



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Report to the Ministerial Council

Secretary General Helga Schmid

Stockholm, 2 December 2021

Madam Chairperson,

Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be here in Stockholm, meeting in person once again.

This is my first report to the Ministerial Council as Secretary-General, and I would like to break with orthodoxy.

Because all too often speeches about the OSCE complain about the state of cooperation in our region.

The lack of dialogue. The growing mistrust.

And that is all true. The situation is not good. And we are less secure as a result.

... But you don't need me to tell you that.

What frustrates me is that sometimes those complaints infer that the OSCE is ineffective or faltering.

Now, I completely understand why you and your representatives may feel that way.

Seeing confrontation chosen over pragmatic cooperation.

Putting gargantuan efforts into negotiations, for minimal returns.

Sitting through repetitive exchanges of statements every week.

Dealing with politicization of the simplest, most fundamental tasks – from the agreement of dates for meetings, to the adoption of our budget.

I can only imagine what your reports from Vienna are like.

But I do not feel the same way about this Organization.

I have no ambivalence one year in.

Because I have the privilege to see, to read and to hear – on a daily basis - about the remarkable human impact this Organization and its activities have.

While dialogue may be stuttering, OSCE staff are getting on with their job.

They are implementing activities – as you have mandated - that deliver benefits for millions of your people.

So I want to dedicate my few minutes here today to their exceptional work.

And let me just give you a few standout examples.

I'll begin in Ukraine, where all of you will know about our Special Monitoring Mission.

They don't just observe and report.

This year they have facilitated roughly 800 localised ceasefires. These have allowed for essential repairs of 94 infrastructure sites, on both sides of the contact line. Those repairs have ensured electricity, water, gas and communications for over five million people.

But the wider picture is unfortunately deeply troubling, and warrants attention.

Our Mission continues to face constant impediments. UAVs are jammed and even shot at. Monitors' movement is increasingly constrained.

This prevents the Mission providing the impartial reporting we demand from it. It hinders the Mission to facilitate the vital activities for the benefit of the people on both sides of the contact line.

These restrictions have to stop.

Ongoing freedom of movement restrictions of civilians also are turning the contact line into a dividing line. Crossings are down 95 per cent compared to 2019.

The SMM just issued a report on the enormous challenges faced by those wanting to cross. It hits people's daily lives. They cannot visit family, they cannot access pensions, documentation, education healthcare, or just go to their jobs.

It also undermines the prospects for longer-term reintegration.

Dear colleagues

Looking elsewhere in our region:

In Kyrgyzstan, we have removed all melange, a toxic rocket fuel component which posed a major risk to human and environmental security.

Over 150 tonnes were removed from deteriorated reservoirs, eliminating a risk to the local community of 21,000 people.

I am glad that later today we will discuss the implications of the situation in Afghanistan for security in our region.

We have presented a food-for-thought paper with some initial ideas. It affects our Central Asian participating states disproportionately, but impacts the entire OSCE region.

In Tajikistan, we have trained border guards and rescuers to improve border security and deal with natural disasters, in addition to the 4000 people trained by our Border Management and Staff College since its establishment.

In Albania, our new work to recover and reuse the proceeds of crime is delivering results.

A premises previously used by an organized crime group was seized and returned to the community, now acting as a workshop employing disadvantaged women.

We will multiply this kind of work across South Eastern Europe next year.

Visiting Georgia, I was also delighted to address participants of the 100th meeting of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in June in Ergneti.

Since 2009, the mechanism has addressed various security – and humanitarian issues, as crucial part of the architecture of the Geneva International Discussions.

And it has helped resolve several practical challenges faced by the conflict-affected population – from detention cases, to irrigation, farmland use, to accessing information on the pandemic.

We have delivered numerous pioneering simulation exercises on combatting trafficking in human beings.

This is part of our work to tackle an unacceptable culture of impunity, where for every 2200 trafficking victims, there is just 1 prosecution.

And we are working hard to tackle demand – stepping up work with partners to help prevent forced labour in supply chains.

We have been championing Women’s Economic Empowerment across the OSCE region.

In Uzbekistan, for example, we worked with a start-up that helps female-owned small businesses operate online and sell to their neighbourhoods.

2021 was also a year of climate action, the OSCE was no exception here.

We identified 42 climate hotspots in our region where climate impacts might fuel instability.

Most of these hotspots are transboundary, they require joint regional responses – like our work in the Shar mountains spanning Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia, to our activities on wildfire management in the South Caucasus.

And I am sure each of the Heads of OSCE Institutions could reel off their own examples just as easily.

Teresa Ribero and RFoM’s monitoring of media developments and staunch support for freedom of expression, free media and safety of journalists.

Kairat Abdrakhmanov and HCNM's discreet diplomacy on national minorities, reinforcing our conflict prevention.

Matteo Mecacci and ODIHR's work to promote and stand up for human rights, democracy and the rule of law – often imperilled in our region.

And I am saying this because security is never ever one-dimensional.

So we are all committed to work hand-in-hand, taking a “whole-of-OSCE” approach.

Also alongside the Parliamentary Assembly, whose work to project OSCE principles and commitments is crucial, also for raising OSCE visibility. Grateful for the work of Roberto Montella.

Dear colleagues,

All of this – and so much more – gets delivered on a budget which, to borrow the words of one of you, who replied to my letter, remains rather humble compared to other international organizations’.

For roughly 140 million euros, you get the Secretariat, 3 specialised Institutions and 14 field operations, excluding the SMM.

You get an Organization which delivers on a mandate broader than any other regional security body – stretching from arms control to free media.

You get over 350 projects and 2,700 expert staff - not including the additional 1300 who work for the SMM, Special Monitoring Mission, or our 230 additional extra-budgetary projects.

You get all this for around 20 cents per citizen per year.

Last night over dinner, some spoke of the need for a stable budget, timely adoption and also the need for budget reform.

We cannot sustain another year of zero nominal growth.

We need the resources to do good on the ground.

And there is much, much more that this Organization can do, if equipped to do so, in particular our excellent field operations.

I remain committed to do my own small part internally to ensure we are lean, agile and ready to do so.

In my hearing prior to my appointment, I pledged to prioritise effective and efficient management as Secretary-General.

And I have endeavoured to do just that.

Within the Secretariat, I have initiated a Functional Review to look into our processes, our structures, our systems and to address gaps.

Its aim is to analyse and align our functions and resources in a better way.

So we make the most out of your contributions and that we deliver in the most efficient manner.

This process is already well underway. Its initial findings will be presented in the first half of 2022, followed by a thorough implementation phase.

I am also modernising many of our internal policies, including on results-based management and evaluation – to ensure we focus on impact.

This week I joined a staff meeting evaluating our adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We were the first to conduct such a comprehensive exercise among Regional and International Organizations, seeking to learn lessons and maintain some of the positive innovations.

And let me say that I am proud of OSCE staff for their excellent work under challenging circumstances, particularly in relation to COVID-19.

Work is also advancing to ensure a professional and ethical workplace culture, in line with international best practices.

And I remain a staunch champion of equal opportunities and diversity across the OSCE executive structures – because a diverse team that produces the best results.

But, *Dear colleagues*, my work is only one part.

How we evolve is really down to you, and your shared will.

Last week, the Finnish President spoke on how we could recapture the Helsinki Spirit.

As he said, the Helsinki Spirit is more than an event. It is more than a set of structures.

It is a set of fundamental principles, uniting us, including our Asian and Mediterranean Partners, and not open to interpretation or negotiation.

The vision of Helsinki and Paris, and the work of Astana may not yet have unfolded as was expected or hoped back then. Yet the fundamental principles of dialogue and cooperation over confrontation continue to reign supreme.

The OSCE Executive Structures are designed and there to promote that.

We are the best placed – the most inclusive and broadly mandated – regional platform to do that.

So please use us.

Support us.

Empower us.

So that we escape the current malaise and this Organization can play a larger part in bringing us back together.

Thank you.