



International Conference on

“The role of Parliamentarians in boosting economic cooperation and cultural ties along the Silk Road”

Remarks by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli
Baku, 13 March 2018

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Dear Speaker Asadov,
Speaker Brajovic,
Minister Mammadyarov
Minister Tsogtbaatar,
Dear Azay,
Fellow delegates,

Let me begin by extending our collective gratitude to our Azerbaijani hosts for their hospitality in welcoming all of us in Baku this week.

I would like to thank in particular the National Assembly of Azerbaijan and the Delegation of Azerbaijan to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, for putting together this event.

It is with a feeling of nostalgia that we return here and think back fondly to the memorable Annual Session which took place in these very premises almost four years ago.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we open this international conference, we underline once more that, along with the military and the humanitarian dimensions, economic co-operation is an integral part of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

Although it may be overshadowed by other OSCE priorities, its economic and environmental activities are in fact one of our Organization's greatest successes.

All along the Silk Road, in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and South East Europe, the OSCE field missions have brought concrete solutions in areas such as transportation, energy security, and cross-border co-operation that have produced tangible results for our populations.

We are becoming increasingly aware throughout the OSCE that economic success and individual security are closely connected.

In every single of our countries, we see that economic and social disparities, poverty and high unemployment – in addition to a lack of rule of law, weak governance, and corruption – are considered credible threats to our security and stability.

It should not come as a surprise, then, that robust and sustained economic growth is a shared priority for all of us.

As we meet today in Baku, let's realize together that this common desire for economic success is no different from the dedication to commercial expansion we have witnessed for over two thousand years along the Silk Road.

Dear colleagues,

As I have pointed out on numerous occasions in recent months, the level of dialogue and trust within the OSCE area is at an historically low-point.

We see little to no progress in the resolution of protracted conflicts, a deterioration of political and military dialogue, and democratic erosion and threats to human rights throughout our region.

In contrast, today's conference represents a fresh opportunity to revitalize international co-operation through our universal desire for prosperity.

Let's remember that the Silk Road trade routes have always carried more than merchandise and precious goods. The Silk Road established an interconnected world stretching across Eurasia.

The constant movement and mixing of populations also brought about the transmission of knowledge, ideas, cultures and beliefs. All of these had a profound impact on the history and civilizations of the Eurasian peoples.

Incredible intellectual and cultural exchange have taken place in cities along these trade routes, many of which developed into hubs of culture and learning. These cities still stand today as proof that increased exchanges and strong co-operation are key to the development and success of our countries and our people.

Your Excellencies,

The countries along the Silk Road and many of those represented here all have their own national interests. Many of us also face important security challenges and tense relations with neighboring countries.

But achieving economic prosperity requires first and foremost co-operation between all countries and on all levels.

When times become difficult, we need to resist the temptation of closing borders and imposing trade barriers. The past week has shown the devastating ripple effects that narrow self-interests have on our increasingly globalized and integrated economies.

We simply can't go at it alone anymore. Instead we must lean on each other more and more.

Dear colleagues,

As parliamentarians, we play a key role in laying a fertile ground for greater economic opportunities and increased trade.

First of all, this requires appropriate legislation to ensure effective governance, prevent corruption, and facilitate cross border exchanges. It also entails to support trade by crafting appropriate national regulatory policies in sectors as varied as transportation, finance, insurance, and telecommunications.

Substantial infrastructure investments are also needed to ensure long-term prosperity. As the famous Chinese proverb goes, "If you want to be rich, you must first build roads." This is a message that will be echoed in our discussions today, with many of our countries being strongly committed to increasing transport links and capabilities.

My own country of Georgia is making significant efforts to modernize its transport infrastructure and actively participates in multinational large-scale projects. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is the perfect illustration of regional efforts to develop east-west transit and ensure an increase in cargo flow with a reduction in delivery time.

I would like to commend the Azerbaijani authorities for their investment in this project in close co-operation with Georgia and Turkey. I am sure that tomorrow's visit will also provide a concrete example of Azerbaijan's efforts in this area.

And finally, because the countries along the Silk Road represented here today are at very different stages in their development, we must gradually bring both our national frameworks and infrastructures closer to each other.

Simply put, we cannot solve our problems without sharing experiences and knowledge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All of us present today share a vision of a more closely connected Eurasian continent that spans from Western Europe to Eastern Asia.

As a unique forum for dialogue, the OSCE is ideally placed to help build more bridges across Eurasia, including by increasing contacts with our Asian Partners for Co-operation and China.

Within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, we – as representatives of the people – we must extend a hand to one another and also build bridges between our peoples and our governments to give our businesses the opportunity to thrive.

In this spirit, I hope that today's conference will provide an additional opportunity for our Members to exchange new ideas and promote the deeper ties necessary for our countries to achieve the security, stability, and prosperity we all strive for.

Thank you.