



**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President
George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia)**

27th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Berlin, 8 July 2017

Mr. President, Mr. Vice-Chancellor,

Deputy Foreign Minister,

Fellow parliamentarians,

Distinguished guests,

Welcome to the OSCE PA's 27th Annual Session.

The theme of this year's Annual Session is "Implementing OSCE Commitments: The Role of Parliaments."

This theme speaks to the question of how parliamentarians can promote full adherence to OSCE principles such as sovereign equality, territorial integrity of States, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. As members of parliament, what can we do to promote respect for the inviolability of frontiers and human rights, and the fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law?

These principles, found in the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE documents, are some of the most important international commitments that exist, but we must admit that the state of implementation is not where it should be. Unfortunately, many of these principles are breached with disturbing regularity. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated, territorial integrity is disrespected, international law is ignored, and the use of force is threatened.

Ongoing violations of these principles are the main grounds for our disagreements with OSCE countries that fail to live up to their commitments. Everyone in the OSCE should understand that if they violate principles, they will receive our attention, and of course, response. After all, that is what we are here to do – to hold each other to account.

I am pleased to see such large delegations here in Berlin from so many countries from across North America, Europe and Central Asia, as well as our Mediterranean Partners. This is a strong sign of our good co-operation and commitment to dialogue.

In recent months, we have seen too little dialogue and too much brinkmanship – where governments ratchet up tensions and take us to the brink of war.

Protracted conflicts also continue to plague the OSCE area, and the crisis in and around Ukraine continues to claim lives and threaten the stability of Europe. In May, I led a delegation with my colleagues to Ukraine including the Donbas region. We met with internally displaced persons and people living in the conflict zone. We saw up close the devastation caused by this conflict.

In reality, everybody in Donbas has become a casualty of war. There is no reason for the continued humanitarian tragedy there.

We will debate this issue once again here in Berlin and I hope for strong and constructive dialogue that will contribute in a real way to resolving this crisis in accordance with international law and respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity.

In my own country of Georgia more than 300,000 people are displaced by conflicts and occupation.

This August will mark ten years since the 2008 war in Georgia and unfortunately the problem is still there. The conflict between Russia and Georgia remains unresolved.

So, when we talk about implementation of commitments, we must realize that this has real humanitarian consequences.

Dear colleagues,

The last time that the OSCE PA gathered in the Reichstag, in 2002, OSCE parliamentarians in a single voice condemned acts of extremist violence and terrorism. Sadly, terrorism remains a fact of life in many of our countries, and we must remain steadfast in our efforts to counter this scourge of our time. This issue will be one of the main topics of debate at this Annual Session.

Also high on our agenda here in Berlin, once again, is the migration crisis. In recent years we have seen the impacts of waves of refugees and migrants on Europe, with countries handling the challenge with varying degrees of respect for humanitarian principles. Germany, to its credit, has been one of the leaders in taking in refugees based on commitments under international law.

The recent political dispute in Germany over migration threatened to destabilize the government but was quickly resolved. The rapid negotiations that took place remind us that there are always areas of common ground and that compromise can be reached in the interest of stability.

Recently though, we have seen these principles put to the test. Reminding us that the migration crisis is a global crisis, the situation on the U.S.-Mexico border has drawn the attention of the world. While border security is important – we all agree with this – it should not result in separating families and traumatizing children.

Closely related to the migration crisis is climate change. With extreme weather on the rise, we must step up our efforts before it is too late. Parliamentarians can promote this process by expanding universal ratification of the Paris Agreement, raising public awareness, and enhancing parliamentary oversight on governments, including in the economic and environmental dimension.

Dear colleagues,

In times when democratic principles are challenged, we must focus on building the resilience of democratic states and promote the consolidation of the rule of law.

This is a message I have repeated with leaders from the Western Balkans, where we must redouble efforts to implement reforms, modernize judicial systems and fight corruption, and where the OSCE must continue to provide expertise and help.

This also means expanding opportunities for women in public life, including by promoting their participation in conflict prevention and resolution.

I am pleased that several of the OSCE PA's recent election observation missions have been led by women – by the way, complex and challenging processes. These missions have been politically challenging, but we have produced strong and balanced assessments, which have once again demonstrated the credibility of our organization.

To continue building the OSCE's credibility, it is necessary to develop better tools and take concrete steps to enhance the organization's effectiveness and efficiency. In this regard, I strongly support OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger's agenda of making the OSCE "fit for purpose."

These are worthwhile reform ideas that we are also exploring within the Parliamentary Assembly to make our work more effective.

I also welcome the good co-operation we have had with the Italian OSCE Chairmanship with whom we have developed strong synergy which reinforces our impact. We are looking forward to work closely with Guglielmo Picchi.

Fellow parliamentarians,

Last month, I travelled to Moldova to welcome achievements in the Transdniestrian settlement process.

Chisinau and Tiraspol are in fact setting a positive example for the rest of the OSCE area. The local ownership and political courage that have led to real advances in the settlement process demonstrate that dialogue and persistence are the way forward.

While we have seen encouraging steps on the regional level, we need to see stronger political will on a much larger scale throughout the OSCE area if we hope to resolve the challenges of our time and finally implement the commitments that our governments agreed to four decades ago in the Helsinki Final Act.

As members of parliament, you and I have substantial influence over decision-makers in our governments. As representatives of the people, we are in a powerful and unique position to help build political will.

This is what we must keep in mind as we discuss how to better implement OSCE commitments. As the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl once said, “Where there is no will, no rules or laws can help.”

My dear friends,

Meeting here in Berlin reminds us both of Europe’s darkest days and its brightest hopes.

I remember myself being in this city in March 1989 and how I never imagined at the time that by the end of the year the Berlin Wall would start to come down.

None of us will ever forget the feeling we had in late 1989 when crowds of East Germans started climbing onto the Wall and were joined by West Germans on the other side in one of the great celebrations of human history.

That moment was an inspiration to everyone around the world who yearned for freedom. It reminded us that what may seem permanent or insurmountable, is not permanent or insurmountable at all. Things can change overnight when there is the will.

We should all keep this lesson in mind as we work in the coming days in adopting a strong Berlin Declaration that can serve as powerful guidance to our governments and the international community.

I thank once again the German Bundestag, the German Government and the German people for their hospitality and thank you dear colleagues for being here today.