



**Statement by OSCE Chairperson-in-Office  
H.E. Edi Rama  
OSCE Permanent Council  
Vienna, 9 January 2020**

\*\*\*

Dear Secretary General,

Dear Excellencies,

First and foremost, I would like to begin by thanking wholeheartedly my predecessor, Minister Miroslav Lajčák, and by praising the Slovak team for chairing with distinction our Organization through the past, especially challenging year.

As we gather today, to begin the work of the OSCE for 2020 and to mark the start of the Albanian Chairmanship, I am confident that the path paved by the Slovak Chairmanship will serve us as a reassuring reference. It will be Albania's task, accompanied by Sweden and Slovakia, to co-ordinate our collective effort to address our common challenges. So, we are in good company!

And talking about good company, let me bring to your attention at this amazing moment for my country that 45 years ago, when the OSCE was founded, was alone - truly a North Korea of Europe - and stubbornly isolated, fuelled by hatred against the free world. More than that, Albania was the only European state to not only refuse to be part of the OSCE, but to denounce its creation, as a clear example of the "deepening moral degeneration of its members".

I was 11 at that time, a pioneer with the red scarf around my neck and today I am the Prime Minister of Albania, addressing all your distinguished excellencies as the Chairperson-in-Office of this Organization of 57 countries and more than 1 billion people - from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

What a life for my generation, in an incredible period of historic transformation for the whole world.

As I sit today in this chair, I cannot but pay tribute to all those who fought, suffered and died for Albania's freedom, and thank all those who worked hard and contributed in various ways through the long tortuous path of our democratic transition, from a brutal dictatorship to a functioning democracy - including also all those who accompanied us in that challenging path. Among them, the OSCE was one of the key presences. Thank you very much.

By the way, allow me to confess to you that I did use not to like the OSCE much. When my party was in government, it seemed to me very tough, while when I was leading the opposition, it seemed to me very soft! But, jokes aside, one thing is crystal clear: If I look back and try to imagine our path without the OSCE presence, it is just impossible. The OSCE may not be able to solve all the problems, but without the OSCE all of us here would have had more problems to solve.

I feel today the huge responsibility, as well as the great opportunity, of having to give something back to our Organization, after the OSCE has given so much to Albania, for so many years.

As Europe is scarred by conflicts and the world looks far from being in its best shape, our work as such a unique and experienced Organization, as well as the good will of all of its members, is needed even more. To be meaningful and relevant, peace and democracy must not be simply our common key words and a common horizon, but our common objectives for both the Organization and this distinguished Council. I believe that the basic principles of Helsinki – respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and defence of human rights – are still today – as they were back then – a simple and effective recipe.

That is why we have chosen **implementing our commitments together** as the motto of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship. This expression contains three main elements: First, the importance to honour our common obligations. We cannot credibly undertake new commitments if we fail to adhere by existing ones. Second, to focus on the valuable instruments that we possess. Third, that our responsibility is shared among 57; as you very well know, for the Chairmanship to advance a common agenda, a shared political vision and will is essential.

Therefore, the priorities of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship are all grounded upon our determination to start from the basics - and yes, to do them well.

Number one, **making a difference on the ground.** The OSCE has proven time and again that it can deploy in conflict and post-conflict settings, often where and when no one else can. We must promote the work of our Organization where it is closest to our people.

As the **crisis in and around Ukraine** remains the most pressing security challenge in Europe, the unique contribution given by the **Special Monitoring Mission** to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security, is essential. While there have been some encouraging signals that we applaud, the road to lasting peace, as we all know, remains long. The Albanian

Chairmanship will do its part to encourage respect for the OSCE principles and commitments and the full implementation of **the Minsk Agreements**, supporting the efforts of the **Trilateral Contact Group** and the process of the **Normandy Format**. The SMM and Ukraine will also be the destination of my **first visit**, in the coming weeks, as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

**Conflict resolution efforts** will be high on our agenda, in particular those of the **Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group** on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the **Geneva International Discussions** and related mechanisms, and **the Transdniestrian Settlement Process**. I am looking forward to working in close co-ordination with my Special and Personal Representatives and I would like to give a warm welcome to those starting their tenure, **Ambassador Heidi Grau** and **Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting**.

Albania knows first-hand the support that an **OSCE Field Operation** can provide. We must maximize their potential and expand their planning horizon, to better align with policy cycles of host governments. In the coming months we will also need to recruit a substantial number of heads-and deputy heads of missions. As we mark the anniversary of **Security Council Resolution Thirteen-Twenty-Five**, which will inspire our overall co-operation with **the United Nations**, I call upon you and your capitals to provide us with as many **qualified female candidates** as possible. Let us lead by example to **advance the role of women in peace and security**. And since my Government ranks proudly among the top five in the world when it comes to gender balance, based on my experience, I can assure everyone in this room that if more women are engaged in real work, more real work gets done.

Number two, **leveraging our acquis**. OSCE instruments play a fundamental role in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Our **Autonomous Institutions** are unique and precious instruments that add value not only to the OSCE, but to the broader international community. As we look to the future, let's make full use of these assets.

Promoting **freedom of expression and of the media** and combating **violence against women** are immediate, urgent priorities. Advancing good governance is another challenge which I am sure is felt by all my colleagues, and I look forward to marking it during a **high-level conference on anticorruption** in Tirana.

Speaking of challenges and threats, the OSCE has developed a remarkable expertise on traditional ones, and we intend to prioritize countering the spread of **small arms and light weapons** and of **organized crime** as well. Combating **trafficking in human beings** is one area where the OSCE is becoming a global player and we will maximize our action on it. Our Organization also excels in responding to recent challenges, such as **countering violent extremism**; and **cybersecurity**, with an important new set of confidence-building measures.

This leads me to number three:

**Dialogue**. I share most concerns expressed in the recent analysis of my predecessor and I believe

that it is high time to signal a response to an undeniable surge in **hate crimes and hate speech** throughout the OSCE region. Promoting **tolerance and non-discrimination** will be a major priority of our Chairmanship and I hope that we will be able to craft together a de-politicized response to this alarming phenomenon. A major appointment will be the imminent **conference on combating anti-Semitism** in Tirana, where we will also share with you Albania's proud history of saving the Jewish people; we were a country that had more Jewish people after the war than before it. We will remember together the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps of the Nazis. Let me say that the fight against anti-Semitism today is not simply about confronting it, but also addressing, in a determined manner, the relativist approach toward anti-Semitic behaviour. As a society that lives in religious fraternity, as Pope Francis said, we appreciate the value of religious harmony. To take it for granted is to endanger it, so we will share our experience with you.

We will endeavour to use all OSCE instruments to advance a mutual understanding on today's security challenges, starting from the **Structured Dialogue**, and reducing risks through our **confidence- and security-building measures**. Dialogue shall be both on policy issues, for example on **environmental protection**, as well as political, with fellow organizations such as the **European Union** and with **civil society**. Parliamentary diplomacy is essential in reaching out to our citizens, and we look forward to co-operating closely with the **OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**. Finally, since many of our challenges and opportunities stem from beyond the OSCE region, we must reinforce our platform for dialogue with **Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation** – and the current situation on our southern shores is an example of how closely interlinked our common security is. And, by the way, I am speaking on behalf of a country that yesterday was labelled as “a devilish little country in the middle of Europe” by the highest authority of the totalitarian regime of Tehran.

Our programme, crafted after talks in capitals and in Vienna, would just remain on paper without a most important ingredient: the **Albanian Chairmanship's team**. Back in Tirana and here in Vienna, we have dedicated diplomats and professionals - a truly talented and multinational team, built also thanks to the support of many partner countries, who I thank from the bottom of my heart. Headed by **Ambassador Igli Hasani**, their difficult task will be to forge consensus, working side by side with the excellent staff in the **Secretariat** and **Autonomous Institutions**.

Now, a final word about our immediate priorities.

The first negotiation ahead is the **adoption of the unified budget**. I know that this is the cause for some headache, but we believe that the current proposal is realistic and a good basis for consensus. At this point, protocol would see me call upon you to engage constructively. But that is a ritual based on a flawed assumption. We all have an equal stake in the functioning of the OSCE. I don't see the adoption of the budget – an essential step for any organization – as a “victory” of the Albanian Chairmanship. Rather, I would say it should be, and it is our collective duty towards over 2,800 OSCE staff, who serve over one billion people. I strongly believe that, while talking about the budget, we should think about them, about their families, about their

needs, which are so important for the needs of this Organization itself. And we must not fail them.

The second negotiation ahead is to secure the **leadership of OSCE Executive Structures** beyond 2020. In the coming months we will start a consultation process here in Vienna. What I can say now is that we will be open and transparent and that I am glad that all incumbents have confirmed their availability for a second mandate. This is a good thing.

Dear Excellencies,

The subtle aim of multilateralism is to keep dialogue open among a community of states, even when all odds are against. I am here, taking this responsibility very humbly, and we are looking forward simply to doing our best, by not pretending to do more than our best. I am now looking forward to hearing your voices and to beginning a dialogue which will last this entire year, and which will hopefully bring us at the end of a year to a better place than we are today.

Thank you.