

Tirana Ministerial Council
Closing Statement by the Chairperson-in-Office
H.E. Edi Rama
4 December 2020

Colleagues,

It now falls to me to bring an end to the 27th OSCE Ministerial Council.

It was two years ago in Milan that Albania was chosen as the 2020 Chairmanship - I recall that at that time none was really keen to do so!

Now too many are lining up wanting to be Chair. And let be honest: When we started in January, the expectations you had for us weren't that high to say the least. We knew that.

Because this is quite a tough Organization to manage. Not fun!

And Albania being new to this level of international responsibility, with all the stigma that unfortunately still comes with just the name in the eyes of some, wasn't really what could excite your senses.

A young democracy, often able to get stormy and far from having the diplomatic firepower of most countries before us in this chair. The odds were stacked against us.

At the start of the year, I set out three objectives:

- To implement our commitments together.
- To make a difference on the ground.
- And to build stability through dialogue.

We aimed high, challenging ourselves to make not just an impression, but an impact. But we also kept ourselves down to earth while embarking in this quite challenging new adventure for a country like ours - the very last to join OSCE by the way and really very much later than the last previous ones.

And then, just a little time after our start, boom, the pandemic introduced its scary self among all of us. We had to work from home, behind screens, deprived of the ability to meet face-to-face, which is so crucial to diplomacy and deal-making processes.

But still we had to keep going. Keep doing this job that meant so much in the history of our relations with the outside world.

Once upon a time, but yet in our lifetime, we were the North Korea of Europe and suddenly we had to lead, through a pandemic, such a large world organization.

So the odds became even worse.

But we dealt with it, and succeeded to make progress I must say - a not at all obvious progress for anyone. We negotiated an increased budget for the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. We implemented new ways of working for the OSCE, with a quick transition to hold our discussions and take Decisions online. We did that before the UN and others adapted and it is not a little thing I believe.

Then, in July, boom, we lost the OSCE's management. No consensus about the whole secretariat and yes, precisely Albania, had to assume more responsibilities than any Chair before.

We had to empower the capable deputies to step up and to step in ourselves where it was needed to.

The odds were well and truly against us.

Then, boom, Belarus came.

Suddenly the much more highly reputed megastructures, namely EU and NATO to just mention two, seemed useless behind the barricades between the west and the east of our organizational map. Therefore, our organization popped up in the eyes of everyone as the only address to address the huge concern about the despicable disruption of our values and principles in Minsk.

We tried to help. But our offer was not taken.

We rightly allowed for the report of the Moscow Mechanism to be heard. And its recommendations to be considered. Far from ideal but more than nothing!

This regional situation was followed by another boom!

The fierce fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context added to the other complex situations we had to handle - from the crisis in and around Ukraine, to Georgia, to the Transdniestrian Settlement Process.

Clear, new hostilities made the conversations in the OSCE even more tense and divisive. But we listened carefully to all sides, to find a way forward.

At this stage, everything was against us, crisis... upon crisis... upon crisis.

But we persevered, and did not let any of that stop us from working.

We had a point to prove.

We took it in all our stride.

We showed our resilience. Our ambition. Our passion.

And we have done it the Albanian way - with fire, perseverance and charm, fueled by gallons of coffee.

We learnt on the job, but we did the job. Against all the odds, we delivered.

This Ministerial Council is the happy end of our main character role in the film of this year for the OSCE. And it has been a good end I must say.

But although modesty, public domain is not my main strength, I have to say it loudly and clearly: It was a success; but it is not my success. There is a long list of people who should be thanked for the part they have played.

First of all, thank *you* for waking up and joining from across our region to contribute to our debate all the way. These two days have been a valuable opportunity to share our views.

While we could not be together, we have had 53 Ministers attending online. Not obvious frankly in these turbulent distracting times. Thank you to all of the precious colleagues that made it happen so graciously.

But let me say that that turnout demonstrates the renewed importance that we attach to the purpose and work of the OSCE. We are a diverse Organization, and we may have our fair share of disagreements. But we should never forget the potential of the impact we can make together.

Second, I want to thank your teams. Because behind everyone who has spoken at this Council are those who do the hard work, day in, day out. They have represented you admirably throughout the year.

Third, I want to thank the excellent women and men of the OSCE executive structures and field missions. They have helped us to deliver on our Chairmanship's agenda and priorities, and continue to make a practical difference despite these circumstances.

I would like to thank in particular our Special and Personal Representatives, and the Officers-in-Charge of the Secretariat and Institutions, whose advice, experience and support has been invaluable.

I also need to mention the unsung heroes of the OSCE during the pandemic - the ICT and Conference Services teams - who have kept the show on the road. We couldn't have done this without you.

Last, but by no means least, I want to thank my team - in Vienna and in Tirana.

They have overcome obstacle after obstacle. And unlike the others, they had the odds to overcome and they did. They have had to operate in the most challenging of circumstances. At a clear disadvantage compared to previous Chairmanships.

They have been apart from their families and friends, working tirelessly for months, to deliver a good result for Albania, for you, and for the OSCE.

They represent the best of Albania, and the best of the international support to Albania.

They should be proud of what they have done. I am proud of them. And I am proud and also happy to have got to know from near, thanks to the daily joint work, a great talent of our foreign service, our ambassador, Igli Hasani. No exaggeration, without him we would not have been able to make it all the way. Thank you my dear friend and let me tell you here and now, how proud I am to have had the chance to work with you.

Because, Colleagues,

This seems to be the most productive Ministerial Council in many years.

We have just appointed the new leadership of the OSCE, who I am pleased to welcome to the Ministerial Council:

- Helga Schmid as Secretary-General;
- Matteo Mecacci as Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights;
- Kairat Abdrakhmanov as High Commissioner on National Minorities; and
- Teresa Ribeiro as Representative of Freedom of the Media.

We have also appointed a new Chair for 2023, our close friend and neighbor, North Macedonia.

The Chairmanship is not an easy task. So, I truly admire their determination to take it on and show that the countries of South East Europe have growing international ambitions. Isn't it great that the traditionally disturbing Balkans are engaging and delivering in cooling things down in such a large space like the one OSCE covers?! I hope this will also help to change for good the mind of some esteemed EU colleagues, who are great people, likeable friends, but who still have some shady thoughts about us, Balkan folks!

With this new leadership, and a succession of Chairs in place for 2021, 2022 and 2023, the OSCE is firmly back in business with full options.

This Ministerial Council has also just agreed several new commitments: on combatting transnational organized crime, on countering corruption, and on preventing torture in the OSCE region.

We have therefore delivered much-needed progress in all three dimensions of the OSCE's security. That has been no small undertaking.

And we have delivered on our ambition to promote gender equality. With a gender balance in the Top Jobs. Leading a fully gender balanced government, which is among top 5 in the United Nations in that regard, I am very proud to leave as a mark of my Chairmanship the fully gender balanced secretariat of the OSCE. And to say, I wish Albania will have in coming times a woman in the top job, but it is great that OSCE already has it now! Together, Anne Linde as Chair and Helga Schmidt as the OSCE Secretary-General, will have a great duo on top during the whole next year.

We have also agreed a Declaration encouraging deeper cooperation with our Asian Partners as well as a joint statement on the 5+2 talks on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process.

The Minsk Group co-chair countries - Russia, France and the United States - also issued a statement yesterday, which calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue fully implementing their obligations under the 9 November arrangement.

Now is the time to take advantage of the ceasefire to negotiate a lasting and sustainable peace, under the auspices of the Co-Chairs.

In a very personal note, I leave with you the humble suggestion to take the call of minister Lavrov for putting together an informal group and starting a constructive open minded discussion on how OSCE should foresee its future, by engaging in a reform that will better prepare the organization for the challenging times ahead. There is a lot to be kept, but there are also things to be rethought and reshaped within the mechanics of this huge structure. OSCE came in life when the world was a very different one, but still the divisive lines between the founders were immense. But they made it happen. Let start from there, as an example of the good will to change for the good of all our people, from Vancouver to Vladivostok and let not forget that compared to that time, the threats we all face are much bigger than the threats from within. I know, I know, the bunch of issues that divide us within is far from irrelevant, but still, let not refuse to see beyond them and to find the way to build a new togetherness when it comes to face common threats.

And don't forget, this thought is coming not from someone who leads a disengaged country, all the contrary. We are proud members of NATO and we fight every day to become one day a proud member of EU, despite the sometimes regretful moments we have to experience after the EU Council does not deliver what we have deserved through hard work. But nothing can change our mind about our devoted work to become part of the EU family and nothing will change our heart in being devoted to the relation with the United States and the EU, by always aligning with them when it comes to our foreign policy. And still there is an old elephant in the room, which OSCE cannot afford to not see and not talk about when it comes to build the future together.

Colleagues,

Albania may be a small country, but we wanted to do big things this year. Our country has never had a diplomatic moment quite like this, here, today. If we can

deliver in the OSCE, mid-pandemic and with conflicts and crises all around us, there should be no question that we can deliver elsewhere, including at the United Nations Security Council in 2022. That is the next goal.

But today is also a proud moment for the OSCE. The Organization has given Albania so much support over the past two decades - on everything from judicial reform, to stopping the flow small arms and light weapons.

Emerging from an isolated dictatorship, to the proud democracy we are now, the OSCE has always stood alongside us.

So it has been an honor and a privilege to give a back.

No matter what your history, no matter if you are from North America, Europe or Eurasia, no matter how large or small... the OSCE is a platform through which we can all be heard. A platform through which we can make a difference, to our own security and to others. It is an Organization whose need for consensus makes it both powerful and fragile, and which needs responsible engagement from all States, to harness that power, and stop those fragilities being exploited. It is an Organization which has a place in the world. An Organization which deserves to be valued in the same way we value our memberships of the UN, EU, Council of Europe or NATO.

We are not a talking shop.

We are not a fridge for frozen conflicts.

We do great work where others cannot or will not venture.

Great work where others cannot or will not venture.

Here ends our Chairmanship journey. It has been a wild ride.

I send my best wishes to Sweden, to Ann, for next year. We will stand by your side as part of the Troika, to help you in every way we can.

Colleagues,

Thank you for your attention, and for joining us in Tirana.