

23rd OSCE Ministerial Council

Speech by the Chairperson-in-Office and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Closing Session, 9 December 2016

Hamburg

Esteemed colleagues,

It was a short night, with our hard-fought negotiations going on into the early hours of the morning. We have now almost reached the end of this Ministerial Council. It is time to attempt a summary.

You will soon have a chance to read the conclusions of our Chairmanship in detail when we distribute them. However, I would like to flag up three observations here and now.

These observations are not only shaped by the large number of intensive debates over the past two days here in Hamburg and the talks held earlier in Vienna, Potsdam and New York. What actually gave me particular insight during this year of our Chairmanship were the many trips we undertook into the conflict areas – to the Southern Caucasus, to Moldova and repeatedly to Ukraine. We discussed the difficult situation on the ground with dedicated OSCE experts. And we met people for whom conflict and violence have been a reality of everyday life for far too long.

Esteemed colleagues,

When we examine the state of our common security today, one thing is clear to me. What was envisaged in Helsinki, Paris and Astana – the vision of a cooperative security order based on shared principles and rules – is not only at risk today because of the frequency of crises. Far more is involved.

Twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War, we are at a crossroads. We are faced with the fundamental question of whether or not we want to continue pursuing this vision of cooperative and comprehensive security.

This vision – and that is my second observation – remains important. But it is also in danger. And this danger does not primarily arise from external threats and challenges, but rather from inside, from the violation of rules and principles that have guaranteed peace and security in Europe for decades.

That is why I ask you if all of us are still willing to invest as necessary in this order and to stand up with determination and conviction for its strengths.

We need this commitment, particularly when it comes to dealing with those who call elements of this order into question. The conflict in and around Ukraine is first and foremost in my mind here. However, I am also referring to the struggle over the OSCE's human dimension, which – and I want to state this very clearly – I regard as one of the supporting pillars of our common security and crucial to the future.

Esteemed colleagues,

We also need joint endeavours and persuasiveness when it comes to our own societies. And we need this now in particular, at a time when we are hearing calls for a withdrawal to the national level in many places in Europe. These calls come from people who want to fool us into thinking that the patent remedy against crises is for countries to go it alone and that international commitments and solidarity apparently no longer matter.

However, and this is my third and somewhat encouraging observation, we took an important stand here in Hamburg against this trend. Despite all our differences of opinion, we met here and negotiated constructively with one another. And it should be no secret to anyone that we also had some arguments.

But by working together constructively, we reached agreement on a number of joint texts. And these texts reflect the OSCE's wide spectrum, ranging from security issues and the topic of connectivity, which is of such great importance to the future of the business sector, to the important topic of migration.

We laid foundations for equipping the OSCE better for the fight against terrorism. And we took decisions on our approach to small arms, the topic of passenger data and the challenges in the cyber area. We made crucial progress on the topic of arms control.

And we addressed a regional conflict in our declaration on the Transdniestria talks in the 5+2 format. This shows that progress is also possible on difficult issues if we work together in a pragmatic way.

We also provided valuable input on many other topics during our Chairmanship. As examples, I would like to mention our Chairmanship Conference on Tolerance and Diversity, the meetings of members of parliament and experts on combating anti-Semitism and our series of events on freedom of the media.

We have shown that we are capable of making compromises and of acting together. However, we cannot content ourselves with this. We now need to make use of this impetus, to look ahead and to ensure that the OSCE becomes even more effective and more capable of taking action in the future.

Along with Sebastian Kurz and Paolo Gentiloni, we made suggestions on this here at this Ministerial Council in Hamburg.

And my experiences of the last couple of days have confirmed to me that we are on the right path in the five elements in our Hamburg Declaration.

The first point from this agenda, that is, the need for substantive exchange and dialogue, in the OSCE was highlighted by this very meeting here in Hamburg.

The presence of so many ministers and the lively participation by civil society, academia, parliaments, media and young people from the entire OSCE area show that there is indeed a need and a willingness to counter alienation and mistrust with more dialogue.

I already felt encouraged by the open discussions in a spirit of mutual trust at the informal ministerial meeting in Potsdam a couple of months ago. And I am pleased that we have been able to build on this spirit here in Hamburg.

My second point is that the OSCE must become more effective and more capable of taking action as regards preventing and resolving conflicts. Our intensive discussions early yesterday afternoon showed how pressing this topic is for us all. It was clear that we do not agree on all issues, but we are all very aware of the benefits of an effective OSCE. I would like to thank Lamberto Zannier and his team for their willingness to now draw up concrete proposals on how we can make the OSCE even more effective in the conflict cycle.

Thirdly, we urgently need a wide-ranging new start in conventional arms control. Our talks yesterday on this topic brought this home to me once again.

Our arms control architecture, which reliably underpinned peace, security and stability in Europe for many years, has become fragile. And it no longer reflects today's security policy, military and technological realities. We must take action here to restore greater predictability and trust. Our objective is clear, namely greater security for all! We commenced work to modernise the Vienna Document this year.

And I am most delighted that I am able to launch a structured dialogue today on challenges and risks to our security in the OSCE on the basis of our declaration. We need dialogue in order to find a common path to greater security for us all. I think that this dialogue could start with cross-cutting issues such as threat perceptions and military doctrines, before turning to specific aspects of arms control at a later stage.

In all of our discussions over the last two days, it was clear that our responses to the challenges of our age can only be joint ones! This is my fourth point. Anyone who believes that solutions to problems such as terrorism, extremism or cybercrime can be found by countries going it alone is profoundly mistaken!

And there are encouraging signs of this sort of cooperation, for instance in the fight against international terrorism. The OSCE has the capacity to play an even more important role in this area if we use its potential more effectively and intensify our cooperation.

We should also draw on the OSCE's instruments and many years of experience when it comes to migration. We have contributed initial input here in recent months.

There can only be joint solutions for all of these important issues. And it is just as clear that we will only be able to master the new and complex threats of our age with a contemporary understanding of the concept of security. Protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is and remains indispensable. Strengthening tolerance in and between our societies is and remains indispensable. This is a question of credibility. And we must take tangible steps, for instance by agreeing, at long last, on a joint definition of anti-Semitism.

Esteemed colleagues,

The most important task for the near future – and we are in agreement on this in the future OSCE Troika – is the fifth point of the agenda for the future, strengthening the institutional make-up of the OSCE.

This task should actually be the easiest to accomplish as it is something that is in our hands alone. It is our responsibility to put the OSCE on a firm basis as a strong organisation for a secure Europe.

A strong organisation that is capable of action is not something that can be had for nothing, however. We must establish the framework conditions – both structurally and materially and in terms of personnel. But let me quite clearly say that the number of tasks facing us is on the increase. And zero growth in the budget over a period of several years represents a de facto cutback! Moreover, the OSCE needs a firm international legal framework.

And it also needs personnel decisions to be made now. Let me say this very clearly: leadership vacancies particularly in our important institutions weaken our organisation. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is something that we can ill afford in times of manifold threats – which call for foresight and rapid responses.

Esteemed colleagues,

It is an important signal of continuity and unity that the future Chairs Austria and Italy intend to continue to pursue this vision for the future of the OSCE in the next two years.

I am very grateful for their willingness to assume this responsibility.

And I am delighted that Slovakia will be taking up the baton in 2019!

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who offered us, and me personally, their advice, support and encouragement in the preparations for, as well as during, our OSCE Chairmanship.

Especially Secretary General Lamberto Zannier and his amazing team at the Secretariat in Vienna, Dunja Mijatovic, Astrid Thors and Michael Link, as well as the Special Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, and, above all, the men and women at the missions and institutions of the OSCE in the field, who work day by day and often under difficult conditions to promote the cause of peace and understanding.

It is their dedication in particular that has impressed me during my visits and meetings.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our special bond with, and commitment to, the OSCE will not come to an end for us, for Germany, on 31 December.

We will continue to work together with you to achieve the vision of common and cooperative security and for a strong OSCE.

Esteemed colleagues,

Helmut Schmidt, a great citizen of Hamburg and Federal Chancellor, once quipped that “whoever has visions should go to the doctor”.

And with his pragmatism guided by his ethical mind set, he indeed won over generations of Germans who continue to venerate him after his death. But despite his fundamental scepticism of visions, Helmut Schmidt was indeed a great supporter of the tangible vision of cooperative security in Europe. It was he who signed the Helsinki Final Act on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1975.

A German OSCE Chairperson-in-Office therefore cannot wind up a Ministerial Council such as this – especially in Hamburg – without due reference to him once again. However, allow me to turn Schmidt’s dictum on its head in light of the current circumstances. I hope that he would have agreed with me:

No doctor will be able to help anyone who has neither visions nor a compass for the future at a time of fundamental upheavals and challenges.

With this in mind, I would like to thank you once again for your support this year and would like to give the floor to the future Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Sebastian Kurz.