



Speech by Member of the German Bundestag, Federal Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairperson- in-Office Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the 25th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

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Tbilisi, Georgia

Mr President,
Parliamentary President, Prime Minister,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Colleagues,
Friends and guests of the OSCE!

I am delighted to speak to you today in my capacity as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. As you doubtlessly know, I am also a Member of the German Bundestag and represent a constituency in the east of our country, in Brandenburg, numbering some 220,000 inhabitants. If we add everyone together, here at the OSCE, you represent some one billion people living on three continents and in 57 countries.

Three times each year, you travel to an OSCE participating State – for the same reason that I have just visited the Southern Caucasus: in order to seek dialogue and to discuss the specificities of the challenges that we face in the region, because, as a Georgian proverb tells us, “it is better to see something once than to hear about it ten times over”.

Colleagues, when we are out and about as MPs in our home constituency, we are approached by people with existential everyday concerns, such as the development of childcare, schools and roads. That’s normal. In recent times, however, I have predominantly been privy to questions about accommodating and integrating people who have fled to us in Germany as a result of war and violence.

To my mind, this clearly shows that major international affairs and threats affect us all, whether in Berlin or in Bishkek, Vancouver or Vladivostok. We live in turbulent times, and we have to face them together. This is demonstrated by the refugee crisis. This is demonstrated by the crises in the Middle East. This is also demonstrated by the conflict in

eastern Ukraine. Germany made a most conscious decision to assume the OSCE Chairmanship in these turbulent times. I believe that, especially in such times of uncertainty, we need the OSCE and its instruments – to resolve conflicts and to strengthen dialogue and cooperation.

On my journey here, I had the opportunity to come into close contact with people in Armenia and Azerbaijan who are affected by one of the most pressing conflicts in the OSCE area. And anyone who has met refugees or war victims will swiftly realise how cynical it is to talk about “frozen conflicts” in this context. The conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region escalated once again three months ago and has claimed many lives on both sides. This was only the most recent high water mark in a conflict that has been simmering for over 20 years, has caused loss of life and injuries and forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes.

Here in Georgia, there are two disputed regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While the situation there is currently stable, the status quo is preventing many people from leading normal lives. The same can be said of the unresolved conflict over Transdniestria. While this conflict is fortunately no longer a violent one, the personal and economic ties with Moldova have been eroded, which is stalling the development of an entire region. And we view Ukraine with concern. Despite the ceasefire agreed by all sides, violence frequently continues to erupt there. With the Minsk agreements, we have a roadmap of tangible steps towards achieving a peaceful solution to this conflict. But progress is slow, very slow. And it is especially alarming to see that the efforts to achieve a stable peace keep on being torpedoed – not only by frequent infringements of the ceasefire, but also by attacks on the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. This is totally unacceptable. These incidents must be investigated and brought before the judiciary. This also includes the increased number of attacks on the SMM’s monitoring drones. We must not allow this mission to be blinded so that it is unable to fulfil its responsibilities.

When Germany assumed the Chairmanship of the OSCE at the beginning of this year, we made two things quite clear: First, that we cannot expect to find quick-fix, surprising solutions to intractable conflicts in the OSCE area. Second, that nonetheless, simply managing the status quo cannot be an option. Too great is the suffering endured by these people on a daily basis! Too great is the risk of escalation, as we experienced most recently in the Nagorno-Karabakh region! And, last but not least, these conflicts are symptomatic of a more profound crisis in our common security architecture.

We are striving to respond to these two conclusions with a two-pronged approach: On the one hand, with a policy of small steps in order to create a minimum of trust between the parties and to improve the everyday lives of people in the region. This is why we are working intensively to expand the team working under Ambassador Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office for the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Further measures are to be implemented to permanently stabilise the ceasefire once again to allow serious negotiations to start. The working proposals are a good basis for this, and we cannot allow the conflict parties to make embarking on these negotiations impossible by imposing too many preconditions.

An encouraging example of a monitoring and conflict prevention mechanism here in Georgia is the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), which was reintroduced for the Abkhazia region after a break of many years. The IPRM was activated just a few weeks ago following a fatal incident in order to perform investigative work and to prevent further tensions. Here, too, we aim to improve the security situation for the people with small and persistent steps and, in the process, to strengthen the network of connections and contacts once again.

On the other hand, we intend, as a second element of our two-pronged approach, to revive and intensify negotiation formats and channels of communication – not merely in order to reinforce the status quo, but to achieve real progress in efforts to resolve the aforementioned conflicts. The OSCE in particular has a decisive role to play in these mediation efforts, which we intend to seize on and strengthen, both in the Minsk Group for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and at the Geneva talks on Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

A new dynamic emerged in the Transdnistria conflict one month ago with the first meeting in the 5+2 format for two years. Chisinau and Tiraspol have, together with mediators from the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine and the EU and the United States as observers, agreed the next concrete steps to be taken and – for the first time since 2011 – signed a consensus in the 5+2 protocol. It isn't much, but it's good news for those who are familiar with the negotiations. Small steps forward can create trust and form the basis for a permanent solution to the conflict.

The Trilateral Contact Group in Ukraine is the central framework for political conflict resolution and for our efforts to make people's lives in this conflict-stricken region that little bit more bearable. Such negotiation processes are slow and laborious. But I am sure that they will only be successful if they are driven forward intelligently and patiently. We should not shy away from making new and pragmatic proposals off the beaten track if by doing so we can actually inject momentum into the negotiations.

I firmly believe that our efforts to resolve the conflicts in the OSCE area will only be successful if they have the support of the societies and people in the region, and if there is also a willingness to engage in dialogue and to achieve peace and reconciliation.

We politicians and parliamentarians have a special responsibility here. If we want to strengthen our societies' capacity for peace, then we ourselves should be careful not to think in simple friend and foe categories and boil every decision down to a question of victory or defeat. Instead, we should make the case for having the courage to take the first step in order to build trust and find compromises. One thing is for sure: we will and must not mince our words if obligations are broken. We must be resolute in our calls for rules to be complied with! I am especially grateful to your President Ilkka Kanerva for doing this most clearly on a number of occasions with respect to all conflicts in the OSCE area, including the annexation of Crimea in violation of international law. And I am grateful to you, the members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, for your manifold efforts to create scope for dialogue and to support the process of mediation.

Let us remain pragmatic and committed in our endeavours. And let us work patiently to foster the dialogue that we so urgently need now – for the sake of our citizens and for the sake of the

over one billion voters who are represented by this assembly. My trip to the Caucasus is, for me at any rate, both a reminder and an encouragement to do just that. Thank you very much!