



**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President
Christine Muttonen (MP, Austria)**

26th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Minsk, 5 July 2017

President Lukashenko, Chairman Andreichenko, Foreign Minister Kurz,

Fellow parliamentarians, distinguished guests,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to Minsk for the 26th Annual Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. Let me thank our hosts for making this event possible and for providing such a welcoming venue for our work in the coming days.

Thank you, Mr. President and Mr. Chairman, for being here today. And thank you Minister Kurz for your participation.

It was 25 years ago, in July 1992, when the inaugural session of our Assembly took place in Budapest – then known as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

For some it might seem a long time – but if you put it into relation to what has been achieved, it is not. Still, there is much more work to do!

This year we meet under the theme of “Enhancing mutual trust and co-operation for peace and prosperity in the OSCE region.” It is a strong reminder of the core values and hopes that underpin and guide our work. Peace and prosperity are the goals, but we should always remember that trust and co-operation are the essential means for achieving these goals.

And I do believe that our will to revive and strengthen these essential means is neither unrealistic nor naïve. In fact, in times of rising insecurity and growing conflict it is the only way to go.

I hope that right here in Minsk over the next days, our debates, committee work, and side events will contribute to achieving that peace and prosperity.

And right here in Minsk we will rebuild bridges, re-establish trust, restore the spirit of co-operation and renew relationships.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Belarus does hold a special place in Europe both geographically and politically. It is also well known for engaging actively within the international community.

The Belarusian Delegation to our Assembly has long been very active and most engaged, especially on issues related to the economic and environmental dimension. Last year in Tbilisi, the Belarusian Delegation put forward a strong resolution to mark 30 years since the Chernobyl disaster. They reminded the international community of the disaster's ongoing effects and the importance of nuclear safety.

For decades, Minsk has been recognized as a meeting place for international diplomacy and conflict mediation. Indeed, the name "Minsk" is almost synonymous with efforts to achieve peace in Nagorno-Karabakh.

And in fact, today, meetings are taking place here in Minsk related to the conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine. Our Assembly has constantly expressed support for the Minsk Agreements and called for their full implementation.

As we have since the onset of the crisis in and around Ukraine, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE will debate this issue here at our Annual Session, along with a lot of other pressing issues of the day. Counter-terrorism, climate change, migration, and strengthening human rights enforcement. They are all on the agenda.

And I am sure we will see lively debates in particular on cybersecurity, the death penalty, the fight against corruption, the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons and nuclear security.

But no matter how contentious these discussions might get at times, let us always remember the guiding principles of this organization, which is based on the idea of political accountability. Let us remember that all of our countries have freely agreed to commitments in the political-military, economic and environmental and the human dimensions of security, which we, of course, have to reaffirm again and again.

By holding each other accountable and demanding the same standards of ourselves as we do of those that we criticize, we can help promote mutual trust. Trust that is needed for comprehensive security, for peace and for prosperity.

Mr. President, dear colleagues, dear friends,

We have learned that real security means more than just the absence of war. Real security means ensuring that human rights are respected, that elections are democratic, that corruption is contained and that the rule of law is upheld.

It is through the hard work of democracy and diplomacy that we can help ensure political stability, economic growth, environmental sustainability, and ultimately, achieve our common goals of peace and prosperity.

These are the ideas that form the basis of the OSCE's model of comprehensive security: ideas that emerged through painful experiences over the course of centuries, including two devastating global conflicts and a Cold War that cast a shadow of nuclear annihilation over all of us for generations.

The OSCE is an organization grounded in a firm historical memory – having never forgotten its roots in the détente era of the 1970s.

It is this spirit – the so-called “spirit of Helsinki” – that we must return to if we hope to pull back from the brinkmanship, the division and the mistrust that characterize our current era.

We see too many indications that we are heading in the wrong direction. Whether the issue is xenophobia, a fracturing Europe, growing East-West divides, protracted conflicts, or a renewed arms race.

It is up to us – the policy-makers and representatives of the people – to stop it and to turn to the right direction! Probably we will not achieve all of our goals, and probably we will not agree on all the possible solutions to our problems.

But the fact that we continue to push ahead with dialogue means that we are succeeding in keeping the promise of comprehensive security alive. We are laying the foundations for genuine co-operation – for innovation, mediation and the sharing of best practices – which we will need in tackling the major challenges of our time.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I look forward to working with you all over the next several days in our various meetings as we debate and adopt the resolutions that will become the Minsk Declaration.

Our hosts have assembled an excellent programme and we are grateful to the Belarusian Parliament, the Belarusian OSCE PA Delegation and the people of Belarus for their hospitality.

Thank you all for your support and I wish you a fruitful meeting here in Minsk.