



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 24th Winter Meeting

**Opening Address by OSCE PA President Pia Kauma
Vienna, 20 February 2025**

**Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Dear friends,**

It is a privilege to officially open this Winter Meeting in a year of profound significance for European security.

The 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act is not just a milestone – it is a call for action.

In 1975, the Helsinki Final Act established the core principles that guide our work:

Sovereignty, territorial integrity, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and human rights.

Endorsed by 35 nations at a time of deep division, these principles were a landmark achievement.

But today they are under threat.

As U.S. President Gerald Ford stated in Helsinki fifty years ago:

"History will judge this Conference not by what we say today, but by what we do tomorrow—not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep."

Half a century later, this is our challenge:

Are we ensuring that these commitments remain meaningful?

Fellow parliamentarians,

The Helsinki Final Act was never an endpoint.

It launched a process that brought Europe closer to peace and security.

As President Kekkonen of Finland then stated:

"A conference is of value only if its results are put into practice."

Yet today, we witness the most brutal war on the European continent since the Second World War.

In a few days, we will mark three years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – an illegal, unprovoked act of aggression that has shaken the OSCE's foundation.

I saw Ukraine's resilience first-hand in Kyiv – but so too the immense destruction.

This war did not happen overnight.

It followed years of eroding arms control frameworks and rising geopolitical tensions.

Now, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act are not just being challenged.

They are being violated.

This raises a fundamental question:

Do we allow rising tensions to further erode the principles that have ensured stability for decades?

Or do we act to defend them?

Colleagues,

At the core of the OSCE's mission is the belief that security is best achieved through dialogue, mediation, and co-operation.

But the threats we face today go beyond what the Helsinki signatories could have foreseen.

Cyberattacks, critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, and the weaponization of migration are being used to undermine stability.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping security – from disinformation to cyber threats – but also offers opportunities.

The impacts of climate change are becoming more severe, exacerbating resource scarcity and displacement, with direct implications for stability in our region.

As ice recedes, geopolitical competition in the Arctic is intensifying.

New shipping routes are introducing new vulnerabilities.

Similarly, the Baltic and North Seas are critical security domains, especially for protecting underwater infrastructure.

Hybrid threats – from cyberattacks to disinformation – are destabilizing our democracies and weakening our trust in governance.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Ukraine.

Facing not only full-scale military aggression but also the broader security threats reshaping our region, Ukraine is at the frontline of this struggle.

This makes our responsibility clear.

Ukraine needs real security guarantees – ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity, not just today, but for the long term.

This is precisely where the OSCE PA must step up.

By strengthening parliamentary oversight, promoting best practices, and ensuring coordinated responses, we can be more effective.

But words alone are not enough.

The OSCE's strength lies in its ability to bring diverse voices together, fostering dialogue and delivering practical solutions.

This is not the time for symbolic gestures.

We must act – with decisive policies, real oversight, and unwavering support for Ukraine and all those facing aggression.

Fellow parliamentarians,

Our response must be guided by action, not just aspiration.

The OSCE must remain an effective platform for preventing tensions, fostering co-operation, and reinforcing security where it is most needed.

As OSCE parliamentarians, you play a vital role in bringing these principles to life – through election observation, field visits, mediation, and advocacy.

This Assembly must remain a driving force, not only by debating policy but holding governments accountable to their commitments.

Looking ahead, the OSCE must be ready to contribute meaningfully to European security – whether through fact-finding missions, monitoring activities, or confidence-building measures.

We need concrete steps:

Ensuring the return of forcibly displaced Ukrainian children.

Securing the release of prisoners of war.

Freeing the OSCE staff unjustly detained by Russia.

Over the next two days, we will tackle these challenges together.

We will explore ways to strengthen the OSCE's role in conflict resolution, bolster democratic resilience, and adapt our Organization to an evolving security landscape.

But, even as calls for diplomacy grow louder, we must recognize that diplomacy must be rooted in principles, not concessions.

Dialogue must serve peace – not provide cover for continued aggression.

As parliamentarians, we must be vigilant against efforts to weaken our collective resolve.

Our message must be clear:

Peace cannot come at the expense of justice.

Nor can stability be achieved by rewarding aggression.

That is why we must actively defend the principles of self-determination, territorial integrity, and the broader foundation of our security architecture.

Therefore, let this anniversary year be more than a commemoration – let it be a commitment.

The principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act were never meant to be relics of history.

They are responsibilities we must uphold every day, not just in our words, but through action.

Each of us here has a role – through debates, resolutions, and pressure on our governments.

This Assembly must not merely witness history.

It must shape it.

Our duty is clear: Defend the Helsinki principles. Hold governments accountable. Turn commitments into action.

Thank you, and I look forward to our discussions.
