

# 25th Anniversary of the Europaforum PfP Consortium

**European security depends on cooperation**

**Keynote by  
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Vienna, 5 November 2021

Madam Minister,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Congratulations on the 25th anniversary of the Europaforum!

As we look to the future of European security and defence policy, I would like to say a few words about the importance of *cooperative security*.

The conventional wisdom is that in times of crisis, in times of polarisation, states should harden their security. This means strengthening their defensive posture, pushing back against tests of their resolve, and maximising their power, even at the expense of other states. Realists would argue that this is the state of nature within what is ultimately an anarchic international system.

But history has shown us that such behaviour can lead to war – and the current crises in eastern Ukraine and the South China Sea signal warning signs of potential dangers.

What is the alternative to an escalating series of increasingly dangerous tit-for-tat reprisals? I would argue that it is cooperative security.

### **What is cooperative security?**

Cooperative security is an approach for improving relations between states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, that is based on the premise that we need to have “security *with* each other, rather than *from* each other”.

Think back to the Schuman Declaration of 1950 – marking the birth of what would later become the European Union (EU). On 9 May 1950 French foreign minister Robert Schuman proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community. He said that the solidarity of producing steel for construction rather than munitions would (and I quote) “make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible”. As difficult as relations can sometimes be within the EU, we should be thankful for the more than 70 years of peace among its member states.

But Europe is wider than the boundaries of the EU – it includes the Balkans, the Caucasus, Turkey, the Russian Federation and all the countries in between. How can so many states with such different perspectives and national interests live and work harmoniously together?

An advantage of cooperative security is that it is inclusive. Cooperative security frameworks, like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) here in Vienna, do not presuppose that there is consensus among their members. Rather, they aim to *build* such security.

This can be difficult – as I witnessed first-hand when I was Secretary General of the OSCE. After all, in an organisation with such a broad membership, not all participants are like-minded.

Therefore, forging cooperative security depends on dialogue. Just because countries have fundamental differences or even profound disagreements, it does not mean that they should not talk to each other. Indeed, precisely because they have such diverging positions, they need to talk, before it is too

late. Such dialogue can identify red lines, keep channels of communication open and make relations more predictable.

You may say that this is naïve. But look at how the United States and the Russian Federation, *because* of their differences, not despite them, have agreed to hold a Strategic Stability Dialogue (SSD) in Geneva, as a follow-up to the June summit between Presidents Biden and Putin.

Or think back to the Cold War, when NATO policy was based on two pillars: deterrence, but also détente, the so-called Harmel doctrine. This opened the way for the CSCE Helsinki process.

In short, cooperative security promotes consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy, and prevention rather than coercion.

It should be pointed out – not least to the sceptics – that cooperative security can produce action, not just talk. Recall the situation in early 2014: tensions were high in Ukraine, “little green men” were taking over key institutions in Crimea, and in eastern and southern Ukraine we witnessed destabilising trends. I was chair of the OSCE Permanent Council at the time in Vienna here, in the Hofburg. Despite fundamental differences between Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the EU and the United States – all of whom participate in the OSCE – it was possible to agree on de-escalation measures and to broker a consensus-based decision to deploy an OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. The Mission has been the eyes and ears of the international community ever since – and I would argue has contributed decisively to contain the situation. So joint action is possible, even under difficult circumstances.

In short, states can either stick to their rigid positions, refuse to talk to each other, and have an arms race that could lead to unpredictable consequences, or they can engage in dialogue, seek to de-escalate tensions, and look for ways of managing their relations peacefully.

### **Looking to the future**

Looking to the future, how could European security move onto a more cooperative path?

At a minimum, states need to exercise restraint. And they need to talk to each other. The SSD in Geneva is a good start. But this bilateral process needs to become more inclusive, for example through the OSCE’s Structured Dialogue system.

So, I hope that we will see bridges built between Geneva and Vienna. I hope that the SSD will offer political impulses allowing some of the multilateral negotiations that are currently completely stuck to become unblocked.

Military-to-military dialogue is also vital, for example in terms of practical modalities for preventing and managing incidents and accidents – particularly on the Baltic and Black seas, but also on land and in the air.

The Vienna Document on confidence- and security-building measures is a common playbook for reducing tensions and rebuilding trust. It was last updated ten years ago, but only procedurally and not substantively. Implementing the existing document in good faith is vital – and modernising it could open other doors, like for instance to rethinking and rebuilding arms control in Europe.

Political capital needs to be invested in resolving protracted conflicts and territorial disputes – like in Kosovo, Moldova, Georgia, between Armenia and Azerbaijan and, in particular, in Ukraine.

And states should seek to engage on issues where their interests overlap: for example, stabilising the situation in and around Afghanistan; cooperating against transnational organised crime; dealing with cyber threats; preparing for future pandemics and disasters; regulating potentially disruptive technologies; and ensuring the peaceful use of outer space.

But such cooperation should not be transactional. Rather, relations must be guided by common rules and principles based on international law, which would ensure fairness and predictability.

The CSCE/OSCE process produced such rules and principles and created an institution for cooperative security *par excellence*. However, there has been a lack of political attention to and political and financial investment in this institution in recent years. This undermines its effectiveness and its ability to act. This trend needs urgently to be reversed.

Furthermore, the very process of working together to develop normative frameworks can enhance cooperation, as we see with the type of global governance that is developed within UN settings in Geneva or here in Vienna.

### **Initiatives for peace**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another important consideration is that we don't have to wait for politicians and diplomats to create a more cooperative security environment.

Think back to the 1970s and 1980s and the importance of civil society organisations like the Helsinki committees, or exchanges of students and scientists, meetings among parliamentarians and journalists, or the role of cultural exchanges in building bridges.

These initiatives helped to increase understanding and generate political will.

We therefore need to explore what can be done through Track 2 or Track 1.5 initiatives to generate momentum for peace.

At the Geneva Centre for Security Policy we are looking into how to support the development of a cooperative security agenda – starting with a dialogue among experts from Europe, North America and the Russian Federation to look at process design and try to identify overlapping, converging interests. We see this as a contribution to the renewal of cooperative security in the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025.

### **An inflection point in European security**

In conclusion, we are at an inflection point in European security. Either we go back to being a continent of walls, divisions and distrust, or we look for ways to work together to deal with common threats and challenges and abide by common principles and commitments.

The last 25 years have shown what happens when states fail to cooperate. The result is not the Europe that was imagined after the end of the Cold War, not what we outlined in the 1990 Charter of Paris.

We cannot go back and undo what has been done. But we can learn the lesson that principled cooperative security is the best option for a more secure Europe.

And all of us – in our own way – can work for a safer and more cooperative Europe.

Thank you for your attention.