



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Winter Meeting
Joint Session of the three General Committees**

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Address by OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid

President Bowness,
President Sobotka,
Chairperson-in-Office Minister Linde,
Secretary General Montella,
Distinguished Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Thank you for inviting me to address the Winter Meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly, in which I am delighted to participate.

It's such a pity that you could not meet in Vienna this year. I would have been so pleased to meet with you in person. But rest assured that I will reach out to your delegations whenever I travel, as I recently did in Stockholm, so that we can get to know each other, as I believe in the added value of close co-operation for the benefit of our organizations.

The Parliamentary Assembly is an essential part of the OSCE family. Your work is crucial for the OSCE, so I want to begin by thanking you for your commitment to the Organization and the principles it stands for, and for your active engagement in promoting our common values within your constituencies.

As parliamentarians, you have eyes and ears all around our vast region. This gives you tremendous expertise on developments at the country and regional level as well as on security concerns in all three dimensions. I see this as an invaluable asset for the OSCE.

The PA also provides the OSCE with new impetus and fresh ideas – which I appreciate very much. You have long been a leader in bringing emerging security issues into the OSCE debate. For example, it was the PA that first drew attention to the security threat that trafficking in human beings poses for our region. Today, of course, countering this cruel practice is an important area of the OSCE’s work, especially now in light of the pandemic.

The more I learn about the PA, the more opportunities I see for synergies. Many of the PA’s Special Representatives and Ad Hoc Committees are working on issues that complement the OSCE’s efforts. Issues like promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. Fighting terrorism. Combatting corruption. Strengthening co-operation with the Mediterranean region. And of course, promoting dialogue as a key tool for conflict prevention and resolution.

The OSCE has much to gain from your expertise. So I will be looking for ways to co-operate even more closely with the PA and to further engage parliamentarians in our work.

Dear Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

The only constant in life is change. Some challenges hit us by surprise, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Others are easier to predict, such as the dramatic impact that climate change will have in the coming decades. We need to prepare the OSCE for both kinds of challenges. We can do so by setting out future-oriented

priorities for the Organization, and by improving our working methods so that we can react quickly to new circumstances.

The PA's recent Call for Action, which calls for higher-level engagement and support for the OSCE, is an important and timely initiative. In the next few years, let's reflect together on what the OSCE should look like when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025. We should be ambitious and work toward concrete outcomes that will strengthen security for everyone. I am delighted that the Parliamentary Assembly is already very actively debating this, and I wish to offer my utmost support to this ongoing reflection.

Allow me to touch upon a few topics we could include in this reflection process.

One of the OSCE's great assets is its holistic approach to security. In our daily work, we see how complex and intertwined today's security challenges are, which calls for comprehensive solutions. Just think about transnational organized crime and corruption. To mention one example, the OSCE is doing good work in South-East Europe to increase regional co-operation and build authorities' capacities to tackle these challenges effectively, including by increasing standardization of anti-money laundering and complex fraud investigations. This is a joint effort of the Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department and Office of Economic and Environmental Affairs, in co-operation with OSCE field operations in the region. I am convinced that by strengthening our cross-dimensional approach through efforts like this, the OSCE will be even more effective at strengthening stability, preventing conflicts and building sustainable peace.

Conflict prevention is the engine for all of the OSCE's work. Along with strengthening cross-dimensional approaches, I see capacity building as a key tool for conflict prevention. Investing in education, training and institutional capacity

building increases the resilience of societies. This is a critical element of the work of OSCE field operations, the Institutions, and the Secretariat's specialized departments. The Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe and the OSCE Academy in Bishkek are also important capacity builders. Resilient societies are better equipped to withstand the root causes of conflict, helping to maintain stability and security.

Another proven way to strengthen the effectiveness of our conflict prevention efforts is to increase diversity and gender equality. There is abundant empirical evidence showing that the meaningful involvement of women in conflict prevention and resolution efforts substantially contributes to their success. So I am grateful to the Swedish OSCE Chair for making Women, Peace and Security one of their priorities.

It has also been well demonstrated that, if given the opportunity, women can contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth and more resilient societies. So we need to step up our efforts to ensure equal access to economic and financial resources, education, and formal employment – including in leadership positions. Women's economic empowerment benefits society as a whole and strengthens stability and security. So I'm glad that this is also one of the Swedish Chair's priorities.

Comprehensive security demands that no one should be left out. That's why the OSCE is providing more opportunities for young women and men to raise their concerns and share their ideas on the future of security in our region. After all, it is today's young people who will have to contend with tomorrow's problems. So we need to engage them as essential partners. Our Perspectives 20-30 youth initiative provides an excellent platform to do exactly that, bringing young people together with diplomats and policymakers to share their recommendations for

tackling what they see as the major security challenges of the coming decade. The Chair's appointment of a Special Representative on Youth and Security, Ms. Rosaline Marbinah, a young woman actively advocating for democracy in her country, sends a strong signal of commitment to advance youth inclusion and youth participation in the life of our societies.

We should also be thinking about the nexus between technology and security. While awareness is growing about the risks that technology can pose – for instance cyberattacks on critical infrastructure – we should not overlook technology's potential to contribute to conflict prevention. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine has pioneered the use of technology in its work – including using drones and cameras that enable 24/7 monitoring even in remote locations inaccessible to ground patrols. Indeed, the SMM is developing expertise that the whole organization can learn from.

Dear colleagues,

My top priority as Secretary General is to support the Chair, the Troika and the participating States, and to ensure that the OSCE is well equipped to help participating States to implement their commitments, to pursue dialogue, and to tackle common security challenges together.

I take my role as the OSCE's Chief Administrative Officer very seriously. My ambition is to increase the Organization's efficiency and effectiveness – and indeed the Chairperson-in-Office has tasked me to do this. I also want to make the OSCE more inclusive and more collaborative. And in all that I aim to do, I am committed to transparency and accountability.

To have an effective and “future-proof” OSCE requires participating States to provide the Organization with sufficient funds, and with a less time-consuming budget process to fully implement its mandate. Dear colleagues, I know you recognize how vital the OSCE’s work is. So I hope you will be strong advocates for the Organization in your parliaments, including by lobbying for a more sustainable budget for the OSCE. In turn, you can count on me to be a prudent, transparent and responsive manager.

“If the OSCE didn’t exist, we would have to invent it.” This phrase is not new, but it is still very true. Over the past decades, the OSCE has evolved into an indispensable tool for our common security. We should remind ourselves more often how lucky we are to have it.

Yet despite the OSCE’s importance for our region, I have noticed that citizens, and at times even the specialized public in many of our participating States, lack a clear understanding of the Organization’s added value. Yet there is no other security organization in our region with the OSCE’s potential to bridge differences through dialogue and co-operation, to build trust, and to reduce tensions.

So raising the OSCE’s profile is also one of my priorities. And I am counting on all of you to promote the OSCE to both decision-makers and the public in your countries.

In closing, I would like to thank Lord Bowness and Secretary General Montella for your staunch support and close co-operation with the OSCE. I look forward to working together with you and the entire Parliamentary Assembly to ensure that the OSCE can indeed be recognized as the world’s leading regional security

organization. I will be eager to hear your ideas and recommendations in this regard.

Dear members of the Parliamentary Assembly, thank you for your support. I look forward to working with you in the months and years to come in our common effort to promote peace and security throughout our region and beyond.

Thank you.