



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Remarks of OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid

**2021 OSCE Asian Conference on
“Common responses to emerging challenges in advancing
comprehensive security”**

20 September 2021

Hofburg, Neuer Saal and via Zoom

Delivered by Director Luca Fratini on behalf of the Secretary General

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking Albania as this year’s Chair of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, and Ambassador Hasani and his team, for their tremendous work and for organising this event together with Thailand and the Secretariat.

This year’s OSCE Asian Conference is an excellent follow-up to last year’s Tirana Ministerial Council Declaration on the Asian Partnership.

Let me further thank the Foreign Ministry of Thailand, Ambassador Srisawasdi [SEE-SAWAT] and her team for their excellent co-operation and flexibility on the format of the event.

It is the second year in a row that we are forced to meet online.

No doubt all of us would prefer to meet for face-to-face – and enjoy real-world Thai hospitality.

Even so, we have a stimulating meeting ahead of us.

The topics chosen for us by Thailand and Albania closely align with a number of areas that we have worked on with great intensity over the past months.

COVID-19 has amplified existing challenges and presented us with new ones, be it in the field of transnational organized crime (Session I), sustainable development (Session II) or the human dimension (Session III with a focus on human rights and public health):

During the pandemic, organized crime groups have taken advantage of institutional, economic and social vulnerabilities to infiltrate the licit economy and create new avenues for profit.

This risks weakening state institutions and undermining economic development.

In an increasingly complex and challenging environment, our comprehensive and inclusive platform for dialogue and cooperation is more relevant than ever.

Increasingly, we work with our Partners for Co-operation and include them in our activities.

In the criminal justice sector, we support informal networks so that practitioners can exchange information on emerging threats and identify adequate responses.

The Permanent Conference of Organized Crime Prosecutors and Balkan Asset Management Network is a good example.

We also build the capacities of law enforcement officials, sharing knowledge and skills across the OSCE region.

And using a broad participatory approach, we promote a culture of lawfulness through education and by encouraging youth and civil society to work with state institutions to improve security for all.

Within the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, promoting sustainable development is closely tied to good governance and addressing environmental challenges, including through transboundary water co-operation, disaster risk reduction and hazardous waste management.

The OSCE also supports the efforts of participating States in advancing the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements: the Water Convention, the Aarhus Convention, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment are a few examples.

The associated activities, often in close co-operation with other international actors, promote good environmental governance in the OSCE area.

Many of our activities are closely linked to the biggest current challenge of them all.

In its most recent report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) presented alarming findings.

There are significant regional variations but no place on Earth will be truly safe from the effects of climate change.

According to the World Meteorological Organization, climate change induced disasters have surged five-fold over 50 years:

Hotter and longer heatwaves, more persistent droughts, more frequent and larger wildfires, extreme flooding events, and stronger hurricanes.

The accelerated pace of climate change requires us to better prepare for its economic, environmental and social impacts as well as its effects on our security.

Sharing of good practices and lessons learned on a wide range of issues including technology, innovation, and digitalization can be instrumental in strengthening climate resilience, sustainable growth and prosperity in the OSCE area and beyond, especially in a post-COVID era.

Five years ago, at the 2016 OSCE Asian Conference in Bangkok, we first discussed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the framework of our Asian Partnership.

It is timely that we revisit our role in this key global process during this meeting.

Last but not least, this Asian Conference gives us the opportunity to share experiences from our respective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2020, this global public health crisis has been tackled through different degrees of restrictions to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These restrictions need to be measured and proportional to the public health threat, and repealed as soon as the situation allows.

The OSCE's Asian Partnership is not closed in on itself – on the contrary.

We value this platform also as a means to share experiences and lessons learned with other regional frameworks in Asia.

I am particularly pleased to see that ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi is joining us today.

Regional organizations like the OSCE and ASEAN have an important role to play in connecting the global with the national levels to promote Sustainable Development Goal implementation.

Last year, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership largely online.

For next year I am hopeful that we will be able to revert to our established practice of carrying our joint discussion into the region of our Partner countries.

I look forward to the next time we can deepen our discussion on common challenges, and do so directly in Asia.

But for now I wish all of us a successful conference.

Thank you.