

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President George Tsereteli

25th OSCE Ministerial Council

6 December 2018 | Milan

Thank you Mr. Chairperson-in-Office,

Dear Ministers,

Dear Ambassadors,

Colleagues, friends,

It is my privilege to represent hundreds of OSCE parliamentarians at this distinguished forum and at this critical time.

Just last month, Europe commemorated the one hundred-year anniversary of the end of the First World War. We should keep this solemn occasion in mind as we pursue diplomatic solutions. We should recall that our first priority is always the pursuit of peace, security and stability.

I regret that instead of focusing on resetting our relations here in Milan, much of our focus is on an armed confrontation between participating States.

I am referring of course to the escalation of tensions in the Kerch Strait between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. It is deeply worrying to hear news about shootings and blockades, instead of receiving information about successful efforts to end this grave European crisis.

So, we are once again coming together at a time of great uncertainty and instability in our region. Besides challenges in the political-military dimension, we also face economic and environmental challenges, with climate change continuing to pose a threat to our collective security. Commitment to human rights and the rule of law is on the decline in many of our countries.

At the same time, powerhouse countries are abandoning international agreements that have served as cornerstones of stability and embarking on new arms races.

With the recent passing of the great American statesman George H.W. Bush, who presided over the end of the Cold War and was instrumental in brokering the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, I can't help but recall his words nearly 30 years ago:

"We can realize a lasting peace and transform the East-West relationship to one of enduring co-operation."

George Bush and other leaders who forged this organization understood that with Europe entering uncertain waters, the OSCE was ideally suited to help countries navigate. The vision that they had was to make the OSCE part of everyday politics. They wanted an active, influential organization, and saw the value of a robust parliamentary dimension to this organization.

With East-West relations now at their lowest point at any stage since the end of the Cold War, what we need is a strong OSCE that can serve as a forum for real confidence-building.

But, dear ministers, we must be honest with ourselves.

As I have stated privately with many of you over the past year, the OSCE is only as strong as those around the table want it to be. Dialogue is of little value if not done in good faith. As leaders, it is up to all of you to demonstrate that good faith.

Too often, exchanges within OSCE forums amount to little more than finger-pointing and mutual accusations. We become defensive when criticized and accuse each other of double standards.

What we should be doing instead is discussing our efforts to implement the commitments that we have freely agreed to.

In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the many useful and strong recommendations adopted by OSCE parliamentarians in Berlin earlier this year, where we held a fruitful and dynamic Annual Session.

In our Berlin Declaration, we urged greater commitment from governments to strengthening arms control regimes, security sector reform, the development of confidence- and security-building measures, and the good-faith implementation of

agreements. We also highlighted the need to recommit to principles of dialogue and détente.

I hope these recommendations can help you to finalize the Milan Ministerial Decisions in the coming days.

Dear Ministers,

As a body of politicians drawn from each of your countries who work on a daily basis with the OSCE, we in the Parliamentary Assembly attach great value to the effectiveness of this organization.

Therefore, we have been concerned in recent years by signs of growing dysfunctionality, much of which can be attributed to abuse of the consensus rule.

When grounded in common cause, consensus is a powerful and very positive feature. However, when misused for petty purposes to block key meetings or shut down field offices, it endangers the very existence of this organization and only exacerbates tensions.

We're politicians here, so allow me to speak bluntly.

How do we look when our flagship human dimension meeting is forced to proceed without an agenda? Or when other meetings are simply cancelled?

The Parliamentary Assembly has long advocated adjustments to the consensus rule. While I do not suggest removing consensus for key issues of principle, I would urge modified consensus for more practical and technical issues.

Parliamentarians have also long advocated for a strong OSCE presence in the field, where countries have benefited in the most tangible way from this organization.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to learn more about the excellent work being done in all three dimensions by the OSCE field presences, including in Central Asia.

This is a region where the OSCE has had and continues to have a significant impact in promoting regional co-operation and providing local stakeholders with the necessary tools to meet the multiple challenges which they face.

This is something I have witnessed during my recent trips to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Yet, field missions have been closed elsewhere, sometimes against the wishes of the host country. As I stated to the Permanent Council recently, it is a paradox that the OSCE is missing from the countries that would most benefit from its support, namely in the Caucasus.

The situation has not improved in this region, with a notable lack of progress in the settlement of conflicts between Russia and Georgia, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

I therefore ask that you recommit to finding the political will to enable the OSCE to carry out its work where it is needed the most.

I have personally led two delegations to Ukraine this year, including to the areas on the frontline in the Donbas, with the support of the Special Monitoring Mission. Seeing up close the tragic human cost of the conflict, I have stressed that urgent steps must be taken to alleviate the humanitarian situation, including the need to reach a sustained ceasefire.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly fully supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and has long called for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides, which remains the best path to a long-term solution to the crisis.

In a visit to Moldova, I was pleased to hear about the significant achievements in the Transdniestrian settlement process. This is proof that local ownership and political will produce concrete results. The OSCE Mission to Moldova and the Chairmanship deserve recognition for their work.

I would urge each of you to personally visit an OSCE field operation in the coming year to see with your own eyes the positive work being done.

Dear colleagues,

Throughout 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly has also engaged on issues such as terrorism, migration, climate change, arms control, freedom of the media, gender issues, and minorities, working closely with our Mediterranean and Asian Partners.

Our committees and Special Representatives continued their active work through field visits and other efforts, bringing parliamentarians from many different countries together to address these problems and deliver real results.

We observed nine elections, including a first-ever mission deployed right here in Italy.

Regretfully, some of these election observations have revealed some regress.

We need to remain vigilant in upholding our democratic standards.

In the coming months we will be closely following electoral developments in Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine with our partners from ODIHR.

We in the Parliamentary Assembly are always happy to discuss with you the challenges of our region, to develop common approaches that deliver results, and to explore ways to strengthen this, our unique organization.

But what it needs from all of us is political support and the necessary resources to carry out its mandate. This is why I would like to welcome the call by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev for an OSCE summit in 2020.

We hope that the organization seizes on such opportunities for more high-level political dialogue with the aim to strengthen the organization.

This is important to maintain the OSCE's relevance in these challenging times.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Milanese, as well as your predecessor Angelino Alfano, Guglielmo Picchi and the whole Italian task force, for their leadership over the past year.

We have greatly appreciated your efforts to strengthen multilateralism and to promote peace, security, stability and co-operation in the OSCE area.

We are especially grateful to the Italian Chairmanship for demonstrating a strong attachment to the parliamentary dimension of the OSCE and understanding our added value.

I look forward to the leadership that the Slovak Chairmanship will bring and to our continued good co-operation.

I hope this Milan Ministerial Council will bring fresh energy to the OSCE process and I wish you all success.

Thank you!