



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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Officer-in-Charge in the absence of a Secretary General

Report to the Ministerial Council

3 December 2020

Mr. Chairperson, Prime Minister Rama,

Allow me to begin by expressing sincere gratitude on behalf of the Secretariat and all OSCE staff for your personal commitment and active leadership of the OSCE during this year of what have been unprecedented challenges.

I would also like to wholeheartedly thank the Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Igli Hasani, for his tireless efforts to steer our Organization through these difficult times. And of course your excellent teams in Vienna and Tirana also deserve our gratitude for their admirable work this year.

Esteemed Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This has truly been an exceptional year, not only for the OSCE, but for all of humanity.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a blunt reminder that our security is interconnected and interdependent, and that the best way to protect ourselves is by working together to protect each other. This is the fundamental tenet of co-operative security – and the essence of the OSCE.

We should all take pride in how quickly, flexibly and successfully our Organization responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis.

Due to the resolute leadership of the Chairmanship and Troika and the steadfast support of participating States, effective management by former Secretary General Greminger, and the flexibility and commitment of all OSCE Executive Structures, we rapidly adapted our working methods to maintain our platform for dialogue and to continue to fulfill our mandates – all the while protecting the health and safety of OSCE staff.

So how have we adapted on the ground?

Our Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine continues its regular monitoring and reporting, though relying more heavily on UAVs and cameras.

All the other field operations have adjusted to the new circumstances and continue to operate. They provide assistance to their host communities, and together with our Institutions and the Secretariat, they are exploring ways to address the longer-term consequences of the pandemic.

These include, for example, increased support for preventing gender-based violence; combatting human trafficking and corruption; promoting digital governance, democratic institutions and media freedom; support for vulnerable groups; and strengthening crisis management capacities.

We can be proud of the fact that the OSCE also became one of the first international organizations to move its decision-making bodies online.

Maintaining dialogue remains critical to building trust, to preventing and resolving conflicts, and to promoting co-operation to tackle shared security challenges.

As this Ministerial Council demonstrates, COVID-19 has not prevented our unique regional platform from fostering an inclusive security dialogue where all participating States have an equal voice.

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the pandemic is having profound and long-lasting effects on our societies and economies, with serious consequences for peace and stability.

Our security environment has become more volatile and unpredictable. There are signs that the pandemic is accelerating existing trends, including growing distrust and polarization between and within states. It is also having a heavy impact on conflict-affected populations, who were already enduring difficult conditions, and it is making conflict prevention and conflict management efforts more challenging.

Unfortunately the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and co-operation across conflict lines to address the pandemic has largely gone unheeded.

Instead, the pandemic has hindered contacts and dialogue, and mediation processes, and diverted attention from conflict resolution efforts. In some cases, we have seen the use of force prevail over diplomacy.

In our region, this has included a destructive war around Nagorno-Karabakh with a severe impact on civilians. While the ceasefire is welcome in halting the fighting, we must now support renewed efforts to achieve a long-term peaceful political settlement. There is wide support for the Minsk Group Co-Chairs and the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office to continue their diplomatic efforts.

On a more positive note, a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine has largely been respected for more than four months, offering the sides an opening to make progress on other tracks.

Political dialogue and mediation processes can continue even in online formats if the political will is there.

Processes where the OSCE is involved remain active, mostly in virtual mode, with support from the Secretariat as appropriate, even if formal meetings have not been possible for all of them.

Work has continued in the Trilateral Contact Group, pursuing a peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine; in the Geneva International Discussions on consequences of the 2008 conflict in Georgia; in the Transdniestrian Settlement Process; and, of course, by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

The OSCE remains ready to provide its good offices and conflict prevention tools wherever they might be needed to help ease tensions.

This year we mark three historic OSCE milestones: the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris, and the 10th anniversary of the Astana Declaration.

These landmark documents, which set out our fundamental principles and commitments, were the work of political leaders with the courage and foresight to look beyond the tensions of their times and to embrace an inclusive vision of co-operative security. We should look to them for inspiration as we endeavor to resolve contemporary conflicts.

This year we also mark the 20th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The OSCE continues to reinforce the meaningful role of women in all stages of conflict prevention and resolution, which – as is well documented – helps makes peace sustainable.

Also, over the years the OSCE has developed a robust toolbox for preventing conflicts and promoting security and stability. Next year we will mark the 10th anniversary of Ministerial Council Decision 3/11 on strengthening the OSCE's capabilities across the conflict cycle. I would hope that we use this moment to take stock and consider how we could further strengthen our toolbox. The OSCE Executive Structures can support and assist efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, but ultimately it is up to participating States to make full use of the tools available to them – to you.

Ten years ago at the Astana Summit, participating States underscored that the security of the OSCE region is inextricably linked with that of our neighbouring regions. Our Asian and Mediterranean Partners are keen to work more closely with the OSCE. So a declaration by this Ministerial Council to strengthen co-operation with our Asian Partners would be a welcome development.

We all benefit from the synergies that both of these Partnerships provide, since they enable us to promote peace and security more effectively and efficiently. This is also true for our partnerships with the United Nations and other international organizations.

Excellencies,

Next year the OSCE will continue to contend with an array of serious challenges. We look forward to working with the incoming Swedish Chairpersonship and Troika members Albania and Poland, who can count on the wholehearted commitment and support of all OSCE staff and Executive Structures. And you, dear Ministers, can continue to rely on the OSCE to support the implementation of your decisions.

Especially now, when we are all equally vulnerable to the virus that is wreaking havoc on our societies, co-operation is essential.

So I hope in the coming weeks, also following your appointment of a new Secretary General and new heads of the Institutions, we will see renewed commitment to co-operative security and the timely adoption of a reasonable budget that will enable the Organization to support you.

We are well aware that many participating States now face serious financial constraints.

I hope that you agree, that the OSCE has always been a very good value for money. Our 16 field operations, our three specialized Institutions, our Secretariat, and 4,000 OSCE staff continue to promote security for the more than 1.2 billion people who inhabit our region – and on a total assessed budget of only 226 million euros (including 92 million euros for the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine).

I can assure you that we make every effort to prioritize and to find the most reasonable ways to use the money that you provide us in a prudent and transparent manner.

It is the women and men in our field operations, Institutions and the Secretariat who translate your directives into action. So I would like to thank the entire OSCE staff for their commitment and hard work, and particularly in these challenging times, for their flexibility and resilience. They continue to deliver despite the added stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Their health and safety must remain our top priority.

Sadly, last month we lost an OSCE colleague to COVID-19. On behalf of us all, I extend my deepest sympathy to Ms. Tatiana Palaguta's family and friends and to her colleagues in our Programme Office in Bishkek.

This year, the pandemic reminded us that we need to be prepared for unexpected challenges, and that it is more important than ever to co-operate in finding solutions.

On a positive note, once again, the OSCE has demonstrated its responsiveness to crises and its ability to quickly adapt our work in promoting security and stability to new developments.

We have continued to see excellent co-operation among the Secretariat, the field operations, the Institutions and the Parliamentary Assembly.

All in all, we can be proud that the OSCE remains flexible and resilient. In the coming year as well, you can count on us to do our utmost to fulfil the mandates that you have given us to promote peace and security for the benefit of people throughout our region.

In closing, I would like to thank the Albanian Chairpersonship and you, Prime Minister Rama, as the Chairperson of the OSCE, for placing your trust in me to carry out the essential functions of the Secretary General over the past few months. It has been a great honor and a privilege to do so. Along with my fellow Directors and all the Secretariat staff, I look forward to the appointment of a new Secretary General.

Thank you.