



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Project Coordinator in Ukraine, Ambassador Henrik Villadsen

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 19, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ambassador Villadsen, for your very successful presentation today.

We welcome you back to the Permanent Council. It has been a few eventful months since your last appearance before the PC and we appreciate your detailed briefing on the work of the *Project Coordinator in Ukraine*. It shows the productive things that OSCE can do through its field missions and we are very grateful for that.

Undoubtedly, this has been another challenging period for the *Project Coordinator's* office as we all grapple with the effects of this coronavirus pandemic. Your ability to put in place mitigation measures at the early stages of the pandemic ensured that your Mission could fulfill its mandate during the transition to operating in a largely virtual space, just like we are right now. We commend your efforts in prioritizing the safety of your staff and for your leadership throughout this difficult year. You are a good model for the OSCE structure that shows what productive things OSCE can and should be doing.

Ukraine held nationwide local elections on October 25. Your Mission assisted the *Central Election Commission* in its preparations by offering training for election commissioners, and by providing *Territorial Election Commissions* with a specialized online resource to aggregate election results. These efforts strengthened Ukraine's electoral infrastructure. We want to commend your efforts in coordinating a multi-component voter awareness campaign, which included training for journalists and outreach efforts to help voters understand the electoral process. As we all know, in so many of our forums here, in many of our discussions that we are having right now at OSCE, a fundamental point of our underlying Helsinki provisions is that free and fair elections are the hallmark of a strong democracy, which is the foundation of what we are trying to do at OSCE. Your work helped to ensure that Ukrainian citizens were able to freely exercise their right to elect local leaders in October's elections. We congratulate you, we congratulate Ukraine for their advancement and their step forward in this process.

The *Project Coordinator's* office continued its efforts to strengthen Ukraine's chemical safety and security infrastructure, supporting Ukrainian authorities in developing comprehensive legislation on chemical safety for the *Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources*. You further worked with the *State Emergency Service of Ukraine* to train personnel engaged in responding to chemical, biological, and radiological emergencies. Such efforts help protect civilian communities from dangerous materials and ensure government authorities can respond effectively to mitigate the environmental risks these materials present.

The United States is particularly pleased to work with your office on a project underway to remove and remediate hazardous chemicals near *Bila Tserkva*. I want to point out that this is a major cleanup project that is going on in Ukraine. It is intended to help Ukraine succeed, it is intended to keep the citizens of Ukraine in *Bila Tserkva* safe. The United States Mission, the Mission that I head here at OSCE, has in fact contributed €3 million for the purpose of advancing that project and making sure that it actually cleans up this legacy of the old Soviet period, when these things were left in Ukraine. It is important to seize the opportunity to protect communities across Ukraine from the risks that this kind of material presents to the environment and it shows the American commitment to the health and safety of the people of Ukraine that goes far beyond any of the military considerations that we constantly talk about.

As you have done since 2014, Ambassador Villadsen, you and your team performed your work against the backdrop of the Russia-led conflict in eastern Ukraine and of Russia's military occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea. In the *Permanent Council*, we have spoken at great length about a demining plan for eastern Ukraine. We note that you have provided a technical assessment of a draft law amending the *Law of Ukraine on Mine Action* and organized a press tour on humanitarian demining to raise awareness of the risks presented by mines, as well as of systems of assistance available to victims of mines. These activities help strengthen Ukraine's response to a problem that will plague eastern Ukraine for years, even decades to come, as these communities work to rid themselves of mines laid during this multi-year conflict.

Ambassador, you have a wide mandate and a broad impact. Your recent projects helped strengthen the capacity of the *State Border Guard Service* to collect data to counter trafficking of weapons, ammunition, and explosives. Your efforts to reduce domestic violence and support conflict-affected populations are particularly valuable as Ukraine addresses the range of deleterious effects of Russia's hybrid campaign against Ukraine, as we have heard today. From democratization and judicial reforms to rule of law and human rights programming, the *Project Coordinator in Ukraine's* work helps build critical capacity in Ukraine's governing structures and improves the lives of its citizens and shows the dedication and the commitment of OSCE to the success of the future of Ukraine.

We reiterate that the mandate of the *Project Coordinator in Ukraine* applies to the entirety of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including Russia-occupied Crimea and Russia-controlled territory in eastern Ukraine.

Thank you again, Ambassador Villadsen, for your leadership and for your service to the OSCE and to the people of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak.

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