



United States Mission to the OSCE

U.S. Statement for the Forum for Security Cooperation:

As delivered by Arms Control Counselor Daniel Wartko
October 11, 2023

Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you for your opening statement regarding the attacks in Israel. I'll repeat the Statement from Secretary of State Blinken about the attacks in Israel this weekend:

"The United States unequivocally condemns the appalling attacks by Hamas terrorists against Israel, including civilians and civilian communities. There is never any justification for terrorism. We will remain in close contact with our Israeli partners. The United States supports Israel's right to defend itself. We stand in solidarity with the government and people of Israel and extend our condolences for the innocent lives lost in these attacks."

In contrast, we have heard Russia's tepid statements and lack of condemnation of the terrorism against Israel, a country with whom Moscow purported to have a "special relationship." A major segment of Israel's population are Russian-speaking, and former Soviet and Russian citizens. All of that said, Russia's lack of support for Israel, and its lack of a moral compass in this regard, is not surprising given the Kremlin's tight partnership with Iran and Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. Now, I would like to turn back to the events of last week's FSC. Time and again, the Russian delegation warned us that it would trigger a "systemic crisis" in the FSC unless we submitted to Russia's demands. This spring, under the Chairpersonship of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia for the first time in our history blocked the work of this Forum and rejected the Chair's agenda because the Chair did not accede to Russia's demands to put its preferred speaker on the panel. Last week, we witnessed a repeat. The Russian delegation again took it upon itself to block the work of this Forum simply because its attempts to pressure the Chair failed.

Madam Chair, as you aptly noted, “The Russian Federation is once again abusing the OSCE’s consensus framework.”

I ask the other participating States in this room to reflect on the fact that 1,039 meetings of the FSC took place between September 1992 and March 2023 – more than thirty years – without a single break in consensus on the agenda. Now, in little over six months, Russia has blocked the FSC not once, but twice. Even during the worst crisis that this organization has faced – Russia’s unprovoked and illegal war against Ukraine – we continued to hold this Forum.

But last week, the Chair refused to bend to Russia’s unreasonable demand that its candidate be allowed to address all of us on International Humanitarian Law, and that became the reason to crash the entire forum. But was that a sincere request? The Chair was fully within her authority to reject even the most qualified candidate for its panel, but it is instructive to look at the qualifications of the particular candidate Russia proposed, Mr. Rodion Miroshnik.

Let’s start with academic credentials: Mr. Miroshnik is currently a student, studying for his master’s degree in the Department of International Law at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Federation. A student, not a professor. His prior degree was in “History and Computing.” His academic background is clearly inadequate, so maybe his professional experience justifies his nomination? So, what has he done that has made him, in Russia’s eyes, an esteemed expert in the field of International Humanitarian Law?

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and illegal attempt to annex additional parts of it, Mr. Miroshnik served as the so-called “Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Luhansk People’s Republic to the Russian Federation.” I will quote from the summary of the 2022 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report on *Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Committed in Ukraine*: “much of the conduct of Russian forces displayed in the parts of Ukraine it occupied before and after 24 February 2022, including through its proxies, the self-proclaimed “republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk, violates International Humanitarian Law of military occupation.” So, Mr. Miroshnik’s only relevant professional experience in the field of IHL was as a member of one of the Russia-installed proxies that the Moscow Mechanism had determined violated IHL.

In short, he was an unqualified nominee, whose professional experience was inherently offensive to the principles of this organization. Russia nominated him because they were certain that the Chair would reject him, thus giving Russia a “reason” to block the FSC. From this, we can conclude that Russia does not want a frank discussion on International Humanitarian Law and intended from the outset to block the work of this organization with its stunt.

And as Russia alone obstructs the work of this organization, it blames everyone else. It accuses us all of dismantling the European Security Architecture, even as it withdraws from the *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe* and blocks the work of the FSC. This would be a remarkable achievement at double-think – accepting two contradictory facts as simultaneously true – if the Russian delegate actually believed what he was telling us.

So, Russia has threatened us with a “systemic crisis”, but the cause of that “crisis” in this Forum is clear – it is the Russian Federation and the Russian Federation alone abusing the consensus framework and asserting a right that no participating State has or has ever claimed to have. Let me emphasize that point: Russia is alone in its behavior and in its purported beliefs. No other participating State in this room has joined them. Russia has isolated itself again.

Just as Russia is alone in its attempts to dismantle the European Security Architecture, it alone is responsible for its war of choice against Ukraine.

I understand it must be uncomfortable for the Russian delegates to hear week after week how their country is transgressing the founding principles of this organization, how it is waging an illegal and immoral war, how individuals will be held accountable for the crimes they are committing. But the solution is not to plug their ears or to try to stop us from speaking. The answer is for Russia to listen to the chorus and examine and change its behavior.

We applaud Canada’s determination to keep this Forum from becoming a platform for Kremlin propaganda. We commend the Chair for preserving the spirit of last week’s Security Dialogue in the side event. We value the Chair’s leadership in the face of Russia’s audacity to ask to speak at an event it had tried to silence. The participating States of this Forum refuse to be cowed by Russia’s

obstructionism. We will not be distracted from Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. We will not be prevented from using this forum to advance the common interests of security that we all share.

Our focus will continue to be supporting Ukraine in its effort to expel Russia's forces from its internationally recognized territory, and we continue to see Ukraine do so in a methodical and systematic basis. We will continue to keep Russia's war against Ukraine at the center of our discussions in the FSC for as long as it takes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.