



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President George Tsereteli (Georgia)

Remarks to the OSCE Permanent Council

11 October 2018 | Vienna, Austria

Ambassadors, friends of the OSCE PA,

One billion people live in the OSCE region – 15 per cent of the world population. These women, men, and children wish to go about their daily lives with dignity, free from oppression, free from discrimination, free from poverty and violence.

This year, 2018, marks 100 years since the end of the First World War, a bloody and destructive conflict that serves as a reminder both of war's futility and the possible consequences of what happens when diplomacy fails.

There is always a danger that history will repeat itself. At times where there is a lack of constructive political dialogue, we must be mindful of this lesson.

Since I last addressed the Permanent Council earlier this year, the state of health in the OSCE region has not improved.

If we genuinely care for the people now living in the OSCE region and the generations to come, we must use the OSCE, the acquis it has developed and what it stands for in the collective interest of all.

For this, we jointly have to mobilize the necessary political will. It is one of the important functions of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to generate political will in support of the

implementation of OSCE commitments.

This is a message that I underlined earlier this week at the Meeting of the Speakers of Parliaments of Eurasian Countries, and in a number of bilateral talks I held there with the parliamentary leadership of OSCE participating States.

In the Assembly, we are very concerned about the state of the organization. As agendas for key meetings are being blocked, well-liked and functional field offices are being shut and resources are being diminished overall, the good work of the organization is often held hostage to unrelated issues. Is this really the way for an organization to run?

We are well aware that a consensus-based organization has its strengths, but the strength turns into weakness when the single-country veto is being misused.

You have started to discuss the budget for next year, and the OSCE PA calls on you to provide all OSCE structures, and particularly the field operations, with the resources needed to make the operations as effective as possible. The proposal of a biennial budget could be a move in the right direction. We need to make sure that the OSCE remains fit for purpose.

We are mindful that the Parliamentary Assembly itself must also undergo internal reforms to make its work more visible and more impactful. This includes creating mechanisms to better follow-up on our activities and our proposals with our national parliaments and with our partners.

We are all aware of the challenges and threats that we face.

Only through dialogue can we move forward in this time of uncertainty and instability. As the leaders of parliamentary diplomacy, we stand by your side to facilitate this dialogue through our lively debates and informal networking.

It has been within this challenging context that Italy assumed the chairmanship in January. I wish to thank the country for steering our governmental branch amidst turbulence while at the same time engaging the parliamentary branch of the organization for improved

navigation. This is a message I delivered personally to Foreign Minister Milanese last month in Rome, and I would like again thank Italy for high-level meetings and fruitful discussions.

We also continue to enjoy close co-operation with the OSCE Secretariat, Institutions and Missions. Our gratitude goes to all of them. I would like to thank Secretary General Thomas Greminger for his continued interest in our work and his considerable efforts to reform our Organization. I have also regularly consulted and had valuable exchanges with the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Desir, and ODIHR Director Ms. Ingebjorg Gisladdottir.

It is an integral duty of the OSCE to ensure that democracy and the rule of law are respected in all participating States. We, at the PA, take this responsibility very seriously. The Assembly continues to promote human rights standards. During our most recent Annual Session in Berlin, where some of you took part and which was devoted to the implementation of commitments, we debated the human rights situation in specific areas of the OSCE where fundamental freedoms are violated, adopting important resolutions, and we worked on cross-dimensional issues such as Combatting Human Trafficking or Countering Propaganda aimed at propagating hatred and war.

We continue to be very worried about the deteriorating human rights situation in several countries and, in particular, about the situation of the media, which are confronted with multiple threats. We will continue to be vocal about our concerns.

I, alongside several senior members of the PA, spoke at the recent OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. As an Assembly whose meetings are public, we cherish the presence of representatives of civil society in OSCE events, especially in those meetings that deal with the third dimension. I hope that the current difficulties related to their participation will soon be overcome.

One of our core responsibilities is election observation. This year we have conducted observation missions in Italy, the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Turkey and most recently in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Secretary General Roberto Montella and I have made use of our visits to a number of participating States to actively promote the objectives and values of the OSCE.

I have also visited many countries in my capacity as PA President: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom; and at the occasion of my visits often participated in events taking place in these countries. All these high-level meetings are useful to remind OSCE commitments and deepen our partnerships.

When going to Ukraine for the second time I included a thorough visit to the contact line. We received moving testimonies from those living in the area immediately impacted by the hostilities and witnessed the suffering of civilians, in particular caused by ceasefire violations and mine explosions. We used the opportunity to re-emphasize the important role that the OSCE plays in the field, and expressed our appreciation for the incredible work done by the SMM. In a resolution adopted at our recent Berlin Annual Session, the PA also expressed concern over violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in occupied territories in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol.

We have often discussed protracted conflicts in the OSCE area. They represent a political failure, the collapse of common and uniting interests, the rise of hatred and a step backward for civilization.

It is now ten years since the armed conflict in Georgia, as commemorated in a PA resolution at our Annual Session in Berlin, and we are still faced with actions that deepen existing problems.

I am convinced that we need a more constructive and purposeful engagement of Russian parliamentarians in our activities in order to implement international commitments and mitigate human suffering and prevent human rights' violations in conflict zones.

It is the OSCE's paradox that in the South Caucasus, where each of our three participating States have suffered from war and where the OSCE is most needed, the OSCE is absent.

In these difficult times you have been conducting your “structured dialogue,” which is an appropriate tool to address political divides, and we commend you for this.

Our Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, which was created in 2016 and with which you are familiar has been conducting fact finding missions and debates to prepare recommendations to address this difficult issue.

Building on the efforts of our Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT), the PA at its Berlin Session adopted a comprehensive Resolution on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Leads to Terrorism (VERLT).

A region which needs to remain in the focus of the OSCE, not only because of the excellent work of the OSCE missions and the fact that a large amount of the OSCE budget is spent there, is the Western Balkans. I appointed the Head of the UK Delegation, Mark Pritchard, to this post. He has already made his mark through visits to Albania and Montenegro in August, and more recently a visit to Serbia and will soon continue his visit by going to Pristina and Skopje.

This week I have also appointed a Special Representative on Central Asia, Roman Haider from Austria, and I look forward to his efforts in boosting our engagement in the region.

Ambassadors, dear friends,

Our very successful Annual Session last July in Berlin would not have been possible without the fervent hospitality, support and cooperation of the German Bundestag and the German Government, for which I am very grateful.

I have already referred to several resolutions that the PA adopted at this occasion, and you have received a full briefing by Amb. Nothelle about the declaration and the resolutions on the 16 supplementary items. Many of them relate directly to your work here.

Immediately after the Session, we organized, together with the German Bundestag, another very interesting and successful seminar as part of our annual Leinsweiler Seminars. It

discussed ways and good practices to address potential ethnic conflicts through law. In the presence of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, parliamentarians from 13 participating States discussed case studies regarding the protection of national minorities, including those related to Roma and Sinti, a topic which I also recommend to put high on your agenda.

Finally, the 17th Autumn Meeting which was held last week in Bishkek, included a parliamentary conference on “Promoting Security Dialogue in Central Asia and Beyond” as well as a Mediterranean Forum on “Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Mediterranean: Addressing Migration, Trade and Environmental Changes.” I would like to voice my appreciation for the excellent organization of this meeting by our Kyrgyz hosts.

All this would not have been possible without the diligent work of the PA staff under the leadership of Roberto Montella. In this context, I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that the Vienna Liaison Office is celebrating its 15th anniversary with a reception this evening, to which all Permanent Representatives have been invited.

Looking ahead, we have two election observation missions planned for the upcoming months, both of them very important. The first will take place in Georgia later this month and the second in the United States in November.

The Ministerial Council in Milan this December will provide another valuable opportunity to demonstrate the close cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the governmental side of the organization. I hope that, when drafting documents for the ministers, you all, and of course the Italian chairmanship, will be able to benefit from the recommendations we have adopted in the PA, including those of the Annual Session in Berlin.

Tomorrow I will travel to Bratislava and meet with incoming Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister Lajčák, and the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament. We look forward to working with the incoming chair as well as future chairmanships. Let me add that we welcome the candidacy of Albania for the 2020 Chairmanship.

Before I conclude, let me thank all the ambassadors in this room, whom I have had the chance to exchange with over the past several months. My special thanks go to Ambassador Azzoni for the excellent working relationship the OSCE PA has enjoyed with the Chairmanship since January.