

"Transforming the OSCE momentum into durable positive dynamics: Half-term assessment of the Swiss Chairmanship"

Bern, 28.06.2014 - Baku, 28.06.2014 – Opening Address by Mr. Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation, on the occasion of the 23rd Session of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly - Check against delivery

Mr President

Ladies and gentlemen,

Many thanks for the invitation to Baku and for the opportunity to give an opening address at this 23rd Annual Session of the Parliamentary Assembly.

It is good to be back. Just a few weeks ago, I paid a CiO visit to Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. We had very substantial discussions and I have vivid memories of the great hospitality we received. I commend Azerbaijan and President Aliyev for hosting this summer session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I see this as an expression of Azerbaijan's commitment to the OSCE, and to the organisation's role in democratisation. On behalf of the Swiss Chairmanship, I extend a warm welcome to all of you.

Standing here in front of you, I wish to start by telling you how much respect I feel;

- respect for the task of chairing this organisation, at a time when many people see their security decrease as a result of new tensions;
- respect in view of the terrible things that happen to people in conflicts, sometimes in the limelight of media attention, but more often than not just in silent dramas;
- respect also for all those who engage, on all levels, to win the best of all fights, namely the one for freedom, security, and peace.

My opening address today coincides with the halfway point in the Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE. This is an opportune moment to take a step back, reflect on our efforts and accomplishments during the first six months, and draw some conclusions for the way ahead – both for the Swiss Chairmanship and for the OSCE as an organization.

The Ukraine crisis obviously has dominated the first six months of our Chairmanship. But we have also been busy advancing other Chairmanship priorities. I will make some remarks on both – the managing of the Ukraine crisis and our pursuit of other Chairmanship activities – before drawing some conclusions for the future of the OSCE and the 'Helsinki+40' process.

The Ukraine crisis: OSCE dialogue and action

Let me start with Ukraine.

Lukas, Lars, Tõris, Memet - four monitors who had been deprived of their freedom and of their ability to work for peace. Who came free two nights ago, after more than four weeks. All four of them represent the strength of the OSCE: its human touch, its proximity to the people and conflicts, its spirit of peace. They are a symbol for our tireless common efforts to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine.

The Ukraine crisis has indeed topped the agenda of the Swiss Chairmanship since day one.

This is partly because the OSCE as a security organisation has been directly affected by the developments regarding Ukraine. OSCE principles, as defined in the Helsinki Final Act, have been put into question. These principles include respect for territorial integrity, the inviolability of borders, respect for human rights, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

But there is a second reason why the Ukraine crisis has dominated the first half of our Chairmanship: The OSCE has been able to demonstrate its ability to assist Ukraine in overcoming this crisis.

The OSCE has proven valuable in two major ways:

First, the OSCE is an inclusive platform for dialogue. The OSCE is no party to the Ukraine crisis. It is the only regional organisation that brings together all major stakeholders in the crisis to discuss their differences and try to define cooperative solutions. The OSCE serves as a bridge in a European security context currently marked by polarization and the risk of estrangement.

Second, the OSCE can deliver on the ground. It is an impartial and credible actor for stability in Ukraine. The OSCE has managed to make full use of the tools at its disposal. There is the Special Monitoring Mission. There have been visits and reports by the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media. There has been the Human Rights Assessment Mission by the ODIHR and the HCNM. And there was the election observation by the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly.

The Chairmanship has come up with a broad range of activities too. These include ongoing high-level consultations with all sides, the nomination of a Personal Representative (Ambassador Guldemann) and of other high-level representatives for specific tasks (Ambassador Ischinger, Ambassador Tagliavini), and almost 50 CiO statements on the Ukraine crisis. We have also proposed a roadmap on de-escalating the situation, which helped provide a conducive environment for the early presidential elections at the end of May.

At the heart of the OSCE engagement in Ukraine today lies the Special Monitoring Mission. The SMM has been mandated to contribute to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security in Ukraine by a consensus decision of all 57 participating States. This consensus decision of 21 March was a milestone for the OSCE. It demonstrated that compromise is still possible despite differences. And it entrusted the OSCE with a major role in stabilising the situation in Ukraine.

Today there are more than 220 civilian monitors providing verified information on the security situation and on specific incidents. Their gathering of facts and regular reporting based on the principles of impartiality and transparency have proven invaluable in a conflict environment where distorted information, biased interpretations, and harsh language abound. I am grateful to the more

than 40 participating States and the two Asian partners for cooperation that have seconded monitors and provided the necessary funding for this important mission.

As I mentioned at the beginning, four OSCE monitors who had been detained for 32 days were released two nights ago. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to this positive development. But I wish to recall that four other monitors are still not free. Taking hostages is unacceptable and illegal. It sabotages the ongoing international efforts to overcome the crisis. I call again for their speedy and unconditional release.

The peace plan presented by Ukrainian President Poroshenko may bring further tasks for the OSCE and the SMM. I assured President Poroshenko and Foreign Minister Klimkin that the OSCE is ready to support Ukraine in implementing this plan. Potential OSCE support roles include monitoring verification mechanisms for the ceasefire and for the effective control of the border. The OSCE could also assist in vacating illegally occupied buildings and in disarming illegally armed groups.

Many OSCE contributions depend however on a more permissive security situation and security guarantees by separatist groups.

Together with a representative of Ukraine and of Russia, the OSCE Chairmanship, represented by Ambassador Tagliavini, is part of a Trilateral Contact Group that acts as a steering body to accompany the implementation of the peace plan. Consultations of this Contact Group with representatives of separatist groups resulted in a common understanding that included support of the separatists for a ceasefire. I welcome President Poroshenko's decision to extend this ceasefire.

All possible efforts must now be undertaken to turn the ceasefire into a durable cessation of violence and to advance towards the launch of a political process to peacefully settle the crisis. The Swiss Chairmanship has informed all parties concerned that the OSCE is ready to play its part. I call upon everyone to now take courageous steps of peace and to settle differences through dialogue rather than further violence.

The crisis has hit Ukraine hard. Rebuilding and reconstructing will take a lot of effort and much solidarity by the international community. The crisis has also devastated people's lives. Every life lost, every house destroyed and every dream broken is one too many.

The crisis and the violence have left a deep mark on the Ukrainian society. It will take a long time to heal the wounds. Those responsible for grave violations of human rights must be held accountable. It will be crucial for the unity of the country that it starts to work towards reconciliation. But for all this to happen, the most important thing is that violence stops now. We will need many more Lukas, Lars, Töris, and Memets to restore peace – people with courage and a vision.

In some ways, the Ukraine crisis has given momentum to the OSCE. Our organization has demonstrated its ability to build bridges – both among participating States and on the ground. After years of limited interest in the OSCE in many capitals, there is growing recognition of how important such an anchor of cooperative security is for European security.

Can this OSCE momentum be transformed into durable positive dynamics for the organization? This will partly depend on the future course of events concerning the Ukraine crisis. If the OSCE can

contribute to a sustainable de-escalation of the situation in Ukraine, both through dialogue and through common action, the prospects for revitalizing it will no doubt augment.

But let us be clear: the Ukraine crisis continues to confront the OSCE with major challenges – challenges that can easily put the momentum into question. While there is common action on the ground, participating States remain divided about the causes and the preferred outcome of this crisis. Differences over strategic issues that had weakened European security well before the crisis have exacerbated as a result of recent events. And the erosion of trust that we have observed over a number of years has no doubt accelerated.

All this suggests a mixed balance sheet. There is momentum, but it is momentum with a question mark. In order to keep it alive, we need to take a broad approach.

We obviously will continue our efforts for a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

But we must also seek to preserve and advance cooperation in other OSCE issues. Limiting negative spillovers from the Ukraine dossier to other OSCE matters, and seizing opportunities for strengthening cooperation instead, are important tasks of the Swiss Chairmanship.

In this context, let me draw your attention to a recent study on national threat perceptions in the OSCE area that was produced by the OSCE academic network. This study maintains that while perceptions of external threats partly diverge in the OSCE area, perceptions of domestic and transnational threats largely converge.

What the study essentially says is this: For all the differences over Ukraine and some other issues of European security, our countries still share many common threats and interests. This provides a good basis for cooperation.

The Swiss Chairmanship is inspired by this sort of thinking. There is scope for cooperation, and there is need for cooperation. From cooperation comes trust and confidence. And building confidence and security through cooperation has been the essence of this organization for almost 40 years now. We should make the most of it. We should do so not just for the security of our states, but also of our people.

We should have a genuine dialogue on those issues on which we disagree. And we should seek to advance cooperation wherever common ground exists. The future of European security and of the OSCE also depends on our willingness to continue cooperating despite differences on some strategic questions.

Preserving and advancing cooperation: Swiss Chairmanship priorities at half time

This brings me to the question of where we are at half-time in terms of implementing the Swiss Chairmanship priorities.

As you can see on the tableau of Swiss priorities that was distributed to you, we are pursuing three objectives: to promote security and stability, to improve people's living conditions, and to

strengthen the OSCE's capacity to act. I do not have the time to brief you in detail on our activities in all priority issue, but let me make a few observations.

First of all, there have been a lot of meetings, not only high level and political ones, but also very direct and personal ones, with young and old people who have suffered from war, have lost a lot, and have been displaced. I consider these personal meetings during this year as chair a privilege.

Our efforts to promote reconciliation and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans have met with a constructive response. During a CiO visit to Serbia, Albania, and Kosovo, we discussed possible ways forward. My Special Representative, in close collaboration with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, has contributed to the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina and is actively promoting the implementation of the agreements between the parties. We are planning a high level regional conference to promote regional co-operation on migration in the second half of 2014 and are working closely with Serbia as the upcoming Chairmanship.

As mentioned, I also travelled to the South Caucasus, where the Swiss Chairmanship seeks to promote dialogue and confidence building. In the Nagorno-Karabakh context, we hope that an intensified and structured negotiation process can be re-launched in the nearest future. We are also enabling the exchange between high-level mediators and civil society actors involved in dialogue processes.

As for Georgia, my Special Representative co-moderates the Geneva International Discussions – a unique platform which allows all stakeholders to discuss the consequences of the 2008 conflict. During my visit to Georgia, we also discussed the possibility of an enhanced engagement of the OSCE. I had the opportunity to meet the participants of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti. This mechanism has proven to be an indispensable instrument for pragmatic cooperation across dividing lines.

The politico-military dimension of the OSCE is clearly the one that is most affected by the Ukraine crisis. In these circumstances, adapting the Vienna Document on military transparency and confidence-building measures to the military environment of the 21st century continues to be a challenge. Still, we will keep pushing this issue, not least because the Ukraine crisis has made evident how essential it is.

With regards to improving people's living conditions, the Swiss Chairmanship has actively promoted the implementation of commitments of the Human Dimension. Switzerland has been able to put the issues of combating torture and of Human Rights Defenders back on the OSCE agenda. We aim for consensus among the participating States for a Ministerial Decision on the Prevention of Torture.

In the field of transnational threats, the Swiss Chairmanship organized an international conference on the fight against terrorism. OSCE participating States, as well as representatives from civil society and academia discussed the issues of kidnapping for ransom, counterterrorism and human rights, and (particularly timely on the background of events in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere) foreign fighters. The recommendations presented by the Swiss Chairmanship will hopefully trigger further discussions within the OSCE and lead to a Ministerial Council Decision in Basel.

Strengthening the OSCE's capacity to act looks more important than ever in the light of the Ukraine crisis. I will talk about the 'Helsinki+40' process in a minute. Let me just point out here that efforts to build up capacity in the field of mediation are already underway.

As a country with much tradition and expertise in the field of mediation, Switzerland is committed to strengthening OSCE mediation capacities, in our Chairmanship year and beyond.

Under our guidance, mediation-support capacities have been built up regarding training, knowledge management, and operational support. Tailor-made coaching services have been provided for my Special Representatives on Protracted Conflicts. Cooperation with other international and regional organizations has been strengthened.

There is now an OSCE Group of Friends of Mediation, founded under the initiative of Finland, Turkey, and Switzerland. The Group will promote the use of OSCE mediation to find peaceful solutions in conflict situations.

The final point I wish to make about our Swiss priorities concerns the efforts to strengthen the voice of civil society and particularly of young people in the OSCE area. Together with the OSCE institutions, we have organized three regional civil society workshops in Belgrade, Dushanbe and Vienna. A fourth workshop will be held in Tbilisi in September and will bring together civil society representatives of the South Caucasus. The recommendations developed in the workshops will be adopted at the civil society conference in Basel. Switzerland intends to introduce the recommendations to the Ministerial Council.

In order to attract young people's interest for the OSCE, and to learn about their needs and expectations, Switzerland has also set up a Model OSCE. I met our Youth Ambassadors from the 57 participating States during their first round of negotiations on a Youth Action Plan in Vienna. A second round of negotiations will take place in Belgrade next week. Our Youth Ambassadors will present their Youth Action Plan in the context of the Ministerial Council in Basel in December. We want their work to become the basis for an OSCE Youth Action Plan to be negotiated during the Serbian Chairmanship.

The bottom line of this brief overview of our Chairmanship activities is this: The Ukraine crisis has clearly had an impact on some of the Swiss priority issues. But while uncertainties as to what can be accomplished have grown, opportunities remain. Switzerland is committed to pursuing these opportunities and reinforcing positive dynamics to the extent possible. We count on the support of all participating States to help define constructive solutions to pressing common challenges.

The way forward: Using 'Helsinki+40' to strengthen the OSCE and European security

Ladies and gentlemen

Having discussed the Ukraine crisis and the state of the OSCE, let me now give you my take of 'Helsinki+40' – which is the main theme of your summer session, as well as a priority issue of the Swiss Chairmanship.

I welcome the fact that you are addressing this key issue. I am also glad to see that the Parliamentary Assembly has defined a broad-based and structured process with high-level meetings with Parliamentarians and experts from distinguished think-tanks and academic institutions on the question of OSCE reform. We will follow this process with great interest and look forward to hearing about the outcome of your deliberations.

There is a 'Helsinki+40' roadmap structuring current work in Vienna on OSCE reform. It defines eight thematic clusters. One coordinator per cluster was designated to move the process forward. The roadmap's objective is to push the reform process based on relevant topics, such as the conflict cycle, transnational threats, and the human dimension, and to put forward specific proposals on how to improve the organization in the respective thematic areas.

Many of these discussions have proven challenging in the face of the Ukraine crisis, and progress has been slow. But the 'Helsinki+40' process is now more needed than ever. It must be continued if we really want to have more security for our people in the future.

The Ukraine crisis gives, however, occasion to reconsider what it is that we seek to accomplish with 'Helsinki+40'. Reforming the OSCE and adapting the organization to the security needs of the 21st century no doubt remain important. But 'Helsinki+40' should be more than that.

I see 'Helsinki+40' as a two-track process.

First, it is about strengthening the OSCE. This requires more capacity and more trust.

The OSCE has demonstrated its conflict management capability during the Ukraine crisis. This expertise and the operational capacities in mediation and conflict resolution should be further strengthened and extended. We require institutions that are able to fully put in place the potential available to them.

We also need to put greater emphasis on conflict prevention. In this regard, our OSCE field missions play a vital role in terms of early warning. These capabilities need to be strengthened.

Capacity can also be enhanced through effective institutional cooperation.

I am thinking of effective partnerships with other international organizations. For example, the OSCE and the Council of Europe organized a conference on trafficking in human beings this February. I would welcome the possibility to jointly carry out activities with the current Chair of the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan.

I am also thinking of constructive exchanges between the governmental side of the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly. Addressing you here is important for me as CiO, and the Swiss Chairmanship looks forward to hosting you in Geneva in early October.

The benefits of cooperation have also been shown in relations between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Their effective common endeavour in observing the presidential elections in Ukraine is a case in point.

As to the need for rebuilding trust to strengthen the OSCE, we will need to find a way to recommit to the fundamental values and principles of the Helsinki Final Act. This will take some time and requires a genuine debate on why the consensus on European security has eroded over past years, and on why we have come to perceive some threats differently.

The second track of 'Helsinki+40' is about using this process as a starting point for a discussion of the future of European security. The 'Helsinki+40' process is focusing on the vision of a security community, as set out in the Astana Declaration of 2010. Against the background of the Ukraine crisis, the fleshing-out of this vision is ever more complex.

The Ukraine crisis points to the need to readdress basic issues of European security, such as conventional arms control. We must also take another look at Europe's security architecture. I am convinced that the OSCE – an inclusive platform of 57 participating States – is the right kind of hub for these debates. (By OSCE, I also mean the Parliamentary Assembly and the academic network.)

Now that Association Agreements between the EU and Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have been signed, Europe's trade architecture is also something we must look into. We should do everything possible to enable these countries to act as trade bridges rather than trade frontiers. The Ukraine crisis has shown that devising a non-exclusionary trade system is an important component of European security and stability.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Ukraine crisis has demonstrated that our future and the future of the next generations will be better and more secure if we find a common way to avoid dividing East and West. I thank you for searching for such ways, wish you constructive debates on this, and look forward to meeting you in my country, Switzerland, in Geneva.