like to thank your teams in Vienna and here in Bratislava, led by Ambassadors Bohac and Kirnag, for their hard work and for their dedication to our Organization.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather here today on the eve of a number of historic OSCE anniversaries.

In 1975, the Helsinki Final Act created a concept of comprehensive and co-operative security built on shared principles that helped to build trust and reduce Cold War tensions.

In 1990, the Paris Charter set out a hopeful vision of a Europe whole and free, united by a commitment to democracy and peace.

And in 2010, the Astana Declaration reaffirmed our fundamental principles and our vision of a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

So next year offers an opportune moment to recommit to our core principles, reflect on our achievements, identify where we can do better, and renew our common vision for the OSCE's future.

But we should also think bigger.

Today we face daunting new challenges that affect our common security: Climate change. Migration. And a technological revolution driven by digitalization and artificial intelligence.

The only way to tackle such immense challenges is by working together, supporting each other, and holding each other to account. Skepticism toward international co-operation in times like

ours is paradoxical. How can we find common solutions to shared problems if we are unwilling to engage with each other?

Let's take inspiration from our Cold War predecessors, who pushed for more dialogue, for more co-operation, as a way to reduce tensions and rebuild trust.

In today's polarized environment, the OSCE offers a rare platform for inclusive security dialogue where everyone in our region has an equal voice. One of our flagship initiatives, the Structured Dialogue, can help to de-escalate politico-military tensions. But its effectiveness depends on the willingness of participating States to engage in good faith, and to give it new impetus in 2020.

Dear Ministers,

We should all be proud of the OSCE's long track-record of preventing conflict, strengthening security, and promoting peace.

Our network of 16 field presences makes a real difference in people's lives by defusing tensions, by promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights, and by supporting national reform processes.

Our Institutions and the Parliamentary Assembly help participating States to strengthen democratic institutions and protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rights of national minorities.

And the Secretariat's specialized departments strengthen the resilience of participating States to challenges that undermine stability – including corruption, competition over natural resources, cyber-threats, terrorism and violent extremism, and trafficking in drugs, arms and people.

The most visible example of the OSCE's impact is in Ukraine, where we have been able to deliver because you gave us the people, the funds, and the technology we need. With your support, the OSCE has played a crucial role since the crisis erupted in 2014, when we were the only international organization accepted by all sides.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine – the SMM – keeps the international community informed about developments on the ground, including by the pioneering use of technology to supplement its patrols.

The SMM also facilitates dialogue, de-escalates tensions, and works hard to improve conditions for civilians in the conflict area. This year alone, SMM monitors have brokered some 1,350 local ceasefires to enable repairs to electric, water and gas lines serving populations on both sides of the contact line. They have also been supporting and monitoring disengagement in the three pilot areas.

All of these efforts should help rebuild trust. But for the Mission to fully implement its mandate, the sides must respect and protect SMM monitors and assets, and remove restrictions on their freedom of movement.

The OSCE also supports the Trilateral Contact Group's efforts to push for full implementation of the Minsk agreements and a peaceful settlement. Although the situation in eastern Ukraine remains fragile, right now there is a huge window of opportunity to make progress toward sustainable peace.

We must all do our utmost to support this new dynamic. The entire OSCE region will benefit. Peace in eastern Ukraine would help rebuild trust. So I hope that next week's Normandy Summit will give the sides a strong political signal to undertake courageous steps towards bringing peace to the people of Donbas. Such a signal could also offer inspiration for progress in other conflicts in our region. The OSCE is ready to support all steps toward peace.

We are also ready to respond to participating States that want greater OSCE engagement. We see this now in Central Asia, where a new spirit of openness has created new opportunities for co-operation. Our field offices, Institutions, Secretariat and Parliamentary Assembly are all eager to respond to requests to help strengthen security in the region and support national reform processes.

Our Asian and Mediterranean Partners also want to increase co-operation. I hope you will support our efforts to strengthen OSCE collaboration as we mark the 25th anniversary of the Mediterranean Partnership this year, and the 25th anniversary of the Asian Partnership next year.

The synergies that partnerships create enable us to promote peace and security more efficiently and effectively. Efforts to leverage partnerships with other international organizations are firmly grounded on the Platform for Co-operative Security, agreed at the Istanbul Summit 20 years ago.

We have already strengthened our relationship with the United Nations – our most important partner – resulting in more effective co-operation, significant cost savings for all of you, and closer alignment with the Sustainable Development Agenda.

Ministers,

Your presence today signals that you believe in co-operation, and that you support the OSCE.

It's clear that you recognize the OSCE's immense potential. Each year you demonstrate this by tasking us to do more.

While we are inspired by your high expectations for our Organization, frankly, they also create a burden for us.

I am well aware that resources are tight for everyone, and I continue to look for efficiencies. But the OSCE needs you to demonstrate your support.

Our unique organization – with its comprehensive approach to security, 18 executive structures, and 4,000 staff – promotes security for the 2 billion people in our region on a budget of less than EUR 240 million (including the entire SMM budget).

I was pleased that at the informal ministerial meeting in the High Tatras, many of you called for more engagement and more investment in the OSCE.

I am encouraged to see that some international organizations are moving away from declining budgets. The Council of Europe, for instance, just approved a zero real growth budget. Dear Ministers, I hope this inspires you to reconsider your OSCE budget policy. This is urgently needed to safeguard our Organization's ability to implement its mandates.

I also hope the spirit of next year's anniversaries and renewed commitments inspires you to resolve institutional issues that are holding our Organization back – issues like, for instance, the scales of contribution, and the lack of legal personality – so that we can move forward together to build our common future.

For my own part, I have taken numerous steps to ensure that the OSCE remains agile and responsive in the face of new challenges and opportunities. I have modernized Secretariat business processes and identified areas where technology can make the OSCE more efficient, secure, and effective – both in the field and in our own offices.

But more profound improvements to how the OSCE operates require your support. I am eager to work with you to transition to a bi-annual budget cycle, to improve staff contract and secondment policies, and to align our internal justice system with international best practices.

The OSCE's many contributions to security would not be possible without the women and men working in our field operations, Institutions and Secretariat. We owe it to them to provide a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment where everyone is treated fairly. That is why I am committed to zero tolerance for any form of harassment, including sexual harassment; achieving gender parity; and ensuring that our Organization provides timely and effective internal governance and accountability.

I would like to thank the entire OSCE staff for their hard work and dedication. I am also grateful for continued excellent co-operation among the Secretariat, field operations, Institutions, and Parliamentary Assembly.

I look forward to working with the incoming Albanian Chairmanship, and to supporting all of you in marking the OSCE's key anniversaries with real contributions that will inspire future generations of leaders.

Thank you.