



Remarks of President Wolfgang Grossruck
Opening Plenary of the 22nd Annual Session of the OSCE PA
29 July 2013 | Istanbul

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Minister Davutoglu,
Minister Kozhara,
Speaker Cicek,
Distinguished guests and colleagues,

On behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, I would like to thank our Turkish hosts for their warm hospitality in this dynamic and inspiring city. It is symbolic that we meet this year in Istanbul, a city with a long history of interaction between civilizations, a place that has served as a bridge between geographic regions and cultural currents. I call upon you, esteemed guests and colleagues, to keep the symbolism of this gateway city fresh in your mind as we embark upon our work at this year's Annual Session.

Just as the Bosphorous is a gateway between Eurasia and the Mediterranean, the Parliamentary Assembly is a gateway to connect national parliaments with each other and with the various bodies of the OSCE. Thus I cannot stress enough the importance of friendly cooperation between us as equal partners, face-to-face with each other, both in and out session.

However, it is critical to note that our success will not only be determined by our actions in the coming days. To be a true success, the experiences we share here, the connections we form, and the decisions we take through a democratic vote must be transferred into increased awareness in our national parliaments and home countries.

As members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, we must commit ourselves to greater involvement in the activities of the OSCE throughout the year. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can only play a strong role in the international community if the parliamentarians actively participate in our work. This includes promoting and advertising the work of the PA in all OSCE member states through events and cooperation with other organizations.

After all we, as Parliamentarians, are the OSCE's primary link to the people. This means on top of communicating the OSCE's message of security and human rights to the people, we must also

communicate to the governmental side the people's desire for more accountable and responsive political leadership. Here in Istanbul, that desire has been clearly displayed for the better part of the last month. We have seen that the people will go to great lengths to protect their fundamental freedoms. Whether the square is in Tunisia or Turkey, Manhattan or Madrid, it is our task to let the public know that we stand in support of peaceful expression. And as elected representatives, we strive to include the diverse opinions of our constituents in our own official actions.

We have been following the events in Turkey closely and come to this conference hall fully aware of events which have taken place a short walk from here at Gezi Park. To be clear, we in the OSCE stand in support of peaceful expression and assembly. Whether demonstrators stand or sit, speak or sing, they have a basic right to assemble and freely express themselves, and it must be respected. However, we also respect a government's duty to preserve peaceful order, and those who commit and incite vandalism and violence should receive a proportionate and careful response from law enforcement.

We are not here to dwell on the situation in this country, but we would be equally remiss to open this conference and not offer our thanks for Turkey's extraordinary humanitarian support for the refugees of Syria. This is especially a tragedy for children and families but soldiers too are human beings, and we all wish for a prompt end to this conflict. I am glad several of my colleagues, including the head of the Turkish Delegation Emin Onen have introduced resolutions related to the struggle in Syria.

That said our agenda here is much broader than the Middle East. At our best, our work here should help strengthen the OSCE and its work to modernize our implementation of the Helsinki Final Act as we approach the 40th anniversary of this landmark agreement.

To that end your committee rapporteurs have drafted strong resolutions which we will debate. Many of you have put forward timely supplementary items to underscore specific issues. From a resolution that would call for this Assembly to have oversight of the OSCE budget to items aimed at strengthening environmental co-operation to reduce carbon emissions, the substantive documents before us reflect the commitment we all share to each other and our shared values.

At the core of the OSCE is a spirit of inclusiveness. And so here, at this bridge between continents, we should look beyond the OSCE's capitals to our partners throughout the greater Eurasian world. We must strengthen our cooperation with our Mediterranean partners and acknowledge the assets they bring to this organization. We must develop more regular cooperation with the OSCE Field Missions. And as international forces withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, we must urge the OSCE to help ensure stability in the region throughout the transition period. The security of the region depends upon strong international cooperation from parliaments, governments and civil society.

This week, let us show what that cooperation can produce.

In the spirit of Istanbul, let us dedicate ourselves to laying a strong foundation for the bridges that we will build. As we all know, it is only through connections between the OSCE and our national parliaments and governments that we can be successful. I look forward to a productive and enjoyable Annual Session in the days ahead and once again thank our Turkish hosts for their generous hospitality and excellent preparations for our meeting.