Key-note speech by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Regional Consultations of the Group of Governmental Experts on advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

“Global Advancements and Regional Efforts: Addressing International Cyber/ICT security policy challenges”

Bratislava
18 June 2019
Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Slovak Chairmanship in Office for hosting this conference and inviting me to speak. In particular, I want to thank them for incorporating these regional consultations for the Group of Governmental Experts into this conference’s programme. I am also grateful for the strong support from the OSCE secretariat and Ambassador Karoly Dan in getting this initiative off the ground.

I am delighted to be present at this first regional consultation of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing responsible State behaviour with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I would like to make use of this opportunity to briefly reflect on three things. First, the importance of dialogue and trust-building around international ICT-security, second, the work of the OSCE in this area, and third, how we see the newly mandated intergovernmental processes at the United Nations.

1. The importance of dialogue and trust-building in promoting international ICT-security

As you are aware, in 2018, the United Nations General Assembly established two processes to take forward the issue of international ICT-security. One is a Group of Governmental Experts, or GGE, and the other is an Open-Ended Working Group, or OEWG. And while this meeting is part of the GGE process, I am very pleased that we are joined here today not only by Ambassador Guilherme Patriota of Brazil, Chair of the GGE, but also by Ambassador Jürg Lauber of Switzerland, in his capacity of Chair of the OEWG. I believe that both of them being here today is a demonstration of their strong commitment to promoting coordination, synergy and complementarities between the two processes.

I consider this quite a significant occasion. It is the first of a series of regional consultations of the GGE, held just before the substantive work of the GGE and the OEWG will commence. We are at an important juncture, one in which we have to start shaping ideas about how to take forward the international community’s efforts to further advance the peaceful use of ICTs.
And, ladies and gentlemen, there is strong impetus to do so. Cyber incidents have been undermining trust between States and increasingly pose a risk to international peace and security.

Consequently, Secretary-General Guterres has made ICT security a priority issue. In his Agenda on Disarmament, he made a commitment to work with Member States to foster a culture of accountability and adherence to emerging norms, rules and principles on responsible behaviour in cyberspace. He also established an independent High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Jack Ma. The Panel’s Report issued last week, sheds light on how to harness the key opportunities and address the challenges facing us in the digital sphere.

I hope that the discussions you have had this morning, as well as those ahead of us, contribute to these objectives. I view these regional consultations as a two-way street. On the one hand, GGE Members have the chance to reach out to the Participating States of the OSCE. On the other hand – and this is what I find even more important – the Participating States have an opportunity to feed their regional perspectives into the work of the GGE.

I hope that today’s conversations will help Ambassador Patriota, other GGE members, as well as ambassador Lauber, to gain more insights into the dynamics, experiences and accomplishments of the OSCE’s regional efforts. Your inputs will also help the United Nations on understanding various measures that will enhance dialogue and trust in the digital space.

2. The work of the OSCE on international ICT-security

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE has much to offer to the work of the GGE. It has made important strides in promoting international ICT-security. I am especially impressed by how it has translated confidence-building measures, including those contained in GGE reports, to the regional context through Permanent Council decisions 1106 and 1202. By doing so, the Organization plays a strategic role in promoting security and cooperation in Europe.

Since the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1975, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) have emerged as a vital tool for risk-reduction.
And although ICT-security is a relatively new field, CBMs can also be effective in the digital era. ICT-incidents can spread quickly across borders, and the challenges of their attribution can lead to misperceptions, miscalculation, and, ultimately, unintended escalation. In this context, CBMs can enhance interstate co-operation, transparency, predictability and stability in the use of ICTs by States. By putting these measures into practice, a reciprocal system for reducing risks can emerge. I am, therefore, encouraged to hear that many Participating States have decided to adopt a CBM.

The work of the OSCE also underlines the great value of building synergies between recommendations made at the global level and regional dynamics. In a welcome development, the OSCE has even taken the lead on developing CBMs that go beyond those contained in the GGE reports, which could be very useful at the global level and in other regions. I hope these synergies will continue to be formed, and that the experience of the OSCE in its work on CBMs will inform the work of the GGE, as well as the OEWG.

Other regions have also made important strides in implementing different recommendations of previous GGE reports, including the Organization of American States and the ASEAN Regional Forum. I consider this a sign of how the diversity between and within regions and specific challenges in different regions can be taken into account in operationalizing the recommendations made at the global level. Through the six regional consultations, the GGE will hopefully be equipped with an in-depth understanding of the work being undertaken across regions.

3. The newly mandated intergovernmental processes at the United Nations

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, allow me to say a few words about the GGE and OEWG processes from the UN’s perspective.

First, I believe both groups can build on the foundation laid by the work of the past GGEs, whose findings and recommendations have accumulated into what I believe can be called a normative framework that guides States in their use of ICTs. This framework includes, of course, the CBMs, but also norms of responsible State behaviour, and the application of international law to cyberspace and capacity-building. In this context, I am encouraged to hear many States express the view that the upcoming deliberations do not start from a blank slate.
Second, as we proceed into the substantive work of both groups, I encourage Member States to use the opportunity to develop a collective vision of what we – the international community – want to achieve in our digital environment.

And although States have to take the lead in shaping this environment, I believe industry, academia and civil society have a vital role to play.

To facilitate the upcoming deliberations, it is important that we work in a constructive atmosphere, characterized by close coordination and complementarity between the two groups.

There seems to be a degree of convergence emerging around the idea that the Open-ended Working Group could focus on confidence-building measures, and issues of implementation and capacity-building, while the Group of Governmental Experts can focus on more technical issues.

One thing is clear: it is not possible to have success in only one of the processes, both processes need to succeed.

How this will further take shape is in the hands of Member States. But I would like to assure you that, as always, the Secretariat is ready to support you and work with you in this vital endeavour.

Thank you.