



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan Ambassador Markus Müller

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 14, 2015

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Müller back to the Permanent Council. Ambassador, we thank you for your report and for the outstanding work you and your staff are doing in Tajikistan. We continue to support much of the traditional programmatic activity your office undertakes, as well as your efforts to address new activities in 2016.

Ambassador Müller, we support your office's ongoing efforts to assist Tajikistan in strengthening rule of law, including through police reform, border security, anti-corruption programs, and legislative assistance. We strongly support the inclusion of civil society in these efforts, and we welcome the willingness of both the Ministry of Justice and the Parliament of Tajikistan to hold public discussions with civil society regarding changes to the Law on Public Associations. We hope that the Ministry of Justice will continue to work closely with civil society concerning this and other future changes to legislation. We also hope that Parliament and relevant government entities will hold similar public discussions concerning future draft legislation.

Countering violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism is a clear priority in today's world. We support the OSCE Office in Tajikistan's work on this topic by advocating a cross-dimensional approach that ensures respect for the rule of law and human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief and promotion of youth engagement and women's empowerment. We are concerned, however, that, due in part to the overly broad nature of Tajikistan's extremism law, dozens of persons have been arrested for allegedly belonging to banned groups – groups that have no clear link to violence. We also are concerned that the list of so-called "extremist" organizations has been expanded to include some small, non-violent political opposition groups. Provisions governing youth religious participation in Tajikistan's Law on Parental Responsibility are also extremely restrictive – and perhaps constitute the only legislation in the world which prohibits children under eighteen from participating in religious services.

The OSCE Office's work in the economic dimension is also extremely important, particularly in light of the Tajikistan economy's heavy reliance on remittances from abroad and the negative effects on Tajikistani migrant workers of new Russian immigration policies and the devaluation of the Russian ruble. The Office's work also addresses factors that can make people more vulnerable to recruitment as foreign terrorist fighters, whether in Tajikistan or while working abroad. We echo Ambassador Müller's comments on the importance of creating a favorable business climate and strengthening economic governance in order to

increase domestic job opportunities for Tajik citizens who have historically worked abroad as labor migrants.

Perhaps the most visible – and one of the most important – components of the OSCE’s work in Tajikistan is the Border Management Staff College (BMSC). It provides an international context to training programs and allows participants to interact with their peers from around the OSCE region, as well as from Afghanistan. We welcome the promotion of women’s participation in BMSC training. The United States strongly supports the BMSC, and we support fully funding the BMSC through the Unified Budget. The current funding model prevents the BMSC from making the sort of medium- to long-term plans that any educational institution needs to maximize its potential. We stand ready to work with all participating States to find a mutually acceptable solution to address this issue in the funding of the BMSC.

We continue to recognize the work of the Women’s Resource Centers, which undertake a variety of important activities, including sharing voting information, serving as crisis centers, and addressing the needs of victims of domestic violence.

The U.S. government and the OSCE regularly cooperate with the government of Tajikistan on efforts to combat trafficking in persons. In this regard, we welcome the recent appointment of Sharaf Faizulloev as Chair of Tajikistan’s Inter-ministerial Commission on Combatting Trafficking in Persons. We look forward to reinvigorated efforts to combat this crime and provide its victims with access to assistance through national referral mechanisms.

Finally, we appreciate the efforts of the OSCE Office and ODIHR with respect to Tajikistan’s electoral system. As we stated previously, the United States took note of the OSCE’s preliminary assessment of the March 1 parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, including the assessment of restrictions on space for the activities of political opposition groups and the subsequent lack of meaningful choice on election day. We urge the government of Tajikistan to take full advantage of OSCE assistance to effectively address the concerns raised in the report. There is an opportunity here for constructive engagement and progress that should not be missed.

Ambassador Müller, we thank you again for your informative report, and plan to continue to support your office as you assist Tajikistan in the implementation of its OSCE commitments, and in addressing common challenges that we all face today. The OSCE’s work in Tajikistan is important to supporting the development of a more resilient society, so important in today’s world.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.