



Chairmanship: Ukraine

945th PLENARY MEETING OF THE FORUM

1. Date: Wednesday, 6 May 2020 (via video teleconference)

Opened: 10.05 a.m.
Suspended: 1 p.m.
Resumed: 3 p.m.
Closed: 4.30 p.m.

2. Chairperson: Ambassador Y. Tsymbaliuk

Point of order: Russian Federation, Chairperson, United States of America

The Chairperson also reminded the FSC of the technical modalities for the conduct of meetings via teleconferencing technology during the COVID-19 pandemic (FSC.GAL/37/20 OSCE+).

3. Subjects discussed – Statements – Decisions/documents adopted:

Agenda item 1: SECURITY DIALOGUE ON COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE POLITICO-MILITARY ASPECTS OF SECURITY IN THE OSCE REGION

Address by the OSCE Secretary General: Chairperson, Secretary General, Croatia-European Union (with the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia; the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area; as well as Andorra, Georgia, Moldova, San Marino and Ukraine, in alignment) (FSC.DEL/85/20), Spain (Annex 1), United Kingdom (Annex 2), Canada, Azerbaijan (FSC.DEL/89/20 OSCE+), Armenia (FSC.DEL/86/20), United States of America (Annex 3), FSC Co-ordinator for Projects on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition (Hungary) (Annex 4), Turkey (FSC.DEL/82/20 OSCE+), Ukraine (FSC.DEL/87/20), Russian Federation (Annex 5)

Agenda item 2: GENERAL STATEMENTS

Situation in and around Ukraine: Ukraine (FSC.DEL/90/20), Croatia-European Union (with the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area; as well as Andorra, Georgia, Moldova, San Marino and Ukraine, in alignment) (FSC.DEL/84/20), Russian Federation, United Kingdom (FSC.DEL/83/20 OSCE+), Canada, United States of America

Agenda item 3: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) *Deadlines for the annual exchange of information on defence planning and the Information Exchange on the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security:* Chairperson
- (b) *Update of the OSCE Best Practice Guides on small arms and light weapons and conventional ammunition:* Chairperson of the Informal Group of Friends on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition (Latvia)
- (c) *Small arms and light weapons (SALW) information exchange:* Representative of the Conflict Prevention Centre (Annex 6)
- (d) *2020 Global Exchange of Military Information:* Representative of the Conflict Prevention Centre
- (e) *Announcement by Andorra of its unavailability to chair the Forum for Security Co-operation in 2021:* Andorra
- (f) *Matters of protocol:* Montenegro

4. Next meeting:

Wednesday, 13 May 2020, at 10 a.m., via video teleconference



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Forum for Security Co-operation**

FSC.JOUR/951
6 May 2020
Annex 1

ENGLISH
Original: SPANISH

945th Plenary Meeting
FSC Journal No. 951, Agenda item 1

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF SPAIN

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Spain aligns itself fully with the statement by the European Union.

I should also like to make some additional brief comments in a national capacity on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on our work at the OSCE – in particular, to thank Turkey as the holder of the previous Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) for the adroit and prompt manner in which it reacted to the new circumstances, and also to provide some information on the crucial role played by the Spanish armed forces in managing the crisis.

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the OSCE security situation

The COVID-19 crisis may well be the greatest threat to the security of our citizens and societies since the Second World War. It is a global challenge that calls for global responses. It is also an opportunity to promote effective and inclusive multilateralism, and to strengthen international co-operation. As the world's largest regional organization and the largest security organization in Europe, the OSCE can and should play a substantial role at this time in tackling the negative consequences of this pandemic through its comprehensive approach to security. If it is to remain relevant, the OSCE must redouble its efforts in order to continue fulfilling its mandates in a context of unprecedented complexity. At the same time, it should take the opportunity to reflect on how the Organization can make a significant contribution to the ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic. This, in Spain's view, is the complex task facing the OSCE and, by implication, each and every one of its bodies, including of course the FSC.

I should therefore like to congratulate the Ukrainian FSC Chairmanship for devoting the first Security Dialogue held during its tenure to the impact of COVID-19 on the security situation in the OSCE area. In the present crisis, the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security is particularly relevant, because this challenge shows how closely all of the issues and all of the players involved are interconnected. Now more than ever, it is essential to effectively link up the deliberations taking place in each of the OSCE bodies.

Accordingly, in my capacity as the Chairperson of the Informal Working Group on the Structured Dialogue, I have sought, in consultation with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship, to contribute to this collective effort by ensuring that the impact of COVID-19 is included on the agenda of the Informal Working Group's next meeting, which will take place via videoconferencing on 4 and 5 June. In line with the approach that I presented at the opening meeting, this impact can be analysed from a strictly politico-military perspective, but also from a more generic or strategic one, which, as I see it, is equally important and should complement the former. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, as few other security challenges have, that the OSCE and its bodies cannot operate as a system of isolated "silos". Today, more than ever before, the OSCE should work like a system of "communicating vessels". I trust that the Structured Dialogue session in June will serve as a fitting follow-up to today's Security Dialogue, and that subsequently the Structured Dialogue as such will be enriched by the ongoing contributions that other OSCE bodies will be expected to make.

Moving on to the strictly politico-military sphere, I should now like to add a few words about the Spanish armed forces' role in the management of the crisis.

As you know, this crisis has had a very strong impact on Spain, where it is leaving behind a profound trail of pain and suffering.

In order to tackle the crisis, the Council of Ministers, at an extraordinary meeting on Saturday, 14 March 2020, approved a Royal Decree declaring a state of emergency throughout the whole country for a period of 15 days. In the days immediately preceding the declaration of the state of emergency, the Spanish armed forces suspended all their military exercises and manoeuvres so as to avoid troop movements that might facilitate the spread of COVID-19, and made all their capabilities available to help combat the pandemic.

The above-mentioned Royal Decree specified that the competent authorities delegated for the purpose could request interventions by the armed forces. Moreover, it established that military personnel performing duties in connection with the coronavirus crisis would have the status of law enforcement officers, thereby complementing the work of the State security forces on the front line of interaction with the public.

On 15 March, the military launched Operation "Balmis", which covers the whole territory of Spain and involves measures aimed at dealing with the health crisis. Under the single command of the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Spanish armed forces have, among numerous other tasks: worked together with the State security forces on the control and monitoring of public spaces and borders; disinfected essential service facilities; reinforced civilian healthcare capacity through the deployment of military medical and pharmaceutical services; helped to set up field hospitals (notably the one erected at the IFEMA exhibition complex in Madrid, which was equipped with 5,500 beds and 49 intensive care units) and to convert hotels into medical facilities; shipped medical supplies by air and helped to distribute them; provided inter-hospital transport for patients and looked after the homeless; protected critical infrastructures; and carried out cyberdefence activities.

A total of 149,334 military personnel have taken part in Operation "Balmis" since it was launched.

It is in fact the Spanish armed forces' largest ever peacetime operation, which goes to show the importance of having well-prepared armed forces that are ready to contribute with all their capabilities to the resolution of a crisis which defies the traditional military concept of security.

Thank you very much.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



945th Plenary Meeting
FSC Journal No.951, Agenda item 1

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

We welcome this opportunity to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the security situation in the OSCE area. This global crisis knows no borders. It is affecting all participating States sat here today, across all dimensions, and we will unfortunately feel its effects for some considerable time.

However, it is not our militaries who are on the frontline of this crisis and I would like to take a moment to reflect on the brave men and women who are fighting this pandemic in medical centres and hospitals around the world. We thank them for their service and recognize the sacrifices so many have already made.

Mr. Chairperson, in times of crisis, we must come together. Co-operation and co-ordination allow us to become a force multiplier, in this case responding to COVID-19, including helping to stop its spread. The positive engagement and co-operation of all partner States to co-ordinate the postponement of verification activities is testament to this and demonstrates that consensus can be achieved quickly and decisively when there is a common and shared purpose – true to the spirit and principles of the OSCE.

However, we must also be cognizant of the risks that COVID-19 presents. It must not distract from the continued violations of international law and basic OSCE principles we continue to be faced with. These are now more important than ever. Ensuring countries do not use the current crisis to pursue their own political objectives, including further violations of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-use of force and the undermining of human rights and fundamental freedoms is critical.

So, whilst the co-ordinated postponement of verification activities is laudable and necessary in the current circumstances, we will want to do all we can to maintain reciprocal military transparency where and when this is possible. And, with COVID-19 potentially impacting military readiness, we must not allow situations to arise which increase mistrust and the potential for miscalculations or misperceptions. Clear and timely information exchanges – in accordance with participating States' commitments – are essential to mitigate these risks.

When the time is right, we must all demonstrate a shared resolve and determination to resume verification activities, showing the same level of co-operation and co-ordination as we did in response to COVID-19.

Mr. Chairperson, during these unprecedented times all participating States must respect the OSCE's fundamental principles and engage constructively.

However, in a series of demarches and at the FSC opening session last week, our Russian colleagues called for an end to European exercises and for all partner States to show restraint during this crisis. Yet, regrettably, we have seen quite the opposite from them. Over the past months, despite the pandemic, Russia has continued to conduct provocative military activities, testing and probing Allies readiness throughout this crisis and necessitating that we remain alert. These activities can endanger civilian and military lives and are certainly not in the spirit of the mutual support Russia called for at the last session.

Last week, we strongly condemned the restrictions on the Special Monitoring Mission's ability to cross the line of contact imposed by Russia-backed armed formations under the pretext of COVID-19 measures and we do so again today. The impact on the UN and humanitarian agencies' ability to operate also continues and risks exacerbating this perilous situation.

We call on Russia to match its words with its actions and build trust for a common good in this time of crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Forum for Security Co-operation**

FSC.JOUR/951
6 May 2020
Annex 3

Original: ENGLISH

945th Plenary Meeting
FSC Journal No. 951, Agenda item 1

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Mr. Chairperson,

Thank you for convening this very relevant and timely Security Dialogue. The United States stands with our fellow OSCE participating States in the fight against the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The US Department of State and the US Agency for International Development have committed more than 600 million US dollars in emergency health, humanitarian, and economic assistance, in addition to more than 3 billion US dollars of generous donations from our private sector and non-profits globally. Let me take a moment to acknowledge our healthcare workers on the frontlines of this pandemic, as the United Kingdom and Canada have also highlighted. The US military has also played an important role in pandemic relief, as has been the case for many of our military forces, including those of the NATO Alliance, which is deploying rapid air mobility to facilitate unimpeded military air transport of medical supplies and resources across Europe.

Regarding this Forum's focus on confidence- and security-building measures in the politico-military sphere, the United States acknowledges the former Turkish FSC Chairmanship's appeal in March for participating States to refrain from or postpone Vienna Document verification activities until prevailing conditions allow. The United States also supports the request, along the same lines, by the Chairperson of the Joint Consultative Group of the CFE States Parties. We likewise abide by the request of the Chairperson of the Open Skies Consultative Commission for an operational pause of observation flights until 31 May. Clearly, in the short term, the conduct of verification activities must give way to extraordinary public safety concerns.

The United States commends the 40 participating States that have used F-messages to notify the status of verification activities for their countries. Proactive communication in a time of crisis provides an example of how the OSCE Communications Network can increase transparency and trust, even when a crisis is unrelated to armed conflict or conventional arms control. The co-operation and restraint demonstrated by participating States in pausing verification activities is laudable.

We note that this is all in the spirit of the Vienna Document, which in no way could have foreseen the current crisis. Indeed, the nearest the Vienna Document comes to addressing a global pandemic is a note in paragraph 30.14 on seminars in the military field regarding OSCE-related tasks such as the participation of armed forces in disaster and emergency relief and humanitarian assistance.

In this light we note the Russian Federation's message of 25 March announcing a snap "inspection" of its Western and Central Military Districts, aimed at training command and control elements and forces conducting counter-epidemic activities. We appreciate that the Russian Federation provided some information regarding the exercise which apparently included 82,000 personnel, 13,000 pieces of military equipment and 30 aircraft. However, we do not believe that the conduct of a non-transparent, massive snap military exercise is a confidence-building response to a global pandemic. To conform more readily with both the letter and spirit of the Vienna Document, we invite the Russian delegation to brief the FSC on details of the lessons learned and value gained from the exercise on pandemic relief and related issues, as all of our militaries might benefit from sharing such best practices.

Mr. Chairperson,

As you and the participating States in this Forum are aware, while Russia was undertaking this snap "inspection," large-scale US military activity in Europe had already ceased or had been substantially scaled back. As communicated through the OSCE Communications Network on 2 April, the United States informed participating States that our "Defender-Europe 2020" armoured brigade combat team live-fire exercise had been cancelled, as were "Swift Response 2020", the "Defender-Europe 2020" command post exercise, "Saber Strike 2020", and "Allied Spirit XI". These steps were taken to put the health and safety of our citizens and military personnel first. The United States transparently modified our planned exercises, and we strongly believe that transparency, not snap inspections, is the right way forward.

Mr. Chairperson, while the COVID pandemic has limited the conduct of military activities and verification, the United States commends the OSCE participating States for continuing to implement, to a large extent, confidence- and security-building measures such as the annual exchanges of information on the Code of Conduct and the Global Exchange of Military Information. We thank participating States that have submitted their annual information and we look forward to receiving information from those that have yet to finalize their submissions. We understand that there may be reasonable delays in annual submissions, including in our own case, due to COVID-19.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow us to reflect for a moment on the broader ramifications as many participating States, including the United States, implement temporary measures to restrict the spread of this disease. Let me stress that in no case should governments exploit the pandemic to infringe on fundamental freedoms and democratic processes. We believe the OSCE has a unique role to play in supporting nations as they strive to maintain a balance between protecting public health and upholding their Helsinki Final Act commitments, and we consider this a cross-cutting security issue that merits further discussion. While most participating States are co-operating in a spirit of transparency, we call on some malign actors

to cease the intentional and reckless dissemination of disinformation and misinformation, which is nothing less than hybrid warfare in a time of global crisis.

Allow me to also note in this context that the United States remains deeply concerned that quarantine procedures are being used as an excuse to impede the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in non-government controlled areas. We will speak to this issue under general statements, but it bears emphasizing that the Mission's leadership has demonstrated that it can operate safely, both for its own personnel and the citizens of Ukraine it is designed to help protect, and it should be afforded the full access and freedom of movement it needs to fulfil its mandate.

In closing, Mr. Chairperson, the United States looks forward to a return to normal, as do we all. We see a future in which COVID-19 has been defeated, and we expect that we will emerge from this crisis tested but stronger. As today's Security Dialogue on COVID-19 demonstrates, and as exemplified by the robust exchange of information via the OSCE Communications Network, the FSC, conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building measures continue to play an important role in sustaining and building trust and confidence in the OSCE area, even in this challenging time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. We request this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Forum for Security Co-operation**

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Annex 4

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945th Plenary Meeting
FSC Journal No. 951, Agenda item 1

**STATEMENT BY
THE FSC CO-ORDINATOR FOR PROJECTS ON SMALL ARMS AND
LIGHT WEAPONS AND STOCKPILES OF CONVENTIONAL
AMMUNITION (HUNGARY)**

Esteemed Chairperson,
Excellences,
Dear colleagues,

Allow me to observe that the topic of today's Security Dialogue is certainly timely, and that the exchanges of views have been extremely insightful.

The Secretary General has already touched on the issue of the OSCE's technical assistance projects on small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SCA). In my capacity as FSC Co-ordinator for Projects on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition, I would like to shed further light by adding some observations on the impact of COVID-19 on these extrabudgetary assistance projects.

The OSCE Secretariat and field operations are currently implementing 16 practical assistance projects in all the OSCE regions, addressing a wide array of security and safety risks related to SALW and SCA.

There is no clear-cut or simple "yes or no" answer to the question whether the COVID-19 crisis is affecting SALW/SCA practical assistance projects. Likewise, attempting to define the impact at this stage can only result in a very vague picture.

What I can say is that in this relatively short period (namely, the last three months) the relevance and coherence of the SALW/SCA assistance projects have not changed. The projects respond to assistance requests and are in line with the OSCE normative base, including best practices on SALW and conventional ammunition.

However, what have changed are the levels of effectiveness in implementation and in the identification and development of projects following assistance requests from OSCE participating States. How can we verify an assistance request if external experts cannot travel

to the State requesting assistance? How can we carry out training events designed for the transfer of practical experience and skills if trainers and trainees cannot come together? How can SALW/SCA infrastructure be improved if OSCE contractors do not have access to project sites?

Therefore, at this stage of the crisis OSCE programme/project managers are mostly responding to the above-listed challenges by rescheduling project activities without any significant budgetary changes. In support of this, the OSCE has already initiated requests to donors to extend their pledges. I therefore ask for your understanding and flexibility in responding to these requests.

The continuation of the COVID-19 crisis is resulting in increased impact on projects, particularly to the disadvantage of the wider outcomes and benefits that these projects generate. In terms of specifically formulated risks, some of the possible long-term consequences could be:

- Safety and security risks: increased availability of SALW for organized crime and terrorism, decreased border security and management, human casualties in the event of unplanned explosions at munition sites;
- Financial and economic risks: reduced ability to expand donor funding, potential expiry of donor pledges, reduced funding streams in support of SALW/SCA practical assistance projects;
- Environmental risks: increased risk of water and soil contamination in the event of explosions at storage sites for SALW/SCA/highly toxic rocket fuel components;
- Strategic and reputation-related risks: reduced ability to increase the OSCE's effectiveness and efficiency in implementing norms, principles and practical measures in the field of SALW/SCA.

However, we should not be completely negative, because while this situation presents many challenges, it also offers new opportunities. For example, expanding the use of e-learning within OSCE SALW/SCA practical projects will now become a regular phenomenon. This may even contribute to a long-term reduction of costs and, for many OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, an increased awareness regarding the accessibility of the OSCE's body of knowledge in the field of SALW/SCA.

In conclusion, I would like to express my satisfaction with the continuity of OSCE SALW/SCA project work in this extraordinary situation. These projects provide technical, practical and tangible assistance to OSCE participating States, visibly generating positive change on the ground in a relatively short period of time.

Mr. Chairperson,

Last but not least, I would like to draw the attention of delegations to the Synopsis of Status of SALW and Conventional Ammunition Projects in the OSCE as of 31 March 2020, circulated on 21 April 2020 under the reference number FSC.GAL/38/20. If the distinguished

participating States need more information, your Co-ordinator and the FSC Support Section are always at your disposal.

Thank you for your attention and I would kindly ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Forum for Security Co-operation**

FSC.JOUR/951

6 May 2020

Annex 5

ENGLISH

Original: RUSSIAN

945th Plenary Meeting

FSC Journal No. 951, Agenda item 1

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Mr. Chairperson,

We join our colleagues in expressing our gratitude to the Ukrainian Chairmanship for its proposal to discuss in the Forum the impact of COVID-19 on the politico-military aspects of the security situation in the OSCE area. We welcome the Secretary General of the OSCE, Mr. Thomas Greminger, and thank him for his statement.

Mr. Chairperson,

First of all, I should like to express to all the distinguished delegations our solidarity in the fight against the coronavirus.

The pandemic is an unprecedented test of strength for the OSCE participating States. We are talking not only about our capacity to counter the spread of the virus effectively, but also about our ability to preserve, in so doing, dignity, decency, co-operativeness and the other best qualities inherent in human society.

At today's Forum meeting, we believe it would be useful to focus attention not only on the exchange of information on national efforts to combat the pandemic, but also to concentrate on drawing up a positive unifying agenda for the OSCE area, expanding fields of co-operation and outlining possible ways of working together. Such an approach would demonstrate the maturity of our Organization and set an example of a responsible approach to solving a most intractable problem. And, on the whole, the discussion has proceeded in precisely that vein.

Unfortunately, some of the statements we have heard have left us with a dismal impression. We never cease to be surprised at how cynically the delegations in question exploit the coronavirus topic for the purposes of information warfare. We note that their arguments are driven by a blatant desire to shift the blame on to others and to deflect the attention of their own societies and of the international community to the search for an "external enemy".

We are flabbergasted at the endeavours of the media in some OSCE participating States and of high-ranking officials who accuse our country of engaging in some kind of “disinformation” campaign in connection with the viral pandemic, of allegedly striving to drive a wedge between countries or wreak some kind of havoc. In particular, we have asked the Department of State of the United States of America to provide evidence in support of such claims, but we have not received any plausible explanations, let alone evidence.

It is easy to see when such campaigns have their origin in Western governmental circles and in Western media. For example, they instantly kicked off as soon as the idea of Russian aid to Italy and the United States in connection with the pandemic was floated or as soon as China had demonstrated its effectiveness in combating the virus and began stepping up its assistance to many countries around the world.

Russia was guided by a simple rationale in its decision to help other countries. For example, in the United States and specifically in New York the spread of the virus was approaching a peak. Consequently, patients, doctors and medical personnel were in urgent need of a large quantity of medical products, including equipment and sanitation supplies. That is why we thought it right to extend a helping hand and sent a considerable volume of such products there. We did this with no strings attached, that is, without demanding or expecting anything in return. We noted with appreciation the US proposal that if we needed help at a later stage ourselves, the United States would come to our aid.

It is rather sad that some countries are now trying to introduce geopolitics into the context of the pandemic, into a scenario where it is essential to save people’s lives, provide them with the necessary medicines and food, and take the measures that are required from a public health perspective. The world finds itself in an unprecedented situation. People’s prospects in life are being shattered; some are even losing their lives. Against this background, we fail to understand the reaction of a number of members of the Alliance and their negative assessments of the purely peaceful, humanitarian aid coming from Russia. I would emphasize that our assistance to a country’s population in no way impinges on the unity of NATO. We consider it irresponsible and unedifying on their part to discuss in such terms actions that are entirely natural and the right thing to do in a situation of universal human tragedy.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our country is actively involved in the collective efforts to tackle the pandemic and its consequences. By now everyone understands that only by working together can humanity rise to this unparalleled challenge of modern times. We are doing a great deal within Russia itself and also endeavouring to assist other States as best as we can.

We regard the attempts to pin fanciful accusations on Russia as an unseemly continuation of the Russophobia “embraced” by certain political forces. They are not at all concerned about what is required now at this difficult juncture for the whole world.

Today’s discussion, particularly the statement by the delegation of Ukraine in its national capacity (to which we shall respond in detail when we consider the next agenda item), has unfortunately demonstrated quite clearly the dangerous tendency of bringing such sentiments to the Forum’s platform. In that connection, we are obliged once again to express

our concern about the future of discussions on pan-European security issues. We urge our colleagues to return to a professional discussion and to free it of politicized opportunistic assessments.

An example of a constructive approach to assessing the situation in the light of the pandemic and its impact on politico-military aspects of security is the telephone conversation that took place a few days ago between the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, and the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Tod Wolters. The businesslike nature of their discussion precluded the use of such words as “propaganda” or “disinformation”.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today, the entire world is concerned about the threat posed by an epidemic that has over 180 States in its grip. According to international medical and health organizations, the total number of infected people in the world is approaching 4 million. It is absolutely clear to us that only by pooling our efforts can we reliably protect people against the pandemic. The armed forces are also involved in this task.

A difficult situation is emerging in Russia. However, all the necessary measures are being taken. Since 12 March, a dedicated task force has been working to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection in the Russian armed forces. By 15 May, 16 new modular medical centres with a total capacity of 1,600 beds will become operational in various regions of our country in two stages co-ordinated by the Ministry of Defence. The health of military personnel at educational institutions and in military units and defence ministry organizations is being monitored. Essential supplies of medicines, personal protective equipment and medical products have been built up.

The suddenness of the global outbreak of COVID-19 and the unpredictability of the scale of its consequences mean it is essential to improve the readiness of the armed forces to carry out a full range of disease control measures, which include quarantine and treatment measures and the disinfection of neighbourhoods and various premises in areas where large numbers of infected persons have been identified.

To that end, pursuant to a decision by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, a snap inspection took place from 25 to 28 March to assess the readiness of troops to carry out tasks for the containment of emergency situations arising from the threat of the spread of viral diseases.

Military command and control units; formations and military units of the Western and Central Military Districts; the Russian Aerospace Forces; the Russian Strategic Missile Forces; nuclear, biological and chemical protection troops; engineering troops; and medical support organizations subordinated to the central command were involved in the training exercises.

We should like to emphasize that no live-fire exercises or missile launches took place during the snap inspection. The training exercises were of a purely medical-humanitarian nature and did not fall under the provisions of the Vienna Document 2011. Nevertheless, our country showed transparency and circulated the relevant notification

(CBM/RU/20/0025/F41/O) via the OSCE Communications Network. It should be noted in particular that the military attachés of all States were notified of this exercise, and every day of the training exercises was given detailed coverage on the official website of the Russian Ministry of Defence.

Bearing that in mind, we should like to respond to the statement by the representative of the United Kingdom, who used his debut at the Forum for a confrontational and politicized attack and baselessly claimed that “despite the pandemic, Russia has continued to conduct provocative military activities, testing and probing Allies’ readiness throughout this crisis and necessitating that we remain alert”. The absurdity of such insinuations does not warrant commenting. However, what does put us on our guard is the blatantly aggressive notion of the Alliance needing to maintain its combat readiness against Russia. Such rhetoric is absolutely unacceptable at the OSCE – an organization whose main purpose is to develop co-operation and dialogue in the interests of strengthening trust and security. We hope that henceforth the UK representative will eschew a confrontational tone and will not forget about the basic principles of the OSCE.

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia stands in solidarity with all those who have suffered the scourge of the coronavirus and will do all it can to help. In response to appeals by the leaders of a number of foreign States, we have provided practical assistance in combating the pandemic to the population of Italy, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia, Belarus and many other countries in different parts of the world.

In accordance with the decision of the President of Russia, in a very short space of time specialized units of the Russian armed forces were established, including brigades of medical and paramedical personnel and biological protection specialists. Russian Aerospace Forces transport aircraft took our specialists to the above-mentioned countries, where they are doing their best to help with humanitarian tasks.

The efforts of Russian epidemiologists in Italy are a graphic and very fruitful example of the aid provided by our country at a most critical period in the evolution of the epidemiological situation, which was characterized by a large number of people falling victim to the disease. Russia took this step from the noblest, most humane motives, displaying selfless co-operative assistance.

Russian specialists have made a practical contribution to the improvement of epidemiological indicators in Serbia, where, as reported by the country’s authorities, the relevant values have begun to decline steadily. The Serbian Government also appreciated the fact that aid was provided to the Republika Srpska within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Member States of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are seeking effective mechanisms for preventing and combating the coronavirus. Consultations with the heads of military medical services on the organization of preventive measures in the armed forces and co-operation with public health authorities, notably on the management of seriously ill patients, were conducted at the CSTO Crisis Response Centre via videoconference.

On 23 March, in view of the rapid spread of COVID-19 all around the world, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, appealed to the parties to regional armed conflicts to stop the fighting immediately, introduce ceasefire regimes and establish “humanitarian pauses”. Russia supported that appeal. As the global epidemiological situation continues to deteriorate, the parties to the conflicts in many countries have heeded the Secretary General’s appeal. A reduction in the intensity of the fighting has been observed in Cameroon, Colombia, Myanmar, the Sudan, South Sudan, Afghanistan and the Philippines. The situation in Syria is stabilizing. At the same time, intensive hostilities continue unabated in quite a number of countries. And in some cases, the pandemic has even become a pretext for new belligerent moves. In particular, the Ukrainian security forces continue to shell the territory of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on a massive scale, resulting in casualties among the civilian population.

As for the freedom of movement of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) in Donbas in the context of the epidemic, we once again caution against any politicization of this question. All the necessary arrangements for the Mission’s work can be determined via contacts with the local authorities, which the Mission is meant to develop in accordance with its mandate in the interests of peace and security in the region.

We should also like to draw attention to the fact that the OSCE has frozen the field activities of most of its field operations. Although the SMM’s work continues, more than 150 SMM staff have been recalled from Ukraine to their home countries because of the pandemic. Steps are obviously being taken everywhere to prevent specialists working for the field operations from becoming infected. Accordingly, we urge against the inflaming of emotions around the decision by the authorities of certain areas of Donbas to introduce precautionary measures in relation to crossing the line of contact in the zone of armed confrontation.

We would also point out the need for the SMM to pay more attention to areas behind Ukrainian armed forces lines. During the pandemic, it is especially important to monitor the routes used by the Ukrainian Government to bring weapons to the line of contact. The objective of such monitoring is to provide early warning of any escalation, thereby preventing further casualties and destruction.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today’s discussion has shown that the armed forces of the OSCE participating States are being actively engaged by national governments in efforts to combat COVID-19. Providing concrete assistance to the civilian population is understandably at the forefront now. With that in mind, the Russian Federation proposed to a number of NATO countries that during the pandemic military exercises and military activities be suspended. In raising this point for consideration, we were prompted by the importance of creating an atmosphere conducive to combating the real threat associated with the spread of the coronavirus and also by the need to free up the forces and means required by States to carry out the most urgent tasks. Attention should also be paid to the fact that the pandemic has confirmed the practical relevance of all the instruments of international co-operation, including military co-operation.

Mr. Chairperson,

The coming days in May will mark the 75th anniversary of victory in the Second World War, which was the culmination of colossal efforts by many countries and peoples and required huge sacrifices by millions of soldiers and civilians. We pay tribute to the memory of their gallantry and courage.

Unfortunately, we are obliged to point out that the statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States to the OSCE, Mr. James S. Gilmore III, during the discussions at the Forum meeting on 29 April was a negative example of the art of diplomacy. In trying to give a loose interpretation of the tenor of the joint statement by the President of the Russian Federation and the President of the United States of America on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the meeting of Soviet and American troops on the Elbe, he patently downplayed the importance of that document and forgot about the basic norms of diplomacy and elementary ethics as he slipped into a lecturing tone. On 6 May, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a comment in response.

We urge the US representatives to “put aside differences, build trust, and cooperate in pursuit of a greater cause”, as it says in the joint statement. This is also relevant in the context of discussions on the theme of today’s meeting of the Forum.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



945th Plenary Meeting

FSC Journal No. 951, Agenda item 3(c)

**STATEMENT BY
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CONFLICT PREVENTION
CENTRE**

The Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) would like to inform the participating States on recent developments with regard to the small arms and light weapons (SALW) reporting templates. At the outset, let me recall that in 2017 the OSCE information exchange template “For the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Supplementary Decisions” was harmonized with the UN reporting template “On the Implementation of Programme of Action on SALW”. This was done to diminish the reporting burden of the participating States. In addition, the online reporting tool for the participating States was developed. It facilitated the electronic and simultaneous submissions to both the OSCE and UNODA.

The CPC would like to announce that the United Nations has recently introduced changes to its reporting template for the Programme of Action on SALW, reflecting the outcomes of the UN Third Review Conference (RevCon3). The updated UN template is restructured and supplemented with new questions on such matters as national action plans, diversion and good practices in the area of marking, tracing and destruction. International assistance is elaborated in more detail, and the gender aspects are expanded.

The CPC will work with the participating States on the imminent harmonization of the OSCE and UNODA templates in order to re-synchronize simultaneous reporting on SALW. The CPC stands ready to present this issue in more detail at a meeting of the Informal Group of Friends on SALW and SCA.

The CPC would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the fact that, in accordance with the OSCE Document on SALW, participating States should provide annual updates on the one-off information exchange on SALW using the existing OSCE template “For the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Supplementary Decisions”, as announced in the document FSC.GAL/46/20 dated 5 May 2020. According to the latest overview of submissions, a number of participating States have not submitted such updates since 2016, some even since 2002, as can also be seen in Table 15A of our quarterly overview, which was also sent by way of additional information as part of the above-mentioned document distributed yesterday.

Let me conclude by inviting the participating States to submit the SALW national reports to the United Nations as well, because those reports will be used in the preparations

for the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States that has been postponed on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dear Mr. Chairperson, I would kindly ask you to attach this statement to the journal of the day.

Thank you for your attention.