



Statement by the Chairperson-in-Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

*Advancing Sustainable Development to Promote Security:
The Role of Parliamentarians of the Annual Security Review Conference*

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Dear President Tsereteli,

Dear President Pasquier, Dear Speaker Etgen,

Dear Secretary General Greminger,

Fellow minister Tsogtbaatar,

Excellencies, distinguished parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen,

We had the opportunity for an exchange during your Winter Session in Vienna and I am very glad to be with you again.

The topic you set for this session “Advancing Sustainable Development to Promote Security” is both timely and urgent, as well as old and well established.

The first is felt mostly as we aim and sometimes struggle to bring to life the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals.

The SDGs are bold. They are visionary. They are transformative. And they are urgent. But they did not come together over night. In fact, groundwork had to be laid for years. And a major part of this began, I believe, in 1975 – with the Helsinki Final Act. Hence my second point.

Because that was the very beginning of what we now know as a unique feature of the OSCE – its comprehensive approach to security. When diplomats and dignitaries met in Helsinki, they acknowledged that security could not be viewed in a vacuum. They knew that they would need to focus on more than just tanks, artillery and military positions to bring about lasting peace and security for people in the region.

Instead, they looked around, and they saw that security challenges are both prevented and exacerbated by many other issues – from trade and economic development, to the protection of the environment and the promotion of human rights.

Today, the OSCE through its field operations, autonomous institutions and secretariat – continues to be active in both stable countries and conflict settings. It has its own expertise, its own prevention toolbox, its own local knowledge.

And, it can, I believe, uniquely contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

And you, parliamentarians have an important role to play. An increase in funding to schools, efforts to boost the participation of women in local governments, observing elections. These are the kind of activities that parliamentarians are participating in on a daily basis. They are not always labelled as Goal 4 - quality education, Goal 5 - gender equality or Goal 16 – effective institutions. But they are examples of SDGs brought to life – thanks to the work of the OSCE.

And your perspectives and lessons learned, are so crucial to the process.

Because, as I told you back in February:

- You are the link between OSCE and the people it serves
- You inform and inspire the work of our Organization.

And back then, I also spoke about 3 priorities the Slovak Chairmanship has set for this year.

First, Conflict prevention, Second, safer future and Third, effective multilateralism.

Well, we are at half-time – and this is an opportunity to reflect on the work done, but also on the challenges ahead.

So let me take few moments to do just that, while focussing on links between development and security.

So to start with our first priority, “Preventing and resolving conflicts - and mitigating their impact on people”

In the past 6 months – I visited all OSCE field missions. What I saw was a mixed picture.

Situations that fill me with hope - political leaders working hand in hand with the OSCE, young people of different backgrounds, religions and ethnicities building democracies together, vibrant civil societies wherever I went.

But at the same time, I could not overlook examples of despair - no bridges, no electricity, no phone connection. These images need to keep us alert.

We, the parliamentarians, politicians and policy makers – are the ones expected to act, expected to help. We cannot simply wait for progress to happen.

So while our Chairmanship focuses on supporting solutions agreed at the negotiating table, we are also working on concrete measures aimed at improving the lives of people caught up in the midst of crisis.

Or to put it bluntly - retaining focus on the big picture should not blind us to the urgent and real needs of people on the ground.

So for example in Ukraine, I have put forward nine Confidence – Building-Measures that should alleviate negative consequences of the crises. We are actively supporting all initiatives to repair the Stanitsya Luhanska bridge. So people can cross to collect their pensions. To see their loved ones. Or to get medical care needed.

And though we might not headline our efforts as Goal 9 – resilient infrastructure, or Goal 3 – good health - such steps – for the betterment of the life of people – contribute to advancing development and hence, promoting security.

Of course, all our efforts would be empty without necessary political engagement of the actors on both sides of the bridge. And in this context, I have welcomed recent disengagement of heavy armoury on both sides.

After President Zelensky’s extraordinary success in the last presidential elections in Ukraine, we must use this new window of opportunity to encourage further progress.

But recently, there have also been situations where I had to express my concerns.

As it was the case on crossing point closures over the Enguri in Georgia. And here, the situation is clear: every restriction brings hardship for local population. Every separation from family or land brings anguish. Every conflict stops people from realizing their potential.

And it is precisely why the OSCE is here - to help to prevent these scenarios.

Moving forward means that we need to rediscover the OSCE prevention tools.

That's why I am looking forward to welcoming a high number of fellow foreign ministers from OSCE participating States in Slovakia's High Tatras tomorrow, for an informal gathering.

We will discuss the role and relevance of the OSCE in the future prevention efforts, and how to better use the OSCE's niche in fostering stability in Europe and beyond.

When it comes to our second priority "A safer future for all", we realize that our societies are different to what they were 44 years ago, when our organization was founded.

Today, we need to lead dialogue on topics unimagined just a few decades ago.

And while we must use our existing tools and practices, we need to keep our eyes open to see and to seize new opportunities. And this means also spotting ways how to advance the SDGs.

Like SDG 16 – on peace, justice and strong institutions, by promoting the Security Sector Governance and Reform agenda. To do so, we started a whole process of three regional workshops feeding into a special conference on the topic in September.

Or SDG 5 – on gender equality, by promoting gender mainstreaming and greater participation of women in OSCE efforts. And just last Friday, our Chairmanship organized a workshop on promoting the Role of Women in Addressing Environment and Security Challenges.

But if we are serious about sustainable development, we need all parts of society to contribute.

There are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24. We have the largest generation of youth in history. And we need to hear their voices and take them into account.

So our Chairmanship, together with the OSCE Secretariat, is organizing a Youth Forum in October in Bratislava, to strengthen our exchange.

And we must be able to listen to their ideas, views and perspectives, to inspire and be inspired; to build their resilience to violent ideas and behavior.

That's why our Chairmanship organized several conferences encouraging real discussions on topics with serious security implications ranging from countering radicalization to security in cyber space.

And we will do our utmost to assist the organization - so that proper discussion on human dimension commitments among 57 participating States, the well-known Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, could take place.

I cannot but repeat, here as well, political will is crucial.

Our third and last priority is about "effective multilateralism".

Multilateralism, partnerships, cooperation. That is the DNA of OSCE. Unfortunately, we are seeing trust and multilateralism eroding all over the world.

At the beginning of our Chairmanship, we set a task for ourselves to do utmost to revive the OSCE partnerships with other multilateral actors. To allow us to create more spaces for sharing and exchange.

I personally engaged with the United Nations, European Union, Council of Europe and NATO.

And we spoke very concretely about adjusting our cooperation frameworks.

But, we can also benefit from more dynamic partnerships within. To use our diversity and broad membership to our advantage.

Because, like it or not, from Vienna to New York, we cannot always be confident that we have our fingers close enough to the pulse.

Which is why we need to also hear from you - the parliamentarians. You can best connect OSCE to its people. You come from all parts of the region. You know the reality, the worries and needs of the people. You can best see sustainable development in action – with every new school open, every new medical device safeguarded, every forest cleaned up. Your perspectives allow the OSCE to improve its own contributions to the implementation of Agenda 2030.

And they give us all valuable food for thought, and practical examples which can be replicated and strengthened, as we go forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us continue working together to advancing these noble goals.

Thank you.