



44th Plenary Session

**Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the
Commonwealth of Independent States**

20 May 2016

President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland)

Dear Madame Chairperson,

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be here at the 44th Plenary Session of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States. As the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and a long-running member of Parliament of Finland, I am an ardent believer in the force of parliamentary diplomacy and co-operation.

As the direct representatives of the people we have a mandate to help strengthen ties between our nations and create the necessary environment for successful co-operation. This overarching objective of building ties and bridges is the common denominator in the work of our Assemblies.

There can be no doubt that to achieve global prosperity and security all countries should co-operate on issues of common ground. Co-operation on issues such as economics and the environment should bring us together in spite of other issues that might divide us – and as I can see from the agenda for this session here in St. Petersburg, many of the same economic and environmental challenges that we address in the Parliamentary

Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe will also be in focus here.

Environmental issues have been on the OSCE's agenda since its creation, back in 1975 when the Helsinki Final Act was signed. Last year, to mark the 40th anniversary of these landmark accords, we reaffirmed the relevance of the Helsinki Final Act and all of its three dimensions of security highlighting in particular the importance that it attached to developing international law as a way to preserve and enhance the environment.

In this regard, we welcome the focus by the IPA CIS today on such significant questions as bioenergy, ecological expertise, prevention of the negative environmental effects of biocides, and the peaceful uses of outer space. These are indeed important global issues that should be addressed on the inter-parliamentary level, and I commend the IPA CIS for raising them.

But while welcoming the attention to these vital issues and recognizing the areas of common ground between our parliamentary assemblies, I cannot help but use this opportunity to highlight ongoing conflicts. Progress on transboundary environmental problems requires mutual trust and respect, and so all of our international efforts are undermined when fundamental principles such as respect for territorial integrity and peaceful settlement of disputes are ignored.

In eastern Ukraine, ceasefire violations have reached their highest levels in months, and civilians are tragically bearing the brunt of much of this violence. The near-daily violence increasingly gives the impression that we are facing the growing prospects of a status quo of neither peace nor war. I call on the leaders of our countries to use our influence over the illegal separatists in the Donbas to put a halt to this violence.

Similarly, another conflict in the OSCE area has deteriorated recently, despite the long-term efforts of our diplomats to mediate and resolve the conflict. Two decades ago, in 1995, this very venue, the Tavritchesky Palace, was chosen by the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to adopt a joint statement "Towards peace and stability in the Caucasus." Sadly, we are steadily moving further away from seeing these words become a reality.

With ceasefire violations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone growing in frequency and intensity, the human toll of continued fighting has become intolerable. My colleagues and I in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly are united in our hope for a complete cessation of hostilities and a return to the negotiating table. I invite colleagues from the IPA CIS to join us in promoting a peaceful settlement within the context of the OSCE Minsk Group.

I am confident that the spirit of co-operation that guides both of our organizations will ultimately prevail, as every day it seems more obvious that the choice is not between co-operation and competition, but between co-operation and insecurity.

I thank you for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to continuing our co-operation in various fields. I have always felt that there is much more that unites us -- whether as a continent, people, or a planet -- than divides us. Let us continue the spirit of partnership and dialogue until all of our common challenges are met.

Thank you.