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Renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust, restoring security

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I am pleased to be speaking to you today for the first time in my capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE and to present the programme for the German Chairmanship.

We had organised a lively event in Berlin for the day before yesterday to mark the launch of this special year. We had arranged performances and discussions and invited writers, musicians and intellectuals from all over our large OSCE area to take part. And then? Then a murderous terrorist attack in the heart of Istanbul claimed the lives of ten Germans on Tuesday morning. Many more people were injured. I had to leave our opening ceremony to attend a special meeting of the cabinet.

This terrible attack showed us that the cancer of terrorism does not spare anyone. This form of barbaric and cowardly murder poses a threat to all the OSCE states and beyond. We in the OSCE stand resolutely side by side with Turkey.

We firmly believe that we must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by murder and violence. On the contrary, we will increase our resolve to tackle terrorism together at all levels. This includes our conflict de-escalation endeavours, the deployment of the police, the use of the rule of law and efforts to overcome murderous ideologies in young people's minds.

To this end, the OSCE is already active in many areas and we have to show determination in maintaining this commitment.

We are taking on the OSCE Chairmanship in stormy times, as can be seen in the attack in Istanbul, the crises in the Middle East and the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

I firmly believe that we need the OSCE during these stormy times and these times of uncertainty and new challenges in particular. We need an OSCE that has clearly defined goals and a compass to guide it!

This compass, our common compass, is formed by the canon of principles and commitments to which we all signed up in the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and the Astana Final Document.

In 1990, at the first CSCE summit following German reunification, the host François Mitterrand summed it up extremely well:

“The CSCE remained the only place, during the years of the Cold War, where dialogue among all could be initiated and pursued. As a result it has become a rallying point, the centre of a debate which bears within itself the future of Europe and to a large extent the future of peace. (...) The method has proved its worth. Let us keep it. The principles remain, let us apply them.”

There is no doubt in my mind that we need to build on these methods once again, particularly because the conflicts in the OSCE area have seriously undermined trust and security. The principles and commitments – in all three dimensions – are and will remain valid. Taken together, they form the foundations for peace and security in Europe.

That is why renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust and restoring security are our priorities for this year.

And the same goes for our programme as it does for the future of the OSCE and of peace in Europe: merely talking about the importance of dialogue and trust will not get us anywhere – we need actual dialogue and concrete steps to build confidence.

What we don't need is dialogue about dialogue – we need a dialogue that cannot and does not want to hide the fact that key OSCE commitments were and are being broken – for example, in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. We need a dialogue that does not ignore the shortcomings in implementing our principles and commitments.

We need a dialogue that names the difficulties and challenges, but also works towards solutions. We want to do everything we can to facilitate such dialogue during our Chairmanship.

And to this end, we will need to answer three questions honestly:

- What contribution is each of us prepared to make in order to return to constructive dialogue and real security?
- Will we succeed in finding our way back to a constructive approach in all three dimensions in order to re-establish the foundations for common security and to make real decisions when they are actually needed and not only at the end of a Chairmanship? This would significantly increase the OSCE's political importance.
- And finally, how can we increase dialogue and discussion among political leaders once again?

We will only be able to answer these questions together.

The discussion with colleagues in Belgrade in December left me feeling optimistic, as it showed that there is a willingness to conduct dialogue and to discuss political topics and fundamental issues of European security.

We should make use of the momentum from Belgrade on both the political and civil-society level, for example to explore the questions in the report by the Panel of Eminent Persons in greater depth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Belgrade, I also called for the willingness to compromise. And I am very grateful to all of you for your role in approving the budget for 2016 in the final hours of last year. In doing so, all of us showed our commitment to making the OSCE able to act, and you lent us momentum for our Chairmanship.

We want to continue using this momentum.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The conflict in and on Ukraine has dominated the OSCE agenda for two years now. Foreign Minister Klimkin's presence here today underlines this. Pavlo, many thanks for coming!

The Ukraine conflict shows us two things very clearly – how urgently we need the OSCE and that we need to strengthen its capacities.

Over the past year, there was significant progress as regards military de-escalation and the withdrawal of weapons. I am relieved that monitoring by the SMM shows that the ceasefire is being observed to a greater extent since the end of 2015.

But at the same time, the SMM is still reporting clashes almost every day. All sides must now observe the ceasefire strictly. Every shot fired and every person injured is too much! And the SMM observers must finally be granted unrestricted access to the entire conflict zone – without threats, intimidation or exceptions!

All sides must also take the other steps towards the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements without delay. At the meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group and the working groups in Minsk, headway has been made on a difficult but now sustainable political process. And I say very clearly here that there is no alternative to this process. I would like to thank Ambassador Sajdik and the chairpersons of the working groups for their hard work.

Along with our French colleagues, we remain firmly committed to supporting this process and conducting mediation efforts in the Normandy format.

The SMM observers have been deployed for almost two years now. Six hundred and sixty observers from 46 OSCE countries ensure that we have

an objective picture every day of the state of play as regards the ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. The Observer Mission at the Russian checkpoints adds to this picture – although unfortunately not to the extent I would welcome because of its restricted mandate.

I would like to thank Ambassador Apakan and all those involved in both missions for their hard work, which often takes place under harsh and dangerous conditions. I would also like to thank all those who support the SMM by providing staff, technical equipment or funding.

The SMM needs our full support. Decisions on the extension of its mandate and on a new budget will be made soon. I am convinced that the mandate has proved its worth and forms a good foundation for the SMM's work in the future. Let us thus bring the negotiations to a swift conclusion and also prove the OSCE's ability to act here.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We also want to work on settling those conflicts in the OSCE area which are still unresolved. For far too long, they have been causing human suffering and hampering development in the countries and regions affected. It's important that we don't simply accept these conflicts.

In a difficult environment, we're striving to bring about realistic steps forward in the Transdnistria conflict. Our goal remains to find a comprehensive settlement which recognises the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and grants special status to Transdnistria.

In the Southern Caucasus, it's encouraging that – despite all the difficulties – there was more discussion on issues of practical cooperation during the last rounds of the Geneva talks. This momentum must continue. We want to underpin the work done in Geneva with confidence-building and humanitarian measures. For restrictions on freedom of movement have a very concrete impact on people's lives in Georgia.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Germany will – as holder of the OSCE Chairmanship and as a member of the Minsk Group – support the efforts of the co-chairs to reach an agreement on resolving the conflict. These efforts have to be stepped up. We're concerned about the situation at the contact line and at the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. De-escalation continues to be the primary goal. That's why we support the co-chairs' initiative to create a mechanism to investigate violations of the ceasefire.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If these conflicts are to be resolved, if the consequences are to be contained and the security situation on the ground improved, then we will need a strong OSCE with strong field missions. Not only in the regions mentioned but also in the countries of Central Asia and the Western

Balkans, the missions – supported by the Secretariat – are doing valuable work.

The posts in the Secretariat established within the framework of the new budget – important as they are – will not be enough to bolster the OSCE.

Let us continue to work on strengthening the OSCE's capabilities in the entire conflict cycle – from early warning to conflict prevention, from crisis management to post-conflict peacebuilding. As stated in our programme, we want to deal with these issues within the framework of a structured dialogue process here in Vienna. Furthermore, we intend to work hard on making progress towards ensuring that the OSCE acquires a legal personality under international law.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Confidence- and security-building measures, as well as conventional arms control, are among the core issues affecting security in Europe. At a time of dangerous incidents, we have to try and avoid misjudgements and unintentional escalation.

Since 1990, the CFE Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document have gone a long way to making our continent safer. We shouldn't keep calling this regime into question but – especially in the case of the Vienna Document – boldly tackle the modernisation envisaged for 2016. To this end, we've already put forward proposals which provide a constructive basis for the discussion.

We also want to strengthen the Open Skies Treaty. We will again procure a national observation aircraft. That will ensure that Germany will soon be able to play an even more active role in the implementation of this Treaty.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Frank discussions on how we want to tackle the challenges facing us all is part of a new culture of dialogue in the OSCE.
I'm thinking here of issues relating to terrorism. At a special conference, we want to examine this issue and look in particular at the radicalisation of young people.

But I'm also thinking of migration.

Especially here, we should make use of this organisation's potential. Its geographical span and comprehensive approach make it a suitable vehicle. It's a good forum for discussion and exchange. And it's the right place to look at the social impact of migration and immigration – with a special focus on tolerance and non-discrimination. This very issue will therefore be the subject of a conference in Berlin which we are planning to hold in the autumn.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Respect for human rights, democratic governance – these are integral components of our joint security.

Questioning this would mean discarding what was achieved in Helsinki, Paris and Astana.

In the human dimension, we have established the OSCE's own independent institutions – ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media. I hoped that the importance of these institutions would be reflected somewhat more in the OSCE budget. We will work closely with all three and are planning joint events.

We should quickly appoint a new Representative on Freedom of the Media, now that it's time for Dunja Mijatovic – whom I'd like to thank for her excellent work – to relinquish this post.

During our Chairmanship, we want to place special importance on improving the implementation of existing obligations in all OSCE states. This expressly includes my own country. Germany will therefore – just like Switzerland and Serbia before us – submit to an independent evaluation which will assess the implementation of OSCE commitments in our country and to which civil society can contribute comments.

We're fully committed to the concept of security – initiated in Helsinki and confirmed by all of us in Astana – which links the maintenance of peace to the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This commitment is our shared achievement and thus a legitimate concern of all participating States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We want, indeed must, look beyond the OSCE_area in our work – for instance, to our partner states in the Mediterranean and in Asia. The joint conference with our Mediterranean partners in Jordan last October showed that the view from the outside, as well as the view outwards, can benefit our work.

It's equally important that we look inwards – to our own societies. Including academia and civil society is vital. We have to make use of the social power of culture. We made that clear at our opening event in Berlin the day before yesterday.

As holder of the Chairmanship, we want to help ensure that the dialogue between our societies doesn't break down – especially at a time when the political situation is difficult.

Economic exchange can also help build confidence. At a business conference in Berlin in May we therefore want to hear from companies how, in their view, we can improve connectivity in the OSCE area in a sustainable manner. I'm thinking here of infrastructure, transportation routes, border and customs procedures, as well as digital networks and the strengthening of good governance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The tasks ahead of us are considerable. In order to renew dialogue, in order to rebuild confidence and to restore security, we need energy, perseverance and firm adherence to the OSCE's principles.

It cannot be enough for us to simply manage the past of an organisation so steeped in history. We have to use our OSCE, here and now, to create a future in which war and violence in Europe once again become unthinkable. I therefore call on you: let's not cling to the old platitudes and certainties. Rather, let's work together to resolve the new issues which are now facing us.

I'd like to thank the preceding Chairmanships – Serbia and also Switzerland – for our intensive cooperation. And I'm looking forward to welcoming Austria as a new member of the troika.

I'd also like to expressly thank the Ambassadors of Romania, Greece and Finland, who will be supporting our work as the chairs of the three committees.

Assuming the OSCE Chairmanship is a great responsibility. I intend to make every effort to warrant the trust that you have placed in us. Now we all want to set course for the Ministerial Council in Hamburg. I'm looking forward to our journey together.