



**OSCE PA Helsinki +40 Project:
“The OSCE’s role in (re)consolidating European security”
Panel III. The OSCE PA and the future of the OSCE**

**OSCE PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver
Stockholm, Sweden
11 March 2015**

Dear esteemed participants,
Dear colleagues,

My involvement with the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, or CSCE, which became today’s OSCE, began in 1972. That was three years before the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the document containing the shared principles and vision of comprehensive security that the OSCE stands for. What that means is that I’ve been there to see it all -- from the months of tooth-and-nail diplomacy that went into agreeing the Final Act to the highs, lows, and changes that the OSCE has experienced over the years.

There have obviously been many anniversaries in that span, but I can say in complete earnest that this, the upcoming 40th anniversary of the Final Act, is one of the most critical junctures in OSCE history. “Helsinki + 40” sounds catchy, and 40 is a nice, round number, but this is no time for resting comfortably on our laurels. In short, our Organization faces a crisis moment, for the 40th anniversary has come at a time when world events and violations of the Helsinki Final Act do not merely present a challenge to us, but threaten to destroy our Organization, making this anniversary a “final act” of the Helsinki Final Act.

What can the OSCE do to remedy this situation? What lessons must we learn from what has happened about our own organization? And how can the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly contribute both to OSCE reform efforts and to ensuring that the Organizations stays relevant and viable in today’s world?

To fix the OSCE, we need to acknowledge the fundamental problem: What good are commitments – commitments made at the highest political level, in writing – if one, those

comments are flagrantly broken and two, if the OSCE eschews its duty to hold its own members accountable?

One of the great strengths of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, of course, is that we can be more outspoken than the governmental side of the organization. One of our core functions is also to provide parliamentary oversight and serve as a consistent source of new ideas and suggestions for needed reform -- as any parliament does in any democratic country. As such, we are primed to lead the Helsinki + 40 reform process and try to determine what adjustments the OSCE must now make.

Let's start with *accountability*. I fondly remember the first follow-up meeting in Belgrade in 1977, two years following the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. The back-room diplomatic battles that preceded and marked the meeting are now the stuff of OSCE and Cold War history, but what we got in the end was a thorough review of whether and how participating States were adhering to pledged commitments. The meeting also set a precedent for naming names and countries. As one of the experts, Javier Ruperez, stated during the previous seminar, "Nothing is to be gained by ignoring problems or refusing to name names... Diplomacy is not about empty words, but about harsh realities. The Final Act could not have been negotiated otherwise."

But today, the review process has deteriorated into closed-doors Permanent Council meetings at OSCE headquarters in Vienna. Instead, let's open up the review process to the court of public opinion and have a weekly, open-press review of implementation.

On that note, discussion of implementing human rights commitments should not be relegated to lengthy, poorly attended HDIMs in Warsaw. Today, the only open forum where implementation of all OSCE commitments is discussed is at the OSCE PA's sessions, which attracts significant media and civil society attention.

The situation in Ukraine -- and within the OSCE during this crisis -- also prove that we must finally adjust the consensus-based decision-making which prevents collective action against blatant violations of OSCE commitments by one participating States. The OSCE as an organization must resolve that it will not be taken hostage by any one state to remain silent and helpless in the face of Helsinki commitments violations. In the OSCE PA's annual declarations, and through our Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Reform, which Joao Soares chairs, OSCE parliamentarians have long called on the governmental side to consider new rules -- perhaps consensus minus one or two, or two-thirds-majority or some procedure that prevents a single country veto by a rights transgressor. Achieving this change will no doubt be a diplomatic battle, but this current episode has demonstrated just how much we need to take it on.

Yes, consensus was eventually reached to deploy a special monitoring mission to Ukraine, but what if Russia had not held up the formation and deployment of such a mission? And then, the OSCE observer mission at the border checkpoints of Donetsk and Gukovo – with the limited mandate it has been given in terms of reports, does it actually serve its purpose?

Over the years, the OSCE has also become top-heavy and bureaucratic, with Vienna ever decreasing the budget for field operations and OSCE presences being downgraded in areas where robust work is sorely needed. This is a pattern that must be speedily reversed, as OSCE parliamentarians have repeatedly called for.

I would be remiss not to also mention one idea for reform that has long been suggested, but may be the toughest to enact – that is, agreeing a legally binding OSCE charter. Our next Helsinki +40 seminar in Copenhagen will focus on this topic.

Will our organization, even with needed reforms, be able to head off all conflicts between member states? Of course not. But will it have a better chance of doing so? I don't doubt it. And will the OSCE be truer to its ideals? Certainly.

The participating States should not miss the chance of making this decisive step in 2015, when the Organization turns 40. Only through these measures can the relevance and visibility of the OSCE be preserved.

Thank you.