



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President

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President Moon,
President Kiska,
Deputy Speaker Bugar,
Minister Sakova,
Ambassador Alvargonzalez,
Your Excellencies,
Fellow parliamentarians,

I am privileged to be here with you today to address this Plenary Sitting of your Spring Session. I thank President Moon for inviting me to share some words on behalf of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and it's a good opportunity to congratulate you all on NATO's 70th anniversary.

It is a pleasure for me to be here in Bratislava, in light of the excellent working relationship that we, at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, enjoy with our colleagues in Slovakia, which holds this year the Chairmanship of the OSCE and marks its 15th year of being a member of NATO.

I am happy to see familiar faces in this room. In fact, some of you also are, or have been, Members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Dear friends,

I address you one week after the conclusion of a vibrant European election that exposed many of the common concerns of our citizens: the threat to security, migration, unemployment, cybercrime or climate change. The debates that have taken place this spring have revealed some core questions regarding the future of Europe as a safe and stable space.

These debates have echoed many of the thematic challenges that have dominated our own focus of attention, from radicalization to terrorism, from populism to hybrid warfare.

We have seen growing political and social tensions, both within and between states and we are also witnessing a worrisome dissolution of core principles and commitments in the crucial sphere on fundamental rights.

Protracted and active conflicts continue to undermine our security arrangements. As key elements of the Euro Atlantic security architecture, we are, and we should continue to be instrumental. Unfortunately, these threats affecting our core missions are not decreasing. We are faced with even more uncertain times ahead.

The scope of these challenges demonstrates the need for greater transatlantic and pan-European co-operation.

I am glad that a renewed focus on effective multilateralism has been one of the priorities of Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship this year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite having different mandates, both NATO and the OSCE are value based and strive to reinforce security and strengthen democracy.

Together, we share that same vision of a safe and secure Europe without divisions. This is why we must exploit every opportunity to maximize the potential of interparliamentary diplomacy.

We need to use debates, such as the ones you have participated this weekend in Bratislava, to nourish our conversations in our home countries. We need to continue engaging with our national parliaments and build on their oversight functions to push for the implementation of international commitments.

We can capitalize on each other's work in addressing issues such as cyber and energy security. This would be particularly helpful in exercising democratic control over armed forces as well as on countering terrorism and managing migration flows.

Fellow parliamentarians,

Six months ago, the Kerch Strait crisis demonstrated the need to further enhance security in the Black Sea region. Such breaches in our system – together with the continued occupation of Georgia, the aggression against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea– are only further proof that despite our best efforts, the European security is under attack.

The conflicts that you see as being on NATO's border are at the very heart of the OSCE, both in terms of geography and membership.

Georgia and Ukraine are integral parts of our organization. Their sufferings and concerns are at the center of our discussions, and their aspiration to join NATO is a sovereign right which should be respected and supported.

All these conflicts, including other protracted ones in the OSCE region, have direct and huge consequences on ordinary people. I have personally travelled to Ukraine several times, including to the frontline where people live under the daily threat of shells falling on their houses.

Our engagement in Ukraine is persistent. We have a third committee visit ongoing in the east as I am speaking which is looking at humanitarian needs and issues of local people.

In my home country of Georgia, people continue to live under stress and fear, being kidnapped, abducted or even killed during their daily routine activities near the occupation line.

As we continuously strive to increase the political will to end conflicts, I appeal to you today to continue to use your influence to more actively engage in peacemaking and normalize people's life.

Because while turmoil may only be on NATO's doorstep, action is necessary to prevent further insecurity spillovers and escalation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE is proud to be an inclusive forum for dialogue, where the voices of NATO members must continue to be heard.

With 29 out of 57, NATO member states represent a little over a half of the OSCE participating States.

NATO Ambassadors gather weekly in Vienna to coordinate policies regarding the politico-military dimension of security. This NATO caucus provides decisive input in our work and helps shape our Organization from within.

The OSCE PA provides opportunities that can assist NATO also engage with Russia. Since the suspension of the co-operation between the Russian parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe five years ago, the OSCE PA has been the only pan-European parliamentary forum where Russian lawmakers can be engaged and confronted.

We continue to have strong disagreements with the views of Russian representatives. These are clearly reflected in the resolutions we have adopted. But dialogue must continue to take place as a complement to deterrence.

This is particularly important in times when tense rhetoric and lack of compromise characterize public posturing. In the name of our people, who expect us to deliver security and stability, parliamentarians must continue to extend their hands, be a voice of de-escalation, and offer concrete solutions.

Our activities in the fields of migration and countering terrorism have opened new platforms for dialogue between delegations. These also helped, for instance, significantly step up our cooperation with Central Asia, Mongolia and other partners such as Afghanistan.

In recent years Uzbekistan has come back to participate in our meetings and election observation missions. Also, last year Kyrgyzstan hosted our Fall Meeting first time and two years back, in Belarus, our Annual Session allowed a rare opportunity for parliamentarians and international experts to freely exchange with local civil society representatives on democratic developments in Belarus.

We stand ready to continue to step up our co-operation with our institutional partners as well.

Dear friends,

The OSCE PA has traditionally enjoyed an excellent working relationship with your Assembly. After all, the NATO PA provided precious support and expertise in setting up the OSCE PA more than 25 years ago. This help is still greatly appreciated. We continue to regularly work together on election observation missions to promote healthy democratic processes across Europe.

On that note, I would like to underline my appreciation for the continued efforts undertaken by our Secretariats to regularly enhance co-operation in that field. Let me use this opportunity to also inform you that since last Summer, the OSCE PA has been conducting a review of our election observation practices to further strengthen our prestige and credibility. But I suggest we should not limit our joint work to election observation alone.

We can only benefit from a deepened relationship in other arenas as well, including the Black Sea and the Western Balkan regions. Furthermore, the Mediterranean region could also be subject to greater cooperation in the context of NATO's Southern Strategy.

This October our Assembly will hold its Autumn Meeting in Marrakesh, marking the first time that one of our statutory meetings is hosted by a country which isn't an OSCE participating State.

Our Organization benefits from robust relations in this geographical area, having a very specific toolbox and acquis which could be of use in your work.

I appreciated the very constructive and rewarding meeting held yesterday with President Madeleine Moon and Secretary General David Hobbs. I look forward to discussing these issues in greater detail to pave the best way forward.

I thank you once again for welcoming me here today and wish you all the success you deserve.