



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
TO THE UN, OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

OSCE is the spearhead of dialogue in the Euro-Atlantic space

Farewell Statement by Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič, Permanent Representative of Slovenia, at the 1237th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 25 July 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

I was supposed to have had this farewell speech already four years ago. This is because I should have come to Vienna in 2011, but was sent instead to Brussels, to NATO. The reason for that decision was my capital's conviction that after the Alliance's Lisbon Summit of 2010 and the adoption of NATO's New Strategic Concept, there was hope for a constructive interaction between NATO and Russia. As the former Ambassador to Moscow I was charged with making sure that Slovenia would actively participate in such an engagement, which is also why my country hosted the second-ever meeting of the Political Advisory Group of the NATO-Russia Council in the summer of 2013. The results of those discussions provided the basis for the NATO-Russia Council Program of Work for 2014. In other words, the future seemed bright and the planned joint maritime escort mission in the Mediterranean a welcome substitute for missile defense as a potential "game-changer" in NATO-Russia relations.

All of this changed at the beginning of 2014. The illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol led to the suspension of NATO-Russia cooperation at the working level in April of that year. And even though contacts at the Ambassadorial level remained open, in practice the meetings of the NATO-Russia Council became increasingly rare events. It was in these circumstances that the OSCE started being mentioned with growing frequency at the NATO Headquarters. In fact, at the beginning of 2015 the OSCE Secretary General even received the Ewald von Kleist Award at the Munich Security Conference for the OSCE's "contribution to peace, stability and security in Europe, particularly its efforts regarding the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine as well as its diplomatic attempts to end the crisis". The increased importance of this organization also led to the creation of the position of the NATO Secretary General's Representative for the OSCE at the Warsaw Summit in 2016 and the reestablishment of the NATO Liaison Office in Vienna last year. In other words, events of 2014 have reconfirmed the unique role of the OSCE as an all-weather forum and a reliable platform of communication for countries West and East of Vienna.

It was in this new reality that I returned to the OSCE in 2015. I say returned, because I was already posted to Vienna once before, in 2004, before the start of the Slovenian OSCE Chairmanship of 2005. In that sense I can contrast and compare my experience as a Deputy Head of Mission with that of a Permanent Representative. Some things have changed, but many have stayed the same. One of them is the absolute precision with which a discussion in the Permanent Council reflects the relations among participating States. In that sense the OSCE has remained a reliable barometer for the state of affairs in the Euro-Atlantic area. The other is the immense knowledge accumulated in this organization on practically everything.

Indeed, the comprehensive approach to security means that the OSCE still provides an attractive platform on topics as diverse as politico-military issues, economic and environmental challenges and, of course, human rights.

On the other hand, some things have changed. One of them is the attention that is now being paid to the issue of gender equality. To be sure, women's rights have been on the agenda of the organization also in the past. In fact, at the Istanbul Summit in 1999 participating States agreed that "the full and equal exercise by women of their human rights is essential to achieving a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic OSCE area". Still, it was only with the adoption in 2004 of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality that this important issue finally received the prominence it deserves. I am therefore proud that I was able to contribute actively to the efforts to mainstream a gender perspective at the OSCE in my role as the Chairperson of the MenEngage Network. The experience was all the more rewarding, since it brought me in even closer contact with other international organizations in Vienna. Like the OSCE many of them are security oriented yet work hard to bring more women into their still male-dominated fields. It is also for this reason that I can say with conviction that promoting equal opportunities is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.

Another reason why I have experienced the OSCE differently this time around is my chairmanship of the Open Skies Consultative Commission in the last third of 2017 and of the Forum for Security Co-operation in the middle of 2018. This has given me a new appreciation of the important work that is done in Vienna in the politico-military sphere. In fact, I now know almost by heart the Open Skies Treaty, especially its Annex L, Section II. I have also become something of a fan of the FSC, the other decision-making body of this organization. Although chairing it is oftentimes a challenge, especially because of a lack of a time limit on interventions, it also provides the freedom to explore different topics. I am therefore glad that I managed to have a Security Dialogue on "Nuclear Security in the OSCE Area", which took place with the active involvement of the IAEA and thus showcased synergies among Vienna-based organizations at a time when I was serving as the Slovenian Governor on the Agency's Board. I am also pleased that I was able to chair a Special Session on the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. One of the conclusions of that event was that what Europe needed in 1914 was precisely an organization like the OSCE.

Speaking of the organization, I have to say that one clear difference from the previous decade is the visibility of the EU at the Hofburg. The intensity of coordination among EU member states at the OSCE has also increased. In fact, I sometimes have a feeling that some of our non-EU colleagues do not realize how much time and effort we devote collectively to the preparation of common statements. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to salute both the Head of the EU Delegation and members of his team for their dedication. I think it is very important that the EU speaks in this forum with a common voice, especially when the basic principles of this organization and our common commitments are at stake. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to repeat a phrase that has become something of a leitmotif of EU statements, but also reflects faithfully the position of my country. It is our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

This, of course, brings me back to the current security situation. It is at times like these that the value of an organization like the OSCE becomes obvious. The importance of Structured Dialogue especially cannot be overestimated. If NATO is the spearhead of deterrence, then the OSCE is the spearhead of dialogue. It is therefore imperative that our organization

remains fit for purpose, as our Secretary General insists. It is also important that we, as participating States, ensure a clear succession of chairmanships to lead it. I think that this is especially incumbent upon countries West of Vienna, in the spirit of the time-tested Harmel Doctrine and the dual-track approach to current security challenges in Europe. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to praise our Albanian friends for having decided to step up to the plate next year. And I also cannot but pay tribute to my Slovak colleagues and you, Mr. Chairperson, for the great job you are doing now. There are still occasions when our two countries are confused for one another. And I have never been more pleased by that than during this year.

Let me conclude by confessing that I have been lobbying my capital to take on the OSCE Chairmanship once again in the future. As of now, no decision has been taken yet, also in light of the forthcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2021. However, I hope that after that engagement Ljubljana will return to considering the OSCE option. It is not only that this organization is so important that we should all be competing for the opportunity to lead it. It is also that it offers the best real-life experience of multilateral diplomacy and that it fine-tunes any diplomat that becomes involved with it. I know this because I saw it first-hand more than a decade ago. I also know it, because I experienced it with my current team here in Vienna. I would therefore like to use the opportunity to thank my staff for their great work. Yes, it was hard, and yes, it was demanding. But it was also very enjoyable and rewarding. Let me therefore quote the well-known lines from the St. Crispin's Day speech of Henry V: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers". Let me also amend them in the MenEngage spirit by adding the words "and sisters" as well.

It is with this new and improved Shakespearean phrase, which you, Mr. Chairperson, no doubt understand, that I would like to thank you, as well as all the participating States, the OSCE Secretariat and the supporting staff for friendship and memories. It is a small world and Slovenia is close by, so believe me when I say that I count on seeing you again soon.

Thank you.