



United States Mission to the OSCE

Plenary Statement 30th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council Skopje, North Macedonia, November 30, 2023

As delivered by James O'Brien,
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I wonder if I could add a personal note to the views expressed thus far with which I wholly agree. It's an honor to speak here. As Secretary Blinken and I were preparing for his remarks last evening at the dinner, we'd noted that across our career, the OSCE has been the shining star of how governments try to uphold human rights and basic values. The Helsinki Final Act was, for me as a young person, an amazing statement that human rights were not just universal, but that they were local, embedded in each of our communities, and that each of our governments had a responsibility to try to uphold them.

And so, when we come together here, it's not just an honor, it's a privilege, but it's a choice. We come together here because we recognize that each of us struggled to meet these aspirations in all circumstances and we need the help of our partners. We support this organization not simply for others, but we do it for one another and we do it for ourselves, and as the Chair so eloquently said at the start this morning, we do it for the most vulnerable populations in each of our societies. If that is what we are here to do, I think we have to reserve special criticism for those who attempt to block the functioning of this organization, because it's a direct affront, not just to values that were put on paper in 1975, but to the lives of millions of people across our societies who are simply attempting to exercise the basic rights that we all agree they are afforded. So in this context, I join with all of my colleagues noting what a difficult year it has been.

Russia's further invasion of Ukraine is a complete affront to civilized standards, to international law, and to the principles on which this organization is based. The continuing conflicts in Georgia and Moldova require our renewed commitment to resolve them and to bring those societies fully in line with the choices of their people to be a part of a broader community of countries committed to the rule of law. Yet Russia continues to block the operations, denying the ability to hold the basic conferences around which this organization has long functioned and is detaining personnel of the organization in complete violation of their rights and the principles of this organization.

Yet for all that, we see the OSCE throughout 2023 deliver exceptional work, the field operations, the reports of the special rapporteurs, the functioning of ODIHR, the use of the Moscow Mechanism, properly named in this context, to call attention to human rights violations committed in Ukraine, all of them show a creativity and a commitment to the values of this organization, of which I hope the staff is justly proud, because I'm proud to be associated with the work of this organization in that context.

I add my voice to those of my colleagues calling for Russia to stop its violations of the basic principles of the organization, but I am not sure that they are yet willing to listen. And so with that, I want to close by thanking our colleagues from North Macedonia for an exceptional stewardship of this organization. By thanking the Secretary General, Helga Schmid, for her leadership and for the special rapporteurs and the leadership of the organizations within the OSCE for the work that they have done, because it makes all of us better.

As we look to 2024, I'm gratified that we have a strong and capable chair in Malta. I appreciate the willingness to step up and ensure that this organization is able to function well in 2024. I also want to note my appreciation for Estonia's willingness to lead the organization, - it would have been an exceptional chair had it not been unfairly blocked - but I also appreciate its willingness to defer its leadership of the organization so that the organization can work well in 2024.

It is vital that we see the leaders of the four main entities within the organization extended for a year. A simple agreement in that way would reflect, I think, the pattern of collaboration on which this organization is based. We have agreed on a chair that everyone can accept, and I think everyone except a very small number of states, particularly one, has expressed strong support for an extension of the four leaders for a solid year. And as my colleague from the UK noted, we want to see a sufficient budget agreed upon very soon. I understand that the numbers are agreed upon and it's a matter of agreeing with the political narrative. We hope to see that concluded within the next week by the ambassadors.

So with all this, we believe the organization can thrive with Malta as its chair, that it will be able to do great work in 2024, and I hope that all member states are able to agree on the full extension of the four leaders. So, again, I'm honored to be here, but this is a privilege and a choice. It is now the choice of the states that have been attempting to block the work of this organization to see whether they are willing to stand with the civilized community that is based on the Helsinki Final Act or if they wish to continue their obstruction. The OSCE will do well either way. But it is a matter for them to choose whether they wish to be with us in this effort.

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