# Book Launch in Vienna

## Multilateralism in transition: challenges and opportunities for the OSCE

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**Remarks by**
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

Dear Friends,

Thank you for attending this book launch. It is wonderful to see so many familiar faces and so many friends tonight! It gives me great pleasure to do so.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to the Centre for Security Studies of the ETH Zurich for making this publication possible. I am also grateful to two of my co-authors, David Lanz and Benno Zogg, for also being present and speaking here tonight. And I see another co-author, Anna Hess, sitting in the audience.

Thank you, Wolfgang, for organising this event. And thanks to Father Nikolaus for making this impressive venue available to us. I really appreciate it! It is indeed great to be back in Klosterneuburg – a town that has three things that I cherish: a wonderful cultural heritage (just think of the Altar of Verdun that I had the privilege of visiting the last time I was here), great wine, and great mountain biking. Believe me, I know many of the trails up here.

And it is good to be back in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – an organisation for which I worked for a decade, but still feel that I left too soon.

But I am not going to dwell too much on the past this evening. I have made a critical appraisal of my three years as Secretary General in the book that you have before you, and I encourage you to read it.

Instead, I will focus my remarks on strengthening cooperative security in difficult times, building on observations that I outline in the book, and drawing on my current perspective as Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP).

**The reform agenda: unfinished business**

That said, allow me to first give you a brief overview of the main points in my book contribution.

The centrepiece – or, at least, one of the key chapters – is the “Fit4purpose” agenda, which I initiated on Valentine’s Day in 2018. To be honest, I did not receive too many bouquets of flowers or boxes of chocolates for my proposals – at least from diplomats in Vienna. Fortunately, there was more of an appetite for very evident reform in state capitals and among foreign ministers, including, for example, at the informal retreat in the High Tatras under Slovakia’s leadership in July 2019.

I am proud of the internal reforms that were achieved during my three years as Secretary General, particularly in terms of introducing efficiencies, improving gender parity, and making more effective use of technology. Such steps should clearly dispel the notion that the OSCE is incapable of or immune to reform. This is the good news for the future.

That said, the reform agenda remains unfinished business. I do believe that the budget cycle should be reformed to enable longer-term planning and greater predictability. Staff rules should be amended to attract and retain the best people and better maintain institutional memory. Internal governance mechanisms should be brought up to today’s standards. While it is wonderful to have achieved gender parity in the top four leadership positions and in the

Directors' Committee of the Secretariat, the OSCE still needs more women heads of mission and special representatives. And yes, I would still argue that the OSCE would be well served by opening liaison offices in Brussels, New York and Moscow to better represent this great organisation, to better fundraise, and to better market its tools for preventing and managing conflict and building resilient institutions.

I also believe that the role of the Secretary General needs to be more clearly defined. This does not necessarily need to be further formalised by more Ministerial Council decisions, but we need more common understanding of what the Secretary General's job is and that he/she needs to be given the necessary space to do her/his job. Or to put it more bluntly: Participating States should not micro-manage the Secretary General.

Equally importantly, ways need to be found to make chairing the organisation more accessible and attractive to a wider pool of potential countries. There is also room to improve continuity from one Chair-in-Office (CiO) to the next, and to provide them with greater strategic support. In another chapter of my book contribution I also look at the four CiOs that I worked with – from Austria, Italy, Slovakia and Albania – and I argue that the diplomatic role of the Secretary General depends very much on the expectations of the different CiOs. The better this role is defined and spelled out, the easier it is to carry out.

I also review the Secretary General's role in relation to other executive structures: the organisation's institutions, field operations and the Parliamentary Assembly. I suggest that Participating States would do well to champion not just the autonomy of the executive structures, but also cooperation and coordination within and between them. And as I never tired of telling ambassadors – especially around budget time – if you want to defend the OSCE institutions, then please invest in them, including in the Secretariat. Playing executive structures off against one another has never led to a positive outcome.

In other chapters I also cover the conflict cycle, including a focus on the OSCE's conflict management in eastern Ukraine through the Special Monitoring Mission and the Trilateral Contact Group, I talk about new security risks not yet on the OSCE agenda, including the China factor, and describe how the OSCE dealt with the COVID-19 crisis.

**A positive unifying agenda**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues,

Allow me to touch briefly on two elements of the reform agenda that got me into some trouble in the past, but which I strongly believe in. Indeed, they go to the heart of strengthening cooperative security in difficult times.

The first is the OSCE as a platform for supporting inclusive dialogue and joint action. That, to me, is in the very DNA of the OSCE, going back to its days as a Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. The CSCE was not established as a fair-weather forum for like-minded countries. It was designed to foster dialogue and cooperation among enemies.

In a polarised security environment, the OSCE is one of the few places where states can meet, discuss their differences and try to manage their relations peacefully.

Yet I was surprised at how many states refused to engage constructively, and merely used the OSCE as an arena for public diplomacy. This erodes the

culture of cooperation and has toxic side effects on so much of the organisation's daily business.

I believe, for example, that more effective use could be made of the Structured Dialogue framework, while existing negotiation frameworks that the OSCE is part of could be used more effectively to resolve conflicts.

From my perspective in Geneva, it is interesting to follow the strategic stability talks that were launched after the June summit between Presidents Biden and Putin. That process has the potential to give a fresh impulse to many of the ideas that have been discussed in the Structured Dialogue in Vienna, for example in relation to confidence- and security-building measures and arms control. This opportunity should be seized in order to de-escalate tensions.

The second point is to work through the OSCE towards a positive unifying agenda. Here I received quite some criticism – partly for this expression and in particular the adjective "positive", and partly because some states felt that promoting such a political agenda is not the Secretary General's role.

So be it.

But how else are we to strengthen cooperative security unless we look for issues where our interests converge … where we can find some common ground … where we can start to rebuild trust?

That was the approach used in the early 1970s in the lead-up to the Helsinki Accords. You may, of course, say that "times have changed".

True, but recall the remarks of Anthony Blinken and Sergei Lavrov after they met in Reykjavik in May this year. Both sides acknowledged their differences, but said that they would seek to build stable, predictable relations and work together to tackle issues where they have common interests – like the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, the war in Afghanistan, and dealing with the nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea.

So maybe it is not such a radical idea.

Surely there are issues that OSCE Participating States – despite their differences – have a common interest to discuss and take action on, like pandemics, migration, reducing the risk of incidents and accidents, preventing conflicts, dealing with climate change, managing transnational threats, and understanding the impact of technology on security and human rights.

Criticism has been raised that identifying common interests is a form of appeasement or a naïve effort to achieve cooperation at any price. But no one is suggesting that principles should be sacrificed.

Ironically, many states that continuously stress the importance of principles do not want to discuss them. Yet, if we regard these principles as the bedrock of our security order or our security community, we need to explain why – not least as the basis for them to be reaffirmed. I see no problem in having a discussion about the OSCE's founding principles – not to change them or challenge them, but to exchange views on what these principles mean today. And how and why they should still be adhered to.

**A cooperative security agenda**

To summarise and conclude:

The OSCE needs to be made fit for purpose. If it cannot adapt, overcome wrangling that is crippling its procedures, and demonstrate its added value, it will lose its significance. This would weaken security and cooperation in the OSCE area at a time when cooperative security there is urgently needed. Therefore, foreign ministers should agree on a compact for an efficient organisation. The time has come to acknowledge that reasserting the OSCE's ability to act has become a political objective of strategic relevance and should not be restricted to discussion in the Advisory Committee on Management and Finance.

Furthermore, a diplomatic process should be launched within the OSCE that strengthens the concept of cooperative security and makes it possible to credibly reaffirm the fundamental principles of cooperation.

Such a cooperative security agenda was last attempted at the Astana Summit in 2010. I would argue that it is time to try again, in the build-up to a future summit – perhaps to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025.

A number of suggestions to this end have been put forward: by the President of Finland, the Parliamentary Assembly, and the Cooperative Security Initiative, among others.

Such a process could take inspiration from the early stages of consultations in Helsinki and Geneva between 1972 and 1975. It could build on momentum from the bilateral Strategic Stability Talks in Geneva and ideas generated in the Structured Dialogue. What is needed is a group of committed Participating States who are prepared to initiate and support such a process – and a series of OSCE Chairs that would steer it. Of course, such a process would need to be, at the very least, tolerated by key actors – and insulated from spoilers.

But why not? What is the alternative? Listening to like-minded colleagues in echo chambers? Digging deeper trenches or higher walls? An arms race? War?

In our increasingly interconnected world, our security is truly indivisible. We need to find ways to get along, to manage our differences, and to address common threats and challenges. In these difficult times we must strengthen cooperative security.

For those of you who feel the same – and those who are sceptical – I encourage you to read this book on *Multilateralism in Transition*. And I urge all of you in the OSCE community to work towards a cooperative security agenda.

Thank you for your attention.