



**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President
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Remarks to the OSCE Permanent Council

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Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

This is the fourth time I address the Permanent Council. I see a lot of new faces, meaning that some of you will hear me for the first time.

I would like to use this opportunity to welcome the new members – my address is not a one-way-street. I look forward to an interesting interaction with you all. I highly appreciate every time I am in Vienna and I can take benefit from your input.

I would also like to thank many of you for your active participation in PA events, and in particular the interest displayed by the Slovak Chairmanship in our work.

Precisely 30 years ago, we witnessed fundamental historical changes in Europe. Free elections in Poland, the dismantling of the Iron Curtain in Hungary, and then the fall of the Berlin Wall, to mention only a few.

This took place against a background of great political achievements regarding disarmament, arms control and confidence-building measures, Perestroika and Glasnost in the Soviet Union and democratization of authoritarian regimes in other parts of the world.

Of course, we should not forget that there were also some warning signs, inside and outside of what is now the OSCE: tragic events happened in several places, including in my own country. Some of them resulted in what we now call protracted conflicts. And we were all shocked by what had just happened in other parts of the world at the time, especially in China.

However, this did not diminish the euphoria of the time.

Despite these events and other warning signs, like in former Yugoslavia and in the Caucasus, Europeans were looking towards a bright future.

Just read the first paragraph of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe: Under the headline “A new era of Democracy, Peace and Unity” the Heads of State or Government of the States participating in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe declared that they “have assembled in Paris at a time of profound change and historic expectations. The era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended. We declare that henceforth our, relations will be founded on respect and co-operation.”

Of course, over these 30 years we have achieved many positive things, and transition was successful in many places. The OSCE has made a substantial contribution to the successes. But the initial spirit of optimism has soured.

I do not want to repeat the long list of issues that today make our outlook into the future much less bright. We all know what today’s reality is: growing tensions between former partners and even allies, war on our continent, unfulfilled promises in many regions of the OSCE, and renewed illiberal and anti-democratic tendencies sponsored by governments that cling to power – but also opposition forces that resort to violence and other undemocratic means or preach the end of liberal democracy.

Just look at the phrase from “Relations founded on respect and co-operation” from the Paris Charter and compare it to the reality of today’s inter-state relations: too many leaders have replaced their readiness for co-operation with selfish unilateral action that shows contempt for their partners and the vision outlined in the Charter.

Post-imperial revenge actions, chauvinist rhetoric and daily demonstrations of a political discourse marked by a presumptuous lack of respect and empathy are the symptoms of deep divisions between and within the participating States that pose a threat to the vision of one Europe safe and free.

Under these circumstances I know it is a bit unfair to expect miracles from you, and I am aware that political leaders sometimes do everything to block progress that might come out of your diplomatic work. As politicians, we might not always be your best allies.

But as members of our parliaments many of us try, and we are ready to listen to you as much as we expect that you listen to our debates and recommendations.

After all, we have so often re-committed to the principles that the new Europe was supposed to be built upon: A rules-based order, the peaceful settlement of conflicts, economic co-operation and democratic societies that respect the human rights of the women and men that live in our countries.

The reality shows we are still very far apart in our interpretation of these principles. The discrepancy between what our governments declare and promise and what they do in practice has often inflicted death and misery on our peoples. Yet, many do not seem to be able to reflect on their own conduct critically.

Will we, as the bodies and institutions of the OSCE, be able to provide the international community with an impetus for a corrective course of action? I know that you have tried

again and again, by way of the reform efforts of the past and now with the help of the “Structured Dialogue”.

The Slovak chairmanship has rightly selected “effective multilateralism” as one of this year’s priorities.

But I am aware that this only works if the countries’ leaders play along. The first positive movements regarding eastern Ukraine we are seeing are a demonstration of how multilateral diplomacy can contribute. At the same time, we witness the negative impact of actions of countries that believe they can do better if they resort to unilateral action.

I have a hard time understanding how anybody can seriously believe that the challenges of our time can be tackled within the borders of one country, or through a complex system of bilateral agreements.

Perhaps we can be more convincing in our plea for effective multilateralism if we coordinate our efforts even more. After all, MPs are mandated to scrutinize governments and steer them into the right direction, and many of them will be or have been in responsible positions in their governments. We have the potential and the instruments. We just need to use them better to convince others. In this context, if you are ready, we will also be happy to support you in convincing more countries that it is worthwhile chairing the OSCE.

In the meantime, while we are thinking about how we can create this great push, the Slovak Chairmanship, many of you, and certainly the PA have often underlined that our success is also measured in terms of how we manage to improve the everyday situation of the people in our countries.

A policy of small practical steps can be beneficial for people in areas affected by humanitarian crisis, or individuals that are badly treated by the authorities. The OSCE, its institutions and field presences have often been quite good at making such efforts in parallel to the discussions about the bigger issues.

Over the past years we as the organization’s parliamentary side have developed quite a positive track record of good co-operation with the governmental side including through joint statements and coordinated action.

We must also stay in close contact with our citizens and their organizations. A systematic involvement of Civil Society in our work is key. It is embarrassing when human dimension meetings cannot take place or lack an agenda because of disagreements regarding NGO participation.

And, since you are now in the middle of your budget discussions: Sufficient resources and a budget that is approved within the deadlines is also indispensable.

Apart from issuing policy recommendations and engaging in inter-parliamentary dialogue during our meetings, our main contributions as the PA since my last presentation to the PC have focused on election observation, outreach, parliamentary diplomacy regarding conflicts

and human rights issues, also extending our partnerships and a further strengthening involvement in events and activities on the governmental side.

Some of you were present at our Annual Session in Luxembourg. This was one of the best attended sessions ever, and it sent out an important message. You have received a thorough briefing by our Special Representative in Vienna, Amb. Nothelle, about our Luxembourg Declaration and are therefore aware of our recommendations.

We have continued to provide leadership for politically sensitive election observation missions in Moldova, three times in Ukraine, in North Macedonia and in Kazakhstan. Currently, we are preparing for our observer missions in Belarus and Uzbekistan.

In parallel, we have codified internal observation procedures and created mechanisms to scrutinize possible conflicts of interest of potential observers. This will further strengthen the resilience of our work against undue outside influences. We also continue to coordinate and brainstorm with the ODIHR and our parliamentary partners who share the same approach to principles of international election observation.

We continue to maintain an excellent co-operation with all the autonomous institutions.

We also see it as our task to engage in awareness raising about the good work done by the OSCE. Together mostly with OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella and senior members of the Assembly I have continued to visit OSCE institutions and field presences, for instance in The Hague, Warsaw, Bishkek, Kyiv, Nur Sultan and Belgrade, and we regularly use these visits for high-level meetings with the countries' leaderships. Such visits clearly strengthen the cohesion within our organization.

Regarding our core business as parliamentarians I have participated in events such as the one on parliamentary oversight in Tbilisi, Bishkek, and a media conference in Tbilisi.

We also continue our co-operation with colleagues from other parliamentary institutions.

I had the opportunity during the Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries' Parliaments in Nur-Sultan to discuss OSCE priority issues at the highest level with Kazakhstan's and other parliamentary leaders on any topics and underline the OSCE's prevalence for security dialogue and the importance of parliamentary democracy in Eurasia.

I have recently also participated in the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, visited the European Parliament, addressed the Spring Session of the NATO PA, and met with the leadership of the Interparliamentary Union.

All these events offer good opportunities for high-level meetings. For instance, the Belgrade IPU Conference also gave me an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in Syria in a long meeting with the President of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Mustafa Şentop just two days before the cease-fire.

But this is not all. We also value the intensive exchange we have with PA delegations outside of our regular meetings. In this context we appreciate the strong involvement of the US delegation in our work which I see as demonstrating their faith in multilateralism. I was happy to see one of the strongest US delegations ever participating in our Annual Session, including House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and the presence of Helsinki Commission Chair and former PA President Alcee Hastings in Marrakech. My visit to Washington was meant to generally strengthen the involvement of the US in the work of the organization beyond the excellent co-operation between parliamentarians.

Regarding the conflict cycle, we continue to offer our assistance to those who are ready to engage in conflict settlement in Ukraine, boosting public awareness about the human suffering in the conflict-affected areas. I, as well as the leadership of our Third Committee, have again and again paid visits to these areas and held talks with all important players.

We welcome recent meaningful steps and some progress regarding the relief of human suffering. I appeal to everybody to support progress through constructive and co-operative rhetoric and not belittle first necessary steps. We must use every window of opportunity and build on any positive momentum that develops. I am looking forward to my next visit in Kyiv which we are preparing in close coordination with our Ukrainian colleagues.

We continue to address the illegal borderization happening in Georgia, in blatant breach of international law and agreements. The most recent example of the consequences is the death of Margo Martiashvili, who suffered a stroke in the Russian-controlled Akhgori district died in the hospital of occupied Tskhinvali as her relatives were unable to transport her to the Tbilisi-controlled territory via the shortest route due to the closure of the so-called border. The main crossing point to South Ossetia and the Akhgori Valley - normally seeing around 400 crossings daily - has been totally closed since 5 September.

As the EU Monitoring Mission rightly stated, such tragic instances show the potential impact of the severe restrictions in place on the freedom of movement for the local population in Akhgori valley.

We also see similar incidents happen as in Ukraine, where the SMM is prevented from freely conducting their observations. There are cases when armed security actors prevent EUMM Monitors from conducting their daily activities in accordance with their mandate.

I have had regular exchanges with the leaderships of Armenia and Azerbaijan to advance parliamentary contributions to peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I am planning to go to Yerevan in the coming weeks. In Moldova I have explained to the parliamentary leadership our readiness to assist in building legislative contacts between both sides.

Additionally, the first visit in a decade by a PA President to Cyprus included meetings with the UN, cross-community organizations to better grasp the dynamics in peace negotiations, and discuss what we could contribute, if requested.

I have also maintained close contact with the Albanian authorities, political camps in the country and the OSCE Secretariat. We look forward to visiting the country of the incoming

Chairmanship soon and are ready to eventually facilitate political dialogue on important reform projects.

Frankly, as many colleagues, we are deeply disappointed by the EU's postponement of a decision on the start of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. Just a week ago I had discussions with high level interlocutors at the European Parliament who share this disappointment, also expressed by a large majority of members of the EP in their recent resolution. Now, more than ever, we must back our field operations who will be crucial in maintaining and boosting transition in the region.

The Human Dimension remains very dear to the PA and its members. We have encouraged greater participation by OSCE MPs in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting as well as other related events. In that context, I have appointed a new Special Representative on Civil Society Engagement.

Our Luxembourg Declaration repeated our calls for the OSCE's 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. We are continuously looking at ways how to improve our own record in this respect.

We have also enlarged the scope of our activities looking at challenges of our time that might grow to a much stronger dimension in the future. I have appointed Special Representatives on Disinformation and propaganda, Fighting Corruption and Climate change/Arctic issues, in order to deal with additional priorities that have been set out in the resolutions of our Assembly.

Our General and Ad Hoc Committees, our Special Representatives and individual PA delegations continue their active efforts to support your work and aspirations regarding the implementation of our principles and commitments.

In Marrakech, we heard a very interesting report from our PA Secretary General Roberto Montella about the many innovative activities, many first-time events our International Secretariat in Copenhagen and Vienna has facilitated, as well as a new media strategy and numerous reforms. It always amazes me how a modest lean budget like ours makes all this possible.

You have become familiar with the very productive work of our Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, which it conducts in close coordination with the Transnational Threats Department, and also other International Organizations and Institutions like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. In Luxembourg, we unanimously adopted a resolution on challenges related to the returning and relocating of Foreign Fighters, and very recently the new committee leadership issued a publication on Strengthening Border Security and Information Sharing in the OSCE Region.

Also, our Ad Hoc Committee on Migration is continuing its valuable work, and in Luxembourg we adopted a resolution on effective migration governance based on promoting inclusive societies and dignified returns.

We are happy to increase awareness of the OSCE acquis. For instance, we will continue to call for a dynamic interpretation and better implementation of the OSCE's Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. We gladly contributed to the 25th anniversary of this landmark document and are proud that – during our Luxembourg Session – we once more added recommendations on how to make more effective use of it.

We held our Autumn Meeting in Morocco earlier this month, the first time that a Partner country hosted one of our statutory events. Next week I will travel to Egypt, together with the PA Special Representative on the Mediterranean, on the first official PA visit in a decade. We were also present at the high-level OSCE Mediterranean Conference in Tirana. The OSCE PA will continue to actively support the OSCE's Mediterranean and Asian dimensions from a parliamentary perspective, enhancing relations between the Organization and the Partners for Co-operation.

We continue to seek better involvement and focus on Youth in our work. You will have noticed our participation earlier this week in Bratislava. Today I will also have a meeting with Samuel Goda.

My experience in these years of my presidency has clearly taught me that there is no alternative to close co-operation between the parliamentary and the governmental sides of our organization. A spirit of co-operation will create the synergies that our joint work will benefit from and strengthen the organization we care about.

Let me thank all of you, excellencies, plus – in absentia – Thomas, Ingibjörg, Harlem, Lamberto, for the co-operation we have had. Delegates, I am looking forward to your statements.