



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Report to the Ministerial Council

Secretary General Helga Schmid

Lodz, 1 December 2022

Mr President

Mr Chair

Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly

Excellencies

Dear Colleagues

Last year in Stockholm I delivered my first address to the OSCE Ministerial Council as your Secretary General. I was optimistic about the great work of this Organization and the potential it holds. There were challenges, of course, and, as ever, plenty of room for improvement. And I expressed the awe and gratitude I have for the powerful work this Organization delivers for so many people across our region every day.

I retain that awe and I retain that gratitude. And yet this year has been one steeped in a different kind of awe – the kind we pair with shock. Not wonder but bewilderment, dismay, devastation.

The war that the Russian Federation launched against its neighbour and fellow participating State – Ukraine – on the 24th of February defies comprehension in this day and age. It has shaken confidence in the rules-based order that has facilitated relative predictability and stability over so many decades.

The war has a devastating impact on Ukraine and on its people. On its neighbours. On the region. On the world. It has had a devastating impact on this Organization and the vital work we do.

This was not inevitable.

It is worth recalling that this Organization has its origins in confrontation. We are not and we have never been a like-minded Organization. We were born of the Cold War – not at its end but in its midst.

The Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe brought together not allies but rivals – in order to manage conflict, find ways to reduce tensions, improve trust,

build confidence, and seek common ground for co-operation. That is our business. That is our work. And this is the work we did – not perfectly, but productively – for nearly 50 years.

Yet this year, one participating State, despite efforts to the contrary, chose to pursue violence over dialogue and co-operation. This is not a failure of this Organization, but the betrayal of one of its members.

In the face of this war – and all previous speakers highlighted the many atrocities resulting from it – the overwhelming reaction of most of the OSCE participating States has been resolute condemnation of the war and firm reaffirmation of the Helsinki principles.

Mr Chair – you said that many signals were sent, and you are right.

As tensions rose, I repeatedly raised my deep concerns about the military buildup at Ukraine's borders in the Permanent Council. I provided official early warning – an instrument used only twice before in the OSCE's history.

At the time, the Special Monitoring Mission was still in place – still doing its work – with 40 countries contributing to it. I am grateful to you all for supporting the Special Monitoring Mission over the years and I am grateful to all the men and women who served in support of this important mission.

At the time, Ukraine asked us to stay – and we did.

The immediate aftermath of the invasion of the 24th of February was traumatic. Thankfully, we managed to get all of our international staff out safely. And while we could not evacuate our local male colleagues due to martial law, we helped many of our local staff to relocate within the country. We pulled together and worked around the clock to ensure their safety.

Tragically, one of our local colleagues was killed during shelling on Kharkiv, and later, several national mission members in Donetsk and Luhansk were illegally detained.

I am grateful that we were able to get some released, but three of them remain in detention – held illegally since April – despite our every effort to secure their freedom.

I can assure you that I will continue to pursue their release – and I am grateful to many of you for your continued strong support.

In addition to the Special Monitoring Mission, the Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine had been supporting the country for nearly three decades – working with government and civil society alike to address challenges from environmental degradation to media freedoms.

As of the 31st of October, both missions are fully closed – not for safety reasons but because consensus on the two mandates was blocked due to the stance of the

Russian Federation. But many participating States made clear that the support that the OSCE had provided over so many years should not be lost. And so on the 1st of November, the new fully donor-funded Support Programme Ukraine was launched to continue that vital support across all three dimensions.

We have nearly 60 staff on the ground – and Ambassador Villadsen is back in Ukraine as Special Representative. This program marks a new and innovative way of working. It also sends the clear message to all those sceptical of the OSCE's ability to deliver in the face of potential blockages that we can find a way.

Consensus is a strength of this Organization. But we cannot allow it to be misused to block support that is requested by participating States.

These are dark days, and some say that the OSCE is paralyzed, but we cannot ignore the important work that the OSCE continues to do across our region. And this is where the awe and gratitude that I expressed at last year's meeting still holds true. Our staff – in the Secretariat, our Institutions, and our field missions continue to deliver – despite the challenging circumstances in which they operate.

As I have highlighted throughout this year, Ukraine is and remains a priority, but the impact of the war is felt well beyond the country's borders. And we are both obligated and ideally placed to provide support across the region.

Impacts are severe in Moldova, where strikes on Ukraine have knocked out power supplies as well. Our tailored support to Moldova continues and is increasing. We are the only Organization there supporting the security dialogue – facilitating regular meetings between representatives in Chisinau and Tiraspol. And this engagement has intensified throughout this year.

The effects of the war are palpable in Central Asia – whether we consider energy prices, inflation, food insecurity, or other destabilizing factors.

Last year in Stockholm I introduced concrete ideas to support our participating States, particularly in Central Asia, as they deal with the instability resulting from the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan – ideas that you all supported. Since then we have begun implementing a range of projects to address this.

I travelled to Central Asia twice this year – most recently two weeks ago when I visited Uzbekistan. I met with Ministers and senior officials from all five Central Asian states. It is clear that the work we're doing – on connectivity, border security, women's economic empowerment, and more – is delivering meaningful results.

Last year in Stockholm you also agreed a landmark decision that tasks the OSCE to enhance its work on climate change, including in support of regional co-operation. In Southeastern Europe, our work in the Shar/Sara Mountains area provides one of the first examples in the region for joint solutions to climate crises. We have a side event

here in Lodz focused on climate change in mountainous regions – a challenge that affects many of our participating States.

And on the 17th of March I will host a ministerial conference on climate in Vienna where we will take our work on climate and security even further. I look forward to seeing you all there.

We are working with governments, technology companies and civil society to harness the positive power of technology to combat human trafficking – the OSCE is truly a leader on the international stage.

We work with your governments and with civil society to support democratic processes and human rights, to protect national minorities, and to ensure the freedom of the media. I want to pay tribute to Matteo Mecacci, Teresa Ribeiro, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, and their teams for their tireless work and our excellent co-operation. This is truly done in the whole-of-OSCE approach and I am proud of what we are achieving together. I am very grateful for our co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly, with the President, and with the Secretary General Roberto Montello.

In all that we do, we apply a gender lens, and our work on the Women, Peace and Security agenda spans from working to prevent sexual violence in conflict to supporting women as agents of change.

After we met last December, I inaugurated the Networking Platform for Women leaders with the objective of supporting women who are active in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and mediation. As part of this, I launched a mentorship program in September with participants from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Georgia, among others.

We work with civil society – and I was glad to have met with the civic solidarity platform yesterday.

We work with law enforcement and youth alike to help reduce the potential for young people to engage in terrorism or organized crime.

Before I close, a word on the budget. As this year comes to an end we still don't have an agreed budget, though I am very grateful to the Polish Chair for their efforts in this regard.

Operating on monthly allotments based on 2021 costs is untenable.

We are already struggling to attract and retain staff. When it comes to local staff in our missions, we are in many cases not aligned with UN salary scales and therefore not competitive – particularly in the face of growing inflation.

When I talk to our colleagues in our field offices, they love their work. They see the impact. They want to stay. But in many cases they just cannot afford the instability of our budgetary situation.

The OSCE provides an extraordinary value. And we continue to work to be an ever more efficient organization. Like all incoming Secretaries General, I arrived eager to improve the Organization – including through a stronger evaluation policy and through the Functional Review that we have now started to implement in the Secretariat.

But no amount of improved working methods or efficiency measures can make up for the shortfalls we are now confronted with.

This Organization delivers on a mandate broader than any other regional security body - for around 20 cents per citizen per year. Madam President, you are right this is an Organization that provides the best value for money.

This has been a difficult year in so many ways. But as Secretary General I am proud of the work we have done in support of our values and our commitments. I subscribe to the Chair's call to hold on to our values and, as you said, to remain agents of peace.

This Organization remains an essential part of the European security architecture. Aside from the UN, we are the only multilateral platform with all relevant stakeholders for European and Eurasian security around the table. We need to protect the essential work we are doing despite the challenging context, and we need to preserve the capacity to realize our potential for more when the situation improves.

We have unique expertise and unique access – and I believe we owe it to the 1.3 billion people who call our region home to continue this vital work.

Minister Rau, I want to thank you and Ambassador Halacinski for your support and the close working relationship we enjoyed throughout the year.

And Minister Osmani, you can count on our full-fledged support in the year to come.