



**Opening Address by**  
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***“We Swiss will build bridges to strengthen security and cooperation in Europe beyond our Chairmanship.”***

**21st OSCE Ministerial Council**

**Basel, 4 December 2014**

Ministers

Dear friends and colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen

The world is a global village. So let us start by talking about a city: Donetsk. Two and a half years ago, Donetsk hosted five matches of the UEFA EURO 2012. Football fans from all over Europe came to see Cristiano Ronaldo, Xabi Alonso, and Wayne Rooney play in the Donbass Arena.

Today, Donetsk is controlled by illegally armed groups. The Donbass Arena has been damaged by shelling. Donbass International Airport lies in ruins. The war in the region has claimed more than 4,000 lives. OSCE monitors are patrolling the area.

This has been no ordinary year for the OSCE.

Security has deteriorated markedly in Europe. The Ukraine crisis has brought hardship to the Ukrainian people and deep divisions regarding the country's future. It has thrown into question many assumptions about the post-Cold War European order. The Helsinki Principles have been repeatedly violated, most blatantly when Crimea was annexed.

The Ukraine crisis has fuelled a broader crisis of European security that has been in the making for years. Trust between Russia and the West has eroded. We have seen a dangerous increase in military activity and belligerent rhetoric lately. Economic polarisation and geopolitical frictions are mounting. Are we all still committed to our declared goal of establishing a security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok?

In this year of crises, the OSCE has demonstrated its value as an inclusive organisation, linking the Euro-Atlantic and the Eurasian regions. The OSCE has come to play a seminal role in international efforts to prevent the further escalation of the Ukraine crisis.

You, the 57 participating States, agreed to set up two new field missions – the Special Monitoring Mission and the Border Observation Mission. The Chairmanship has fostered dialogue through CiO diplomacy, Permanent Council debates, participation in the Trilateral Contact Group, and support for the national round tables during their (all too short) existence in May. OSCE institutions too have been closely involved in Ukraine. International awareness of the OSCE's role and potential as a platform for debate and action has grown in 2014.

Yet, despite the positive momentum of the OSCE, the situation is not good today.

Regarding the Ukraine crisis, implementation of the Minsk arrangements is more limited and uneven than we had wanted. The ceasefire is still not consolidated. A political process has yet to take off.

As for the OSCE, its recently gained momentum remains fragile. Sustaining it will require the political will to continue cooperation and find common solutions despite differences.

I interpret the large number of Ministers present at this Ministerial Council as a commitment to use the OSCE as a platform to advance cooperative security for the benefit of all.

We are all aware that we have reached a critical point in European security. My main message to you today is this: Let us take good care of the OSCE. Let us take good care of it because an effective OSCE strengthens the security of all our nations and our people.

Frank exchanges about our grievances and disagreements are important. With its inclusive nature, the OSCE is the right format to have this debate. But let us do this in ways that preserve the space for common decisions and common activities on the ground. As a consensus-based organisation, the OSCE depends on the goodwill of everyone to act constructively and in a solution-oriented way. The OSCE is a bridge; and a bridge can be used from both sides simultaneously.

Twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is our duty as political leaders never to allow Europe to be divided again. The OSCE can help prevent or resolve conflicts – provided that participating States have the collective political will to use it to that end.

In this spirit, I see three priorities for the OSCE's short- and mid-term agenda: First, we must cooperate concretely to provide new impetus to efforts to resolve the Ukraine crisis and to ensure that the OSCE stays engaged with meaningful contributions.

Comprehensive and effective implementation of the Minsk arrangements remains the best way forward to resolve the Ukraine crisis, and we need to provide strong support to the Contact Group as it seeks to facilitate this. We also need to equip the SMM with the necessary resources, and to ensure that all parties respect the safety and freedom of movement of our monitors.

As I announced last night at the informal dinner of Ministers, Switzerland will support the SMM with a further

2 million Swiss francs (1.7 million Euros). We are also ready to provide substantial support to any political dialogue within Ukraine. And we are supporting a series of civil society projects in Ukraine, either through the OSCE or bilaterally.

Beyond the Ukraine crisis, participating States must continue to work towards common solutions to the many common security challenges they face. The OSCE has a responsibility to take care of the whole range of security issues that have a negative impact on peoples' lives in our region of the world. Divisions over Ukraine must not stand in the way of effective multilateral answers to these issues. I invite you to support the Ministerial Decisions and Declarations that are still being negotiated.

As our second priority, we need to provide the OSCE with more continuity and capacity. The model of consecutive Chairmanships has proven its merit. Swiss-Serbian cooperation has been a success. Germany and Austria are set to be confirmed by the Ministerial Council tomorrow as the two Chairs following Serbia. This is very good news for the OSCE and European security.

As for capacities, the Helsinki+40 process provides an opportunity to adapt the OSCE to today's needs. The Ukraine crisis should intensify rather than slow our efforts to provide the OSCE with an even more effective tool box and more resources for crisis prevention and resolution.

The OSCE is great value for money. With a budget of approximately 140 million Euros, it enhances the security of 57 States on three continents with more than one billion people. Switzerland will continue to promote a strong OSCE beyond its Chairmanship. One focal point will remain the strengthening of the OSCE's mediation capacity by providing respective Swiss knowhow and resources.

The third priority for the OSCE should be to address the broader crisis of European security. We will have the opportunity to discuss this issue over lunch today.

The Swiss Chairmanship, in close cooperation with the subsequent two Chairmanships, will launch a Panel of Eminent Persons. This Panel is expected to come up with proposals on how to rebuild trust, how to re-establish respect for the Helsinki Principles and improve implementation of the OSCE commitments, and quite generally how to reconsolidate European security as a common project. This is not about a revolution in European security but about restoring a higher level of security for everyone.

We believe that the OSCE should also look more closely at the nexus between trade issues and European security. Building confidence and facilitating trade links between different economic zones, as well as among countries in conflict zones, has become an important aspect of stability in Europe. With its second dimension, the OSCE is well positioned to make valuable respective contributions. We are currently identifying ways of going forward on this – I invite you all to join our deliberations.

Ladies and gentlemen

A year ago, at our meeting in Kiev, I showed you a tableau with ten priorities of the Swiss Chairmanship. Irrespective of the Ukraine crisis, we have been working hard to advance those priorities.

In three Chairmanship trips, we sought to promote security and cooperation in the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia, and discussed respective OSCE roles. We organised OSCE conferences on terrorism, human rights defenders, the prevention of torture, and disaster risk reduction. We engaged closely and fruitfully with civil society in five conferences and a series of encounters abroad and at home. And we conducted a Model OSCE where 57 young people from the participating States successfully negotiated a Model OSCE Youth Action Plan.

Although the Swiss Chairmanship soon ends, I do not wish to take stock here of what we have achieved. There have certainly been some successes; there have also been issues where no progress has been possible. But what matters most is that we all remain committed beyond any individual chairmanship to taking the OSCE forward. Let us strengthen the OSCE as an anchor of cooperative security and use it responsibly to discuss our differences, rebuild trust, and find common solutions to the many challenges we face. We Swiss will continue to build bridges to this end.