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2020 OSCE Annual Security Review Conference

“Building Stability Through Dialogue”

Vienna, 23 June 2020

Opening Address

OSCE Chairperson-in-Office
Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania
H.E. Edi Rama

Checked against delivery

Dear Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you this afternoon at the 2020 Annual Security Review Conference. Even if we cannot meet in person.

It is now six months into Albania’s OSCE Chairmanship.

We have managed to navigate the restrictions and complications of COVID-19 to keep discussions in Vienna alive, and to keep the activities of field operations going.

And we have had some common achievements - including a much-needed increase in the budget of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

But these accomplishments should not give us false hope.

All is not well in the OSCE.

We all celebrate Helsinki, Paris and Porto - and the broader body of OSCE commitments - as a success of multilateralism.

They are a foundation of the international system we depend on.

But a sledge-hammer is being taken to these foundations.

Our cooperation is faltering due to a lack of trust.

And that trust is lacking due to the breakdown in our dialogue, and due to clear and repeated disregard for our principles and commitments.

This is affecting the very fundamentals of our Organization and our shared security.

Because without respect for what we have collectively undertaken, and without a genuine commitment to conversation, we cannot hope – or expect - to foster a more stable and secure Europe.

So it is clear to me. And it will be clear to you.

We need change. And now.

Yet I see unwillingness among us participating States to seriously reflect and accept responsibilities for the current security situation.

I see reluctance to use influence or imagination to make a difference and foster closer cooperation.

Instead, regretfully, a culture is becoming entrenched where most time is spent calling out the actions of others. We trade assertions and statistics.

That scrutiny and evaluation can be important for ensuring accountability and encouraging compliance.

But shouldn't we be dedicating as much time to conceiving, to proposing and to underlining actions that could actually fix the situation?

Over the next three days, I urge us all to start thinking – as much as possible, and with as much genuine effort as possible - differently.

Let's not merely share our "reviews" of the current context as the title of this conference suggests.

Let's be bolder.

Let's openly propose. Let's openly discuss. And let's openly confront how we could strive to improve things.

How we can build more stability through dialogue, and be more forthcoming in our dialogue.

How we can put the OSCE on a path to recovery. Yes, to recovery.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to share my own reflections in four areas.

Firstly, on COVID.

The crisis has hit all of us hard and reminded us of our vulnerabilities.

We can and will reflect on its security implications as an Organization.

But it should not become something that distracts from our focus on existing commitments, nor the longer-lasting, fundamental issues facing us.

Secondly, on the conflicts which continue to claim lives, exacerbate the hardships of the civilian population, and take an especially heavy toll on women and children.

I echo the UN Secretary-General's urgent call for a global ceasefire.

Now is the time to pull back from hostilities and put aside mistrust and animosity. We need to act in a spirit of solidarity.

In February, I paid my first visit as Chairperson-in-Office to Ukraine, where I saw first-hand the work of the OSCE on the ground.

At the time, I was upbeat, given recent progress, including at the December summit of the Normandy four in Paris.

I have stayed continually apprised about the conflict, but am concerned by the lack of further improvement.

We say it time and time again. We need to see full respect for OSCE principles and commitments and full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

To support that, credible and substantial discussions through the Trilateral Contact Group format need to be reinvigorated.

And they must build on the established practice that has so far allowed the Trilateral Contact Group to make progress, despite the difficulties.

I urge the sides to take up their responsibilities, relying on the OSCE as the mediator.

The focus must be on the timely implementation of commitments that have been undertaken.

A full and comprehensive ceasefire is crucial.

We must put an end to the unacceptable civilian casualties and hardships.

So we can regain momentum and press on towards a sustainable resolution.

I mentioned earlier the increased budget and renewal of the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission as an important achievement of our Chairmanship so far.

But the work of the Mission is seriously hindered.

The SMM needs to have safe and secure access throughout Ukraine, in line with its mandate. The additional restrictions placed on their movement during the pandemic must be lifted.

The Mission must be allowed to do its job and must be given the respect it deserves.

That will ensure that the dedicated staff of the SMM can continue to deliver for our security, for the people affected.

Like all of you, I sincerely hope to see further progress on Ukraine in the next months.

So I call on all of those closely involved to engage constructively to enable this.

But this is not the only conflict and crisis in our region.

There are other places where our Chairmanship urgently seeks to see progress.

The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group continue to spearhead the OSCE's efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The important work of my Personal Representative, including OSCE monitoring exercises, has my full backing.

The OSCE is also supporting the Geneva International Discussions to de-escalate tensions, provide for dialogue, and help meet the needs of people on the ground.

Managing and resolving conflicts requires us to never lose sight of the human consequences of conflict, like displacement, isolation, and the loss of human life.

In the Transnistrian Settlement Process there has been continuous commitment by the Sides to make progress and achieve results. It shows us that political will and effective mediation - finding shared interests and benefits - can identify and implement resolutions to conflicts in our region.

We must strengthen the tools at the OSCE's disposal to prevent conflicts. To stop these horrors occurring in the first place.

That includes strengthening border security, reinforcing human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, institutions and the rule of law, and enhancing access to justice.

It means taking an inclusive and gender-sensitive approach, reflecting on the interests of all our people, to maximize the likelihood of sustainable peace.

And the OSCE must also continue to pay special attention to women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 – what better way to mark it than redoubling our efforts to promote an enabling environment for women's meaningful participation?

The third area I want to reflect on are transnational threats.

Terrorism and organized crime in the OSCE claim more lives and cost our economies more than conflicts. They sow instability and erode public trust in our institutions.

That is why our Chairmanship has placed this topic higher on our agenda at this Conference.

The OSCE has gone without a new commitment on terrorism since 2016.

It is hard to justify why - the threat hasn't faded, and the UN has agreed new resolutions in this time.

It is time for progress. So that the OSCE keeps pace and continues to offer a credible contribution - building effective partnerships and strengthening our States' capacities.

From preventing violent extremism, to addressing the threats posed by foreign terrorist fighters, use of the internet, and terrorist financing.

Organised crime is another area Albania wants to place extra emphasis.

We speak about "transnational threats" in the OSCE's first dimension, about corruption and good governance in the second dimension, and about effective democracy and the rule of law in the third dimension.

These institutional divisions should not stop us from taking a more holistic view of the impact of organized crime in our region.

You cannot tackle crime in one area alone, but must look across the whole cycle – from prevention, to investigations, to criminal justice, to rehabilitation.

And we must not forget that organized crime remains principally motivated by financial gain.

So we must be more coordinated in going after the profits and proceeds of crime - seizing, confiscating and recovering criminals' assets.

Our vigilance must also extend to cyberspace.

Because with increased connectivity comes increased inter-dependence.

So we all have an interest in enhancing cyber security across our region, including by implementing the OSCE's confidence-building measures.

Fourth and finally, I want to reflect on our arms control frameworks, which are essential tools for our peace and security.

These require trust. Without this, they seem to be faltering in front of us.

The OSCE has a proud record of confidence- and security-building measures – including the Vienna Document 2011.

Such commitments need protecting. They are not irrelevant. But to cope with a changing landscape, they need to be updated.

So I ask participating States not just to rally behind the OSCE's arms control measures.

But to modernize and reinvigorate them, to prove they still have a part to play in ensuring transparency and risk reduction.

This may not be an easy path. But we have the means.

We must use formats like the Structured Dialogue to have a frank discussion and allow for innovation.

And, where we can, look for further steps forward to build confidence and strengthen compliance.

The same goes for OSCE action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

I encourage participating States' to continue supporting measures that promote effective export control, destruction of surplus, stockpile security and trafficking, as well as education and public awareness.

Dear friends,

Consensus in this organisation is scarce.

But it will be no easier to arrive at consensus if we simply lament the state of affairs and just point the finger at others.

Our politics may tempt us to do that. And we may feel comfortable doing that.

But we serve our people, and they need more from us.

We need fresh ideas and renewed intent.

We need to rediscover the art of effective mediation.

We need the desire and ambition to fight for compromise.

And we need genuine dialogue – an actual conversation based on respect, not just presentations and counter-presentations. Not just statements and counter-statements. Blame and counter-blame.

If we can adopt a more pro-active mentality, then I am confident we can turn things around and improve security in the OSCE space.

Let me conclude by thanking you all for being here today – we count on your support in that honourable mission.

I wish you a successful conference.