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President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Remarks
14th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
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Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to address this Session of the 14th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference representing here the more than three hundred members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Let me also warmly thank our Lithuanian hosts for their hospitality in welcoming all of us in beautiful Vilnius.

The Baltic States and the Baltic Sea are in a dynamic development mode. I have been following very closely the great achievements of all your countries in the recent years. Today, you are facing – like most OSCE States - new challenges and making efforts to strengthen democratic values and promote welfare, peace and prosperity for all your citizens.

After participating in this Conference I will have the opportunity to pay official visits to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Being my first time in the region I look forward very much to learn about your countries and exchanging views with your leaderships both as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and as a Member of the US Congress.

Parliamentary Conferences, such as this one, greatly contribute to enhanced co-operation and dialogue between legislators for the common good of our citizens. I take this opportunity to praise the active involvement and contribution your national delegations provide to our Assembly.

Both the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference act as important fora for debate and exchange of information between parliaments.

One of the important objectives of this Conference is to discuss forms and ways of closer co-operation in the enlarged Europe, including the improvement of relations with the EU neighbouring countries.

The OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly have extensive experience in such matters.

The OSCE, which initially was a process to reduce tensions between East and West, has become today an active institution in reducing tensions. It also contributes to the different peace processes that still take place in Europe.

The OSCE's main objective is to prevent conflicts and here is where its comprehensive approach to security plays a major role through the three baskets. It approaches security through "arms control, preventive diplomacy, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights, election monitoring and economic and environmental security".

In sum, we look to security as a broader issue not limited to military terms and territorial integrity. Furthermore, the OSCE work is relevant in order that conflicts are avoided because it looks to the roots and background of possible, or existing conflicts in order to reduce tensions and increase stability in problematic hot spots.

At the same time solidarity and co-operation are fundamental OSCE values. The OSCE is a unique organization, including 55 participating states from Europe, Central Asia, and North America. All these 55 participating states share and uphold the same values and work together toward a common objective: the creation of a free, democratic, prosperous and undivided Europe.

Continuous dialogue and the free exchange of views and ideas aimed at enhancing co-operation, building confidence and security between states and societies as well as within societies are important assets of the OSCE.

The OSCE, as you know, has been very active in the Baltic States. The OSCE Field Missions and the High Commissioner on National Minorities have played an important role in the past years. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has actively supported their efforts.

We have paid special attention to the protection and promotion of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of persons belonging to national minorities, as this forms an integral part of Democracy.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has reiterated on numerous occasions that pluralistic and genuinely democratic societies should not only respect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of its peoples, but also create appropriate conditions enabling them to express, preserve and develop this identity.

As part of our continuous efforts, the OSCE PA will devote this year's Autumn Conference to the issue of Democracy and Good Governance in Multi-Ethnic Societies as a Basis for Stability and Security. This parliamentary conference will address the promotion of the necessary conditions for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and preserve the essential elements of their identity. We will also look at the multilateral instruments devoted to the protection of national minorities in general.

As parliamentarians we have an important role in implementing by the necessary legislation the legal principles that our States can undertake to ensure the protection of national minorities.

I look forward to the active participation of your parliamentarians in our Conference in Montenegro.

Let me conclude by saying that the challenges ahead are enormous for all of us, on both shores of the Atlantic. As parliamentarians we have the ultimate responsibility in addressing our citizens' concerns. Such concerns are very similar for the citizens of Vilnius, Miami or St. Petersburg and they relate to peace and stability.

We look forward in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to co-operate closely with the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in achieving such noble objectives.

Thank you