

Address of Mr. Timo Soini, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland,
at the 24th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,
Helsinki, July 6, 2015

Mr President,

Distinguished parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address you here in Finlandia hall at the 24th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This assembly takes place at the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act.

There were challenges also 40 years ago, and the Helsinki Final Act was negotiated to respond to these challenges. The aim was to build security through co-operation. Later on as the Cold War had just finished, the OSCE Participating States declared in Paris that the era of confrontation and division in Europe is over.

We are all aware that the crisis in and around Ukraine is now shaking the European security and we now face serious questions. How to strengthen our collective engagement and explore opportunities for finding common ground? How can we reconfirm the existing elements of cooperative security on the basis of the OSCE commitments and principles? How can we continue efforts to develop the tools and instruments that we have jointly established in the OSCE framework?

These questions will be discussed also at the informal High Level Meeting later this week on Friday here in Finlandia Hall.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear that also the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is affected by the current situation. I wish to stress that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly plays a crucial role in seeking solutions to the current crisis. I will follow keenly deliberations and suggestions of the Assembly.

Our main common topic should be the de-escalation of the crisis in and around Ukraine and the implementation of the Minsk agreements. This remains the most imminent task at hand. All sides should truly follow this commitment. We must promote a political solution that will respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Spheres of influence belong to the past.

Under the Chairmanship of Switzerland and Serbia, the OSCE has wisely used all the tools and mechanisms available to support this work: the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups; the Special Monitoring Mission; the Observer Mission; High Commissioner on National Minorities, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the ODIHR, including its election observation and that of the Parliamentary Assembly.

I want to commend the Parliamentary Assembly for its contribution to the efforts to end the crisis in and around Ukraine. Political will is of utmost importance.

Progress in the implementation of the Minsk arrangements is also paramount to help re-building trust and confidence among the participating States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, the ongoing effort to strengthen the OSCE under the so called Helsinki +40 process has not been an easy task. Despite the difficulties, the topics identified within the process are even more relevant in the current situation. I am confident that the discussions will continue in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly.

The panel of eminent persons, led by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, is preparing its contribution, and we look forward to the final report of the panel to be presented later this year. The panel has already made clear recommendations in its interim report on Ukraine. Finland supports these recommendations.

Let me raise some other elements that in my view require attention in the mid-term if we are to improve our security community. It is by no means an exclusive list.

First, the arms control. There is a broad consensus that the arms control tools agreed in the OSCE framework should be modernized. That also included the Treaty on the reductions of Conventional Forces in Europe which has been in difficulties for years. We hope that a way forward could be found, both regarding arms control as well as the confidence and security building measures.

Second, the human dimension. A recent study by the OSCE academic network found out that the citizens of the OSCE participating States see governance issues such as lack of rule of law and corruption as biggest threats to their well-being. We should find ways to improve the implementation of our commitments in the human as well as in the economic and environmental dimensions.

Third, the mediation. In the Helsinki Final Act the participating States committed themselves to resolving conflicts by peaceful means and through dialogue. As a matter of fact, mediation is part of the DNA of the OSCE. Especially at these challenging times, we should not shy away from focusing on the OSCE toolbox related to mediation support. This is why Finland, Switzerland and Turkey established the OSCE Group of Friends of Mediation last year and that is why in couple of hours I will be opening a side-event on mediation here in Finlandia Hall. The Parliamentary Assembly, as the forum for dialogue *par excellence*, plays a crucial role, as was stressed in the resolution on the development of mediation capacity in the OSCE area, adapted at the PA Annual session in Baku last year.

Fourth, gender equality. Finland has been in the forefront advocating an OSCE wide action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security. We believe that such an action plan would bring added value to the OSCEs own activities as well as promote the implementation in the participating States.

Finally, the OSCE must continue incorporating the civil society in to its work – also in other areas than the human dimension. The history teaches us a lesson. Would the follow-up to the Helsinki Conference of 1975 been left only to the governments, Berlin Wall might still be up and standing. Big change and push came from the grass-roots. It grew from the civil society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE has helped us to bring about stability, human rights and democracy. It has facilitated human contacts from Vancouver to Vladivostok. All OSCE participating states have declared their adherence to common values and norms. The Final Act has stood the test of time.

"The work, however, has not been completed. Only the firm implementation of the decisions we have approved will really introduce a new era, at which we aim, into the relations between our countries and the life of their citizens." These were the words of the Finnish Prime Minister Keijo Liinamaa in July 40 years ago in the Helsinki Conference.

As of 2015, I cannot but echo the former Prime Minister. The concept of building security through co-operation has prevailed over the past 40 years, and it needs our support also today.

Respect for binding international agreements and common norms and principles such as the Helsinki Final Act, Charter of Paris and the UN Charter are at the core of a predictable, rules-based European security order. This order also consists of international actors and organisations as well as of nation states which have a right to belong or not to belong to these international organizations.

Finally, distinguished parliamentarians, let me wish you fruitful discussions during this annual session of the parliamentary assembly. As mentioned, I will follow your debates keenly, as these surely once again provide input to the work of the governmental representatives in the OSCE, including our meeting on the 10 July.

Thank you.