



Remarks by OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva
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Mr. President,
Distinguished Speakers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me, as the newly elected president of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, to participate in this conference with you, my distinguished colleagues. It is also a pleasure to be back in Oslo, where the OSCE PA met a few years ago for our 19th Annual Session under the theme "Rule of Law: Combating Transnational Crime and Corruption."

The themes on the agenda of this conference include some of the biggest concerns facing our continent and the wider world. When it comes to questions of **fundamental freedoms, democracy, sovereignty and security**, the topics we could discuss in detail are seemingly endless, and I can think of no better place to debate them than here.

In recent years we have been reminded that there has been **too much democratic backsliding on our continent** and in recent months we have witnessed **flagrant violations of sovereignty** and growing threats to security even right here in Europe.

Just last week, I was in Moscow for a series of high-level meetings. In my discussions with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Matvienko, State Duma Chairperson Sergey Naryshkin and Chair of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Aleksei Pushkov, I emphasized the need for the Russian Federation to take responsibility for its impact on the situation in Ukraine.

In all of my meetings, I underscored that Russia's stated commitment to diplomacy and peace in Ukraine requires a full accounting of its impact on the crisis as well as constructive action on the ground. We hope that the **Parliamentary Assembly Liaison Group** we are working to build will help complement the other OSCE and international initiatives aimed at de-escalation.

The Liaison Group, an initiative first proposed by Chairperson Naryshkin, is an endeavor to promote dialogue and de-escalation of the conflict.

For any dialogue that we build to have value, however, Russia must respect its neighbor's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as it has committed to do as an OSCE

founding member and signatory of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. These commitments have been commonly agreed to by all OSCE participating States. And therefore impunity cannot be tolerated. The violations undermine the basis of trust that should be the guiding force of international relations in the 21st century.

In democracies, there is an open discussion of the relation between guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms and security. In the name of national security and particularly in the context of the fight against terrorism, there is a constant temptation to trade away a few constitutional rights for the promise of safety and security, or even to breach another nation's sovereignty in the never-ending hunt for those who would do us harm.

But in an increasingly complex world in which friendships are sometimes strained and alliances occasionally shifting, the one thing that must remain constant is our steadfast commitment to democracy – both as a political system guaranteeing fundamental rights by the Constitution, and as a form of society based on **public debate, participation and trust.**

Over the years, the OSCE and the Council of Europe have forged a strong collaborative relationship, and we must continue working together to ensure democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in all our countries. Our Assemblies are indispensable in this regard, providing the democratic foundations not just for our respective institutions, but for the region at large.

Thank you.