



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President

George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia)

Remarks to the Opening Joint Session of the Three General Committees

OSCE PA's 17th Winter Meeting

22 February 2018

Vienna, Austria

Mr. Undersecretary of State,

Mr. Secretary General,

Fellow parliamentarians,

Ambassadors,

Distinguished guests,

It is my pleasure to open the 17th OSCE PA Winter Meeting. This valuable tradition of gathering every February at the headquarters of the OSCE provides us the chance to interact with ambassadors from our home countries, to hear from experts and officials from the OSCE's governmental side, and to begin preparing for our Annual Session next summer.

As always, we offer our gratitude to the OSCE for making this possible.

I would also like to personally thank Italy's Undersecretary of State of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, Vincenzo Amendola, representing the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE, and OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, for being here today. I welcome the strong co-operation that we have had so far, which hopefully we can build upon throughout the year.

In presenting the priorities of the Italian Chairmanship last month, Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano announced that "Dialogue, Ownership and Responsibility" would be the guiding principles of the Chairmanship. This reminds us that our ultimate responsibility is to the people of the OSCE area, whose interests we should always keep at the forefront of our thoughts.

I am pleased that many of the Chairmanship's priorities overlap with the Parliamentary Assembly's agenda. On issues including addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine, resolving protracted conflicts, enhancing the security of the Mediterranean region, and tackling the challenges of migration, there is much room for co-operation. Minister Alfano also spoke about promoting a holistic approach to the fight against terrorism, which is something that we have been working towards in the PA, particularly with the work being done by our Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, led by Makis Voridis.

Tomorrow we will hear a report from Mr. Voridis on the committee's work since being established last July, along with reports from the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, Filippo Lombardi, and the Special Representative on Gender Issues, Hedy Fry. I am sure that their reports will provide for lively debates in our closing session.

Dear friends,

It is no secret that the level of dialogue and trust within the OSCE area is at a historic low point. On one hand, this could be seen as a failure of multilateral organizations such as the OSCE for falling short of doing what is needed to build trust and manage the challenges we face. But on the other hand, this can also be seen as a historic opportunity to revive this organization. After all, let us remember that this organization was founded in a Cold War climate of tension and mistrust.

If it wasn't for those tensions and a common desire of our governments to reduce the threat of war, this organization probably would not exist.

With the OSCE's founding spirit of co-operation and threat reduction in mind, we can look at the critical and complex challenges that we face today as potential areas for partnership and collaboration. While some of today's issues are different than the ones that the founders of the OSCE were concerned about, some of them are remarkably similar. And what is very much the same is the relevance of the OSCE's pioneering model of comprehensive security.

We know from experience how the OSCE's three dimensions of security – the political-military, the economic-environmental and the human dimensions – relate closely to each other. We know that each of these dimensions affect the others and that real security is not possible unless the commitments we have made are fully upheld.

We are gathered here in Vienna to share ideas and to promote problem-solving on some of today's most critical issues. Through open dialogue, I hope that we are able to find areas where our national interests converge. This should not be difficult, as there are many such areas, several of which are included at the top of our Winter Meeting agenda. We will tackle challenges such as migration and terrorism, two areas in which there are clear opportunities for joint action to enhance security for all of us across the OSCE area.

We will also hold a debate on the importance of upholding democratic principles in an era of fake news, which should be of concern to all of us as parliamentarians. Arms control and

disarmament are also on the agenda. This is an issue that has taken on new relevance and urgency in recent years, with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the troubling trend among nuclear powers to try to make their nuclear weapons more “usable” and remove the stigma that has long been attached to a nuclear first strike.

We will also be discussing long-term strategies to tackle climate change and its global consequences, which is obviously a very timely and urgent concern. It is troubling that even while the effects of climate change are becoming more evident – and the long-time predictions of scientists are proving accurate – we still have some within the OSCE that fail to take the threat seriously.

Dear colleagues,

As you may know, I was recently in Ukraine where I held a range of high-level meetings with governmental and parliamentary officials. I also met representatives from the international community, including the UN and OSCE SMM Chief Monitor Ambassador Apakan.

I want to reiterate what I said in Kyiv, that a sustained ceasefire is urgently needed and that efforts must be stepped up to create a safe environment for the people in the Donbas. The human cost of the conflict is simply unbearable. The OSCE PA has adopted several resolutions since 2014 expressing our full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, which includes the Crimean Peninsula.

But to move forward, we need the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements, which set out concrete actions to be undertaken by the sides.

Resolving the crisis in and around Ukraine is something that we in the international community should be able to do – and I remind everyone that we have a blueprint for this process in the form of the Minsk Agreements. What we need is implementation of these agreements, as well as our OSCE PA resolutions, and this will remain a priority of mine as President.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We come together at a critical time for the OSCE and for the one billion people that we represent. It is not alarmist to say that we are at a crisis point that could lead to a conflagration that we have not seen since 1945. After all, even the conservative Economist magazine ran a cover story in a recent issue warning of “the next war” and “the growing threat of great-power conflict.”

As parliamentarians and policymakers, as diplomats and conflict mediators, it is up to us to make sure that this does not come to pass. We should always remember the lessons of history and always guard against the complacency, hubris and the false sense of security that in the past have led nations to war.

In this respect, we should keep in mind that this is precisely why the OSCE exists – to provide a forum for dialogue, to promote security and co-operation, to ensure that our differences are resolved with words rather than with arms.

We heard last week at the Munich Security Conference several positive references to the Helsinki process as a best case template for troubled regions around the world. We must be proud of our acquis. We must treasure and nurture our commitments and principles. If we want to shape a secure and stable future for the generations to come, we have no real options except to abide by these commitments. All participating States share this responsibility equally. The crisis in and around Ukraine is a stark reminder of the dramatic consequences we otherwise have to face.

Our challenges are many in the OSCE area, but each one of these challenges also represents an opportunity to enhance the level of dialogue and co-operation. It is in that spirit that I hope we can hold spirited and productive debates over the next two days.

Thank you all, dear colleagues, for your support. I look forward to working with you all and I hope that I can continue to uphold the high level of leadership that was provided by my predecessor, Ms. Christine Muttonen.

Now, I would like to give the floor to Undersecretary of State Amendola.

Thank you all. I wish you much success over the next two days.