



Briefing by the OSCE Chairperson in Office

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Mr. President, distinguished members of the Security Council, excellencies, dear colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to address you today as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

This meeting attests to the quality of relations that the United Nations and the OSCE have built on both the political and operational levels.

As the world's largest security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE is committed to supporting the UN global mandate at the regional level.

So today, I have a very simple message to deliver: I believe that we need to continue working together. Perhaps even more than we are doing now.

Because, the stakes are quite high.

And they concern the issues that are at the core of this Council.

Peace and security. Or, in the words of the mandate governing this very organization, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

So, Excellencies, I will give you a rundown of our priorities and activities as the Chair of the OSCE.

I will do this through three main points.

And, then I will listen carefully to any ideas you may have on the way forward.

First, I want to talk about preventing and resolving conflicts - and mitigating their impact on people.

Because this is our top priority.

I will start with what is happening in and around Ukraine.

Frankly, it is unacceptable. The crisis goes against everything the OSCE and the United Nations stand for.

And we must be very clear right upfront: there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements.

That is why we strongly support existing formats, in particular the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group.

But, we cannot simply wait patiently for progress to happen. There are too many people suffering, as we speak.

I saw this firsthand - when I traveled to the country in January. It was my first trip as Chairperson-in-Office. And it is not one I will forget.

In the Luhansk region, elderly women and men - on sticks and on wheelchairs - are forced every day to make the risky journey across the only open entry-exit point: a bridge, on the line of contact in Stanytsia Luhanska, that has been severely damaged by the conflict.

More than 10 000 people cross daily. They suffer; they feel hopeless, neglected and abandoned.

Because the commitments are not upheld; because the trust just keeps eroding; because the space for real dialogue is disappearing.

Since my trip, we have been brainstorming on concrete proposals, which can bring about tangible improvements for people on the ground.

Some measures we have identified include repairing the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge and humanitarian demining.

These – and more - have come from close engagement with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, the Project Coordinator in Ukraine, the ICRC, the European External Action Service and UNDP.

In February, I had the chance to discuss them with Ministers Klimkin and Lavrov separately.

And I did not hear “no” a single time.

I hope we can work to bring these proposed steps forward in the coming months.

I also want to use this opportunity today to express my sincere gratitude to the brave men and women of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

They are the eyes and ears of the international community on the ground. And they are operating with great risk - and deserve our support.

I know that some people have been talking about a United Nations mission in Ukraine. And, I want to point out: this is not a new discussion.

And there is nothing I can add to it today - except to reaffirm that we stand ready to engage on any concrete proposals, or decisions coming out of this esteemed body.

Excellencies,

While the crises in and around Ukraine occupies much of our attention, there are still other dark spots of conflict, in the OSCE area.

The organization works towards conflict resolution and mediation in Transdniestria, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

And, I am glad we can turn the spotlight of this Council on these contexts today as well.

Let me start with the Transnistrian settlement process, where we have seen some real momentum.

This momentum needs to keep building.

On my trip to Moldova in January, I stressed the need for progress on the “Package of 8” measures to continue. Next steps could focus on public transport and telecommunications.

And, with political will and real dialogue, tangible results for the benefit of the people on both banks of the Nistru River can be achieved.

We are also prepared to host a 5+2 meeting in Bratislava, depending on the further developments following the recent parliamentary elections.

The OSCE International Observation Mission has issued a statement of preliminary findings about the conduct of the elections.

I fully support it – and I want to underline here more broadly the crucial role of the OSCE’s election observation. It consolidates democracy in the OSCE region. And, that is why OSCE participating States must do everything possible, to allow these missions to work unimpeded.

Let me now turn to Georgia, where our Chairmanship fully backs existing formats and remains committed to the Geneva International Discussions and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms.

I visited the Administrative Boundary Line with South Ossetia, where I saw for myself the urgent need to reopen the crossing points that have been closed for a few weeks.

Their closure creates daily obstacles for the local population, such as limited access to healthcare.

So here as well, we aim to focus on projects that could bring about small - but concrete - results and an improvement of the situation for people on the ground.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, there have been some steps forward, but we need to see more positive developments.

I returned from Azerbaijan two days ago.

There, I welcomed the intensification of talks and reduction in ceasefire violations.
And, I will also travel to Armenia next week.

Further trips to the Western Balkans and Central Asia are on the books.

On these and all my trips, we are following the same strategy: to open up new space for dialogue, and practically address the challenges we are facing, right on the spot.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

There is a lot of debate over what to call these conflicts.

But, no matter what terms we use - frozen, protracted, dark spots - we cannot escape the undeniable fact: they have gone on for far too long.

Until they are resolved, there is always a risk of escalation.

Until they are resolved, people will continue to suffer.

And, until they are resolved, they need our attention and our cooperation.

UN-OSCE engagement must be part of this.

There is already constructive dialogue between my Special Representatives and United Nations envoys and representatives.

And there are some very positive, concrete projects being implemented on the ground.

I think there is still room for more - and that is what I am here to explore today.

So for my second point, I want to talk about what lies ahead.

The United Nations was born from the ashes of the Second World War.

Later, the OSCE grew from Cold War divisions.

They both channeled power through systems of agreed rules, principles and norms, which gave everyone a stake in the running of international affairs.

They both envisaged new forms of cooperation between decision-makers - so that life could be better for people on the ground.

They both aimed to create dialogue in places where there had been none.

Now, our two organizations are facing a similar challenge: we are learning how to deal with issues the founders could scarcely have imagined - from climate change to cyber-terrorism and violent extremism. And, that is why we have chosen the theme of "A Safer Future" as our second priority.

The security landscape is changing. The unpredictability is rising.

Our institutions need to adapt to suit a young century.

And again, it is something we can – and must - work on together.

The UN took steps to tailor its agenda in 2016, when this Council adopted the Sustaining Peace resolution - trying to better capture the cycle of peace.

Not waiting until conflict has hit to react. Instead, removing the conditions in which it can flourish.

This means pooling our capacities in the areas of sustainable development, institution building, rule of law and good governance.

And this is fully aligned to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

As we all work to make Sustaining Peace a reality, the OSCE conflict cycle toolbox and related work can offer some lessons from the ground.

Let me name just a few examples, *starting with* the counter-terrorism portfolio.

Terrorism and violent extremism are not exactly new phenomena - but they pose bigger threats than the founders of our organizations could ever have anticipated.

And, I was extremely glad to hear that a memorandum of understanding was signed between the OSCE and the UN Office of Counter Terrorism.

Prevention mechanisms are key - and the more we work together, the more people we can reach.

Another opportunity for enhanced cooperation lies within the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Both the UN and the OSCE are doing valuable work on the ground.

We are both supporting women peacebuilders. We are both advocating for inclusive peace processes. We are both mainstreaming gender throughout our field missions.

And we are both working to turn the tide on conflict-related sexual violence.

The 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 is approaching. And, as it does, I urge us to look at more ways in which we can reinforce and support each other's activities.

The same goes for Youth, Peace and Security.

For too long, the narrative has been completely imbalanced.

In the context of peace and security, young people were seen as risks - rather than assets.

We are changing that.

I see many opportunities for cooperation as resolutions 2250 and 2419 are implemented.

But if we are to make any visible progress in any of these areas – we must band together.

I suppose you know where I am going with this - I want to conclude my briefing today by outlining our third priority. And, it is the one that is particularly close to my heart: effective multilateralism.

Because it appears the world has started to forget the very urgent role played by multilateralism - this fundamental problem-solving and war-preventing tool, in international relations.

Some of you in this room are from countries which are thousands of miles outside of the OSCE area.

But we are not as far apart as it may seem.

In fact, many of the challenges you are facing are also being seen within the 57 participating States of the OSCE.

Because the spectrum of challenges is global:

Climate change – and its effects on the most vulnerable societies.

Poverty and hunger – which can fuel migration.

Growing inequalities – and how they fan the flames of conflict and radicalization.

These are completely resistant to any unilateral solutions.

Working together, using multilateral platforms - it's not a luxury we can afford to opt out of.

It's our only choice.

In working together, we have nothing to lose - and everything to gain.

Our people – have everything to gain.

Fortunately - when it comes to the UN and OSCE, we *are* mindful of this.

There is strong cooperation between the OSCE and UN entities in Vienna - and there are crucial projects taking place on the ground.

Our field missions - including the Special Monitoring Mission - have benefited from UN expertise and support.

And, we have more memoranda of understanding and letters of agreement than ever before.

The OSCE has a lot to *earn* from closer UN engagement.

This includes operational readiness, capacities and capabilities at various stages of the conflict cycle, as well as training and expertise across a wide range of themes and issues.

But, the OSCE has a lot to *give* too.

From tailored regional knowledge and niche expertise to lessons learned from the ground.

And, in this climate of eroding global arms control, the OSCE can be a platform for confidence-building and increased transparency.

I think we could – and should - see even more engagement in the coming months and years.

Because there is absolutely no alternative when it comes to the legitimacy the UN brings and the reach it allows.

And when it comes to the OSCE 57, there is absolutely no alternative to local know-how and field presence.

When mobilized effectively and pulled together, the results can be historic.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

I came here - to New York - to talk to you about the priorities of Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship. And, to focus on opportunities for stronger UN-OSCE cooperation, in bringing these priorities to life.

And, I thank you for the attention you have given me today.

But, before I finish, I want to make one more thing clear: this briefing, alone, will not change anything.

It will not change anything in our work. And, it will not change anything in the lives of people.

That is why it is so crucial that our words today are followed up by action.

And, we are willing to do our part. I have already reached out to the Secretary-General and other high-level UN officials, to invite them to participate in various OSCE events this year. My team has also ramped up coordination with the UN Liaison Office in Vienna. And, there is ongoing discussion about options for deeper cooperation on the ground.

The more we work together, the closer we will get to our shared goals. And, I am confident that today's briefing is another step along the way.

Thank you, very much, for listening.