



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President George Tsereteli

Opening remarks to the 28th Annual Session

Luxembourg | 4 July 2019

Check against delivery.

President Etgen,
Prime Minister Bettel,
Congressman Hoyer,
Fellow parliamentarians, friends, colleagues,
Distinguished guests,

It is my honour to welcome you all to the 28th Annual Session in Luxembourg. Our Parliamentary Assembly has held Annual Sessions in the three countries surrounding Luxembourg, but this is the first time holding a meeting in this country, so this is a real pleasure.

On behalf of the Assembly, I extend heartfelt thanks to our hosts, and to the President of the Chamber of Deputies and the Prime Minister for being here. Although he is not in the room, I would also like to thank His Royal Highness Grand Duke Henri. We had a memorable meeting two months ago and I look forward to meeting once again tomorrow.

It has only been a couple of months since the passing of his father, His Royal Highness Grand Duke Jean. Here, let us extend sincere condolences to all of Luxembourg for this loss.

With a population of just over 600,000, this prosperous state reminds us that all countries – big and small – have an equal voice in this organization. With three official languages and half of its residents foreign born, Luxembourg also embodies the spirit of internationalism that is at the heart of the OSCE.

The theme of our Annual Session is “Advancing Sustainable Development to Promote Security: The Role of Parliaments.”

This theme reminds us that parliamentarians are in a unique position to promote security, development, democracy and environmental protection within our countries, as well as to hold other countries to account. It recalls our responsibility to work to improve people’s lives and strengthen good governance in the OSCE participating States.

As parliamentarians representing more than one billion citizens, we have a duty to speak out on behalf of the principles on which our organization is founded.

More than 40 years ago, the signatories of the Helsinki Accords called for the enhancement of the UN’s role in strengthening international peace and in promoting solutions to international problems. Since then, through the UN system, countries of the world have taken great steps towards addressing common challenges such as arms control, migration, climate change, and combating corruption.

Governments have negotiated multilateral agreements and global leaders have committed to take specific actions in order to meet economic and good governance goals and to protect the planet's health.

Of particular relevance to our Annual Session are the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which provide an action plan to promote peace and prosperity, providing 17 targets on areas such as economic inequality, innovation, and sustainable consumption.

Nearly 20 years ago, standing at the UN rostrum on behalf of the Georgian Parliament, I spoke in favor of this global agenda.

The goals, which you all know very well, are founded on five pillars: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. All five of these priorities are at the core of our Organization's major activities. The OSCE is contributing but we have to do more. We can use the potential of our 57 participating States, our partners and our field missions to keep the development goals high on our agenda.

But unfortunately, too many of our governments set aside some of their responsibilities. We are seeing multilateralism undermined and international agreements violated with impunity. Meanwhile, many of our global challenges grow more entrenched, tensions rise, and new threats emerge.

For example, the tense situation regarding Iran, which is not directly related to the OSCE's mandate, but which shares a border with several OSCE countries. In this regard, I would highlight the OSCE's model of dialogue and conflict mediation as an alternative to military action.

While not perfect, the forum provided by the OSCE has long prevented great-power conflict and provided a basis for trust-building and stability.

This is why many academics and policymakers have for years discussed the idea of a Helsinki Process for the Middle East. With tensions at an all-time high, and conflict still impacting Syria and other countries of the region, it is perhaps time to give this idea greater consideration.

Dear friends,

If we hope to make progress in building security and sustainable development, our focus must be on tackling the crises that already exist.

There is still a conflict raging in eastern Ukraine. The humanitarian burden is huge, and we cannot allow innocent civilians to be hostages to political disagreement any longer. We must step up efforts to create a safe environment for the people in the Donbas. OSCE PA leaders, including myself, have conducted numerous visits to Ukraine over the past year to promote resolution of the crisis.

We are witnessing more aggravated violations of human rights in Georgia's occupied territories. This requires effective international action.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also needs more political will to guarantee progress towards peace. This is also necessary for the Transdniestrian settlement in Moldova.

Without conflict resolution, we cannot achieve progress in other areas of sustainable development, such as poverty or the environment. Conflicts and wars are causing economic and environmental disasters, making it unrealistic to fulfill the development agenda.

We cannot afford to ignore climate change either. Time is running out. We must take decisive action to limit global warming. As I witnessed weeks ago in the Arctic region, the consequences of inaction will be disastrous for hundreds of millions of people all across the OSCE area. That's why a strong multilateral response is most needed to tackle this challenge.

For security and development, we also need a robust commitment to human rights and good governance. Sadly, it has become the norm to scapegoat minorities, with a troubling rise of hatred and violence. We need decisive action to prevent violent hate crimes and to reassure all of our citizens that bigotry will not be tolerated in our societies. Public figures – and that includes of course all of us – must speak out clearly against intolerance and leave no doubt where we stand.

At a time of the highest number of conflicts since World War II, some 71 million people – including over 30 million children – have been forced from their homes worldwide. We must keep in mind our obligations to uphold the highest standards of human rights.

My dear friends and colleagues,

The Assembly's Final Declaration that will be adopted here in Luxembourg in a few days will provide policy guidance on many of these issues and more. Following thorough debates and extensive work in the three general committees, we will vote on this document in plenary session as a reflection of the collective voice of the OSCE PA.

In our deliberations, we must keep the needs and demands of the citizens in mind as we set the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's agenda for the coming year.

Throughout the OSCE area, citizens have organized for action on climate change. In several countries, abuse of power, corruption, democracy and rule of law have also been grounds for protests.

We should view this unrest as a reminder of the need to fulfill promises to our citizens and meet their expectations. As the OSCE's most representative body, the Parliamentary Assembly has a duty to listen closely to the demands of the people and ensure that they are channeled to the political leadership of the Organization.

This Assembly is active throughout the year on many fronts, through its election observation activities, its ad hoc committees, its special representatives working on numerous issues, and through field visits and parliamentary diplomacy. Our Assembly has expanded partnerships with other international organizations. This outreach has strengthened our ties in Central Asia, in the Mediterranean, and across the Atlantic.

We are working to advocate our shared priorities with the Slovak Chairmanship, including on issues such as conflict resolution, youth and gender, and effective multilateralism. Through our work here in Luxembourg, we will contribute to the strengthening of international co-operation, the reinforcement of international norms, and to the development of dialogue-based mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution.

At a time of heightened tensions and mistrust between East and West, this dialogue is more important than ever to ensure security for our societies. In this spirit, I look forward to the debates here in Luxembourg, which I expect to be a constructive and meaningful contribution to the implementation of our sustainable development agenda.

Open dialogue has been a hallmark of the Assembly's work. We should always build on this strength and put it to full effect.

In closing, allow me to thank once again our hosts for the excellent organization of this meeting. And let us not forget the work of the International Secretariat. In recognition of this good work, Roberto Montella was re-elected today as Secretary General. Congratulations, Roberto.

And thank you, dear colleagues, for being here and for the confidence you have placed in me as President of the Assembly.

I look forward to working with you in the spirit of shared values, co-operation and friendship. I believe that together we can make a difference.

Thank you very much.