



**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President
George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia)**

**19th Winter Meeting
Opening Joint Session**

Vienna, 20 February 2020

Check against delivery.

President Sobotka,

Secretary General Greminger,

Deputy Minister Xhafaj,

Ambassadors,

Fellow parliamentarians,

Distinguished guests,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 19th Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

As our main forum bringing together such an important audience, the Winter Meeting has become an indispensable tradition of our Assembly.

I would like to express my gratitude to President Sobotka and the Austrian Parliament for their support.

I would also like to thank Secretary General Greminger for the OSCE's hospitality, and for the close co-operation that the PA enjoys with you and your staff.

Dear friends,

Less than two months into the Albanian Chairmanship, I welcome the priorities identified by Prime Minister Rama and we look forward to working closely with his team in 2020.

This year offers an opportunity to reflect on the purpose and power of this organization – particularly in these times of changes and upheavals. There are great challenges but also great opportunities.

This year we mark 75 years since the end of the Second World War and 30 years since historic changes swept across Europe, when from Germany and the Baltics to the Caucasus people demanded change.

For many of us who lived either in the Soviet Union or Eastern bloc countries, this was proof that – no matter how strong a state seemed to be, it cannot survive if it is unresponsive to the overwhelming desire of its citizens.

Thirty years ago, our Organization was challenged in to redefining itself.

With the end of the Cold War, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe lost its fundamental purpose but at the same time, gained a new *raison d'être*.

Our predecessors understood the opportunity to build on the experience and create an organization capable of managing the historic changes taking place in Europe.

In 1990, the Paris Summit envisioned a brighter future for our continent. In one optimistic voice, our leaders saw “a new era of democracy, peace and unity.”

In Copenhagen, the participating States agreed to formally recognize a number of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The historic changes of this era led to predictions about the inevitability of democratic progress, and indeed, 30 years on, much has changed – often for the better.

Today, across Europe and around the world, there is much to be optimistic about. Technological and economic advancements have generally improved our standards of living and with new levels of global connectivity, we live on a planet that seems smaller than ever before.

But we also see multiple crises, challenges, and demands for change. Protests and political instability have become hallmarks of this time.

These are indications that difficulties linger on. Whether the challenges are economic, environmental, political or security related, we are called upon to meet the expectations of our citizens who demand more than just promises and campaign slogans.

We must therefore live up to their expectations through concrete achievements, including a peaceful resolution of the OSCE area’s conflicts, and to normalize the lives of millions of affected people.

For instance:

Despite positive steps, we are yet to find a final, comprehensive and durable settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict.

We fail to see meaningful progress to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In the occupied territories of Georgia, creeping borderization, abductions and illegal detentions continue to constitute severe violations of Helsinki principles and fundamental human rights.

And of course, despite some timid steps to de-escalate the conflict, the war in eastern Ukraine – and the illegal annexation of Crimea – have defined our work for more than five years now.

The major problem is that even with a clear road map how to settle the conflict the process is a hostage of geopolitical ambitions and suffers from a lack of genuine political will.

Last week, at the Munich Security Conference we saw yet another attempt to identify concrete steps to settle these conflicts, which deserve to be followed up in good faith in a sense of collective responsibility.

Our failure to put an end to the war in Ukraine and other calamities has made it more difficult to counter emerging transnational challenges that require a joint response.

It has contributed to a deepening divide between East and West at a time when what is needed is deepening co-operation between all our countries on issues such as corruption, migration, terrorism, intolerance, and climate change.

All of these have impacted our societies and revealed a sense of powerlessness among our governments to address them in a coherent way. And they come at a time when the transatlantic divide is becoming more pronounced.

We see these divisions on display particularly when it comes to different approaches towards confronting China's growing influence.

Meanwhile, uncertainty around Brexit and a prolonged EU enlargement process casts a shadow on the European promise and threatens to roll back hard-earned progress achieved in the Western Balkans.

Developments in Syria and the broader Middle East have displayed rifts between regional powers and demonstrated the limits of exporting stability by military means.

Renewed arms races between nuclear powers, the deterioration of confidence-building measures and arms control agreements threaten the survival of millions of ordinary people.

So, we must wonder: what role for the OSCE now?

In times when multilateralism is undermined, do we let this lead us into irrelevance?

Or instead do we muster the political will to find difficult compromises and provide once more the OSCE with the resources to manage today's challenges? I believe this is part of the response, because parliamentarians can best relay the concerns of the people our Organization serves.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Prominent voices have emerged in recent years calling for a review of the continent's security arrangements.

In the face of the challenges I have outlined, we should keep an open mind and embrace this desire for high-level dialogue. We must remain steadfast in defence of the very foundations of European security.

The principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and our foundational documents cannot be compromised. Every country regardless of its size or power must respect the rules of the game. Legitimate interests must not be pursued with illegitimate means.

Instead of tabula rasa and a completely new world order, we must work ever-closely to complement our politically binding commitments with new standards addressing contemporary threats.

In doing so, we should rely on the strength of the OSCE: the ability to respond quickly to tackle emergencies.

This however depends on us to make the best use of this organization and what it stands for. Even when particular governments or leaders disapprove with our critical views and activities, they should not use this as an excuse to intentionally weaken the organization. Its always better to follow more constructive approaches whenever possible.

I have been serving the OSCE for many years, working with dedicated individuals in Vienna, Copenhagen and in the field and its so inspiring to witness how many people are devoted to our common cause.

Many of you have traveled from far away, including North America and Central Asia. Your robust participation highlights our collective belief in what the OSCE can achieve.

I am privileged to work with you responsible leaders, both parliamentarians and staff, men and women from different generations and backgrounds, who understand the importance of this endeavor. Let us keep in mind the purpose of the OSCE and the responsibility we have to meet the expectations of our people.

This is our tough but noble mission.

Thank you.