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Statement by the Chairperson in Office of the OSCE

Opening Remarks

OSCE Annual Security Review Conference

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Good morning, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to be here, to open this Annual Security Review Conference.

I want to start by going back to the beginning.

In 2002, foreign ministers from across the region came together in Porto, Portugal.

And, they decided to establish a new annual conference.

They said it should review the work on security being done by the OSCE and its participating States - and enhance dialogue based on the current challenges and developments.

So, that is what we are here to do for the coming three days.

As you all know, the Slovak Chairmanship has now reached the halfway mark.

And let me name two personal highlights:

Since I gave my opening address last January, we have visited all OSCE field missions – as well as areas of crises and conflict.

And through the recent series of Chair's Dialogues, we have also engaged with every participating State here in Vienna.

We have learned a lot of lessons along the way.

And, to frame our discussions today, I will share three of them.

The first lesson is that our toolbox is already quite full.

We have many mechanisms, forums and processes at our disposal.

Some have been a core part of the OSCE *acquis* since the Organization was founded in 1975.

For example, conventional arms control and military transparency.

Other tools and mechanisms are more recent innovations.

Such as, the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department, which was formed as a response to the increasingly borderless nature of security threats.

Or the elaboration of a conflict cycle toolbox, which boosted our early warning and conflict prevention capacities.

Another example is the creation of the Structured Dialogue, three years ago. It gave new life to what has always been part of our core business - increasing transparency, reducing risks and reinvigorating arms control and confidence-building.

And in my engagement with Vienna-based ambassadors, I heard a clear distinction: we do not, necessarily, need to create *new* structures or mechanisms. Instead, what we need is the political will to better use the tools we have.

And, this is a message I agree with.

Progress does not come, simply, from creating new initiatives.

In fact, that is often the easy part.

The harder thing to do is to implement, and to effectively work within existing frameworks and commitments. To find opportunities for dialogue. To try new ways of communicating and negotiating. And to take on different perspectives and viewpoints.

Like I said, this is not easy.

But, if we want to use this Organization to its full potential, it is something we simply have to do.

The second lesson I want to share today is that there is also a whole world outside Vienna. One that maybe we do not hear or see enough of in this building.

Over the past six months, I have visited the missions on the ground. And, I have felt genuinely inspired by their dedication to our core work of preventing and managing conflict.

This is where we can see the real, and unique, value of our comprehensive approach to security.

Our missions are working in close cooperation with local and national actors.

They are talking to and listening to people on the ground.

And, they are working in a truly cross-dimensional way.

But, I want to also stress: the picture in the field was not all positive. Because, we also visited areas of crisis and conflict.

Many people continue to suffer from the crisis in and around Ukraine. This is a crisis which, some years ago, seemed unthinkable – but it is now the reality for too many people on the ground

In Georgia, hopes for a resolution to the conflict seem, after ten years of inertia, to be dimming.

Despite some progress in the Transdniestrian settlement process, a resolution is still too far away.

And, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, daily life continues under a dark cloud - with an ever-present risk of escalation.

Something struck me on these field trips. Which is that, in the face of real, human suffering, a lack of dialogue is unjustifiable.

When you see an old woman climbing a broken bridge - or a young person who has never known real stability - our red lines, and our silence, hundreds of miles away, speak volumes.

That is why we need to continue with dialogue - even when it is difficult. In fact, especially when it is difficult.

I think this is an important message, as we kick off the OSCE's flagship annual dialogue on security.

And it is also one that I plan to stress when our Chairmanship hosts your foreign ministers in Slovakia, this July, for our Informal Ministerial Gathering.

My third and final message today is on the threats of tomorrow.

There are uncertainties ahead.

Terrorism and extremism continue to evolve and adapt. The ways and means of warfare - from hybrid threats to cyber attacks - are changing at a rapid pace. Environmental threats pose a complex danger to our societies. And distinctions that used to be clear are increasingly blurred.

The good news is: we are more equipped than ever to deal with these threats.

We have better data, research and technology. We have stronger field presences and communication tools. We have broadened our understanding of security - realizing, for example, that the participation of women is not just an option, but a necessity. And, that the voices of young people help us to better understand the path ahead of us. We are also doing more to reach out and partner with other regional and multilateral partners.

So, we have built on the Helsinki Final Act - layer upon layer. And, we have ended up with an Organization that is more comprehensive now than it has ever been.

But, as we look towards the future, we should also draw heavily from the past.

Because, some of the most fundamental elements of the OSCE might hold the key to combatting not only the challenges we are facing today, but also the threats on the horizon.

And here, I am talking about our principles and commitments.

Our openness to dialogue.

Our belief that, even in a non-likeminded group, there is a way to find consensus.

These elements have been there from the beginning, over four decades ago.

And, paradoxically, they could also provide us with the answers for the decades ahead.

Yes, we have lost sight of some of these values along the way. There is no point denying this.

We have not always stuck to the rules.

And, our dialogue has not always been effective.

As we all know, at one stage last week, it even looked like we would struggle to find consensus on a procedural document, which would have blocked this entire conference from going ahead.

But there is time to turn this around.

Next year will mark 30 years since the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. This document outlines a clear vision for dialogue and cooperation.

And, I cannot think of a better opportunity than this one to recommit to our founding core values, for a safer future for all.

So, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank you all for being here today.

My thanks in particular to Baroness Ashton and President Fischer, who joined us today, to share their expertise and wisdom. Thanks also to Secretary-General Greminger, for his steadfast support.

And thanks to all of you for being here - to talk about the way ahead for security in the OSCE space. And, to recommit to our most fundamental principles, which can, I believe, stand the test of time.