



Statement by the Chairperson in Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

**Presentation of Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship priorities**

**to the**

**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

Vienna, Austria

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*President Tsereteli, President Sobotka, Secretary General Greminger,*

*Excellencies, distinguished parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen.*

It's an honour for me to be here with you today – to take a look at the security situation in our region and share with you our priorities and the vision for the OSCE in 2019.

Slovakia is taking the helm of the OSCE with the sense of responsibility and seriousness, but most of all – with the utmost sense of urgency.

Looking at the current state of international affairs, it is difficult not to feel a certain chill. The situation on the ground in many places in our region is alarming. We are witnessing series of smaller and bigger crises. Some of them sometimes seem endless. The challenges are big and fundamental.

As the President just mentioned, some of us have just come back from the Munich Security Conference, where, despite the sunny weather, you could feel the relations between old partners cooling down.

While we can't tell what the future will bring, and it's never been harder to predict it – it is obvious that we will need management tools - old and established as well as new ones - to prevent a situation where the relations and situations become irreversible.

And our Chairmanship believes that many of those needed tools are actually here. At the OSCE.

So as our number one priority, we want to use and develop the tools OSCE offers to prevent, mitigate and resolve conflicts.

How?

**First** by using practices and mechanisms already in place – such as the Structured Dialogue and Security Sector Governance and Reform.

Second, by taking better advantage of opportunities and developing agendas like gender mainstreaming and greater participation of women in the security fields.

I took a look at the participation list today, and it seems that we have about 15 women heads of delegation here.

And, while I am glad that we have 15 women heads of delegation here, I hope we will see this number rise in the years ahead.

And third, by making full use of the OSCE presence on the ground. OSCE field missions are doing a remarkable work. They contribute to easing civilian suffering and put our eyes where we cannot see from Vienna.

And this is extremely important, especially as the crisis in and around Ukraine continues to undermine our principles and threatens our security.

And it's the civilians paying the highest costs.

So I used my visit to Ukraine last month to collect feedback from our monitors, and appeal to our Ukrainian partners to actively promote a lasting ceasefire.

I followed up with a visit to Moscow, just this past Tuesday, and I conveyed the same messages in support of dialogue to our Russian partners.

I will actively continue leading the dialogue in Vienna, in capitals and on the ground where OSCE is present.

I have already travelled to Moldova, where we want to keep the positive momentum in the Transnistrian settlement process. The sides need to continue their constructive interaction and avoid unilateral moves that could hinder the settlement process.

Last week in Georgia, I had an opportunity to see the situation on the Administrative Boundary Line between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. The Slovak Chairmanship will fully back existing formats for conflict resolution. We welcome that the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meetings in Ergneti are back on track.

Our team further plans to visit Armenia, Azerbaijan, countries of Central Asia and the Balkans in the upcoming weeks and months, so we can talk about challenges we are facing right on the spot.

But we cannot limit our discussions to 2019 optics.

The world is rapidly changing, new threats are emerging and we cannot let them catch us unprepared.

So as our **second** priority, we will focus on providing for a safer future.

For our institutions to remain relevant, we must prepare them for what's to come.

The drafters of the Helsinki Act could hardly predict that decades later, we would talk about climate change and cyber warfare.

New technologies and tools of statecraft, new interdependencies, new vulnerabilities are emerging.

And this also means we will most likely need new tools in order to manage them.

We need to adapt. Open up space for new themes within the OSCE, and generate dialogue about a safer future.

To this end, our Chairmanship will host topical conferences dealing with issues from terrorism to cyber security - to call attention to worrying trends, and look for opportunities for cooperation.

The first conference of this type already took place, on 5- 6 February, in Bratislava, addressing problems of combating modern-day antisemitism.

However to prepare responsibly for modern opportunities and threats – first and foremost - we must band together.

So as our **third** Chairmanship priority – we want to promote multilateralism.

We need allies. We need complementarity. And to this end -

*First*, we need strategic partnerships with international organisations.

All the Members of the European Union are also Members of the OSCE. We are all Members of the United Nations.

And we want to see how we can better harmonize and support mutual efforts.

To this end, I will visit the Council of Europe next week and engage with the United Nations Security Council in March.

*Second*, we need to connect with non-governmental actors. Think tanks, women's groups, youth networks and other civil society partners.

But let us start within the OSCE family – by better using existing channels for dialogue and ensuring inclusivity.

Out of the OSCE structures, Parliamentary Assembly brings the most plurality and diversity.

Your input and action are critical to our collective success.

Let me just mention **three areas** where, as I see it, we need the perspective and skills of parliamentarians the most:

## **First - You are the link between the OSCE and the people it serves.**

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You come from all parts of our region, representing constituents from megacities to small-towns, from agglomerations to countryside.

You know how things work on the ground. You know best what concerns your people you represent.

You are the body best suited to ensuring that the OSCE is responsive to the aspirations of its citizens.

You can bring their voices to this room and ensure that the OSCE focus stays on people.

But the Organization also needs you to work the other way around. Not only to bring people closer to the OSCE, but also to bring OSCE closer to its people.

To convey our message and work, to explain why it matters.

You are in an opportune position to connect our Organization with local political authorities, communities, neighbourhoods, civil society ... people on the ground.

With that, you are playing a vital part in turning our regional obligations into national and local realities.

## **Second - Your engagement in election observation is crucial.**

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In the past 25 years, over 6000 parliamentarians and staff observed more than 170 different elections.

Your presence adds credibility and international visibility to the electoral processes.

And I want to stress the importance of election observation as a Flagship in consolidating democracy in the OSCE region.

For the OSCE, election observation is an endeavour involving the ODIHR, the OSCE PA and other parliamentary institutions.

Your presence adds elected authority and international visibility to these common, election observation endeavours.

And especially at a time when we are heading towards numerous elections of critical importance.

Moldova's parliamentary elections are the most important ballot in the modern history of the country.

The conduct of this election has potential to determine the light in which the international community will see Moldova.

Also, the importance of the upcoming presidential election in Ukraine does not need any further emphasis.

Our Chairmanship will of course play its part. I will designate a Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission, as I did for Moldova - designating you - Mr. President.

And I want to emphasize one more thing here.

We all have high expectations for the OSCE.

But the election monitoring does not come free of charge.

And its proper conduct is seriously endangered if we do not put the organization back on sound financial footing.

The OSCE is worth an investment. Cooperative security is worth an investment. After all, last year's unified OSCE budget did not exceed the price of one average modern jet fighter.

**Lastly, I want to highlight how the Parliamentary Assembly informs and inspires the work of our Organization.**

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Difficult times require creativity and innovation in responses. And we live in difficult times.

We need new approaches and original proposals and so far, the Parliamentary Assembly has proven to be an excellent source of inspiration.

Our focus on issues like trafficking in persons and combating intolerance is rooted in initiatives originally undertaken by this Assembly.

You have also been a key factor in the efforts to reform and modernise the OSCE, such as through the Corfu Process and the Helsinki +40 initiative.

And it was the recommendations of this Assembly that led to creating the post of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, to provide expertise in promoting media pluralism and safety of journalists.

We highly appreciate his activities, as vibrant and free press is critical to sustaining the rule of law.

And I want to emphasize this especially on this day.

It is precisely one year since our society was left in shock, after the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé Martina Kušnírová.

Our thoughts go out to their families and loved ones.

We continue to strongly condemn this crime and place faith in the authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

The major challenges facing the OSCE region today - and, indeed, the wider world - demand more cooperation and more dialogue than ever before.

Any argument about going alone is fundamentally flawed.

In promoting multilateralism, cooperation and the fundamental principles the OSCE stands on – parliamentary diplomacy can be a powerful tool.

And so that is my final message today.

We all need to assume our responsibility -we all need to use the tools at our disposal.

To make sure that the freezing environments in the OSCE area gets some sunshine after all.

*I thank you for your attention.*