



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Address to the Plenary Session

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by the Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General

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Madam President,
Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Very nice to be back in Minsk. In a relatively recent past life, I was accredited to this interesting country, and it is my first time back.

Having said that, it would have been better if not me, but someone else be standing here. We now face the unprecedented situation of the OSCE not having a Secretary General. I'm afraid it's a reflection of the current climate, where we are insufficiently able to work constructively together and think in win-win terms.

2. Talking about the Secretary General... although I will be speaking in my own capacity, I intend to reflect the spirit of former OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, for whom I have great respect and admiration. So I aim to evoke his passion in defending our essential – and yet too often underutilized – Organization, and to reiterate his calls to make it more effective.

3. Honorable delegates, we are committed to fostering productive co-operation among all segments of the OSCE, and you -the Parliamentary Assembly- play a crucial role in this. I would like here to echo Ambassador Zannier, who referred to the Parliamentary Assembly as an “important member of our big OSCE family”, which plays “a key role in promoting OSCE values, principles and commitments”.

4. Under the leadership of Secretary General Roberto Montella, our relations with the PA have entered a new era. While fully acknowledging our respective roles, we have developed constructive and fruitful co-operation. We have established well-consolidated mechanisms which are proving to be effective and helpful. Co-operation between the PA and ODIHR on election observation is becoming a flagship for the OSCE as a whole. These exchanges and common efforts have helped to ensure complementarity in our work, and have increased our outreach and effectiveness. And at this point, I would also like to show my great appreciation for the excellent work done by and the leadership of President Muttonen and her team.

5. My presentation this morning consists of three points. First, I would like to share with you some general observations on the difficult security environment we live in, and on how important the OSCE is, as a platform for dialogue, in this context. I will then focus on ways that, in my view, could make our Organization stronger and more effective, which I think is crucial at

this point in time. After which, and this is the third point, I will be calling on you, honorable delegates, to support us in these efforts in your influential capacity as parliamentarians.

I

6. We face a rapidly evolving security landscape, with growing fragmentation and polarization within our region and within our societies. Divergent threat perceptions have appeared, trust and confidence in East-West relations have diminished, military predictability has deteriorated. Inter-state relations are increasingly governed by a zero-sum mentality, and the divides within our region seem to be deepening month by month.

7. It has been said many times before, but bears mentioning again, that in this difficult environment, the OSCE is a unique platform for inclusive dialogue accepted by all parties on the most relevant security issues on the agenda. (It offers a holistic concept of how different elements of security interact and must be addressed together, and it can provide a bridge between sometimes radically different visions of what security means.)

II

8. But, Ladies and Gentlemen, the OSCE has great potential to do more. So it is time to reform, to adapt and to revive results-oriented dialogue. Current security challenges require a space for engagement: it is our common responsibility to make full use of the OSCE's potential and to help build a safer and more stable future for us all. We need to adapt the Organization to the array of challenges we face in order to address them more effectively.

9. So, what should be done.

First and foremost, I would argue that we need to have a fundamental debate on the OSCE's role in this changing world. Traditional relations are changing (between Europe and the US for example) and new developments are emerging, such as migration, and threats, such as terrorism.

In this changing environment, we need to change too, and think about how to use our unique platform in the best possible way.

And we need to look at our instruments that enable us to achieve our goals. Because, investing in and protecting the Organization are essential pre-conditions for creating the environment for the much needed dialogue.

So where do we need to adapt, where do we need to reform? How can we make the OSCE stronger?

I would like to focus on four elements:

- 1. dialogue in Vienna*
- 2. budget discussions, now more or less twice a year, instead of once every two years*
- 3. the lack of legal personality, and*
- 4. the concept of our crown jewels, the field offices.*

1. We need to reform the way we work with and engage with each other. Instead of an instrument of dialogue, the Permanent Council has become a forum for parallel monologues, and it risks turning into a forum for confrontation, whereas the Organization is meant to be – and needs – a space for genuine discussions.

(Perhaps we could build on Ambassador Zannier's suggestion of introducing a system whereby the OSCE Chairmanship rotates among participating States in alphabetical order. This could help foster a stronger sense of ownership of the Organization by all participating States,

and could increase everyone's responsibility for it. Instead of the current voluntary system, where that important responsibility is borne by a handful of participating States.)

2. This could also help our discussions on the budget, which are becoming every year more difficult. Instead of focusing on the major security problems facing our region, participating States are increasingly occupied with the daily operations of the Organization, and we lose a sense of proportion and priorities. Considering the incredible array of challenges we face and the mandates the Organization bears, EUR 140 million is an astonishingly modest budget. To put it into perspective, it is equivalent to what the European Parliament spends each year just on its own security! Several delegations in Vienna have been wisely advocating for a multi-year budget, which would not only align us with other international organizations, but would also make us more efficient and therefore more effective.

3. The OSCE's lack of a formally recognized legal personality poses a major risk to the Organization. We have not yet been able to reach consensus on this issue. As a result of this, the Organization had to resort to acquiring de facto legal personality through a number of agreements and memorandums of understanding with host countries. Just three days ago, in the PC the Audit Committee said –and I quote: “Acquiring legal personality would strengthen our effectiveness and would make the Organization stronger and more credible in all fields we operate in”. A stronger OSCE means a more stable and secure European and Eurasian space.

4. The current concept of our field presence stems from the 90's. It could use an update. We could revitalize this exceptional operational tool by investing more in providing tailored practical assistance. We could also consider opening offices with a regional or thematic focus, which could be located also west of Vienna, as well as OSCE representation or information offices to promote our work and the principles we stand for. (Of course, field operations that have been deployed in response to a conflict or to a post-conflict situation should be maintained.)

III

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me come to the third and final part of my presentation. Parliamentarians are well equipped and positioned to encourage their governments to engage constructively in the political dialogue in Vienna. The Parliamentary Assembly has already proven its extraordinary potential and effectiveness in promoting dialogue between seemingly irreconcilable sides. The OSCE stands ready to continue working on our common security and on the whole range of issues affecting it – from cyber-security to terrorism, from arms control to climate change – but we need sufficient support from your capitals for the necessary reforms and to fulfill our mandate effectively. You can make the difference, reminding your governments that the OSCE provides very good value for very little money.

As I said earlier, investing in and protecting the Organization are preliminary conditions for genuine dialogue. I urge all of you, when you return to your capitals, to use your leverage to increase political support for the OSCE for the reform it needs, advocate for strengthening the Organization's legal personality, and mobilize sufficient resources to support its work. You can help make the Organization even more effective, and make the OSCE region safer for all of us.

Thank you.