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## **Opening address for the Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

Mr President,  
Mr Picchi,  
Minister,  
Parliamentary colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen!

I am delighted to welcome you to your Annual Session here at the German Bundestag, the second to be held in Berlin. A very warm welcome to you all!

When the Parliamentary Assembly met for the very first time in Budapest in 1992, the world certainly was not perfect. And yet following the end of the bloc confrontation, a period of hope had begun: Hope for a new world order, in which cooperation was worth more than confrontation. In which peace, prosperity and democracy could flourish in the OSCE region and beyond.

In which conflict between states was solved peacefully on the basis of mutually agreed rules.

Just as was intended in the Final Act in Helsinki and as we affirmed in the

“Charter of Paris”.

The world seemed to have become more reasonable and safer.

At least a little bit.

Despite all that, no-one seriously had the idea to abolish the CSCE as an unnecessary organisation – fortunately!

For the world has not become more reasonable nor any safer in the past quarter century.

Nor is it any less complicated.

Increasing global interconnections and rapid technological development have intensified the mutual dependency of our states and societies

– and yet they haven’t brought us closer together to the same extent.

On the contrary:

We are currently experiencing how partners are growing apart.

Disengaging from values, ideas and agreements  
that we had all voluntarily acknowledged and committed ourselves to.



How the European peace order and the territorial integrity of sovereign states  
– the political heart of the CSCE process –  
are no longer accepted unreservedly.

How trust is eroded – between our countries, but also within our societies. Because politics has  
lost credibility and its ability to solve problems in the eyes of many people.

The situation is complicated:

The international community has become more heterogeneous,  
interests more diverse.

Old certainties fall away.

There are new risks and challenges that affect the security of us all:  
advancing climate change, hybrid threats, cyber attacks, international terrorism,  
multidimensional wars and conflicts, failing states.

And not least: migratory flows, the scale of which has not been seen since 1945.

It should be obvious that these problems cannot be solved by unilateral national action.

And yet we observe a trend towards turning away from international regulatory systems,  
from multilateral cooperation,  
from a willingness to compromise and seek consensus.

In contrast, the fatal conviction that there can only be one winner is spreading  
– despite our better knowledge  
and against all historical experience.

While the need for global order grows,  
the transnational institutions and bodies created for this purpose are losing their ability to act.

The fact that the governments of the OSCE states have not managed to agree on a final  
declaration supported by all members since 2003 may be understandable on an individual level.

But none of us can be satisfied with this!

Despite the differences which exist,  
the mutual blockades,  
the unresolved permanent conflicts,  
a multilateral organisation such as the OSCE is absolutely essential,  
today more than ever:

The dense network of established processes, well-developed institutions, proven discussion  
forums;

the on-site presence of independent observer missions recognised by all parties;  
the unique experience in crisis and conflict management.

The military escalation in Ukraine made this more than clear.

Even if the implementation of the Minsk Agreement is still not quite satisfactory:



Who would like to imagine what this conflict at the heart of Europe would look like if the OSCE did not exist?

This Assembly is no stranger to tensions and differences of opinion.

We are also familiar with these when it comes to election observation, one of – or perhaps even the core competence of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Its expertise from over 130 elections observed since 1993 is undisputed.

As a form of mutual checks and balances, the election observation missions show where deficits exist and foster trust in the democratic process.

However, election observation can only fulfil these functions if the fundamental prerequisite is accepted by all involved: namely, the independence of the missions.

This includes the composition of the team and free access for all observers.

At times of growing tensions, agreements reached in concert are an especially important value in and of themselves, and should not be casually called into question.

I am convinced:

The parliamentary dimension of the OSCE will continue to gain significance, against the background of hardened fronts and mutual distrust.

Here, lines of communication can be maintained and established, even if governments are not making any progress:

in informal contact between parliamentarians.

Viewed in this way, the Parliamentary Assembly is a constant exercise in gaining understanding for the perspectives of others.

It always helps to be aware of the different perceptions that are rooted in various experiences and traditions, as well as in our various histories.

Even if no consensus can be reached in the end.

It helps to establish trust

– and talking is at least as important for this as the mutual checks through election observation.

For trust does not emerge between states.

It always first develops between people. People who are ready to listen to each other, to debate, to respect that which divides us and yet still seek that which unites us.

Here is the answer to the question asked occasionally of what the point of interparliamentary meetings such as this actually is.

The role of Parliaments in implementing OSCE commitments: the theme of your Annual Session is well chosen.



I certainly don't want to get ahead of your discussions.

But allow me to mention two points that I believe to be particularly important:

A Parliament is not a Parliament  
if it does not keep a critical eye on the government.

It is not only our national governments who require close parliamentary scrutiny.

The OSCE as a whole does, too.

It is therefore a positive tradition that the chair of the OSCE faces your questions here.

Secondly:

Where necessary, do what you can to persuade others of the necessity of cooperation between our countries.

Persuade your governments,  
your colleagues in Parliament  
and – at least equally as important: persuade your voters.

We would be in a much better position  
if more people in our countries showed distrust for the promise of fast and easy solutions  
through isolationism  
– and for the principle that focuses on survival of the fittest in international relations.

When I was first elected to the German Bundestag in 1972, the first preparatory conference for the CSCE had just begun in Helsinki.

The idea was:

Peace and prosperity through trust and cooperation beyond ideological boundaries.

This was a pioneering, successful idea!

And we in Germany in particular owe it a great deal.

Not far from here ran the border that divided Germany and Europe, at which two highly-armed blocs stood off irreconcilably against one another.

The CSCE process started to heal the division of Europe;  
it created the conditions for German unity.

That may have been the hope in national German politics at the time,  
but there were no guarantees.

That is why long-serving Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher made the case in the Bundestag in 1975 for the CSCE's Final Act with a stark reminder:

Each individual should measure what has been achieved by what was possible and – I quote –  
“not allow ourselves to lose sight of what is possible today through what would be ideal.”

We still need to keep sight of what is realistic.

We have to work with reality.



And we need the ambition, the will and the tenacity to achieve what is really possible  
– without losing sight of the ideal.

In this spirit, I wish you every success in your discussions and hope that the days ahead are  
filled with constructive debate!