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Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten

«Reconsolidating European security with vision, determination, and a stronger OSCE» (en)

03.10.2014

Genf, 03.10.2014 - Ansprache des amtierenden OSZE-Vorsitzenden und Bundespräsidenten Didier Burkhalter anlässlich der 24. Sitzung der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der OSZE - Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Mr President,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Switzerland. Welcome to Geneva, the capital of peace.

Geneva – this is also the home base of the ICRC. Yesterday, a Swiss delegate of the ICRC was killed in Donetsk. This delegate stands for the essence of Switzerland, for what we are most proud of: the humanitarian support, the humanitarian assistance to people in need. Today, I would like to speak particularly for him and for all the innocent victims of this conflict, and for their families.

The shores of beautiful Lake Geneva are home not just to the ICRC, but also to the European headquarters of the UN and to more than 30 other international organisations. Around 250 NGOs are based here. This is a place where leaders frequently meet to discuss ways out of seminal crises – whether they concern Iran, Syria, Ukraine, or other crises.

Less known is that Geneva was the city to host the first- ever multilateral East-West negotiation process. Between September 1973 and July 1975, delegates from 35 participating States gathered in this very building to hammer out what came to be known as the CSCE Final Act. Signed at the Helsinki summit on 1 August 1975, this Final Act defined the common foundations and basic principles of European security. It has remained the reference text for the OSCE to this day.

It is therefore very appropriate that this year's Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is taking place here. Almost forty years after the Final Act was signed, European security is faced with a deep crisis that must be addressed. Discussion formats like this Parliamentary Assembly are important for finding ways to reconsolidate European security as a common project.

The Chairmanship of the OSCE reflects Switzerland's sense of responsibility to engage in international efforts to advance peace and security. It also underlines our commitment to the OSCE's approach to advancing security through dialogue, shared commitments, confidence-building and broad cooperation.

Recent developments regarding Ukraine have shown that Switzerland's distinctive foreign policy stance and our broad set of instruments to promote peace can be useful to build bridges and work out compromise solutions. But this crisis has also made clear that it will require a collective effort by everyone involved to restore stability, both to Ukraine and to Europe at large. The OSCE has an important role to play on both accounts.

When I last spoke to you at the opening of the Summer Meeting in Baku, we were half way into the Swiss Chairmanship. I gave you an interim report on OSCE activities in Ukraine and on progress regarding the other Swiss priorities.

Now that the final quarter of our Chairmanship has begun, I will talk about three priorities in the run-up to the Basel Ministerial Council and beyond. These priorities are: continued efforts at de-escalation in Ukraine, reforming and strengthening the OSCE, and launching a reflection process on how to overcome the broader crisis of European security.

The first and most imminent priority of the OSCE remains Ukraine.

In the past month, there has been a shift from a military to a political logic in this crisis. It is a fragile shift; we are still far from a political solution. But in view of the more than 3,500 victims and the humanitarian misery caused by the military confrontation in eastern parts of Ukraine, this has been an important development. While August was still dominated by the risk of further military escalation, there is now a political momentum that requires our full support.

The Minsk Protocol and the related Minsk Memorandum that was worked out at the highest levels in Kyiv and Moscow provide a basis for moving towards a political process to resolve the crisis. Some progress has already been made. But the parties must continue to take steps to make the ceasefire more sustainable and implement all commitments agreed in Minsk. All shooting and shelling must now stop. Differences must be resolved through dialogue rather than force.

The Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE has played a crucial role in the international efforts to assist Ukraine in de-escalating the crisis. Our monitors have done a tremendous job in a volatile environment.

As a result of the Minsk agreements, the SMM has been given new responsibilities, in particular monitoring the ceasefire and effective controlling of the Russian-Ukrainian border. The SMM has also monitored several rounds of simultaneous releases of prisoners in recent weeks – it has been present at the release of more than 430 prisoners so far.

As the Mission adapts to the new monitoring needs, it is expanding to its full capacity of 500 monitors. It is our responsibility of us, the participating States, to enable the SMM to live up to its many demanding tasks and continue to operate in safe conditions. This is why I have written to the OSCE foreign ministers this week and asked their governments to contribute more experts, more specialised equipment, such as armored vehicles, and additional funding. The Mission's budget has grown by an extra 30 million Euro as a result of the Minsk provisions. I count on your support for the SMM in national debates at home.

Dialogue will remain key to stabilising the situation in Ukraine. We can only resolve this crisis with Russia – we cannot resolve it against Russia. The Swiss Chairmanship will continue to engage in diplomacy. We also stand ready to organise any meeting of the leaders of Ukraine and Russia in Switzerland.

It must be our objective to take the political process further in ways that allow resolving the conflict rather than freezing it. Through my Special Representative Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, the Swiss Chairmanship will continue to work together with representatives of Ukraine and Russia in the Trilateral Contact Group. The meetings and video conferences of this group with the representatives of certain districts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions are an essential part of the peace efforts.

The OSCE is also ready to assist the inclusive dialogue within Ukraine that the Minsk Protocol envisages. A nation-wide dialogue will be important to win back hearts and minds and foster a common sense of purpose. The recent clashes over a Lenin monument have indicated how disputed Ukraine's identity remains. Such incidences suggest that local discussion formats could be useful too.

This Parliamentary Assembly can make vital contributions to de-escalation in Ukraine. One way is through parliamentary diplomacy: The talks between Russian and Ukrainian members of parliament can contribute to building confidence between the two countries. Another way is through observing the early parliamentary elections on 26 October. I trust that the Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights will cooperate as effectively in observing these elections as they did in the case of the presidential elections in May.

The second priority we will focus on is to feed the lessons learnt from the Ukraine crisis into the 'Helsinki+40' process. Enhancing the OSCE's capacity to act must be an essential part of reconsolidating European security.

The OSCE's engagement in the Ukraine crisis has demonstrated the relevance of the organisation as a forum for dialogue, as an operational responder, and as a normative intermediary to remind States of their commitments. But this engagement has also shown the importance of further improving the OSCE's toolkit to deal with crises.

Capacities for early warning and rapid reaction need to be strengthened. The OSCE should also further increase its capacities in mediation and reconciliation. Switzerland possesses many years of experience in mediation and will continue to support the OSCE in this field well beyond our Chairmanship.

The monitoring of implementation of commitments should be improved too, especially in the human dimension. Moreover, the OSCE needs institutional reforms to remain fit for purpose. The budget process should be simplified, and we really should have a bi-annual budget. After ten years of zero nominal growth, we should finally allocate financial and human resources to the OSCE that are commensurate with its tasks.

For all this to materialise, strategic guidance on where the OSCE should be heading is required from political leaders. This is what 'Helsinki+40' in the context of the Ukraine crisis must be about.

Again, the Parliamentary Assembly can and should play a role in this. I have taken good note of the recent launch of your seminar series on 'Helsinki+40' in Moscow. As we are working on the same issues, let us exchange our ideas and work together for a stronger OSCE.

And let us be bold and allow for some out-of-the-box thinking when discussing the future of the OSCE. I will mention just one idea that has remained in my mind in recent weeks:

The Ukraine crisis has shown how economic border lines and frictions within the OSCE area can contribute to insecurity in Europe.

Organisations other than the OSCE are obviously better suited to resolve trade disputes. But the OSCE has the potential of assisting efforts at strengthening regional connectivity in trade and infrastructure matters. And it has developed confidence-building and monitoring tools that could also be applied to mitigate economic challenges.

We do not have to start from scratch here. OSCE work in the field of border security and border management has included efforts to facilitate cross-border trade. There has also been some fruitful OSCE cooperation with the UN Economic Commission for Europe on these issues.

The OSCE could, for example, support the implementation of some trade agreements by using the expertise of the OSCE Border Management Staff College to improve cooperation between customs authorities.

The OSCE could also encourage states to clarify their commitments under the various bilateral, regional and global trade regimes existing in the OSCE area. Greater clarity and transparency of rules and procedures will enhance the potential to build confidence and trust.

Most importantly, the OSCE as an impartial actor could monitor compliance with certain trade agreements. Whatever trade deal the EU, Russia, and Ukraine work out, some monitoring or verification support measures will likely be required.

I am well aware that such ideas will not materialise overnight, but they are worth examining. Expanding confidence-building and monitoring capacities in the OSCE's second dimension could make a vital contribution to strengthening pan-European security.

Ladies and gentlemen

There is a third priority that will mark the final quarter of the Swiss Chairmanship, and that

is to launch a reflection process on how to overcome the broader crisis of European security.

The Ukraine crisis is not just a tragedy for the Ukrainian people. It is also a blow to pan-European security.

The violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia have repercussions that go far beyond Ukraine. They call into question the foundations of European security as defined in the Paris Charter on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act.

Disregard for the post-Cold War rule book and the growing political divide between Russia and the West have brought about great uncertainty as to the security and stability of Europe.

Erosion of the consensus on European security set in more than a decade ago. Now that developments in Ukraine have aggravated the crisis of European security, we should address it without further delay.

How can States recommit to the normative foundations of European security as reflected in the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter? What measures could be adopted to rebuild confidence and reduce perceptions of threat? How can former cornerstones of pan-European security, such as conventional arms control, be rebuilt? What will it take to reduce the risk of further tension, render security in Europe indivisible, and advance the Astana goal of the OSCE as a security community?

Finding common answers to these questions will take time. We should approach these issues with an open mind as to the result of such deliberations.

Three things are clear from my perspective:

First, the Helsinki principles and the OSCE commitments are not up for renegotiation – the issue here is how to ensure more effective adherence and implementation.

Second, we should not aim at a major overhaul of Europe's security architecture. Rather, debates should focus on possibilities to reconfirm, refine, reinvigorate, and perhaps complement existing elements of cooperative security in Europe.

Third, as an inclusive platform for dialogue, the OSCE has an important role to play in these discussions on the broader issues of European security too.

Last week, on the margins of the UN General Assembly, the Swiss Chairmanship organised an informal ministerial-level meeting of OSCE participating States. We had a first discussion on how to reconsolidate European security as a common project. It was a constructive debate, and more than 20 foreign ministers took the floor. We will resume our discussion in Basel in December when we meet again for the OSCE Ministerial Council.

During the meeting in New York, I proposed to set up a Chairmanship-commissioned panel of eminent persons with representatives of all regions of the OSCE. Over a period of six months, the panel could produce a report that would take stock of the current situation and propose a set of recommendations concerning the next steps to be taken in strengthening European security.

There was broad positive feedback to this proposal. We are now operationalising this idea so that the panel can be launched in Basel. It is important that this panel be provided with opportunities for interacting with the political level – with ministers, as well as with you, the General Assembly. Once the panel has issued recommendations, debates at ministerial level could be organised to take stock and decide on next steps and follow-up phases of the reflection process.

Ladies and gentlemen

In the early 1970s, Europe was divided. To reduce this division and search for common ground, governments decided to hold a conference on security and cooperation in Europe. The several hundred diplomats and experts who gathered in this hall in 1973 were told that

the conference was likely to last just a few weeks. In the end, the negotiations took almost two years.

Diplomats moved from hotels to houses. Some of them settled in Geneva for good. Two participants from opposite sides of the Iron Curtain even married during the negotiations. A Soviet participant reported from here: "We are progressing at the rhythm of mankind".

But then something remarkable happened. After more than 2400 meetings, consensus was established on the Final Act. The notion of cooperative security has since transformed Europe for good.

Today, our continent is far less divided than in the 1970s, but the common foundations of our security are eroding. War and insecurity have returned to Europe. We should do everything possible to reverse this negative development.

There is no need to reinvent the CSCE today. We are fortunate to have the OSCE.

But what we should be inspired by is the vision and determination of the founding fathers of the CSCE to work out an inclusive system of security through dialogue and compromise.

It is this kind of vision and determination that is needed in our efforts to reconsolidate European security as a common project.

With this in mind, I wish you fruitful debates here in Geneva. Perhaps not to the point of marriage, but in the same constructive spirit that led to such remarkable results at this venue almost four decades ago.

Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten
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