

Security Through Dialogue and the Vital Role of the OSCE

Remarks by NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller at the OSCE Annual Security Review Conference, Vienna, Austria

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Secretary General Zannier,

Colleagues of the OSCE Community,

We meet at a momentous time.

A time when the security situation in the Euro-Atlantic area has deteriorated markedly, with borders being changed by force for the first time since World War II.

It is a time of increasing tensions and declining trust. A time when human rights are in retreat and press freedom is under threat.

This is a time when the role of the OSCE in facilitating constructive dialogue is more important than ever.

Mr. Chairman, I am not here to talk about NATO, and I will respect that. However, during the 20th anniversary year of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the 15th anniversary year of the Rome Declaration, I can say that NATO has sought a positive relationship with Russia, and will continue to do so.

But we in NATO must take steps to deter and defend against Russian aggressive actions.

Until Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea and destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, NATO had no plans to place NATO troops close to its borders with Russia.

NATO's actions are proportionate, defensive and in line with international law. They will remain so.

We need mutual predictability and confidence-building. So, from my perspective, this Annual Security Review Conference could not come at a better time.

I want to express my gratitude to Foreign Minister Kurz and the Austrian Chairmanship for hosting this conference. And I thank the Austrian Chairmanship for focusing our attention on a compelling theme: "Strengthening Security Through Dialogue."

This theme is of overriding importance at this moment in history. But it presents us all with a stern challenge: Can the Euro-Atlantic community – working together in the spirit of goodwill and mutual trust – truly make progress toward greater security through dialogue?

I am optimistic that we can.

I am also greatly honored to appear this morning with Secretary General Zannier, and United Nations Under Secretary-General Lacroix, and Ambassador Grushko, the Head of the Russian Federation's Mission to NATO.

We will certainly express diverging views. And I'm sure we will do so in the spirit of respectful dialogue – which truly is the purpose of this conference.

The OSCE was created to provide a forum for dialogue to address human rights, economic and environmental security, and contribute to military transparency and risk reduction. This is your *raison d'être*.

Indeed, the OSCE – with 57 members across the Euro-Atlantic area – is the most inclusive and appropriate organization for enhancing security and fostering cooperation through dialogue. There truly is no better forum for addressing both near and long-term security challenges in Europe.

I'm delighted to see that the agenda calls for in-depth discussion on a wide range of critically important issues, from Ukraine, to the "Conflict Cycle," conventional arms control, transnational threats, and Structured Dialogue.

In my opening comments this morning, I will not attempt to cover all of the issues to be discussed over the next three days. Instead, I want to highlight three interrelated topics that are both relevant to the agenda and of particular importance from NATO's perspective.

First, pressure on the rules-based international order.

Second, the situation in Ukraine.

And third, the importance of dialogue and the way forward.

It is abundantly clear that the Euro-Atlantic security system has been hindered in recent years by the lack of respect for the rules-based international order.

Fundamental values and principles of this organization have been challenged – values and principles enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter of 1990, the Istanbul Charter of 1999, the Astana Declaration of 2010, and most recently, the Hamburg Declaration from last December.

This contributes directly to the lack of trust. Because in the final analysis all of us need to be able to trust that everyone will play by the same set of agreed-upon rules. It is good for everybody.

And this brings me to the situation in Ukraine.

The security situation in Ukraine is of deep concern. This is by no means a "frozen conflict." Eastern Ukraine is an active conflict zone. Nearly 10,000 Ukrainians have been killed and the violence continues every single day. Your Special Monitoring Mission has faced many severe and unacceptable challenges, including the recent tragic death of one of your monitors – an American paramedic.

Russia's aggressive actions are not only an attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are also an assault on the post-World War II, rules-based international order that has helped to keep the peace in Europe for seven decades – the longest such period in European history.

As a matter of law and principle, NATO has not and will not accept the annexation of Crimea. This illegal action – combined with Russia's ongoing support for militants in Eastern Ukraine – has done more than anything else to undermine trust, predictability and security in Europe.

NATO Allies strongly support all international efforts that could lead to the relaxation of tensions and a negotiated settlement in Ukraine. In the meantime, NATO will continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will continue to assist Ukraine in its efforts to reform its security and defence institutions to enable Ukraine to better defend itself.

Our support for reforms, institution building and resilience in Ukraine is being replicated with other NATO partners to the east and to the south. Our overall objective is to enhance stability by helping our partners help themselves.

We also remain strongly committed to dialogue with Russia. We held three meetings of the NATO-Russia Council in 2016 and another meeting in March of this year. These meetings provide a platform for dialogue, which we are keen to see turn in an ever-more useful and pragmatic direction.

And on that note, I want to turn to my final topic: The importance of dialogue and the way forward.

Dialogue is not only the fundamental purpose of the OSCE. It is one of the organisation's greatest strengths. Dialogue offers a bridge to increased confidence and a more predictable relationship among all participating countries.

Let me take this opportunity to commend the Chairman in Office and the Chairman of the Informal Working Group for their leadership on the Structured Dialogue initiative. It offers a forum for discussing threats as well as near and long-term challenges to European security.

This is a welcome process that promises a way to unblock the logjam that has undercut efforts to enhance transparency and predictability. I know you have already held a number of productive meetings that are fostering better understanding.

We all recognize this is a long-term process requiring time, effort and patience as we dig deeper to address the threat perceptions that too often divide us.

I think we appreciate that ever-more detailed and technical discussions alone will not yield optimal levels of understanding. We also need open and frank dialogue on broader issues – difficult as they may be – including threats pertaining to the rules-based order.

It is worth considering whether Structured Dialogue could support efforts toward modernizing the Vienna Document. I hope we can all agree that it is time to make progress on that important topic, one way or another, and sooner rather than later.

Embracing key improvements along these lines would constitute a welcome step toward greater predictability, mutual confidence and stability in the Euro-Atlantic community.

It is vitally important that we not turn back the clock, that we not return to a time when Europe was divided into spheres of influence. We tried that before and it's simply not in anyone's interest; it simply does not work.

The rules-based order has helped to keep the peace in Europe for more than seven decades – the longest such period in Europe's history. It should be maintained and strengthened.

NATO Allies strongly support efforts to reinforce the rules-based international system. And we would very much welcome Russia's re-embrace of the post-World War II European security system – a system that is the best hope for sustaining peace and security in Europe.

The OSCE has a vital role to play as a venue for dialogue that could help to restore trust and rebuild confidence among all 57 OSCE members. We must all do what we can to equip, encourage and empower the organization to do so.

You are about to nominate a new Secretary General and the other heads of the OSCE bodies. This is an important step toward the future, and we must do what we can to fully support the process.

My presence here today testifies to the importance NATO Allies attach to the OSCE and your indispensable role in upholding the rules-based international order.

I thank the OSCE once again for holding this annual conference and I applaud your continued role as a champion of dialogue to address the threats and challenges to European security.

As I wrap up my remarks, I want to express gratitude to Lamberto Zannier, the OSCE Secretary General, for your firm leadership of the OSCE. And may I express my personal admiration for your constant efforts to strengthen and develop the organization during a challenging time? Thank you, Lamberto.