



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Remarks by OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier

6th Moscow Conference on International Security

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Honourable Deputy Minister of Defence,
Dear co-panelists,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the end of the Cold War the promise of a common and indivisible security space stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok seemed within reach. Indeed, the vision of a co-operative and rules-based order outlined in the Charters of Paris and Istanbul seemed all but inevitable. Many looked to the OSCE with high hopes and great expectations.

It is now clear that the post-Cold War order failed to provide genuine stability. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the break-up of Yugoslavia soon shattered the emerging security paradigm. Divergent threat perceptions appeared. Trust and confidence in East-West relations diminished. Military predictability deteriorated. New borders divided peoples, creating crises and conflicts whose dire legacies still affect security today.

We are now entering a new phase in relations in the OSCE space. Although we still see signs of Cold War logic, including renewed geopolitical competition and confrontation, we have left behind both the Cold War and the post-Cold War transition. But the new realignment is not yet complete. In fact, the process is still in motion, and what shape it will ultimately take remains unclear.

Today's world is fundamentally different from that of the Cold War. We now live in a multipolar, increasingly complex and interconnected security environment with many more actors, including non-state movements and groups that seek to exploit our divisions.

In many countries in the OSCE region, new national tendencies are making it difficult for governments to continue old policies. Growing populism, nationalism and even xenophobia are reactions to new trends, including more frequent acts of terrorism, the proliferation of transnational threats, and the pressures of mass migration. They also contribute to fragmentation and polarization within and between societies, increasing the risk of confrontation.

We are at high risk of being drawn into a vicious circle driven by fear and prejudice fed by a growing sense of unpredictability and uncertainty. This is creating a fragmented, polarized and confrontational environment that undermines stability and co-operation. This in turn deepens insecurity, further eroding stability.

Some of the tools and principles we developed together to ensure security and stability have not withstood the challenge of these changes. The norms and principles that underpinned the international order for decades are being contested. Some tools have become obsolete, and we are struggling to develop policies to address new challenges like cyber-threats. In this regard, we have some measures in place to prevent conflict stemming from cyber-threats, but implementation is lacking.

As the balance tips further away from co-operation toward confrontation, multilateralism is being challenged. We see this on a daily basis in the OSCE, where mistrust and confrontation are crowding out space for dialogue and co-operation.

There is a limit to what can be done if governments are unwilling to engage. It can lead to a downward spiral of increasingly hostile rhetoric, greater investment in defense, growing pressure for militarized responses, and, ultimately, heightened risk of conflict – including accidental conflict triggered by misperceptions or misunderstandings.

All of this forces me to conclude that we need to reconsider the whole post-Cold War security arrangement.

Throughout its history, the OSCE has been an instrument for stability. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was established to enable dialogue with the concrete aim of preventing war. It is high time for us to revive this kind of results-oriented dialogue. But we also need to reform the Organization to ensure it has the capacity to confront contemporary challenges to stability and security effectively.

The OSCE has repeatedly proved to be flexible and responsive. It was transformed in the wake of the optimism of the early 1990s and evolved again in response to the ensuing conflicts. Today it continues to adapt itself to address both traditional and emerging challenges. Yet throughout its history, the OSCE's fundamental characteristics have remained constant. Its comprehensive approach takes into account the interconnection and interaction of different elements of security and seeks solutions that address them together. It can serve as a bridge between sides that sometimes have radically different visions of what security means. And it continues to invest in efforts to prevent instability and conflict, and to deal with their consequences when they arise.

Unfortunately divergent threat perceptions and different interpretations of fundamental principles in this new context are undermining the OSCE's capacity to seek common approaches. As a North-South split is starting to emerge, the East-West divide is deepening not only in geopolitical terms, but also in terms of values. The West has dug in its heels to preserve the status quo, while here in the East, we hear complaints about the current state of affairs, especially in relation to the expansion of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Meanwhile, those caught in the middle of this renewed competition are being pulled in both directions.

Despite these divisions and differences, current challenges to security demand co-operation. A return to zero-sum logic is in no one's interest. We must continue to look for areas of engagement. We must be pragmatic and seek convergences of interests. We have no other choice. Otherwise the dynamics of confrontation will only continue to gain momentum and could propel us into conflict.

We can see these dynamics at work right now in the crisis in and around Ukraine. Completely different narratives about the crisis and its origins are fueling mistrust and tensions, and we see increasing pressure for militarized responses. The risk of escalation is extremely high, and it carries the potential to reignite protracted conflicts in the OSCE region and beyond. At the same time, the hybrid nature of the crisis has shown the limits of traditional crisis management tools.

Achieving a peaceful and durable settlement to the crisis in and around Ukraine is more urgent than ever. The OSCE is doing its part to facilitate the political process through the Trilateral Contact Group, and our Special Monitoring Mission is working hard to de-escalate tensions on the ground. I would like to commend our monitors for their courage and their commitment to carrying out their work in increasingly dangerous conditions. A few days ago the Mission experienced its first casualty, and I offer my heartfelt condolences to the family of the colleague who died. This tragic incident underlines the dangers that our monitors confront every day. But they also face daily hindrances to their work, and I once again call on all sides to respect the monitors' mandate and guarantee them freedom of movement and unfettered access.

This brings me to a larger point. Ultimately, responsibility for achieving peace in Ukraine lies with the local actors. I urge all those who have influence on the sides to press them harder to comply with the Minsk Agreements and to take real and substantial steps toward a sustainable peace. Millions of innocent people in the conflict region have lost their loved ones, their homes and their livelihoods. They deserve peace. They deserve the chance to put their lives back together.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My final message to you today is that we must not abandon multilateralism, and I would like to echo the words of UN Secretary General Guterres on this. To prevent crises from turning into conflict, and to confront new challenges effectively, we need comprehensive, co-operative and co-ordinated solutions. These can only be achieved through robust collective engagement underpinned by strong political leadership.

But traditional multilateralism is not enough. Today we must build flexible coalitions, mobilizing diverse constituencies who can bring in new perspectives and unique expertise to complement traditional intergovernmental dynamics.

Once again, the OSCE is doing its part. As the world's largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, we are building broad and strategic partnerships. We are enhancing our engagement with our Mediterranean and Asian Partners, with whom we increasingly share common security concerns. We are also strengthening our engagement with civil society, media and academia, as well as with less traditional partners like municipal governments, philanthropy and the private sector.

The OSCE is also intensifying its efforts to support the role of youth in preventing and resolving conflicts, countering global and transnational challenges, and building peace across our region. We need a new generation who can be a positive force for change, questioning old, divisive messages and calling for accountable and transparent government and institutions. We also continue to reinforce the role of women in all stages of conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

Reopening a space for real dialogue is key. With this in mind, in May I will convene a Security Days in Prague on “Countering fragmentation and polarization: Re-creating a climate for stability in Europe,” aiming to stimulate dialogue on how to re-create a stable and resilient security environment at a time of growing uncertainty and unpredictability and complementing the structured dialogue process launched by the 2017 Austrian OSCE Chairmanship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I recently came across a very troubling quote from Antonio Gramsci. In the aftermath of the First World War he said: “The old world is dying. The new world is struggling to emerge. It is in this twilight that monsters are born.”

These words should make us reflect. Today we seem to be facing an equally precarious transitional moment. But in contrast to Gramsci’s time, today the international community has a well-equipped toolbox of instruments and mechanisms for preventing monsters from emerging, and for co-operatively tackling monsters already in our midst. The OSCE, with its inclusive platform for dialogue and joint action, is a very relevant tool. It is our common responsibility to make full use of its potential to help build a safer and more stable future for us all.

Thank you.