



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Ilkka Kanerva

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 19, 2015

The United States welcomes OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) President Ilkka Kanerva to the Permanent Council today, and thanks him for his report. Let me assure you, Mr. President, of the value we attach to the work of the Parliamentary Assembly as an independent, integral part of the OSCE family. We believe that the PA has an important role to play in addressing many of the challenges we face today.

We share your horror over the terrorist attacks in Paris last week. As President Obama said, “this is an attack not just on Paris, it’s an attack not just on the people of France, but this is an attack on all of humanity and the universal values that we share.” And as you know, the Permanent Council adopted a declaration earlier this week that condemned the Paris attacks, as well as the downing of a Russian passenger jet over Sinai and the bombing in Ankara in October as “brutal and indiscriminate acts of violence against innocent people,” and stressed “the need to bring the perpetrators to justice.”

President Kanerva, we appreciate your recent visit to Ukraine to assess for yourself the tragic impact Russian aggression has had on the lives of the people of Ukraine. I think that what we just heard from the distinguished Russian ambassador is a good reminder of the urgency of the crisis that continues to burn in Europe. It’s worth remembering, every day, that Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine is the victim. The conflict in eastern Ukraine would not have started, would not have continued, and would have ended long ago, if the Kremlin had upheld its OSCE commitments at any point in the last two years. The Minsk agreements, nonetheless, remain the only path to a lasting peace, and Russia must meet the commitments it made when it signed those agreements. We call on Russia and the separatists it backs to release all Ukrainian hostages, including Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov, and Oleksander Kolchenko; to provide full humanitarian access to separatist-controlled areas for UN agencies, NGOs, and government relief agencies; to allow for free, fair elections in the Donbas under Ukrainian law and monitored by ODIHR; to remove all foreign forces and weapons; and to return to Ukraine control over its international border. Full and unfettered access for the Special Monitoring Mission is vital. We encourage you to help us and build support within the Parliamentary Assembly for participating States to provide the SMM with the resources necessary to carry out its critical mandate across the entire territory of Ukraine. We also appreciate the Parliamentary Assembly’s commitment to the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and we hope you, Mr. President, and the PA, will continue to shine a spotlight on Russia’s violations of international law and its abrogation of OSCE commitments, including the ongoing occupation of Crimea.

We appreciate that at both the Baku and Helsinki Annual Sessions, the Parliamentary Assembly resolutions expressed unequivocal support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, reminded us of the ongoing threat to Georgia and Moldova, and voiced support for democratic forces under threat in Russia today, including those exposing rampant official corruption. We believe those views expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly reflect the overwhelming sentiment around this table.

The United States supports the work of the Parliamentary Assembly to combat trafficking in persons within and among our countries. We also applaud the OSCE PA's efforts to combat anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance in our societies. These are issues that the Assembly first put on the OSCE agenda, and they need to remain priorities for action. The United States is proud that two of our own Members of Congress are OSCE PA Special Representatives: Congressman Christopher Smith on Human Trafficking Issues and Senator Benjamin Cardin on Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance. We are also pleased to hear of the Assembly's focus on the refugee and migrant crisis here in Europe, and welcome Assembly contributions to an OSCE response. I also welcome the Assembly's examination of the U.S. record, including its evaluation and some constructive criticism of our electoral process and the expressed concern to find solutions for the remaining detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

Finally, we know that you will soon oversee an internal transition in the Parliamentary Assembly's Secretary General from R. Spencer Oliver to Roberto Montella. I would like to express our appreciation for Secretary General Oliver's sustained contributions over the past two decades. Thanks in great measure to his depth of knowledge of the OSCE process, he has helped parliamentarians be a political force in the OSCE, and a source of new ideas and substantive contributions to our work and deliberations. We look forward to greeting and working with Roberto Montella as the new Secretary General beginning in 2016, and we value the continued efforts of Ambassador Andreas Nothelle and the Assembly's team here in Vienna.

Thank you, again, Mr. President, and thank you, Mr. Chair.