



OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting

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Address by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli

As delivered.

Thirty years ago, the leaders of our countries declared that the era of confrontation and division had ended.

The Charter of Paris seemed to have laid the foundation for what would have been seen as a naïve utopia before: long-lasting democracy, peace and unity in Europe.

The decades that followed showed light and shadow.

On one hand, the OSCE contributed to strengthening security and promoting stability throughout our region, in particular through confidence building between – and democratization assistance inside – those countries where it was most active.

On the other hand, old, unresolved conflicts were simmering, and new ones erupted.

And, in some places, democratic progress was halted, or even reversed.

Over all these years, the OSCE made numerous attempts to find ways for enhancing its effectiveness.

We can recall the Astana Summit and others.

But today, we are probably farther away from unity and mutual trust than ever since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Again and again, during the past decades we experienced wars on OSCE territory, the decline of arms control regimes, and brutal repression of opposition movements.

We have seen assaults on free speech and free media, flawed elections, growing intolerance and discrimination, as well as other deep divisions and polemics inside our societies.

Unfortunately, there has also been a rise of extremist groups and, again and again, devastating terrorist attacks.

This gives rise to many questions.

Does this mean that this organization has not done its job?

The answer to this is twofold, as is the whole history of the OSCE.

The OSCE's structures have performed very well, considering the scarce resources put at their disposal by the participating States.

But, more than these structures, the OSCE is *you*, dear Ministers, your ministries, and the States that you represent.

So, the question that we have to ask today is not: Has this OSCE lived up to the expectations created thirty years ago?

No.

The question is: Have we all – have the governments of the participating States – put in practice the pledges and promises they made over the past thirty years?

For parliamentarians, and for me as the President of the OSCE's own Parliamentary Assembly, this is a very legitimate question to be asked.

As the Foreign Ministers of the 57 participating States, can you say that your policies and actions are always in line with OSCE commitments?

And how often are selfish national interests or power games abandoned, and replaced by a cooperative attitude?

There are so many fundamental challenges to the future of the peoples of our countries: climate change and resulting environmental cataclysms, pandemics, scarcity of natural resources and ensuing geopolitical conflicts, migration, terrorism, and international organized crime.

Are we all investing enough into common efforts regarding these issues instead of wasting resources on a renewed arms race, hybrid warfare, violations of international borders and occupation, manipulated elections, and the oppression of the opposition?

How much attention is paid to the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments by governments and inside your countries?

And how much interest do they show in making the OSCE perform for the well-being of our citizens?

In an organization in which every participant is accountable to the others, it is of course legitimate and necessary to address the issues where we see failure to comply with the OSCE's and other international standards.

We, as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, have been very outspoken on this. Whether it is the violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity in countries like Ukraine and Georgia, minority rights, democratic backsliding, or human rights atrocities.

It is, for instance, appalling when we see peaceful protestors beaten or shot to death because governments cling to power.

It is right to say this loud and clear. We should be as critical of ourselves as we are of our partners. And, most importantly, we should ask ourselves whether we individually contribute to the restoration of trust and co-operation within the OSCE space.

And, excuse my bluntness: How often do you engage directly with your representatives at the OSCE in Vienna, when they sit together to do the diplomatic groundwork for what is so vital for our future?

What the citizens that we represent expect from us is not just a repetition of long lists of wrong-doings, but our creative and credible answers to the burning question about how we intend to find a way out of this situation, which is so much out of line of what the authors of the Paris Charter had been hoping for.

Recent events, for instance in Nagorno-Karabakh, demonstrated again that a failure to devote sufficient interest in the solution of long-standing conflicts inevitably leads to less security and turmoil.

Elsewhere, the same is true about the neglect of basic requirements regarding the development of democratic structures and the protection of human rights.

As the OSCE PA, with our direct representatives of the people and our capacity to engage in frank and open dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy, we continuously have been offering our assistance.

The pandemic has not stopped us.

Having been unable to convene since last February, our regular consultative and deliberative process was halted soon after our Winter Meeting.

We organized numerous “Parliamentary Web Dialogues,” which brought together experts, representatives of intergovernmental structures with hundreds of parliamentarians discussing the pandemic and core OSCE issues.

In late summer and autumn, we also resumed our election observation activities.

Through our parliamentary networks we provide great tools for the facilitation of dialogue in conflict situations, and we have reiterated our offer in crisis situations like in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Belarus.

The OSCE’s intergovernmental structures have benefitted from the synergies of our joint work, and this could be exploited much further.

We remain engaged in Central Asia and the Western Balkans. We cherish our strong transatlantic ties, including through our excellent partnership with the U.S. Helsinki Commission. Beyond our region, we are eager to extend our hands to Partners in Asia and the Mediterranean.

Our most recent contribution, dear Ministers, is an appeal to you: We want to make full use of the OSCE’s potential to help build a safer and more stable future for us all.

This already has the support of so many present and former senior OSCE leaders.

Political support and adequate resources should be provided to all executive structures, and in particular, to the activities of the OSCE Institutions.

This would enhance efforts to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, achieve gender equality, promote tolerance and non-discrimination, protect media freedom and,

more broadly, the stability of our diverse societies, and to strengthen democratic institutions in all participating States.

Our initiative, a “Call for Action: Reaffirming our Common Purpose” has been endorsed and signed by more than 50 former and present OSCE leaders, including Chairs-in-Office, Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly, Secretaries General of the OSCE and the OSCE PA, and Heads of Institutions.

Despite all the difficulties that we are facing, during these two days and in the days and months that follow, we must, make an attempt to relaunch all our efforts to bring back the spirit that motivated the signatories of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris.

Increasing our attention to this organization is even more urgent, given that the daily operations in Vienna and in the field presences are impacted by the pandemic, and while COVID-19 is in the focus of so much attention.

I see it as a positive sign that delegations found consensus on the appointments of new Heads of Institutions. I’d like to commend the Albanian Chairmanship and the incoming Swedish Chairmanship for their efforts.

I wish that these be finally approved by you tomorrow.

This would already represent a significant contribution to make the work of the OSCE more effective in future years.

This is my last appearance before you in my capacity as PA President.

I would therefore like to finish by thanking all those I have been able to enjoy good cooperation with:

Chairmanships, Ministers, Ambassadors, leaders of executive structures, my colleagues in the PA, and the numerous staff.

I hope for your fruitful work on behalf of the OSCE and wish you all success in your future endeavors.