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**Address by the Special Representative
of the German OSCE Chairmanship
Dr. Gernot Erler, Member of Parliament
On the occasion of the OSCE Conference on the Code of Conduct
Federal Foreign Office, Berlin
2–3 June 2016**

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues from the parliaments of the OSCE area,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to this conference on the Code of Conduct on politico-military aspects of security.

As Special Representative of the Federal Government for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2016, and most especially as a member of the German Bundestag, I'm delighted that so many of you have come to the Federal Foreign Office.

My connection with the central theme of this Conference goes back some time. When the OSCE Code of Conduct on politico-military aspects of security was adopted in 1994, I had just become Chairman of the Bundestag Subcommittee on Disarmament, Arms Control and Nonproliferation.

My predecessor – and this of course was a great honour for me – was Egon Bahr, the architect of Germany's Ostpolitik and policy of détente, who sadly died last year.

Disarmament questions were always crucially important to Bahr and his policies. Among other things, Bahr was a member of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues chaired by Olof Palme in the early eighties. Almost 25 years ago now, the Commission's final report stated:

“In the modern age, security cannot be obtained unilaterally. Economically, politically, culturally, and – most important – militarily, we live in an increasingly interdependent world. The security of one nation cannot be bought at the expense of others.”

Back then, the Palme Commission mainly had the threats posed by nuclear armament in mind. However, faced with new and seemingly ever more complex challenges to our security, the

Commission's conclusion that these challenges require complex answers, international cooperation and a comprehensive understanding of security is still right today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Many of you are elected representatives of the people in your home countries. Our responsibility as members of parliament hasn't remained untouched by these changes.

Far more than 25 years ago, international issues reach into all areas of society today. Our economies are just as globally interconnected as our media today. Nor is it possible any more for us to tackle the challenges to our internal and external security at national level alone.

The OSCE Code of Conduct, whose current significance and possible further development are the focus of this Conference, is aimed at anchoring parliamentary oversight of armed, police and paramilitary forces and intelligence services as an unalterable element of stability and security, not only at national level but also across national borders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this respect in particular, the Code of Conduct has recently gained an unexpected – and also regrettable – relevance. For a long time, the Code's main significance seemed to lie almost exclusively in the domestic sphere. The demand for democratic oversight of the armed forces as well as the protection of the democratic rights of its respective members were central here.

However, the recent conflicts in the OSCE area have shown that the provisions on the security relations among states and on restricting the deployment of national armed forces in war have, unfortunately, lost none of their relevance.

Even more than 20 years after its adoption, the Code of Conduct is thus a surprisingly modern and innovative document. In six short pages, it contains the most comprehensive compilation of OSCE norms on regulating the deployment of armed forces within and between states. Most importantly, the demand for democratic oversight of the armed forces is codified for the first time here in an international document. For us Germans, this demand stems from the painful experiences and catastrophes of our recent history and is therefore also directly anchored in our Basic Law.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is thus fitting that two motions on the deployment of German armed forces abroad are being discussed, as we speak, in the German Bundestag, a mere two kilometres away.

One topic – and I quote the title of the motion – concerns the “continuation of Germany's participation in the international security presence in Kosovo”.

For almost 20 years, the German Bundestag has been overseeing and monitoring this mission as part of its parliamentary role as the body that decides on and monitors the deployment of German armed forces abroad. Significantly, this role allowed it to generate the necessary acceptance for a deployment that was initially viewed extremely critically by the German public and indeed by parliament itself.

The second topic being discussed today by the Members of the German Bundestag involves the continuation of the participation of German armed forces in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), now in its tenth year.

These examples show that decisions by our parliaments on the deployment of armed forces now have an impact that goes far beyond both national and European borders.

As members of parliament, we are thus no longer merely responsible to our national electorates.

And in order to live up to this responsibility, particularly in an age of new conflicts in Europe and its neighbourhood, we need to seek and foster dialogue with all stakeholders who can help to bring about understanding, build confidence and achieve peaceful solutions.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its German members are exceptionally active in this field. Particular credit goes to my colleague Doris Barnett, who I am pleased to say is here with us today, for her role in establishing dialogue this year between members of parliament from the various conflict regions in the OSCE area, with the aim of promoting trust and transparency.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dialogue at events such as today's conference is also important in order to ensure the consistent implementation of agreed norms and undertakings and to work together on their further development. International crises seem to be becoming ever more complex these days, in part because it is often increasingly difficult to distinguish between the national and international levels of conflicts.

And as a result, the Code of Conduct is also becoming more and more significant as an important reference document in dealing with these challenges. The more closely and comprehensively parliaments monitor the armed forces and the more we as members of parliament are aware of our responsibility for international security and stability, the sooner we will have the potential to prevent crises or resolve conflicts before military clashes and threatening scenarios arise.

Is that always easy? No. It is not easy at national or international level. But in the Code of Conduct we have a document that has proved its worth for over 20 years now and enables us to bring about a better and more secure future.

However, in order to be able to do so, the Code of Conduct must constantly be reviewed and assessed, and new objectives need to be agreed.

This conference on the Code of Conduct will provide an ideal opportunity to reach these aims, that is, to review the tasks we have set ourselves in this instrument and to define the objectives that we want to and can achieve with it.

The emergence of new players, such as private security firms, in the security field and the need to monitor them, has posed new challenges for years now. This is why a transparent exchange of information at international level is important and useful.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A few years ago, Egon Bahr, who spent his entire career dealing with the topics of disarmament and the monitoring of military force, was asked how highly he rated the chance that humanity had a future, given the large number of global challenges, such as climate change, extreme differences in income levels in the world and the continued high level of armament.

And Egon gave one of his typically concise and cryptic answers. He was an irredeemable optimist, he said, and thus came to the following conclusion:

“There is a fifty-fifty chance that the world will survive. It’s not more than that, but we do have a chance.”

Although this may seem somewhat pessimistic today, we should bear in mind that the military threats to our security have actually increased since then, leading to new challenges in the field of parliamentary monitoring of the armed, police and other forces.

This is why I would like to encourage you to use this conference to look back in order to see where we started and where we are now; to look to the side in order to inform yourselves and others and to discuss national options, obstacles and expectations; and to look to the future in order to define the target coordinates using concrete ideas and thoughts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As this year’s OSCE Chair, we want to play our part in enhancing the Organization’s proven instruments, which have helped bring about greater security in recent decades via transparency and confidence building, and to adapt them to the challenges of our time. The Code of Conduct is one such instrument and a key component of trust and security at national and international level.

Our discussions today and tomorrow, and if necessary during the boat trip to which you are cordially invited, will give us the opportunity to explore the importance and further development of the Code of Conduct.

I invite you to do so and thank you for your willingness to come “on board” in order to “harden and strengthen our ship” – the OSCE – as Foreign Minister Steinmeier put it at the last OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade.

I would like to welcome you all once again. I hope you have a productive conference and wish you a very pleasant stay in Berlin.