

Statement by the Chairperson-in-Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Opening of the 2019 OSCE Asian Conference

Tokyo, Japan

2 September 2019

*State Minister Toshiko Abe,*

*Ambassador Azzoni,*

*Ambassador Bekkers,*

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

I would first like to thank our Japanese hosts for their hospitality and excellent organization.

Our thanks go as well to Italy, as the current Chair of the Contact Group, and the OSCE Secretariat.

I can't even express how much of a pleasure it is for me to be back here in Tokyo.

I feel a very personal connection to Japan.

I served here as a Slovak ambassador from 1994-1998, so coming back always feels like visiting family and for a second stepping into a life long gone.

Since the time I served here, perhaps no region has changed as swiftly or dramatically.

The past few generations have produced an extraordinary period of prosperity in Asia.

It has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty across the entire region and it has fostered dynamic, innovative economies that today are fuelling global growth.

I remember that the year I came here, in 1994, the office of the Prime Minister of Japan had just established a website.

At that time, four per cent of the world's population was connected to the Internet. Now it's nearly half.

And through all these changes, the fortunes of Europe and Asia have become more closely linked than ever before.

So today for me feels like coming back to the same Japan, but in a different world.

And this new world needs to urgently address the ways digital capabilities influence our security and welfare.

Because digitization changes everything:

- the way we generate economic value.
- the way we access and share information.

- even the ways of human interaction and relationships.

It brings immense changes for the better – but also for the worse. It has made our world more connected – but not always safer and more peaceful.

I am sure there will be plenty on the agenda today and you will explore various avenues how to harness opportunities and mitigate risks – across all three dimensions of security.

The aspects of your discussions here will help to guide our Chairmanship’s approach to deliverables for the Ministerial Council in Slovakia this December.

In getting there, we intend to propose – among other things - a draft decision focused on making new technologies safer and more inclusive - and to mitigate possible negative effects of digitalization.

Today, we could not be at a better place to address these issues.

Asia is quite simply the world’s most dynamic region.

Equally as important, Asia is showing the world what can happen when you look forward.

When people overcome conflicts that seem locked in time.

This is the spirit we need, because there are many new challenges brought about by the age of digitalization.

So to start the day off, I would submit to you that we need to organize ourselves around three principles:

**First, in preparing for the future, the OSCE can help.**

Ever since the creation of the OSCE, technological development has been part of our comprehensive approach to security and stability.

When it comes to links between security and digital progress, the OSCE is already active in some areas:

For instance, to mitigate the risk of tensions between States created by the use or misuse of technology, the OSCE developed what we know today as cyber confidence-building measures with the aim to assist states in resolving cyber-related incidents before they can become a source of conflict.

But we cannot measure the age of digitalization only in speed of data transmission.

We need to measure it in human terms.

The speed of communication and instant access to information brought about new social challenges.

- ensuring online freedom of media and protecting journalists,
- eliminating the online breeding grounds for disinformation,
- or spread of intolerance and hate speech.

Some of you may have been targeted by one of these phenomena and did not know how to deal with them.

That is why the OSCE is partnering with other organizations to provide guidance to governments and civil society.

But there is always room for more.

We should explore ways to enhance digital governance and promote guidelines for the ethical and socially beneficial use of emerging technology in our societies.

And the OSCE can help.

**But we must better use platforms the OSCE offers. Which is the second point I want to emphasize.**

As we all know, ensuring security in the OSCE area goes beyond our borders.

It is linked to that of our neighbours in Asia.

In the OSCE, we have our tools and mechanisms, and we have groups of partners.

But we must rethink how we use them.

Two principles underlie OSCE's relationship with the five Asian partners: the first is the desire to share and learn from each other's experiences; and the second are the mutual benefits to be gained from the Asian Partners' contribution to OSCE goals.

After all, this continent is home to both enormous opportunities and enormous challenges at the same time.

How we handle them together will be felt for generations everywhere in the world.

In 2020, we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation.

Slovakia, as the incoming Chair of the Asian Contact Group views this anniversary as a perfect opportunity to work towards a more strategic partnership.

The discussions today and tomorrow will inform our preparation for next year, so I sincerely wish to see many positive outcomes of this Conference including concrete deliverables.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

**As my third and final point, I want to stand as an advocate of multilateralism.**

Most of the challenges we face today are transnational.

Digital domain by its definition does not stop at national borders - or stay within the reach and mandate of one organization.

Effective multilateralism is the only way out.

Because it answers difficulty with courage and collaboration.

Because it accepts that what happens over here, matters over there.

Because it helps us unbound from the past and head for the future.

And this is what the OSCE offers a platform and the tools to work together to improve the lives of all our people.

I hope that this meeting will bring us closer to comprehensive security in the digital era and motivate us to step up the pace in our joint response.

*Once again, dear friends,*

Thank you for hosting us in this extraordinary land, marked by fascinating traditions and strong histories.

Land of remarkable talent and drive of the people's advancing human progress.

It is greatly meaningful to be here with so many of you today – discussing issues that are already shaping our present and will continue to shape our future.

We are all in this together – so let us work on it together as one. Or as our Japanese friends say IČIGAN TONATTE GAMBARIMAŠÓ! Thank you.