



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement at the 2015 OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
Belgrade, December 4, 2015

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to the many delegations who offered condolences for the events in San Bernadino, California.

Mr. Chair, before reiterating some of the points made by Secretary Kerry yesterday, I want to make an administrative note. We note that this year we were unable to agree on the modalities concerning the participation of other international organizations, and therefore had to fall back on past agreed modalities. Under the circumstances, NATO elected not to make a statement. We stress that this year's practice does not set a precedent for future Ministerials.

Colleagues, in President Obama's Proclamation marking 40 years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 and declaring yesterday as Helsinki Human Rights Day, he urged us to stand united on the importance of reinforcing a principles-based and rules-based order that can help us meet the challenges of the 21st century. As we prepare to leave Belgrade, we should all reflect on the wisdom embedded in the Helsinki Final Act, and in the commitments that followed in Copenhagen, Paris, Istanbul, Astana and elsewhere.

Three weeks ago, we saw terrorists strike in the city of light—since then we've seen the people of France – and the people of the world – come together with determination to reject the darkness of Daesh. The United States remains committed to combatting terrorism with partners across the OSCE region; and we mourn the loss of innocents from Russia, Turkey, Britain and too many other places. As we mourn the loss of life, we should also appreciate the importance of the international system and of trust within it. And herein lies one of the challenges in what the distinguished Ambassador of the Russian Federation just said, that we should “put aside anything that does not have to do with counterterrorism.” Because you see, colleagues, it is often as we seek to forge a cooperative response in the wake of an event like the Paris attacks that we sense most acutely the loss imposed on all of us by actions that violate international law and abrogate the principles of Helsinki and the international system.

Russia's ongoing occupation of Crimea and support for conflict in the East of Ukraine have caused tremendous human suffering and have destroyed trust and confidence. The full implementation of the Minsk Agreements—including the release of Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov, Olexander Kolchenko and others; including local elections in the special status areas under Ukrainian law and with ODIHR observation; and the return of Ukrainian control over its border— these things are necessary not only to bring an end to the conflict and to pave a political way forward, but also to begin the long process of rebuilding trust.

As the Secretary made clear we face and will continue to face global challenges. In Paris this week leaders came together because climate change threatens security and livelihoods. We are working to defeat Daesh and we welcome the British and German moves this week to strengthen the coalition. Many of us are working both within and across our governments to respond to enormous human and security needs precipitated by refugee and migration flows. It could go on, but colleagues, the point is this: in the year 2015, we have too many shared challenges that strain the international system to be able to afford actions from members of the international system that attack and undermine its foundational principles from within.

We can and should do more to bolster a rules-based order grounded in human dignity, including by working with civil society. Secretary Kerry met with a group of activists from across the OSCE area yesterday and they shared concrete ideas about how we can be more effective in tackling shared challenges and building stronger communities and countries. We should listen to them. The story of progress in the United States would have many many fewer chapters without civil society. Even when those in government didn't like what was said, the work of activists and journalists pressed us to do better and our country is stronger for their efforts. And they've helped make us a better partner for those represented around this table, too. We should all continue to hold each other accountable for our commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly and religion or belief. And we should stand with human rights defenders and independent journalists from Belgrade to Budapest to Bishkek, from Moscow to Ankara, from Minsk to Ashgabat.

We need to strengthen the OSCE too. As Secretary Kerry noted, it has become an unattractive habit for some participating States to attack the budget and mandates of the OSCE's independent institutions. These institutions are crucial parts of our early warning and conflict prevention systems. No one should be seeking to silence or undermine the independent work ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner for National Minorities. It's fine to have a substantive disagreement with a particular statement or assessment—if a country has a credible argument, that delegation should present it. But when countries attack the institutions themselves it suggests insecurity and the lack of a credible complaint. We saw examples of this even since we arrived in Belgrade.

When action returns to Vienna, we should assist the incoming German chairmanship and agree to a budget on time. We should negotiate efficiently the continued support needed for the SMM, whose more than 600 courageous monitors are the eyes and ears of the international community. We have important work to do together.

After all, fulfillment of the vision founded on the Helsinki Final Act and elaborated in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe remains incomplete. We must make progress on building a Europe and Eurasia that is whole, free, and at peace. As we heard from Secretary Kerry and many other ministers, we need to rebuild military transparency in Europe through an intensive effort to update the Vienna Document in 2016. We cannot accept as permanent the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh and the protracted conflicts in Moldova and Georgia. We

welcome the statement by the Heads of Delegation of the Minsk Group co-chair countries and encourage maximum efforts toward a productive meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. We welcome also the consensus statement on the 5+2 Negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. We regret that it proved impossible to reach agreement on even a simple statement addressing the need for progress on the conflict in Georgia. The United States expresses its unwavering support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We fully support the Geneva International Discussions, call for the expedient resumption of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, and remain committed to enhancing the role of the OSCE in facilitating progress on this conflict.

Forty years after Helsinki we must embrace its enduring promise with renewed urgency. Too many of our shared commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to counter intolerance and hatred remain unimplemented. The failures of participating States to implement their OSCE commitments do not make the fundamental truth underlying the OSCE concept of comprehensive security any less true: States with governments that respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, that foster shared prosperity through openness and good governance, and that respect the rules of the international system—including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their neighbors—are states that are more stable, more resilient, and more innovative; that are better partners and better able to provide a stronger future for their people.

Before concluding, allow me to thank, on behalf of Secretary Kerry and the entire US Delegation, Foreign Minister Dačić as well as Ambassador Šahović and Ambassador Žugić and their teams for the hospitality, for their patience, for your good cheer and for your hard work.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I ask that this statement be attached to the Journal of the Day.