



Statement by the Chairperson-in-Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Closing of the 26th OSCE Ministerial Council

Bratislava, Slovakia

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Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends.

We have almost reached the end of this year's Ministerial Council. And I want to use this opportunity to mention a few messages that I will be taking away from our discussions here.

First, I want to point out: if something is not broke, we do not need to fix it.

And, this seems to apply to the OSCE.

Many of you stressed that the Organization's principles and commitments are as relevant today as they were in 1975; that they have weathered the Cold War, and still hold the key to peace and stability in this region.

Alongside these principles and commitments, we talked about the tools and mechanisms to advance them.

And, here, again, the message was clear: we have everything we need.

We have field missions with unique capacities, and inspiring results.

We have a strong toolbox built around our core areas of work – from conventional arms control, to military-to-military transparency.

And, we have a comprehensive approach to security, which extends to human rights, gender equality, the rule of law, and beyond.

But, often, we are missing one, essential ingredient: the famous political will.

Without it, it doesn't matter how many tools we have - we will keep going around in circles.

And, you seemed to agree.

Because, I heard strong support for the idea of compromise over rigidity; of putting the needs of people over our own narrow political aims; of committing to multilateralism - not just in words, but in our day-to-day actions; and of, simply, returning to real dialogue.

And, on this note: I want to thank those of you – the majority of participating States - who endorsed my Bratislava Appeal.

The second takeaway is about the challenges ahead.

Because, even if the Organization is not broke, there's no denying: we have some serious problems to tackle.

Over the past day and a half, we have heard references to violations of international law; we listened to condemnations and accusations.

But, there was another narrative running alongside this. About the threats of tomorrow.

And, it is quite clear from our speeches that we are all seriously concerned.

Because, there could be unprecedented challenges ahead. You mentioned various megatrends that could change our regional landscape. From mass migration and accelerated climate change, to increased cyber threats and the evolution of artificial intelligence.

When it comes to those areas: none of us knows exactly what to expect

So, even if we acknowledge the differences and vast challenges between us.

There is still a compelling case for cooperative security. Because, the one thing we do know about the threats on the horizon is that none of us will be able to tackle them alone. And, joint solutions will become more crucial than ever.

So, as my third point, I want to ask: what does this Ministerial Council tell us about the year ahead? Indeed, about the years ahead?

Honestly, I think we are going into 2020 on solid footing.

We now know who will be chairing this organization for the next three years. This provides certainty and continuity in leadership. Here, I want to congratulate Sweden and Poland, for their recent confirmations. And, of course, our Chairmanship is committed to supporting Albania, as the incoming Chair, in any way we can.

Also, the future in respect of Ukraine looks brighter now than it did last year. Hopefully we will see strong political commitments at next week's Normandy Summit. And, I am glad we can conclude this Ministerial Council knowing that the OSCE's political representation on the ground is secure. Here, I want to again

congratulate Ambassador Heidi Grau, and to thank Ambassador Martin Sajdik for his dedication these past years.

I hope that we will have some solid texts to come out of the negotiations, which are still going on.

And, finally, I think this Ministerial Council– gathering nearly 40 ministers from across the OSCE– is a reason to have hope.

In many ways, this conference looks like every other.

Ministers make speeches in the plenary sessions, hold bilateral meetings, and attend side events.

But there *is* something that sets us apart, from others.

And that is all of us here: the 57 participating States.

We are not necessarily likeminded. We do not speak the same language. We are not all from the same continent.

Yet we are all held together – in this unique configuration - by the glue of the Helsinki Final Act.

In some areas, the glue looks to be wearing thin. Cracks are appearing.

But, I think we have solid foundations.

And, that we are starting 2020 on the right note. We have a lot to work *with*. Our principles and commitments...our evolving toolbox...and some positive developments.

But, to take advantage of them, we need political will; we need a commitment to real dialogue and diplomacy.

Many of you displayed that commitment over the past day and a half.

But, we cannot walk away from here, and return to business as usual. We cannot publish our speeches online, and then forget about them. We cannot trust that the discussions we had in this hall will, themselves, make any difference to the lives of people.

Instead we need to go out there, and put our principles and calls into action.

If we do that, we will have even better results to point to, when we meet in Tirana this time next year.

Thank you all again for being here – and good luck in the work ahead.