



**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President
George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia)**

**Opening Session of the 18th Autumn Meeting
of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
4 October 2019 | Marrakech**

President Benchamach,

Fellow parliamentarians,

Distinguished guests,

Welcome to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 18th Autumn Meeting.

It is a distinct honour and a privilege to gather here in Marrakech, one of the largest and oldest cities in all of Morocco.

Founded in 1062 and serving as the capital for two centuries, this city embodies the rich culture of this country, with its long and storied history dating back thousands of years.

On behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, I extend my gratitude to our Moroccan hosts for their hospitality and a special thanks to the House of Councilors for organizing this meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Autumn Meeting is a historic occasion for both the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and for Morocco.

This is Morocco's first time hosting a meeting of the OSCE PA, and is even our Assembly's first time holding a meeting in an OSCE Partner State.

Gathering here is a testament to the value that we attach to the Mediterranean Partnership and to the inter-connectedness of our regions.

This is also, of course, our first time meeting in Africa. Having met many times in North America, Europe and Asia, we can now say that we have met on four of the planet's seven continents. This is a powerful reminder of the truly global scope of the OSCE.

On our agenda are topics such as the economic connectivity of the Mediterranean region, climate change and environmental migration, African regional co-operation, and combating religious intolerance.

The issues are not new, but what is new, perhaps, is the unstable and unpredictable geopolitical context in which we debate them.

With rising trends of human rights violations, mistrust in institutions, authoritarianism and violent extremism, we have seen a corresponding decline in predictability and stability. Diplomacy and policymaking are increasingly impacted by fake news and conducted in a climate of uncertainty. Multilateralism is threatened daily.

Long-held assumptions about our common beliefs have been challenged by crises ranging from political and environmental to economic and social.

Even in established democracies, we have seen fractures and divisions. These upheavals have an impact on our comprehensive security and remind us of the importance of open debate.

Indeed, the interesting dynamic in the UK's parliament related to Brexit in recent months and particularly the recent court ruling again demonstrated the necessity of strong and independent democratic institutions.

Even though the Brexit process is prolonged we hope that a decision is ultimately reached that benefits the British people and Europe as a whole.

Dear colleagues,

For the past five years, following an unprecedented spike in the number of migrants and refugees entering Europe, migration has proved to be a divisive issue in many of our societies.

Much of the public debate has focused on the security implications of the crisis. We discuss managing migration flows, how to integrate migrants and how to ensure a balanced approach to responsibility sharing among European countries. Less attention has focused on the real causes for migration.

Meeting here in North Africa along the Western Mediterranean migration route, it is worth taking some time to understand the underlying factors.

Why are so many Africans deciding to leave their home countries?

Whether they are fleeing protracted conflicts or economic hardship, is there anything we can do as legislators and diplomats to improve these circumstances?

Another topic of national, regional and international concern is terrorism. I noted with interest a recent report issued by the Moroccan Public Prosecutor's Office which found

that Morocco's counterterrorism strategy has helped lower the level of terror crimes in the country over the past two years.

I hope to hear more over the next few days about Morocco's efforts to stop terrorist attacks and dismantle terror cells. We welcome the efforts of the Moroccan authorities to develop effective counterterrorism strategies that help keep all of our citizens safe.

Dear colleagues,

Whether the issue is migration, counter-terrorism, climate change or pursuing economic connectivity and sustainable development, we cannot hope to make progress without regional and international co-operation.

This is why it is so important to pursue multilateral and comprehensive approaches to our common challenges. But we must be honest with ourselves: today's geopolitical landscape is characterized less by co-operation and solidarity than it is by division and distrust.

There are however signs for optimism, including some positive developments in the Ukraine conflict.

The prisoner exchange last month between Russia and Ukraine was a constructive step in the right direction – one that was advocated for a long time, including by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In recent days, we have seen important efforts to reach agreement related to modalities for local elections in the Donbas region. After five years of bloodshed, all steps that can bring lasting peace are appreciated and so we again call for full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We must build upon positive steps with further confidence-building measures, which hopefully can help inspire progress in resolving other conflicts in the OSCE region.

We should not forget the people suffering and must continue to push for tangible results related to the conflict in Georgia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and Transdniestria.

We have also recently seen a major climate action summit take place in New York, where leaders just gathered to move forward with concrete plans to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In the wake of a summer marked by unprecedented wildfires in the Arctic and the Amazon, it is encouraging to see the international community moving from the era of debate over climate change into an era of concerted action.

Dear colleagues,

With the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall next month, we should remember the historic importance of the Helsinki Process of the 1970s in bringing an end to the Cold War.

This is a reminder of what is possible when political will is applied to building co-operation and comprehensive security, underpinned by a commitment to shared values.

With you, I am proud to continue this work. Together we must build on the work of our predecessors who fought so hard for the principles of this organization. We cannot let those principles fall on our watch. It is our responsibility today to revive the spirit of solidarity that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In Africa, similar processes have taken place. Various projects have attempted to build political consensus to preserve African independence and unity in the post-colonial era starting in the 1950s.

Leaders eventually launched the African Union in 2002, in order to promote the unity of African States and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and their independence.

Several nations of North Africa have also participated in the OSCE through the Mediterranean Partnership. Inherited from the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership was structured with a Contact Group at the 1994 Budapest Summit.

In 2019, this year, we therefore celebrate the 25th anniversary of this Partnership. I would like to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for their good work in this direction.

It is encouraging to see the participation here in Marrakech of so many parliamentarians from across the OSCE area, including some Mediterranean Partners, who are joined by representatives of the African Parliamentary Union and the Economic Community of West African States.

Regional co-operation is a high priority for us. Just last week I had the opportunity to again visit Central Asia as a reflection of our work there. I was there for a series of speaking engagements and high-level meetings in which I underlined this and other messages.

As I said at an event in Nur-Sultan, the fulfillment of international commitments and obligations is a prerequisite for honest dialogue, genuine trust, and stronger partnerships for peace and sustainable development.

We need greater dialogue throughout all of our regions, from North America to the Mediterranean to Central Asia, in order to better understand our challenges and ensure greater success in our efforts.

This Autumn Meeting, dear colleagues, therefore is a unique opportunity for us all to share our experiences, to learn from one another and build values-based relationships.

Since 2002, our Autumn Meeting has become a valued tradition in the Assembly. It is not only an opportunity for OSCE PA members to debate pressing security-related topics and build upon their friendships and networks, but also to follow up on outcomes from the summer's Annual Session.

In Luxembourg, as you know, we adopted a very strong Declaration endorsing a multilateral approach to addressing arms control, conflict resolution, the environment and human rights.

The Luxembourg Declaration affirmed the essential role of parliamentarians in advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and urged parliaments to develop legislation with the aim of promoting comprehensive security.

We heard many of these topics echoed in the speeches of world leaders at the recent General Assembly at the United Nations.

As we gather now, I hope that we have all started the follow-up process on the Luxembourg Declaration in our capitals – and that is crucially important.

It is up to us to ensure that OSCE PA recommendations are implemented and that OSCE values are championed in all of our countries.

Dear friends,

Open discussion is important. As we discuss our common challenges, we sometimes have to criticize one another, and highlight areas in which we are falling short of our commitments.

But as a Moroccan proverb goes: “Love truth even if it harms you, and hate lies even if they serve you.”

I look forward to discussing the issues with you in our working sessions.

I thank the leaders and all Members of the Parliamentary Assembly for their enthusiasm and dedication, I am grateful for the support and trust placed in me as President, and of course I hope to keep this momentum going in the coming months.

I thank the Slovak Chairmanship for their leadership and wish the Albanian Chairmanship all success.

I also thank the staff of the Secretariat, led by the very capable Secretary General Roberto Montella, for their support.

And I once again welcome all of you to this historic Autumn Meeting. I know that it will be a memorable experience for us all, and I expect a high level of dialogue here in Marrakech.

And now, to paraphrase another Moroccan proverb, as I hand over the floor to the next speaker: “If I listen, I have the advantage; if I speak, others have it.” I hope this has been true so far today.

Now I will take the advantage of sitting and listening to others.

I wish all of us productive and very fruitful discussions.

Thank you for your attention.