



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
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**Opening Address by
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Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of
Foreign Affairs of Switzerland,
Ignazio Cassis**

**delivered
at the 1548th (Special) Meeting of the Permanent Council
on the occasion of the
Inauguration of Switzerland's 2026 OSCE Chairpersonship**

**Vienna, 15 January 2026
Check against delivery.**



Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour for me to address the Permanent Council for the first time in my capacity as chairman-in-office of the OSCE.

Tragedy in Crans-Montana - Gratitude for solidarity

Allow me to express my condolences on behalf of the Swiss government to all the victims of the **tragedy in Crans-Montana**, and to their families.

I would like to thank the many countries represented here that have supported us and shown their solidarity. Feeling that we are not alone in the face of such a tragedy means a great deal.

Swiss chairmanship in 2026 – Preserving the spirit of Helsinki in a world in crisis

Ladies and gentlemen

The OSCE is one of the greatest diplomatic achievements of the Cold War.

Our organisation was born at a time of acute ideological confrontation. It was designed for dangerous times, **never** for easy ones.

If it still exists today, it is because the participating States have been keenly aware for 50 years that dialogue and cooperative security are not luxuries, but necessities.

Yet Russia's war against Ukraine has plunged our organisation into the most serious crisis in its history. Our consensus has been eroded, our capacity for action reduced, and our trust deeply damaged.

A clear and committed Swiss approach to ensure the OSCE remains relevant

Ladies and gentlemen

Switzerland is embarking on its chairpersonship with a clear conviction: **the current crisis must strengthen the OSCE, not marginalise it.**

Our approach is based on three imperatives:

Effectiveness: we must focus our work on areas where it can deliver real added value. **Credibility:** our commitments must be realistic, financially viable and politically sustainable. **Responsiveness:** our organisation must be ready for action when windows of opportunity arise.

To be successful the OSCE also needs a **budget**. Achieving this as soon as possible is a priority. Alongside a budget, the OSCE requires **reforms**. We are preparing



pragmatic proposals, for the OSCE to deliver on its mandate. We will discuss them all together.

The Swiss chairpersonship is not promising the impossible. But we refuse to stand still.

Ukraine: preparing the OSCE for action

Our current priority is clear: contribute, when conditions allow, to **a just and lasting peace in Ukraine**.

To remain relevant, we must be fully involved in current and future discussions on such a peace.

Over the course of this year, Switzerland will therefore work to reaffirm this role and ensure that the OSCE is recognised as a useful and necessary actor.

To this end, I have asked the Secretary-General to step up preparations to ensure the OSCE is fit to take on a **targeted, credible and complementary** role in the event of a de-escalation or ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia.

The OSCE will be **neither** a peace-enforcement force **nor** a **miracle** solution. But it can serve useful purposes – in particular as a platform for dialogue, as a ceasefire support mechanism, or as a targeted stabilisation actor.

For the time being, however, **attacks on the population and civilian infrastructure of Ukraine are continuing**.

Switzerland strongly condemns all attacks on civilians and civilian objects. International humanitarian law must be respected at all times.

We also reiterate our call for the immediate release of the three OSCE staff members detained by Russia.

The OSCE: a political platform, not a spectator

Ladies and gentlemen

This war is the greatest challenge our organisation has faced since its creation: we must re-establish trust between all our members and **get back to the spirit of Helsinki**.

We must restore the meaning of the **consensus** on which the OSCE was built: not a right to veto, but a commitment to make progress all together. With a chairmanship prepared to make **clear political choices**.



There is a brochure in front of you that sets out the priorities of the Swiss chairpersonship and presents the conferences we will be organising this year.

We want the OSCE to remain:

1. A platform **for inclusive dialogue**, even when talking is difficult;
2. A forum able to **anticipate the technological transformations** that are already redefining our security;
3. An **actor that is credible and complementary** to the other international mechanisms;
4. An **impartial guardian of our collective security on the ground**, ready to observe, document and support peace as soon as possible.

We must fulfil the expectations of the founders of the OSCE: They are today the same as 50 years ago: peace and security.

Europe and the world were **not** at peace in 1975.

And yet diplomacy has prevailed. When instability takes hold, we can and must **act with courage and clarity**.

Conclusion

Thanks to all those who ensure the day-to-day life of the OSCE: the Secretariat, autonomous institutions and committee chairs.

I look forward to working closely with all of you to **ensure** that the OSCE remains able to act.

Thank you.