



**Address by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli
1255th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

Vienna, Austria

16 January 2020

Your Excellencies,

Dear Secretary General, Thomas Greminger

Dear friends,

Let me begin by wishing all of you a Happy New Year!

It is good to see you again here in Vienna, after a well-deserved recess following intense weeks in the lead up to the Ministerial Council meeting in Bratislava. Thank you for the opportunity to having this discussion which underlines the value of having regular interaction.

I want to congratulate Albania on taking over the Chairmanship of our Organization in these challenging times. As I told Chairperson Rama during my visit to Tirana in November, this is an act of courage, responsibility, and generosity.

I appreciate Mr. Rama's stated intention to further strengthening the Chairmanship's work with OSCE parliamentarians, and we look forward to working closely with his team. I thank Ambassador Hasani for his introductory words highlighting the work of our Parliamentary Assembly.

I would also like to welcome Sweden as the new member of the Troika, and salute the decision to have Poland chair the OSCE in 2022. This will greatly contribute to giving the OSCE a strategic direction in the next three years.

Ambassador Hasani, thank you for giving me today the opportunity to address your esteemed body. After more than two and a half years as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, my term will expire at the Annual Session in Vancouver this July.

Today is therefore an opportunity to measure the work we have achieved together and determine how to further strengthen our co-operation.

Dear colleagues,

The sharp escalation in tensions between the United States and Iran over the past several weeks will continue to preoccupy all of us at this table. Tragically, the downing of the Ukraine International flight in Tehran has demonstrated the perils of increased volatility in world affairs.

I wish to once again extend our condolences to the families and nations affected by this heartbreaking disaster and I invite all participating States to work in concert to promote greater stability in the Middle East.

As we also saw with the outcome of the Bratislava Ministerial Council, our region itself continues to suffer from serious disagreements on key political and security issues.

Yet, we must realize that multilateralism is the only instrument that can allow us to overcome these deep divisions and realize the concept of a united Europe, safe and free.

The fact that it has at least been possible to agree on future chairmanships until 2022 will hopefully indicate that we all agree on the value of the organization. What is most important is that there is willingness to go in the same direction.

It has been the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's overarching goal to support that objective.

Our ability to collectively support multilateralism has been considerably increased in recent years through wider synergies and deeper collaboration between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and all OSCE executive structures.

I am confident that OSCE parliamentarians are reliable partners. We may be critical and sometimes sharp, but we always seek to be helpful for the OSCE by highlighting areas that require united action, promoting collective responsibility and safeguarding our values and principles.

There can be disagreements with the texts we adopt – it is the essence of our parliamentary work, our healthy debates, and our decision-making with a majority vote.

But this should not stand in the way of recognizing the concrete contributions our Parliamentary Assembly makes to overall OSCE efforts.

These cover a wide range of your priorities, including the resolution of conflict.

In Ukraine, we have been active in advocating for small practical steps that can be immensely beneficial for the people living in areas affected by the hostilities in the Donbass.

Last month, I visited Kyiv again for substantive conversations with the chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Razumkov, Foreign Minister Prystaiko, parliamentary and other leaders as well as the SMM leadership. It was an occasion to reiterate our firm dedication to a peaceful resolution of the conflict through political and diplomatic means, and to stand firmly behind Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

I welcome the recent high-level dialogue between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The exchange of detainees, the repair of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, continued disengagement, and a commitment to opening additional crossing points are all rays of hope.

We must now build on this momentum to follow up swiftly, in order to facilitate substantive results at the next meeting of the Normandy Four leaders and keep full implementation of the Minsk agreements high on the agenda of all sides.

On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I have had several times very honest conversations with the leaderships of Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue to explore ways parliamentarians can advance peace in the South Caucasus.

And our Assembly continues to address the illegal borderization in Georgia, in flagrant breach of international law and agreements, where daily life in and near the occupied territories remains precarious.

I want to thank participating States and OSCE structures for their consolidated efforts in securing the release of Dr. Vazha Gaprindashvili. We need to do more to prevent similar situations in the future and I call on you to pay greater attention to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the area.

The OSCE is greatly needed in the South Caucasus, so I hope that we can find modalities to reestablish a meaningful field presence in the region in the foreseeable future.

Beyond this key aspect of our work, we have sought to build bridges.

You are all aware of the productive and inclusive work of our Ad Hoc Committees on Migration and on Countering Terrorism, which continue to diligently coordinate efforts with relevant OSCE units and offer concrete opportunities to build partnerships with other International Organizations and Institutions.

I have just returned today from a field visit to Oslo organized by our Ad Hoc Committee on Combatting Terrorism, where we looked at the lessons learned following the tragic events of 22 July 2011. In Utøya we had the opportunity to exchange views with the families of the victims and survivors.

We continue to work ever-closely with other OSCE Institutions, for example through participation in conferences organized by the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

In light of our excellent relationship, both on a working and personal level, with Secretary General Thomas Greminger and all Heads of OSCE Institutions, I hope we will carry on with our fruitful partnership in the months and years to come.

Thanks to an exceptional level of co-operation with the Secretariat and successive Chairmanships, we have together increased the visibility and credibility of our Organization and our Institutions. This is a precious achievement which we must maintain in the future.

As testament to our desire to strengthen relations with the Permanent Missions and the OSCE executive structures, it is my particular pleasure to announce that our Vienna Liaison Office welcomed last week Ambassador Miodrag Pančeski, joining us as Chief Diplomatic Advisor.

Good co-operation with the ODIHR is, of course, central to preserving the OSCE's credibility in the field of election observation.

We expect to observe some 12 elections in 2020, and I salute continued efforts made at the staff-level to enhance our collaboration on the ground.

We concluded a busy year of election observation by deploying our first mission to Uzbekistan, which revealed that democratic consolidation now seems more visible in Central Asia. Despite the shortcoming we outlined in our preliminary findings and conclusions, I want to note that this election was a step forward in Uzbekistan's democratic development. I thank the Uzbek leadership for the good cooperation and for the constructive discussions held in Tashkent including with President Mirziyoyev.

I hope to also see positive signs when we observe our first election of 2020 next month in Azerbaijan.

We also look forward to working with ODIHR on a regular basis to advance parliamentary oversight and push for the implementation of key commitments across the OSCE region.

Following up on the success of our Autumn Meeting in Morocco, we have continued to build up parliamentary relations with our Mediterranean Partners.

In November, I was in Cairo with French Senator Pascal Allizard, Vice-President and Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs and Secretary General Roberto Montella for the first visit to Egypt by an OSCE PA delegation since 2009.

Stronger ties between both sides of the Mediterranean Sea are necessary to tackle security challenges in the OSCE area, and we recognize that this must also materialize at the parliamentary level. This visit was therefore essential to nurturing the personal relationships which are key to better understanding the realities on the ground and to build the trust necessary to work together.

As we gear up for our next Annual Session in Vancouver in July, we look forward to fully exploiting this opportunity to similarly engage with our Asian Partners for Co-operation.

Dear Ambassador Hasani,

Dear colleagues,

Looking at the year ahead, we can see many synergies between the priority themes of the Albanian Chairmanship and some of our cutting-edge work:

We have consistently emphasized that there cannot be security without the involvement of women and called for greater women empowerment, in particular thanks to the dedicated work of our Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Hedy Fry.

In the field of human trafficking, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has adopted numerous relevant resolutions under the impulse of our Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues, U.S. Congressman Chris Smith.

On anti-corruption and good governance, our most recent Special Representative, Irene Charalambides from Cyprus, has been working hard since last summer to assume our Assembly's responsibility in the fight against corruption by strengthening co-operation with relevant partners.

Intolerance, hate speech and the fight against Anti-Semitism will be the subject of our Special Debate during our Winter Meeting next month.

As you see, the Parliamentary Assembly's toolbox is diverse and ready to serve the promotion of peace and stability, economic progress and environmental protection, human rights and democratic development across the OSCE region.

Let me note that I will further emphasize the added value of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening international security and co-operation in the coming months, at hearings of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

Dear friends,

As we strive to make a greater impact, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly continues to take an honest look at its working practices and adjust when necessary.

Election observation is under strict scrutiny. Last year, we rolled out new guidelines and a Code of Conduct for OSCE PA observers, which addresses, among many other points, possible conflicts of interest, including corruption.

On the margins of the Ministerial Meeting in Bratislava, we also convened a group of OSCE PA Members – including from the Russian Federation – to work together on ways to modernize our Rules of Procedure, in light of procedural disagreements we have witnessed in recent meetings.

These amendments will be on the agenda of our next Standing Committee Meeting that will take place in Vienna next month, so that they may be effective for our Vancouver Annual Session.

Within our Secretariat itself, I would like to voice my appreciation for the continued reforms conducted under the leadership of Secretary General Montella, including greater media outreach, investments towards digitalization, gender mainstreaming, and the empowerment of our young staff.

This comforts my belief that our people are the OSCE's best asset.

Over the past two years, I have had the opportunity to visit eight OSCE field missions and I have met with dedicated professionals from many other OSCE offices.

I can personally attest to the excellent work they do, sometimes under difficult circumstances.

But the fact is that we keep asking more from our people without giving them adequate resources to match our expectations.

I have, on the many occasions I have addressed the Permanent Council, always urged you to provide the OSCE with the resources it needs to do its job.

I welcome the efforts that have been undertaken under the Slovak Chairmanship to break the deadlock and reform the Scales of Contribution. I encourage you all to sustain these efforts to provide the OSCE with a stronger footing in the future

And today again, I want to echo last week's call by the Chairperson-in-Office to adopt the unified budget in a timely manner.

Dear Ambassadors,

As Slovakia passed the torch to Albania, I want to underline one legacy of the previous chairmanship: bringing the OSCE closer to the people it is working for.

I welcome Albania's intention to continue to make a difference on the ground and pledge our continued support towards that goal.

In order to be successful, it is essential that we stay in close contact with our citizens. This is also why we must encourage a systematic involvement of civil society in our work.

Next month, our Winter Meeting will be a renewed opportunity for our parliamentarians to exchange directly with you and the executive structures of the OSCE.

As always, open discussions will explore how to better implement the commitments all our countries have undertaken.

This resonates particularly as we prepare to celebrate the 30th anniversaries of the Charter of Paris and the Copenhagen Document later this year.

We have often recommitted to the principles that the new Europe was supposed to be built upon – an era of democracy, peace and unity, dedicated to democracy, human rights and the rule of law – but the reality shows we are still very far apart in our interpretation of these principles.

This divergence between what our governments promise and what they deliver continues to provoke human suffering across the OSCE region. We look forward to continuing addressing it to inspire a genuine engagement for human security.

I would like to once more thank last year's OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Miroslav Lajcak, and our dear friend Ambassador Radomir Bohac, for Slovakia's leadership, and express our best wishes of success for the Albanian Chairmanship under Minister Edi Rama and his competent and able ambassador, Igli Hasani.

Thank you.