



**Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Opening address by OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt
23 February 2023**

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Mr. President,
Madam Secretary General,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me go straight to the point. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has shattered European security. For the past year, every single principle of the Helsinki Final Act has been violated by the Russian Federation. As a direct result of Russia's actions, our entire region is spiraling into the unknown. And as a consequence, the OSCE and our Parliamentary Assembly find themselves at a crossroads.

You are here today, so I take it that the OSCE has strong advocates throughout our region. I take it that most of you still believe in the power of international organizations and international solidarity. The efforts deployed by many participating States to respond to the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria illustrate this.

Multilateralism has never been easy and straightforward. But today, considering our membership and our consensus-based rules, it is particularly challenging. How can we move forward if the countries responsible for devastating our common security are also the ones crippling the OSCE? The task is enormous.

Today, some are ready to write an obituary of the OSCE because large-scale war has returned to the heart of Europe. Because the OSCE would have failed to prevent the collapse of peace and co-operation in Europe. To those, let us be clear: the OSCE should not be held responsible for the deliberate actions of participating States intent on violating every principle of international law and waging a war of aggression on a neighboring country.

Now is not the time to shoot the messenger. Rather, we should continue to protect our decades-long engagement for peace and security. We should continue to fight for the small, incremental - and often intangible - improvements that the OSCE makes in the daily lives of our citizens. And we must continue to defend the unique role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as a platform for principles-based dialogue.

And, here again, let me be clear: the OSCE PA has always been open to frank and honest dialogue rooted in our shared values and commitments. But this does not mean that this parliamentary assembly should provide an unrestricted platform to spew propaganda and promote a war of aggression.

Although I find the situation very unfortunate, I do sympathize with the fact that some Members find it unbearable to sit in the same room as the aggressors. But for those present today, this is your opportunity to stand up to them and confront their lies.

Fellow parliamentarians,

More than a century and a half ago, a Russian author wrote that: "War is so unjust and ugly that all who wage it must try to stifle the voice of conscience within themselves."

Some in this room have trampled their mandates. While we have spent decades promoting the role of parliamentarians as agents of peace, some have become promoters of war, murder, and destruction.

Today, some parliamentarians are aiding and abetting the crime of aggression. They have willingly and knowingly created these conditions over several years, by gradually destroying civil rights, by dismantling civil society, by suppressing free expression and independent media, and by undermining election integrity. They must bear responsibility for their actions.

Our disgust at the innumerable crimes committed by the Russian aggressor feeds our deep empathy for Ukrainians victims. It drives us to work together to bring all those responsible to face justice. Because allowing impunity for war crimes, for crimes against humanity, and for the crime of aggression would put the final nail in the coffin of our collective security. Today, it is our political responsibility to ensure that international obligations and commitments truly mean what they say.

Colleagues,

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This Winter Meeting should provide you with ample time to debate security in all three dimensions of the OSCE. It is also a great opportunity for us, parliamentarians, to exchange with the executive structures of our Organization. In a way, the Winter Meeting should serve to oil the wheels of the OSCE, to make sure that parliaments and governments pull together in the same direction.

In our discussions, much will be said about what will happen to the OSCE in the years to come. On this issue, I count on your strong support, on your political influence, and in your ability to mobilize public opinions to advocate vigorously on behalf of our Organization.

Our Parliamentary Assembly has a long tradition of advocating for more on behalf of the OSCE: more presence on the ground, more financial resources, and more high-level political attention. Now is not the time to give up on these.

After tomorrow, we must bring our energy and these messages back to our capitals to ensure that, together, we can overcome this existential challenge and continue to build on five decades of European security co-operation.

Thank you.
