

Address by His Excellency Mr. Ivica Dačić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia at the Seminar "OSCE – The Litmus Test of an Evolving Security Community"

"Distinguished Minister Tuomioja,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to take part, upon the invitation of my colleague Minister Tuomioja, in this exchange of views on the future of the OSCE and its role in the security architecture of Europe. As an incoming Chairman-in-Office, and especially with regard to the crisis in Ukraine and the upcoming 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Summit and the Helsinki Final Act, I consider this kind of events precious. They provide opportunity to take a closer look at current challenges and to present ideas on how to strengthen the OSCE in the period ahead through dialogue of political representatives with civil society and academia.

Our two countries' engagement with the CSCE/OSCE has been longstanding and dates back to its beginnings. Finland and at the time Yugoslavia were not only among the founding CSCE States, but also the most active and prominent ones. As you might all remember, the first Follow-up Meeting to the CSCE was held in Belgrade in 1977 and 1978. At the end of 2015, after almost 40 years, our capital Belgrade will again be the host of a high-level OSCE gathering and I am looking forward to welcoming you on that occasion.

The OSCE Chairmanship, in the year marking the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, is a great honour for Serbia but it comes at a particularly difficult moment for Europe. We face one of the biggest challenges since the inception of the OSCE. You may recall that two weeks ago at the fringes of the UN General Assembly, the Swiss Chairman in Office organized a ministerial meeting where we discussed the way forward and the role of our Organization in addressing the current crisis. Many elements of that discussion are also pertinent to today's debate and I would like to briefly touch upon some of them.

We welcome the initiative of the Chairman-in-Office Mr. Didier Burkhalter to bring new energy to the Helsinki +40 process in the upcoming period. In that sense, we consider the proposal to form a panel of eminent persons, with the aim to take stock of the current situation and to propose a set of recommendations in that regard, as a step in the right direction. Between now and the Ministerial Council in Basel, we are ready to closely cooperate with Switzerland in developing these proposals and, formulating them in a way that will be acceptable to all Participating States.

We agree with the assessment that the crisis in Ukraine poses a great challenge to European security and brings into question the very concept based on guiding political documents such as the Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the 1999 Istanbul Charter for European Security. Instead of cooperative spirit, mistrust is now prevailing. Admittedly, this is not the first major challenge to the European security since the end of the Cold War. Unfortunately, many unsettled politico-military developments have had a negative impact on the erosion of trust and confidence among the OSCE participating States. Needless to say, current situation in Ukraine exacerbates such state of affairs. On the other hand, the perspective of successful resolution of this crisis has the potential of transforming the current security environment into a mutually beneficial security community that we have long aspired for. That is why in our debates, we often talk about this crisis as one that not only presents challenges, but also opportunities.

In the past four decades, the OSCE has evolved in a progressive manner. It systematically developed flexible and sophisticated mechanisms to effectively address all phases of the conflict cycle, particularly in terms of early warning and early action. This was possible due to the existence of political will among participating States to engage in cooperative processes, as well as the neutral and comprehensive character of the OSCE as a security organization.

For the OSCE to continue to be relevant, it is essential to further strengthen its capacities and mechanisms to actively respond to conflicts, from early warning to post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation, and to achieve concrete results in terms of stabilizing the situation on the ground. In view of the experiences of the Western Balkans, I wish to point out that concrete and sustainable solutions can only be reached through constructive political action and dialogue. I would like use this opportunity to point out that we support the renewed, more systematic efforts of the OSCE in strengthening its mediation capacity, which I know is a policy area that Finland strongly supports both in the UN and the OSCE. I look forward to working in close cooperation with you on these issues during our Chairmanship.

At the same time, these processes and the crisis in Ukraine should be observed in a more holistic context, which would result in preempting the reoccurrence of such situations in the OSCE region in the future. In order to achieve this, the participating States should work on reconsolidating the consensus on European security first and foremost by reaffirming the basic OSCE norms, principles and commitments and their full implementation in good faith. From the outset of the Ukrainian crisis, on many occasions we expressed our position on the norms and values which should guide the actions of states in the international arena, based on respect of international law embodied in the UN Charter, and the dialogue as the only means of peaceful resolution of the crises.

In light of recent developments in Ukraine, we hope that the Minsk Protocol and the subsequent Minsk Memorandum on the implementation of the ceasefire will mark the beginning of a comprehensive peace process, which will not only provide security on the ground but also allow conditions for inclusive political processes within Ukraine. The Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has a key role to play in this respect. The mere fact that the OSCE was the first organization to respond to the crisis in Ukraine by setting up this Mission testifies to the significance of the OSCE as a regional security arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. The response of the OSCE in such difficult circumstances highlighted the comparative advantage of the organization, its relevance and ability to contribute in addressing the existing challenges emanating from this crisis. The ongoing political efforts together with further expansion of the SMM with the additional staff, equipment and resources are essential for us to move forward. It is our hope that it could, in turn, also serve as a catalyst for a renewed comprehensive dialogue on European security.

The Ukrainian crisis is a stark reminder of an urgent need for joint action and a dialogue based approach. Despite current challenges, areas of common interest continue to exist and should be explored to the greatest extent possible in order to create an environment in which trust and confidence among participating States can be restored. We deem that the Helsinki +40 process still provides an appropriate framework for addressing these issues. This process should continue precisely because of the challenges we have been facing in the past months. The discussions on revitalizing the role of the OSCE should include the reflection on current events and the relevant experiences of the Organization. In pursuing a cooperative endeavor, we should draw lessons from both positive and negative experiences while working on the peaceful resolution of the crisis in Ukraine. At the same time, we should aim to reconsolidate the European security as a common project and strengthen the OSCE's role and capacity to act.

I hope that next year in Belgrade when we mark the 40th anniversary of our Organization, the circumstances will allow us to make substantive progress in our deliberations within the Helsinki +40 process. We don't know, of course, what the concrete outcome of the process will look like. We hope, though, that Belgrade will again emerge alongside Helsinki in a positive light in a historic OSCE context. This goes in line with our goal of transforming Serbia into a long-term positive contributor to the European security.

In closing, I would like to thank you once again for this opportunity to address you on a topic of a high relevance for the upcoming Serbian Chairmanship and for the future of the OSCE. I hope that our debate today will contribute towards our joint endeavours of building a strong OSCE in an ever-evolving security environment in Europe.

Thank you for your attention.”