



**Address by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli to the  
OSCE Permanent Council on 17 January 2019**

Dear colleagues,

Dear friends,

Looking into so many familiar faces, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity and I am happy to be back in the Hofburg to deliver my next regular address to you, just a few weeks after the Ministerial Council Meeting in Milan, where we enjoyed great Italian hospitality. It was a very important event for all of us.

I thank the Slovak Chair for giving me the opportunity to address once again the PC – I'd like to say this is the third time in a little less than one year, which again reflects the co-operation between the executive branch and our Parliamentary Assembly – one week after the CiO's inaugural address..

I also welcome Albania as a new member of the Troika.

And let me use this opportunity of course to wish you all a good and successful 2019.

Unfortunately, for too many citizens of OSCE participating States, the days around the New Year celebrations did not give much reason for optimism.

What the SMM reported on January 6, for instance, sounds like an illustration of our unfortunate joint failure to provide full security to all of them:

“Since the beginning of the recommitment to the ceasefire on 29 December, the SMM registered a total of 3511 ceasefire violations, including 260 explosions.”

This came shortly after a delegation from the PA's Human Rights Committee had concluded a visit to the area of Mariupol and launched an appeal for sustained ceasefire and increased demining activities in eastern Ukraine for the sake of the safety of civilians, especially children.

Whilst there are hopes connected to positive developments like Moldova or a possible solution of the name dispute between South-East European neighbors, too many people remain victims of unresolved conflicts or human rights violations.

What is worse, we see growing public discontent and even serious tensions in several areas of the Western Balkans and even in Western Europe, harsh nationalist rhetoric in almost every corner of

the OSCE territory and participating States that engage in renewed conflicts with countries outside of the OSCE.

Despite a sharp decrease in the number of migrants, the core issues linked to migration flows have not been resolved, and terrorism remains a serious threat.

A look at the democracy index issued by the Economist reveals that large parts of the OSCE cannot be considered to be full democracies yet, some democracies have moved into the wrong direction, and some countries have gone down dramatically.

In fact, all of the post-communist countries in Europe are categorized below the category of "full democracy".

Of course, there are also positive examples of countries moving up in the ranking, and some of this might be co-attributed to the OSCE's work.

If we want to do more for the security of our citizens, we have to redouble our efforts regarding our work on democracy, human rights and civil liberties.

The PA is ready to support this work further.

I do not want to sound too pessimistic but coming from a country that has its own conflict with a powerful neighbor, which erupted into an armed conflict over a decade ago, I know where all this can lead to.

We need to continue reminding that "war does not determine who is right - only who is left", a famous line attributed to a famous British philosopher.

It is the difficult task of the OSCE, the task of all of us, to increase the safety of our citizens.

Whatever we do must be to their benefit.

We must do so by practicing all the good things we have committed to, in order to become reliable partners to each other.

As I said when addressing the Ministerial Meeting in Milan, with East-West relations now at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, what we need is a strong OSCE that can serve as a forum for real confidence-building.

We need this, not only because of the deepening divisions in Europe and across the Atlantic, but because of so much unfinished business.

Protracted conflicts need all our attention and pro-active engagement.

Last year saw two of the largest military exercises since the end of the Cold War and a number of military incidents, the latest one linked to the militarization of the Azov Sea.

This should be of concern to everybody, as it shows the extent of uncertainty, unpredictability and potential for misinterpretation that could lead to even more serious confrontations.

The OSCE is the primary forum where this can be addressed effectively.

We need to make next steps within the Structured Dialogue in order for it to bear practical fruit.

In this context it is a timid sign of hope that the Ministerial Council in Milan witnessed consensus on several documents, including on texts that have been controversial – although others that would have been expected to be less controversial were not approved. I also welcome the very important Quadriga-Statement.

It will not come as a surprise that we have noticed the readiness of delegates to include references to the PA's work in several texts, which I take as an acknowledgement of our increased and deepened cooperation.

However, the environment we are in and the behavior of several participating States, which is partly marked by backpadding on commitments, clearly demonstrates the need for more sustainability in the OSCE's work.

The theme chosen for our next Annual Session "Advancing Sustainable Development to Promote Security: The Role of Parliaments" addresses the link between sustainable development and the promotion of security, pointing at the role and responsibility of parliamentarians in this context.

Since I have mentioned sustainability: I have on many occasions urged you to provide the OSCE with the resources it needs to do its job.

I hear that no participating State raises objections of substance against the compromise you have put together regarding a draft budget for this year – yet you have not been able to find a consensus that allows for its adoption, because of a link made to the Scales of Contribution, on which you have not been able to find an agreement.

A consensus on the budget would allow, for instance, the ODIHR to observe important upcoming elections and still fulfill other parts of its mandate. In other words, it is urgent.

I hope it is true that there are new developments and you will soon find an agreement on this.

I have also been informed – probably not such a serious point – that last-minute cuts by comparably petty sums amount have again demonstrated the degree of superfluous and very costly micromanagement in an organization which covers a great deal of the Northern Hemisphere.

Participating States are continuously making more demands of the OSCE.

At the same time, scarce financial resources, diminished trust and misperceptions or a diminished sense of purpose for multilateralism are serious obstacles we must tackle when defining a medium- to long-term strategy for our Organization.

You are all aware of the PA's position, which is also mine, regarding the need for a reform of the consensus rule and establish modalities that allow for this organization to function more effectively.

We look forward to seeing the Slovak Chairmanship paying high attention to this.

We encourage participating States and executive structures to take a longer-term perspective: both programmatically and politically, and we very much applaud the efforts of the OSCE Secretary General and the Troika in this direction.

We envisage that the coordination between our two Secretariats could be enhanced further.

In this context, I must stress again with appreciation how positively our cooperation with the Secretariat, Ambassador Thomas Greminger and his colleagues, has evolved over the past years, notably in quantitative but also most importantly in qualitative terms.

After all, both the OSCE Secretariat and the Parliamentary Assembly are equal parts of the same OSCE tools.

I can assure you that, on our side, we will continue to replicate in good faith.

Yesterday we had a very good meeting with Thomas Greminger and Paul Bekkers and our Secretary General Roberto Montella and our Ambassador. I think we are united in our vision to have concerted efforts to tackle the challenges that we have.

Our cooperation must benefit, above all, those we ultimately serve.

In this context I also appreciate the good cooperation we have had with Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Harlem Désir – whom I met here two days ago to discuss a range of issues – and Lamberto Zannier, as well as their staff.

At the OSCE PA we try our best to be useful.

When doing so we apply the Slovak guideline “ambition and realism”.

The PA is engaging directly with national parliaments and building on their oversight functions to push for the implementation of key OSCE commitments, including, of course, those related to gender.

In a few weeks’ time you will be able to see us in action here during our Winter Meeting.

This will facilitate additional dialogue – not only during our official meetings, but also in the corridors and couloirs of the Hofburg.

It is also another opportunity to explore ways and means to better implement the commitments all participating States have undertaken.

We will continue to address the persisting breaches of OSCE commitments stemming from the occupation of foreign territory and military interference into internal affairs of neighboring countries.

We deplore the failure to implement agreements meant to address some conflicts, in particular in Georgia and Ukraine, despite numerous appeals by our Assembly.

Every day that goes by without any meaningful implementation of the Minsk Agreements causes additional suffering and will be seen as a failure of this organization and the whole international community.

In Ukraine, we will also observe the presidential election in March and the parliamentary election in Autumn, and we will continue our field visits to the country – if possible, and agreed with both sides, beyond territories under the control of the Ukrainian government.

Of course, we will also continue field visits to other regions, and we will have a busy calendar regarding election observation, starting with Moldova, which I will visit next week, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, as I have already mentioned, Ukraine.

We count on the continued cooperation of the ODIHR, but we are also tackling the challenges posed by attempts to taint the work of the observation missions.

We have elaborated and discussed at our Bureau Meeting in Milan a set of special Guidelines and an enhanced Code of Conduct addressing, among many other points, possible conflicts of interest of observers, including corruption, and hope to put them in place right after our Winter Meeting.

One of the purposes of our field visits is to show a very practical sign of our appreciation for the work of the field presences - and to offer our assistance in bringing them together with political representatives on issues within their mandates.

As I have stated repeatedly, and as confirmed in many PA resolutions, we believe firmly in the strong value the field presences add to our work.

After so many visits to them I am absolutely convinced of their outstanding performance.

I have told the Ministerial Council how paradoxical it is that the OSCE is missing from or downgraded in countries that would most benefit from the OSCE's support, and that some of them were even closed against the will of the host country.

This is another example of how individual states hold the potential of the OSCE hostage to their unilateral interests.

We should intensify our search for new ways of bringing on-site OSCE engagement back to where it is needed.

We will – of course – make every effort to participate in and contribute further to your conferences and those of the executive structures.

Our committees, including the very active ad hoc Committees on Migration and on Countering Terrorism, and their leadership stand ready to continue the path of practical cooperation.

Our internal reform considerations include new formats like thematic meetings and public hearings, or follow-up mechanisms for which we need your support.

We will also try to utilize NGO input more systematically, enabling their activists to play an interactive part in our work.

And we will continue offering additional opportunities for inter-parliamentary dialogue, for instance by holding another Leinsweiler seminar, this time on the role of the OSCE's second dimension in conflict resolution.

In terms of planning and prioritization, the Bureau of the Assembly will enhance its leadership.

We have always attached great importance to our cooperation with our partner countries.

We are delighted about the continuous input from Afghanistan and the regular participation of their parliamentarians in our events and meetings.

This year, as it was announced already, Morocco will host our Autumn Session in Marrakech. This will be the first time we meet outside of the OSCE region for a statutory event, but by no means our first activity in a partner country.

And we will not limit our outreach to partners within and on the margins of the organization and with parliamentary organizations that we traditionally cooperate with, but further seek where we can benefit from cooperation with others.

Before I conclude, I would like to once more thank last year's OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Enzo Moavero Milanesi, and our friend Amb. Alessandro Azzoni, for Italy's leadership over the past year, and express our high appreciation for the good start we have had with the Slovak Chairmanship under Minister Miroslav Lajcak and his able ambassador and friend, Radomir Bohac.

As I see so many parallels between your priorities and the PA's recommendations, for instance on Security Sector Governance/Reform, you can count on our support towards their implementation.

So finally, I'd like to thank you again, and let us be ambitious and work together to turn 2019 into a year of renewed OSCE security building!