



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
President George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia)

7 December 2017

24th OSCE Ministerial Council, Vienna

Dear Ministers,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We come together this year at a time of deep divisions within the OSCE region. There is talk of a “New Cold War” and discussions about how and when nuclear weapons can be used, which would have been unthinkable just ten years ago. We must take a moment to step back from the brink.

Today’s meeting provides an opportunity for us all to sit at the same table, take a breath and talk to each other. As foreign ministers representing your governments, obviously your primary responsibility is promoting your national interests. However, in this forum of the OSCE, all of our interests are intertwined – our common interest is comprehensive security.

Of course, we do not always agree with each other, and this organization has experienced its share of fundamental disagreements in recent years. Indeed, we have seen a deterioration of trust take place to an alarming degree. This has eroded dialogue, entrenched existing conflicts and has made it more and more difficult to address other possible problems that loom on the horizon and threaten our security.

As a well-known saying goes, “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”

Only through co-operation and dialogue can we ensure mutual security, but while co-operation in some cases might require compromise, we cannot compromise on our values or on the founding principles of the OSCE.

When one OSCE country violates the territorial integrity of another OSCE country, for example, we must stand firmly in defense of the commitments found in the Helsinki Final Act. When human rights are violated, we cannot compromise or look the other way.

Instead, we must raise our voices and act. Otherwise the promise of real security will never be achieved.

These days, it is also becoming painfully clear that comprehensive security requires equal attention to all its dimensions – including the economic and environmental. Climate change poses a threat to us all and this challenge requires innovative and creative thinking to move us into a sustainable, low-carbon economy. We need co-operation between all countries and on all levels. I am glad to see increased attention to this challenge within the OSCE.

Dear Ministers,

I know that you are not dealing with the OSCE every day. As a member of parliament, my daily work is also focused on matters often not directly related to the OSCE. But as President of the Parliamentary Assembly, where I have been involved for many years, I can tell you that we know the organization well and we value this forum for co-operation immensely.

We therefore ask you to take good care of the OSCE. In increasingly critical times, governments should make the best use of the OSCE. It is a unique platform that does no less than serve our collective security which deserves to be nurtured, supported and provided with necessary financial, human and material resources.

We have also long advocated for a robust field presence, where countries have benefited in the most tangible way from this organization. It is therefore a pity that so many of our field missions have been closed down in recent years, sometimes against the wishes of the host country. It's in your hands to reach consensus and solve this problem.

Coming from Georgia, I can attest both to the value of the OSCE's work on the ground, and to the need for renewed attention to conflict mediation. We have our own protracted conflict and occupation of the territories, but as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I am equally concerned by all conflicts around the OSCE area.

Increasingly intense hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh are a cause for deep concern, and of course, we must not lose focus on the crisis in and around Ukraine. The conflict remains very hot with more than 1,000 ceasefire violations every day in eastern Ukraine and the Minsk Agreements remain unimplemented.

Too many lives have been destroyed by these conflicts and fundamental human rights have been violated. We in the OSCE should never accept this as normal or tolerable. I hope that around this table we can find the political will to boost our efforts in pursuit of peace- and confidence-building. Like in Moldova, where we see that persistence produces positive results.

In the PA, we have focused much of our attention on two issues over the past year: migration and terrorism. We have organized a number of visits by politicians to frontline countries dealing with the migration crisis, including Greece, Turkey and Italy, and issued a major report in October with wide-ranging recommendations.

We also established an Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, which brings together parliamentarians for the common goal of making our societies safe from extremist violence in spite of differences on other issues.

We are very happy that the increasingly positive relationships with the OSCE Secretariat and Institutions have produced concrete results for instance in our election observation and human dimension activities. We had a rewarding exchange of ideas yesterday with Secretary General Greminger at our Bureau meeting. We are eager to develop our cooperation and are pleased that consensus was found on the appointments and all the Institutions are represented by heads today.

Dear Ministers,

The Parliamentary Assembly serves as a bridge between the peoples and governments of the OSCE area. We are an open and inclusive forum where you will always hear a frank and full exchange of views on all of the most pressing issues of the day.

I'd therefore like to recommend that you make full use of the Parliamentary Assembly and the national delegations from each of your countries. We are always happy to discuss with you the common challenges of our region and explore ways to strengthen this very valuable organization.

Before I conclude, I want to thank Sebastian Kurz for his leadership over the past year and offer congratulations on his success in the recent elections. Mr. Chairman-in-Office, we greatly appreciate your strong commitment to the OSCE and all that the Austrian Chairmanship has done to build dialogue and trust over the past year. I look forward to the leadership that Minister Alfano will bring. Italy can count on the OSCE PA's support during the coming year.

I hope this Vienna Ministerial Council will bring fresh energy to the OSCE process and I wish you all success.

Thank you.