



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

2026 Annual Security Review Conference

Opening Remarks by the Secretary General

Vienna, 17 June 2026

Mr Chairman-in-Office, dear Ignazio,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to address this year's **Annual Security Review Conference**. I congratulate the Chair, and **all participating States** for convening this event at a critical time for European security. Critical, because we are witnessing a deterioration of fundamental norms and principles that have underpinned **European security** for decades.

Trust between States has eroded. Geopolitical competition is intense. **Escalation risks** are growing.

The **war in Ukraine** continues to cause immense human suffering. It remains a major threat to European and global security. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be **protected at all times**, and can never be targets. This includes humanitarian workers, schools, hospitals, homes, as well as cultural and religious heritage sites.

Across the OSCE area, security postures are hardening. Dialogue and communication channels have narrowed.

Against this backdrop, States are investing more and more in **military deterrence**. Global military expenditure reached almost 3 trillion US dollars in 2025: a 30% increase since 2021, and almost twice the level of military spending at the end of the Cold War. Based on this trend, the UN estimates that global defence spending will double again by 2035.

Meanwhile, investment in multilateralism, diplomacy, confidence-building, and risk reduction continues to fall.

This imbalance reflects the **deterioration in our security environment**. But over time, it will **become unsustainable**.

I understand the need in insecure times to invest in deterrence. Hard capabilities can send a signal of resolve. But they also shape threat perceptions. And can increase uncertainty.

History has taught us that such imbalances do not produce sustainable security. Rather, they can increase mistrust and raise the risk of miscalculation.

The situation is compounded by the **pace of technology**. Artificial intelligence is advancing more rapidly than the rules governing it. Cyber capabilities and autonomous systems, including drones, have radically changed **the speed and character of war**. The idea of a fixed frontline is increasingly outdated; the theatre of operations has expanded, across both the physical and cyber domains. We see this every day **in Ukraine**. And we see it more and more **around Ukraine** too.

Taken together, these developments are making the **security environment more unstable**, and **more unpredictable**.

Against this backdrop, the network of **arms control agreements and norms** that we developed **together** over decades has been abandoned or fallen into misuse. The expiration of New START earlier this year means that, for the first time since the CSCE was founded, we are operating in a world without a functioning US-Russia nuclear arms control agreement.

Key conventional arms control pillars, such as the Treaty on Conventional Armed Force in Europe and the Treaty on Open Skies have effectively ceased to function. Their absence means that today even small incidents can carry serious consequences.

At the same time, we must be honest. These instruments were designed for **a different era**. Since then, military doctrines and capabilities have evolved significantly. Forces are more mobile, more precise, and more integrated across domains, rendering traditional arms control approaches based on static numerical ceilings increasingly obsolete.

This is why **adaptation** of our tools is necessary.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am under no illusion about the low level of trust among participating States around this table. We are clearly not in an era where we can expect significant new arms control agreements. This reflects a broader reality: the European security architecture we built over decades no longer functions.

Only **after** the war in Ukraine ends, will there be conditions that allow for a gradual rebuilding of our **Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security space**. Nevertheless, it remains **in the interest of each and every one** of us to build **a more stable and predictable** security environment, for our own security and for the citizens we represent. All participating States have a responsibility to contribute to efforts to reduce tensions and work towards a negotiated settlement to end this long and dangerous war in the middle of our geography.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our common goal remains the same as when the OSCE was established. It has not changed. But the environment we live in, which I just outlined, has changed fundamentally. This is why we must adapt.

This requires strengthening and modernizing the instruments we already have at our disposal. The Vienna Document; risk reduction mechanisms; confidence-building measures; the Stabilizing Measures for Localized Crisis Situations. These tools were designed to increase transparency, reduce uncertainty, and lower risks, even in periods of low trust and growing polarization. We need to **rediscover them**, and adapt them to the new reality.

This will require **political will**, a shared recognition of **mutual vulnerability**, and reciprocal steps to increase predictability.

And to this end, allow me to share with you a few ideas that might be useful in the coming months or years. **Five areas** where I think it is in the common interest of **all 57 participating States** to update the current framework, and adapt it to changed circumstances.

First, a **paradigm shift**. Arms control could move away from numerical balance. Because deterrence, not parity, now shapes force postures. It could instead focus on “reasonable sufficiency”. Maintaining forces sufficient for deterrence, while increasing transparency on capabilities that enable rapid offensive action.

Second, **reinforced security-building measures**. The focus could shift away from broad limitations of forces. It could instead focus on reducing and preventing destabilising behaviour. Including ambiguity, coercion, and escalation risks.

Third, strengthened **situational transparency**, to better reflect the changed nature of warfare. Transparency could go beyond static data exchange towards shared situational awareness, focusing on those elements that are meaningful for offensive action.

Fourth, **improved predictability**. Notification and risk-reduction mechanisms could be updated, to better reflect destabilizing or risky activities.

Fifth, **modernized verification**. Verification will have to adapt to the changing nature of warfare. Numerical approaches no longer capture operational realities. Building on elements of the Vienna Document, verification should better reflect capability, readiness, and mobility.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

What I have outlined are possible directions for reflection. They are not exhaustive. But they point to areas where progress **could be made** in the current difficult conditions, with trust at its lowest point, and risks at the highest, **to restore a measure of stability and predictability**.

I do not underestimate the scale of this challenge. Stability has never been built through a single meeting, a single document, or a single decision. It is built gradually. Through perseverance. Through dialogue. Through transparency. And through practical measures that reduce risk.

The coming days provide an opportunity to lay the groundwork to advance this goal. But sustained progress will require **continued engagement** well beyond this Conference. **Trust** will take time. But stability **cannot wait**.

And it is precisely in polarized and dangerous conditions that the **OSCE's stabilizing role** becomes more important. By preserving dialogue and transparency, we can reduce risks. And manage mistrust.

The OSCE remains the most inclusive and comprehensive regional security organization in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area. It is **the only** security platform where **you are all represented**. That gives this Organisation a particular **responsibility**. And a particular relevance. We should use that responsibility. To preserve dialogue. To maintain transparency. And to reduce risks where we can. We owe this to the security of our States and to the billion people across our region who depend on peace and stability.

Thank you.