



Statement by the Chairperson in Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Presentation of Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship priorities

to the

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' Deputies

27 February 2019

Palace of Europe, Strasbourg

Madam Chairperson, Secretary-General Jagland, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's very good to be here with you – and especially at the time Council of Europe is preparing to celebrate its 70th anniversary.

Let's take a moment to travel back to that time. 70 years ago.

War is over, but peace is far from secure. World had just seen humanity at its cruelest.

Hospitals and refugee camps still filled with those suffering consequences of violence and displacement.

Out of this misery – an idea.

So powerful, that it would shape the course of history for our continent in so many ways.

The idea, that human rights would be given a house.

And that together, European countries would take first steps to collectively enforce them.

For those 7 decades, this Council has been preserving and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

But – fortunately - for a long time now, it does not stand alone.

Built on the same ideals » ideals of security and democratic governance – OSCE tied together over a billion people spanning 3 continents.

And the idea of Helsinki Accords is just as powerful.

When they were signed in 1975 – in the midst of Cold War – many dismissed their ambitious human rights provisions as not worth the paper they were printed on.

That it's just words. Obviously, they would be disregarded.

But here we are – in 2019 – with our two organizations translating the words of human rights into reality of people's everyday lives.

We in Slovakia are very proud of the Helsinki story, and very excited to stand at the helm of this Organization.

Because we believe the OSCE's potential to rediscover is immense:

- 57 participating states at one table.
- Years of know-how in conflict prevention and resolution.
- Presence on the ground.

Our two organizations share the same core values and foundational principles.

And this is vivid in exploring the priorities of our Chairmanship:

1. First, we are focusing on preventing, mitigating and resolving conflicts and on the people whose lives have been negatively affected by conflicts.

Many civilians in the OSCE area continue to suffer the consequences of protracted conflicts.

The situation in many places is bleak and unacceptable.

But we believe that OSCE can be especially useful platform to overcome challenges and impasses in our region, as it has the mandate to address all aspect linked to conflicts –

from prevention; through assistance in finding political solutions to existing ones; to supporting peace and stability in post-conflict areas.

And it has a unique role to play –

- OSCE is in different capacity part of many conflict resolution formats and thus extending experience and expertise.
- The organization has its presence in participating States and thus putting our eyes where we can't see from meeting rooms.
- CiO utilizes advice and active role of our personal representatives for each conflict and thus keeping the finger on the pulse.

Our goal is to contribute to restoring the trust and dialogue where it's weakened or absent.

We pay utmost attention to the crisis in and around Ukraine, as it continues to undermine our principles, threaten our security and cause suffering to the people on the ground.

I have visited Ukraine last month to appeal to our Ukrainian partners to actively promote a lasting ceasefire.

Just last week, I have delivered the same message to Moscow.

We remain equally engaged with Moldova, as we want to keep the positive momentum in the Transnistrian settlement process; and Georgia - where we fully back the existing formats for conflict resolution.

I have visited both countries since assuming Chairmanship and our team further plans my visits Armenia, Azerbaijan and 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.

2. As our second priority, we want to generate dialogue on safer future.

Challenges are changing and we must adapt our response.

This is what we have in common.

Our societies are different to what they were 70 years ago, when Council of Europe was born, or 45 years ago when the Helsinki Act was drafted.

Communication technology, artificial intelligence...we need to open up space for these new themes.

To this end, our Chairmanship hosts topical conferences dealing with issues from terrorism to cyber security - to call attention to new trends and their impact on our lives and rights.

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

I note that dealing with implications of advancing technologies on human rights guarantees is also one of the priorities of the Finnish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

It truly is important to lead these dialogues and accommodate our tools – so the future doesn't catch us unprepared.

But to get ready for the modern opportunities and threats –we must band together.

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

Just look around. One continent – one room.

There is no other way to address the challenges we want to overcome - from radicalization to chronic human rights abuses – but together.

None of us can do it alone.

Yet, we are all experiencing common phenomena.

The Council, the OSCE ... our entire multilateral system.

That at a time when we are in urgent need of cooperation, we are seeing multilateralism coming under increasing threat.

70 years later – do we need another reminder from history?

The lessons are clear - compromise and cooperation are the only way forward.

And we need to work to rejuvenate and reinforce this lesson.

Our Chairmanship aspires to do so, within the OSCE – between and among participating states.

But also outside - by promoting OSCE's strategic partnerships.

And that's exactly why I am here today. To reflect on the partnership between OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Together, we have close and longstanding cooperation.

And this cooperation is (1) solid – (2) vivid – and (3) valid.

Let me now comment on these different aspects in turn.

1. First – Our partnership is based on a SOLID framework.

We highly appreciate the structured cooperation between the OSCE and the CoE.

It has been established for 14 years already.

The OSCE-CoE interaction - at both political and working levels - is time-proven.

Day-to-day, informal co-operation between experts is widespread and efficient, focusing mainly on the four priority areas agreed in Warsaw –

from fight against terrorism, combating human trafficking, protection of national minorities to promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

2. Second - this cooperation has VIVID effects in the delivery of our organizations.

I would highlight the continuously close co-operation between OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Venice Commission - on legal reforms affecting the protection of minorities in some countries.

Also, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights continues to actively contribute to OSCE activities.

There are of course other positive examples.

To add some more, I would highlight the cooperation between the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, particularly on issues related to hate speech and hate crime.

Or excellent cooperation between the Venice Commission and ODIHR in providing joint assessments of legislation or monitoring legislative developments pertaining to freedom of religion or belief.

Our Chairmanship strongly supports this cooperation and enhanced dialogue.

And It's logical - we share the principles and commonality of aims. And right now,

3. Our cooperation is more VALID than ever before.

Which is the third point I want to make.

Both organizations are currently going through a reform process to deal with shrinking resources.

Both face challenges in maintaining trust and constructive dialogue between the participating and member States.

Needless to say, the OSCE and the Council do differ in terms of mandate, membership or functions.

But these different characteristics must be seen and utilized as comparative advantages - creating space for complementarity of actions.

More synergy can bring not only enhanced coherence and effectiveness, but also better use of resources – the issue highly relevant for both organizations in these days.

Because while the mandates vary in many key aspects, the political context of our activities remains the same.

We are here to work for safer and democratic Europe, where rights of every individual are guaranteed.

But democratic order and human rights depend on institutions and mechanisms for cooperation that give them form.

And right now, we see worrying trends across Europe.

70 years after those historic events, forces are at work to undo the progress.

If the founders of this Council were here today, I think they would not be content.

To see authoritarianism growing in influence.

To see the rise of populism.

To see attempts to disturb institutions and undermine checks and balances.

To see false prophets offering unviable, manipulated alternatives to our people.

You, Secretary-General Jagland, have comprehensively captured these developments in your recent report focusing on role and threats to institutions.

And yes, the key building blocks of our democratic security recently seem to be shaking.

We need to repair the statics.

Stand up to defend our institutions. Stand up to defend rules. Stand up to defend multilateralism.

So I join your call – Secretary General - to recommit to shared values, as reflected in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Human rights need defense and renewal.

So let's continue the track towards a future where democracy flourishes, autocracy fails and the human rights of every woman, man, boy and girl are guaranteed.

OSCE and the Council of Europe must work toward this end together.

Because I am sure, that it's in the interest of every European.

Thank you.