



## **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

### **Opening Remarks at the Slovak Security Forum**

**Secretary General Thomas Greminger**

*Bratislava, 2 October 2017*

*General Director Stasselová,  
President Šinková,  
State Secretary Parížek,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thank you for inviting me to address this prestigious forum. I value the opportunity to present some of my thinking on issues and challenges facing the OSCE in these difficult times for European security. I am also fully aware of the preparations for the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship that have started in a timely way, which augurs well for 2019 and adds to my pleasure of being here with you today.

Last week I attended the high-level segment of the UN General Assembly in New York, where, as you all know, Foreign Minister Lajčák plays a key role. After following the debate in the UN General Assembly and bilateral meetings with numerous UN interlocutors and Foreign Ministers of OSCE participating States, I am more than ever convinced that we need to significantly step up our efforts to develop effective multilateral partnerships at all levels. This will certainly be a key requirement for strengthening the OSCE's ability to effectively respond to modern-day challenges that are complex and interconnected, transcend national borders and elude simple one-dimensional solutions. We are already strongly invested in UN-led global processes on issues ranging from counter-terrorism and the fight against violent extremism to climate change, migration governance or sustainable development. This trend is set to continue.

We continue to be engaged in addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine through political negotiations in the OSCE facilitated Trilateral Contact Group and through the activities of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. We are also seeking ways to reinvigorate our support for managing and resolving the so-called protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh. As Chapter VIII regional organization under the UN Charter, it is our ambition to effectively foster peace and stability within our region.

But all of our efforts must be seen against the backdrop of a larger divide that is affecting the OSCE's work in everything it does, the dialogue in Vienna and the activities conducted by our field operations and institutions. In this situation, we need to do what the OSCE was created for in the first place – a platform for rapprochement and inclusive dialogue. Only through dialogue can we hope to overcome the profound crisis of confidence that separates us.

This is a delicate task. There can be no doubt that we need to talk about the fundamental principles that have been violated and are increasingly being challenged. At the same time, there is also a growing sense of urgency to arrive at a results-based dialogue as soon as possible. There is a real risk of conflict, if tensions are not reduced, if transparency is not restored and if, for lack of agreement on their modernization, we allow our arms control and confidence and security building mechanisms to slide further towards eventual irrelevance. In this situation, shoring up predictability, stability and cooperative security through meaningful dialogue remains a central task.

Since the Hamburg Ministerial Council meeting last December, OSCE participating States are making a renewed attempt to strengthen informal dialogue on fundamental questions of European security. This process, known as Structured Dialogue is being taken forward through informal meetings, including at capitals level. There have been various sessions, including on “threat perceptions”, on “force postures” and on “challenges to the rules-based European security order.” I am pleased to note that the atmosphere has been mostly constructive. OSCE participating States also agreed on first practical steps, including a mapping of military capabilities that is set to start before the end of the year. The next meeting on “interstate tensions of a politico-military nature in the Euro-Atlantic area” will take place in capitals format in Vienna on 10 October. As you can see, these discussions are becoming increasingly concrete. As this process matures, it will be important, to focus our efforts on areas with the clear potential to gain traction in the short and medium term.

Turning to the crisis in and around Ukraine, which at all times remains uppermost on our minds, the situation is not encouraging. The ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine remains fragile at best and tensions regularly flare up, producing further material damage, suffering and casualties. The work of the Special Monitoring Mission faces regular obstacles and the security of our monitors is a constant worry, not least since the tragic death of one of our paramedics on 23 April. Meanwhile, the implementation of the security and political commitments made in Minsk has reached an impasse and discussions on the proposal for a UN peacekeeping operation in Ukraine could further distract the sides from their responsibility to implement their obligations under the Minsk Agreement. Having said this, the OSCE stands ready to engage with the UN and a possible assessment mission, should any progress be made on bridging the Ukrainian and Russian positions in the coming weeks and months. So far, prospects for such an understanding seem remote.

The Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine is easily the biggest and most complex OSCE field operation. We were able to rapidly deploy back in 2014, because we are a field based organization with the necessary experience and central structures in the Secretariat to support an extensive network of field presences. Some field operations such as the SMM are engaged in conflict management, others work more broadly in promoting OSCE principles and commitments based on our comprehensive concept for security. It may not be widely known but some 80 percent of our staff work in our field presences in South East Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. They are constantly adapting to a shifting environment and it is one of our foremost tasks to make sure that their assistance, visibility and impact remains attractive and useful to all OSCE participating States.

Beyond our efforts to address the crisis in and around Ukraine, the broader question of how our Organizations makes best use of its various tools to add value on the ground will be a key topic for discussion for participating States in the coming period. The OSCE was established over 20 years ago and it may be time to reassess how we use our resources and how we can

increase our impact through greater strategic coherence and in partnership with other relevant actors. I have taken up my duties as OSCE Secretary General in the firm conviction that OSCE is well positioned to do more to prevent crises from turning into conflicts, and to confront transnational challenges. But in this difficult security environment, we will only succeed if we manage to intensify our efforts to protect and uphold OSCE principles and commitments and seek comprehensive, co-operative and coordinated solutions. So, looking at the next couple of years, I think we have our work cut out for us.

Finally, a few words on the upcoming Slovak OSCE Chairmanship, which officially starts in 2019 but, in effect, will already implicate Slovakia from the beginning of next year as member of the OSCE Troika and as Chair of the Contact Group with the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation. In particular, the Mediterranean dossier illustrates the importance of working closely with the preceding Chairmanship, in this case Italy, which will be at the helm of our Organization next year. Unrelated to the upcoming Chairmanship, Slovakia will also chair the Forum for Security Cooperation in the first trimester of 2018, which is assumed on a rotating basis. As a result, 2018 already holds very important responsibilities for Slovakia, which is more than just a practice run for 2019.

The coming two years will certainly also offer renewed opportunities for Slovakia to champion a topic which is emerging strong on the OSCE agenda largely thanks to Slovakian leadership, including as Chair of the Group of Friends on Security Sector Governance and Reform. Your commitment to promoting discussion on a coherent OSCE approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform has not gone unnoticed and has become a sort of brand name associated with Slovakia in the OSCE. It demonstrates how smaller countries like Slovakia or Switzerland can help shape the agenda of the Organization.

At this point let me thank you for your readiness to take on this important responsibility in these extremely challenging times for European security. As we approach the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship, I look forward to working closely with Foreign Minister Lajčák and the Slovak Government.

Thank you for your attention.