



Helsinki +50 Conference
Secretary General Feridun H. Sinirlioglu's, Keynote Speech
Helsinki, 31 July

President Stubb,

Minister Valtonen,

I thank you for your **invitation to Helsinki**.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being here, in the very same room, 50 years after our forefathers and foremothers, one could be tempted to talk about **the past**. Therefore, I am sure that we will hear a lot today about what the Helsinki Final Act meant when it was signed.

I hope that we will also hear about the successes of the Helsinki Final Act – an example of how adversaries, allies, neighbours, as well as countries with little in common, came together to agree on the fundamental principles that would guide their peaceful and prosperous co-existence.

I hope that we will hear about the **transformative powers** of the Helsinki Final Act. How, little more than one year after the Helsinki Summit, **Charter 77** promised to initiate a new era of civil liberties and freedoms. And how it was followed by many other movements that helped to expand and strengthen the democratic space on the continent.

I hope we will hear about all that, because **I am not going to talk about it**. Today, rather than to talk about the Helsinki Final Act with my eyes on the **past**, I want to look to the **future**, and talk about **the next 50 years**, the future security architecture that will ensure a better and safer order for our children and grandchildren.

Together we are navigating through an increasingly **difficult and uncertain period**. Our collective security architecture, which our founding fathers and mothers built, over decades of hard work with sometimes a high cost, is in shambles before us.

The current state **of our fundamental norms and principles** is the biggest challenge in front of us today. Once rules do not matter to some, they won't matter to anyone. And that becomes a problem for everyone. This cannot be the **new normal**.

Therefore, when it comes to principles, they should be **applied to everyone**, inside and outside of the OSCE Region. Period.

Selectively applying rules and exceptions erodes international law. We must stand **against aggression**, everywhere it is perpetrated, by whomever it is perpetrated. We must stand **against genocide and war crimes**, in every context. We must combat impunity, before it takes root.

Double standards are eroding the fundamental principles that are our foundation. We need to be able to rely on them. The fifty years of work from the OSCE and the eighty years of work from the United Nations, **is all being undermined**.

We see across the OSCE region desecration or dismantlement of monuments, religious symbols, and even cemeteries. If we want to build solid foundations for the next 50 years of peaceful coexistence, **history** needs to be learnt, not re-written.

Excellencies, Dear colleagues,

Yesterday Pope Leo renewed his appeal for peace in the world, and stated the following: "Today, more than ever, it is imperative to cherish the spirit of Helsinki, persevere in dialogue, strengthen cooperation and make diplomacy the preferred way to prevent and resolve conflicts." If there is one lesson that we can draw the "spirit of Helsinki", is this: **dialogue is always possible**.

The only pre-requisite to dialogue is a space to exercise that. You, the participating States, have created that. It was designed here in Helsinki in 1975. It was built on in the following decades. You have created by consensus **the OSCE to hold that space**.

Now is the time to use it. To invest in it. To utilize it as a platform for meaningful, open, transparent and structured diplomatic dialogue. Now more than ever before, we need this platform to address the many challenges facing the participating States and the Partners for Co-operation.

However, dialogue requires both talking and listening. That is **engagement**. It is unfortunate that today there appears to be very little appetite for engagement. Yes, people are speaking. But talking past each other or talking across each other is not the same as speaking *with* each other. If you want a real conversation, you have to listen and hear each other as well.

That's why it is high time to return to the meaningful, respectful engagement envisaged by our forefathers and foremothers here 50 years ago.

Let us recall that this Organization was born at a time when the threat of mutually assured destruction was at the fore of everyone's mind. Frankly, these capabilities have only increased since 1975. And their presence continues to pose a global existential threat. Therefore, to use a reference to them as a threat is unacceptable. Hence, to forego engagement is to play with fire.

Security cannot, and will never be, guaranteed by **military deterrence** alone. Because military deterrence alone can lead to an arms race and be destabilizing. Therefore, security must be ensured through **cooperation**, which requires **dialogue**. That is the living legacy of Helsinki.

Excellencies,

This anniversary should serve as a brief reflection moment. A moment to pause before we reach the precipice. And re-direct our course towards building a new security architecture that will, once again, serve us **all**.

In order to do that, I will say this again, I believe we need three crucial steps.

First: we need to end the wars. Of course, when it comes to the OSCE region, that first and foremost means in Ukraine. We have seen in recent weeks and months glimmers of diplomatic engagements for a ceasefire.

It is our duty to support efforts towards a negotiated settlement to end the war; and encourage the sides to continue meeting, and agree on further confidence building measures, including the release of prisoners.

In this regard, I want to stress once again, publicly, my call that these initiatives should include our three OSCE officials, Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov. After three years, their families continue to endure unspeakable anguish and pain, and deserve to hold their loved ones again, as do far too many families of prisoners.

Secondly: we need to recommit to the fundamentals. Our shared Helsinki principles must continue to live and guide us through these difficult times.

I cannot imagine a stable and reliable security system in our geography and beyond, where fundamental ideas like sovereign equality and territorial integrity of States or respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, are not at the core.

We need to vigorously re-commit to the principles we placed as the foundations of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. And then we need to actively implement them, every day, in every way we can. We need these principles, and we need the house we built to defend them – that is, we need the OSCE.

Thirdly: we need an honest discussion on how we got here - what went wrong. And I repeat, honest discussions. When a system crumbles in the manner that we are witnessing right now, there needs to be some soul searching, an open-minded review to investigate the reasons for collapse.

We all bear responsibility for mistakes, misinterpretations, hubris, and indeed, **silence**. A meaningful security discussion will need to include an honest assessment of what we did wrong; what we condoned, which we should not have; and, what we underestimated.

We need to go through that together, and listen to each other.

Excellencies, Dear colleagues,

Globally and in Europe, we have reached a **critical juncture**. The choices we make in the coming weeks and months will determine what the world of our future generations will look like.

Fifty years ago, despite our differences, and our conflicting interests. **We came together and found common ground**. There is no doubt that today's geopolitical situation is challenging, but **geography has not changed, and will not change**.

Fifty years ago, there was a recognition of what was needed: a **security platform** for mutual accountability, dialogue, and collective action in Europe. We still need that today. And mark my words, we will need it for the next fifty years. **This platform is the OSCE**.

Let us make **full** use of it.

The alternative would be an affront to the men and women who made history in this very room fifty years ago. The alternative would be an affront to the women and men who will stand in this room fifty years from now.

I thank you.