



*Remarks to open special debate on
“The migrant and refugee crisis in the OSCE area: strengthening the collective
response”*

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Esteemed parliamentarians,

Distinguished guests,

We now turn to the final segment of our 2016 Winter Meeting, our special debate. As so much of our meeting this year has focused on the crisis of migrants and refugees in the OSCE area, is it fitting that we are now addressing this complex topic as a full parliamentary assembly. That’s because a comprehensive, effective and sustainable solution to the crisis will only come from collective brainstorming, collective will, and collective action.

That, of course, is what the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly can facilitate and generate. That’s what we do best.

And as I said in my remarks yesterday, the OSCE and the PA are also particularly well-suited to address this crisis because of our approach: considering all three dimensions of human security. The strength of our input is the fact that it is multi-dimensional – *just like the crisis itself* – touching on hard security, economics, human rights and humanitarian questions. As I know we will discuss today, the OSCE, itself, can and must do more. We have the potential, and so let's figure out how to activate it.

The stakes are extremely high for us today, as they are for Europe and the OSCE area. Indeed, the international community has been unable to find enough political will and clarity of purpose to fully deal with this crisis, and it is sobering. This is a crisis that has tested some of core principles upon which the European Union was built. It has generated political and social tensions – with real, practical consequences.

Some of our constituents are afraid of how this will affect their countries, their communities, and themselves, in terms of security, social cohesion, economics and more. Meanwhile, walls on our territories and in our minds are going up and people are continuing to die. As the tragedies continue in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, the issue before us is not going to simply go away on its own.

Let us make the most of this important opportunity today – here, together, in one room. In this hall we have parliamentarians from countries of arrival, transit and destination for migrants and refugees. We have parliamentarians from countries that have experienced migration crises before, and from countries which have not. Of course, we also have parliamentarians from countries affected by different migrant and refugee crises, such as the one stemming from the conflict in and around Ukraine. In short, there is a wealth of perspective, knowledge and ideas in this room – *and the time is now for us to harness it and help solve this problem together*. There's simply no other way.

We have the distinct privilege of having with us today Mr. Christos Stylianides, the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and a former distinguished member of our own Assembly. On behalf of the OSCE PA, thank

you for joining our Winter Meeting. We look forward to your remarks and ideas, which will be an ideal way to open our debate today.

We will then hear from the leadership of our Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, who have produced a special report in time for this meeting. Each delegation has a copy. As we will hear, this useful report offers concrete proposals for greater OSCE engagement on this crisis, as well as suggestions for OSCE participating States.

I also look forward, of course, to hearing from all of you and encourage us to have a productive, results-oriented dialogue.

With that, I will turn to Commissioner Stylianides. Sir, the floor is yours.