



Remarks to open to the 2015 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Winter Meeting

OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva

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Vienna

Mr. Chairman-in-Office,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ambassadors,
Distinguished Guests,

It is an honor and privilege to welcome you to our 2015 Winter Meeting in Vienna. This meeting has become a valued tradition of our Assembly and of the OSCE as a whole.

I would first of all like to thank the Austrian Parliament and the OSCE for hosting us and once again offer condolences on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly to the Austrian people over the loss of our esteemed colleague and friend, Barbara Prammer.

For the 14th year in a row, we are gathered at the Hofburg, home of the OSCE, to represent the collective voice of one billion people across the OSCE area who have elected us and on whose behalf we work.

Last month, Chairman Dacic outlined the Serbian Chairmanship's agenda for 2015, with timely and relevant priorities in all three dimensions of the OSCE's work. We welcome the assurance that as Chair-in-Office of the OSCE, Serbia is ready to act as an honest broker in building peace

and stability in Ukraine, taking full advantage of the tools that the OSCE offers, including the work of the Special Monitoring Mission.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will continue to support our Organization's efforts to facilitate peace in Ukraine and at the same time we must also support to the fullest the commitments to reform made by the Verkhovna Rada.

The monitoring mission has played a key role in the implementation of the Minsk documents and has been instrumental in shaping an international response to the crisis that is both fact-based and timely. I cannot stress enough that the monitors on ground have to have access throughout Ukraine in order to carry out the mandate entrusted to them by all the participating States.

Even as the OSCE has provided leadership throughout the crisis and offered a vital forum for dialogue and negotiation, at times it has proved challenging for the Organization to keep up with the rapid changes in the conflict environment.

We all sincerely hope that the agreement from Minsk last week will hold, as the escalation of violence preceding the agreement -- including mounting civilian suffering -- has been appalling. I have consistently raised my voice as President of the Assembly to call on all sides, Russia in particular, to take decisive steps to help end the bloodshed. The loss of civilian lives is unacceptable.

The agreement reached in Minsk now hangs in the balance. It is shocking to hear the claims by rebels, and support for those claims by some in Moscow, that there are exceptions to the ceasefire and areas where it does not apply. Make no mistake: There are no such things as exceptions here and such a precedent could have disastrous consequences for the entire Minsk process. Let us not take any detours on the road to much-needed peace in Ukraine.

After the events in Debaltseve and now the aftermath, I once again ask if an international peace-keeping mission should be considered. I am not saying this to undermine the work done by the Special Monitoring Mission -- quite the opposite, in fact. An international peace-keeping mission could perhaps complement the OSCE's work in making the peace process viable.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues,

While the Ukraine crisis may rightly consume the lion's share of our attention, we must remember that it is not the only challenge that we face. With recent tragedies such as the terror shootings in Paris and Copenhagen offering terrible reminders of the ongoing threats to security posed by violent extremists, we must commit to redoubling our efforts to improve our counter-terrorism strategies -- for example, by better intelligence-sharing, making border controls more effective and combating extremism on the Internet.

2015 is a year of milestones and anniversaries that offer opportunities for serious reflection on achievements, setbacks and possibilities, taking stock of lessons learned and obstacles overcome as we continue to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. When it comes to the OSCE, 2015 marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the OSCE's founding document. I am proud to say that we will commemorate it this summer in Helsinki by holding the final colloquium of the

OSCE PA's Helsinki +40 Project in conjunction with the Assembly's 24th Annual Session at historic Finlandia Hall.

With our next Annual Session being held under the theme "Recalling the Spirit of Helsinki" and taking place at the venue where this historic document was signed four decades ago, I hope that we can rekindle the spirit of co-operation that has guided our work since 1975 and provided the basis for real progress in the three dimensions of security as outlined in the Helsinki Final Act.

Dear colleagues, with these few introductory words I would now like to give the floor to the Chairman-in-Office, Minister Dacic.

Thank you.