



Welcome Address by
Mr Didier Burkhalter
Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE
Head of the Swiss
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

***“Politics is not just about today. It is also,
and most importantly, about tomorrow.”***

**Youth for Security and Cooperation
in Europe (OSCE-Model)**

Vienna, 16 January 2014

Dear Youth Ambassadors,

Today is my first official appearance in Vienna as the OSCE's chairperson-in-office. As you can imagine, this has been quite a busy day, full of interesting and important meetings. But of all the encounters I have had today, this one with you is particularly dear to me.

It is my firm conviction that a core task of politics is to create good prospects for young people and for future generations. Politics is not just about today. It is also, and most importantly, about tomorrow.

This is why Switzerland has set up the "Youth for Security and Cooperation in Europe" project. I am delighted that you have agreed to participate in this project – and I welcome you all. You are a group of motivated, smart, and enthusiastic young people from the 57 participating States of the OSCE. It will be a great pleasure for the Swiss chairmanship to work with you.

This project provides an occasion for simulating a whole OSCE-negotiation cycle. It will allow you to get to know the OSCE and its working methods in more detail. But we aim to do more than that.

A key purpose of setting up this format is to give young people a voice – and a stake – in OSCE matters. We want you to represent youth rather than any country in this project. And we want to ensure that the work you are doing here has real impact.

This morning, the three participants from the Troika states had an opportunity to address the Permanent Council. Tonight, at the official reception by the Swiss chairmanship, all Youth Ambassadors will be invited to engage with national representatives of the participating States and with OSCE staff. We will also make sure that you can present the results of your work as Youth Ambassadors at the ministerial meeting in Basel in December 2014.

The Youth Action Plan you are negotiating in the course of this year is no mere academic exercise. Rather, it should give you the opportunity to pool ideas and put together proposals for a “real” Youth Action Plan of the OSCE. Your draft should influence the OSCE’s Youth Action Plan as much as possible.

As you know, Switzerland and Serbia are working closely together for their consecutive chairmanships. We have agreed in our Joint Workplan to make youth a priority and to work towards the development and adoption of a Youth Action Plan of the OSCE by the end of the two consecutive chairmanships in 2015. We strongly believe that such a Youth Action Plan will add great value to the work of the OSCE.

The Youth Action Plan should address the needs and expectations of the younger generation concerning security and cooperation in the OSCE area. At the same time, it should provide ways that allow the OSCE to better tap the potential of young people. It should harness and institutionalize the work you are doing here and provide the basis for a sustainable youth policy for the OSCE. For all this, we need your ideas, your input, and your commitment.

Dear Youth Ambassadors

There is actually a history to the involvement of youth in the OSCE. It is no coincidence that the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which forms the backbone of the OSCE to this day, contains a passage regarding youth. This chapter – called “Meetings among Young People” – was based on the conviction that young people can easily build bridges, make friends, and learn from each other – without being hindered by political obstacles, borders, or language barriers. Young people were seen as important agents of cooperation during the Cold War who would have a role to play in building confidence and in strengthening ties among societies, thereby contributing to pan-regional stability.

If Switzerland is eager to revitalize the notion of an OSCE youth component, this is also because the OSCE faces major challenges today

and is in need of new impulses and creativity. In the so-called “Helsinki + 40” process, participating States discuss how to adapt the organization to meet the demands of the future and get closer to the shared objective of creating a security community that encompasses both the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions.

The Swiss chairmanship firmly believes that you as Youth Ambassadors should play a role in these discussions – a role as actors, not just spectators. We also encourage you to come up with ideas in your Youth Action Plan for the “Helsinki+40” process.

In your work on the Youth Action Plan, you will touch upon some important questions. Let me just mention three:

- First, how do you, how do young people, perceive “security” in the OSCE region? What are the major threats and challenges that you are concerned about?
- Second, how could cooperation in the OSCE region be further promoted? And what could the younger generation contribute to this?
- Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, what should the OSCE’s specific role be in all this?

The Youth Action Plan that you are putting together will be an indicator for us about what really matters to you and where you think the OSCE should be heading. We are taking your work seriously. Conversely, I count on your commitment to make this project a success.

Let me close with an anecdote from a retired Swiss diplomat who was a member of the Swiss Delegation in the negotiations that led to the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. This diplomat recalls that many delegates who were involved in negotiations on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in the early 1970s were surprisingly young people.

These young delegates, according to the retired diplomat, connected very quickly among each other and became very passionate about their project. There was a spirit of cooperation across the board – there were even

marriages between delegates from East and West. And when the negotiations finally succeeded, many of these delegates shared the feeling that they had created something new and exciting together.

These delegates, dear Youth Ambassadors, felt that they were preparing for the future. This is exactly what you are doing as well. I wish you fruitful, creative, and productive discussions. And I look forward to the outcome of your negotiations.