



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
1412th Reinforced Permanent Council
Remarks from Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid
Friday 24 February 2023

Dear Ministers, Ambassadors, Colleagues

One year ago, we woke to attacks on Kyiv, having spent the days, weeks, and months prior working urgently to reduce tensions. To our grave dismay, Russia chose force over dialogue – in contravention of international law and the Helsinki Principles – the very principles on which the OSCE was founded, as our Chair just outlined.

In the days, weeks, and months that followed, we worked urgently to bring our staff in Ukraine to safety, to support the people and government of Ukraine, and participating States worked to hold the Russian Federation to account.

This has been a year of incredible suffering. A year of unprecedented challenges.

It has also been a year in which we have witnessed the profound resilience and determination of those dedicated to their independence, their sovereignty, and their freedom to choose.

These values are OSCE values. They are enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. They have inspired and guided us for nearly 50 years. We stand by these principles – even as they are now violated on a daily basis.

Dear Ministers,

During the last year, we were forced to close our field missions in Ukraine. Some of our colleagues – Ukrainian mission members who worked for our Special Monitoring Mission – remain in detention in Donetsk and Luhansk. It has been more than 10 months. We do not have reliable information about their whereabouts nor about their wellbeing. I continue to do all I can to secure their release. I have sought your support before and do so again today. Our colleagues must be freed.

Though we had to close our missions in Ukraine, confronted with what seemed an insurmountable obstacle, we found a way forward. Through a wholly donor-funded effort, we have returned to Ukraine with a multi-million-euro support programme – to assist the government, to assist civil society, and to assist the people of Ukraine.

Our team in Kyiv is supporting Ukraine on issues including humanitarian demining, cyber resilience, environmental impacts of the war, and human trafficking, among others. This includes dedicated support to women and girls – war is never gender blind.

We also continue the essential work of supporting people and governments across the OSCE region as they cope with effects of the war as well as a range of other challenges.

This has been a year of tragedy and of tenacity. Russia must stop its war of aggression. And we must continue. Continue to stand for our principles. Continue to deliver for Ukraine. The OSCE remains as relevant as ever.

Thank you very much.