



*International Conference on*

**“THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) AS A DRIVER FOR THE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)”**

Remarks by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli

*Andermatt, 5 September 2019*

*Check against delivery.*

Dear Margareta,

Dear Filippo,

Dear Azay,

Minister Cassis,

Fellow delegates,

Distinguished guests,

Let me begin by extending our collective gratitude to our hosts for their hospitality in welcoming all of us in this beautiful area of Switzerland this week.

I am particularly grateful to the National Council and the Delegation of Switzerland to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, for putting together this event.

Thank you Margareta Kiener-Nellen and Filippo Lombardi for putting all your energy into reuniting us here this evening.

This is a wonderful opportunity to discover the beauty of the Swiss Alps, and understand how this mountainous city in the heart of Europe has been an international crossroads mixing different influences and bringing prosperity to an entire region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet today for the Third International Parliamentary Conference of the OSCE PA's Silk Road Support Group.

In the space of a couple years – from the first conference in Baku, through our regular meetings, and after its last standalone meeting in Minsk – this group has managed to establish itself as a valuable complement to our OSCE PA activities.

A lot of credit for this goes to the driving force behind the Silk Road Group, Vice-President Azay Guliyev and his team.

Our agenda for these next several days will again offer a unique opportunity for us, parliamentarians, to interact with key stakeholders – government officials, diplomats, civil society representatives, or leaders from the private sector – all of which must work in concert to advance economic co-operation in the OSCE region.

This meeting is also a good occasion to follow-up on the work we undertook during our most recent Annual Session, and prepare for our Autumn Meeting in Marrakech, where the Mediterranean Forum will focus on economic connectivity.

You will recall that in Luxembourg we recognized the essential role of our parliaments in advancing sustainable development and security.

We underlined that we can do this through various means: by adopting relevant legislation, providing oversight, ratifying treaties, approving budgets and setting agendas that prioritize the need to comply with international commitments and domestic responsibilities.

Today, we are invited to determine how greater economic convergence between our countries, through vast infrastructure projects such as the New Silk Road, can further contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Through our defense of freedom, democracy, strong principles, shared commitments and common goals, the OSCE already makes strong contributions towards the fulfilment of the SDGs.

But we can and should always do more.

We must use the full potential of our 57 participating States, our partners and our field missions to maintain the development goals high on our agenda.

This is why we are gathered here today.

Dear friends,

After Baku, where we visited important and strategic infrastructures that are part of a regional effort in the South Caucasus to develop east-west transit, and discussions in Minsk on Belarus's economic potential as a bridge between East and West, here we are in the heart of the Swiss Alps.

This third conference invites us to imagine how Switzerland, a mountainous landlocked country, must reach out to compete in a globalized world.

Just a few kilometers from here, we will visit the Gotthard, one of the main North-South routes through the Alps crossed by three major traffic tunnels, all of which were the world's longest at the time of their construction.

We will grasp the infrastructure efforts necessary to increase transport capacity without provoking irreparable damage to our environment.

While Switzerland had the capacity to finance such a gigantic enterprise, our discussions will necessarily approach sustainable financing for infrastructure projects.

On this issue, our previous meetings have revealed some concerns regarding the growing influence of some countries, namely China, and an increasing dependence on Beijing in the OSCE area.

We must be open to discussing such concerns, including through direct contacts with Chinese representatives.

Our meeting seems to be a good occasion for this, bearing in mind that Switzerland is also the only European country to have a Free Trade Agreement with China.

As a matter of fact, and contrary to what most could believe, Switzerland is experiencing an exports surplus with China.

Perhaps we can rely on Switzerland's experience to better grasp the benefits of closer and mutually beneficial trade relations with one of the world's largest economies.

With talks about trade wars and a continued deterioration of trust between our OSCE countries, I am convinced that we need to seize every opportunity – such as this one – to have a frank and honest dialogue on these legitimate concerns, and thus avoid creating further divisions between our countries.

We must also underline that the activities of the Silk Road Support Group are not simply to provide blank parliamentary backing to projects decided in our capitals or in Beijing.

This would go against our core mission as parliamentarians.

As representatives of our citizens, it is their best interest that we must defend.

Our engagement here today translates our ambition to have the widest population benefit from these new projects and investments.

We are here to make sure that a local workforce is used and that projects respect the highest local and environmental standards.

This invites to provide greater parliamentary oversight on the projects along the historical Silk Road, to ensure the long-term prosperity and security of our citizens and countries, and to prevent the kinds of abuses too often linked to infrastructure investments.

I am glad, for instance, that our agenda includes a dedicated session on Good Governance, Transparency and Fight against Corruption.

In several declarations, our Assembly has recognized that corruption constitutes a major obstacle to sustainable development.

We have continued to urge our parliaments to establish or further develop anti-corruption policies and to promote best practices to both ensure a genuinely free and transparent market and enable sustainable economic growth.

Amidst widespread calls from our citizens for increased transparency and accountability, it is my belief that the OSCE PA has a greater role to play in this domain.

This is why I recently appointed our esteemed colleague from Cyprus, Irene Charalambides, to lead our efforts on the fight against corruption.

We also need to continue promoting more urgent action on climate change.

The protection of the environment and the safeguard of our biodiversity and natural resources must not become an afterthought.

Last year's SDG Report found that climate change is a major contributing factor, leading not only to a growing number of people facing hunger and forced displacement, but also curtailing universal access to water and basic sanitation services.

This summer, wildfires in the Arctic region and the Amazon rainforest highlighted the need for both emergency short-term responses and increased long-term attention.

Greater international co-operation is needed, and our Special Representative on Arctic Issues continues to act as a focal point to streamline our parliamentary contribution to this global challenge.

Fellow delegates,

For most of us, Switzerland is synonymous with neutrality.

This is a country who has not been in a state of war for over two centuries.

Although it has been surrounded by great powers on all sides, and despite its dramatic topography, Switzerland has prospered.

This goes to show that peace and conflict resolution are preconditions for progress on the issues we will discuss here in Andermatt.

Without peaceful relations between our countries throughout the Eurasian continent, there can only be limited progress in our quest to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Ukrainian crisis and protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus remain our biggest challenges and pose a significant roadblock towards prosperity in the OSCE area.

Let's remain steadfast in our collective commitment to uphold the Helsinki principles and defend the universal values of our rules-based multilateral system.

This is the only way we can continue to pave the way for durable peace and stability in Europe.

Thank you.