

RECALLING THE SPIRIT OF HELSINKI



HELSINKI 5-9 JULY 2015

Ilkka Kanerva

President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

*Opening plenary address
24th OSCE PA Annual Session
Finlandia Hall, Helsinki
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Dear Mr. President,

Dear Mr. Foreign Minister,

Dear esteemed parliamentarians, friends, and guests,

Tervetuloa Helsinkiin! Welcome to Helsinki!

On behalf of the Finnish Parliament, we are delighted to host the Parliamentary Assembly for the 24th Annual Session. After hosting the Annual Session in 1993, Finland is now the first nation to host our largest meeting twice. We are very proud to do so.

As you have heard President Niinistö and Foreign Minister Soini say, we meet today in a place that resounds with the memories of this Organization's past.

Almost exactly 40 years ago to the day, leaders from East and West put pen to paper here in this very hall. In doing so, they proved that enormous ideological differences need not be incompatible with commitment to shared values. That moment was the culmination of hard negotiations, some hard concessions, and more than a little bravery.

The theme of our Annual Session this year is “Recalling the Spirit of Helsinki”. When I recall the spirit of the Final Act, I think of a quote by Finnish president Urho Kekkonen. This is what he said:

“Security is not about putting up fences, but opening gates.”

The act that bears this great city’s name represented a fundamental redesign of our understanding of security. It linked political and military security to the environmental and economic and human dimensions. The years since have proven that the Final Act helped change the lives of millions of people across the OSCE area. It has led to greater prosperity, more rights, and yes - improved security. Here, inside these historic walls, and on this landmark anniversary, we will pay tribute to the advances we’ve made as a result of the Final Act. And also as a result of the work of the OSCE.

However, dear friends, I am afraid that recently in the OSCE area, far too many fundamental promises have been broken. The crisis in and around Ukraine has shocked us all. The actions of Russia toward Ukraine have absolutely broken all of

the Final Act's principles. Understandably, some have even questioned the meaning of the Final Act today, when the violations taking place in Ukraine seem to have proven it meaningless.

As parliamentarians, we all believe in constructive dialogue and the co-operation and initiatives that result from it. That dialogue does include Russia, just as it includes all of our other participating States. But at the same time we cannot close our eyes and must recognize at this moment just how far events in and around Ukraine have taken us from the "spirit of Helsinki."

The inclusiveness of our Assembly is one of its prime strengths, and must be maintained. We all know that the crisis in and around Ukraine cannot be resolved without Russia. I hope that the PA can continue to facilitate constructive dialogue to de-escalate the situation and encourage the implementation of the Minsk Agreement, which is the most important chance for a diplomatic resolution of the crisis. As I mentioned yesterday, I plan to approach the European Union to discuss how the sanctions regime can affect the work of our Assembly and perhaps others.

Let me also quote the words of U.S. President Gerald Ford from 1975:

"History will judge this Conference not by what we say here today, but by what we do tomorrow -- not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep."

We are all firm believers in the OSCE's enormous value and potential. The PA, in particular, has never avoided hard realities. I am proud that we have taken the lead in driving the sorely needed efforts to reform the OSCE. The Ukraine crisis has brought new attention to the OSCE – both its strengths and its weaknesses. The Parliamentary Assembly's Helsinki +40 Project has explored all of them. The Project's Final Report contains wide-ranging recommendations for OSCE reform.

I also greatly look forward to the Assembly's discussion of this Report and its recommendations, which have been synthesized into a supplementary item that we will consider shortly.

This, indeed, is a good start towards a new generation for the OSCE – the OSCE 2.0.

I will present our Final Report to Chairman Dacic when he arrives in Helsinki later this week, as well as to the high-level OSCE meeting that will directly follow our Annual Session.

Of course, there is much more on the agenda this week, as we debate and consider many pressing issues. These include the tragedy of migrants and refugees to arms control to climate change to foreign terrorist fighters and more.

Let us take this opportunity for constructive dialogue and for finding new and creative ways to work together toward comprehensive security.

During this difficult moment for the OSCE, and this serious moment for the European security structure, the nearly 300 parliamentarians from more than 50 participating States who have assembled here have both the duty and the privilege to “recall the spirit of Helsinki”.

And so, “recalling” means not only looking back and understanding history. It also means looking forward and building something new: an OSCE that we will be proud of recalling 40 years from today.

This generation, here today, will leave a tremendous legacy, and bears an enormous responsibility for the future of security in the OSCE area.

Thank you all very much.