



U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Ministerial in Basel

Closing Statement As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer to the OSCE Ministerial Council December 5, 2014, Basel, Switzerland

President Burkhalter, thank you—thank you very much, thank you and your team and to the people in Basel for the warm welcome you have given to all of us, and the great example of Swiss hospitality and Swiss efficiency in organizing this meeting. It has been a real pleasure to be in Basel.

It has been a hard year. Not the one that you envisioned for your Chairmanship, not one that any of us imagined for the OSCE area. We knew that this was going to be a difficult meeting. And it was. But it was also a successful meeting. For anyone sitting in the plenary, or watching online, the message was resoundingly clear—minister after minister expressed support for Ukraine, for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and for the reform process that the people and government of Ukraine have begun and that holds the key to Ukraine's success as a democratic, prosperous, secure state. And minister after minister expressed dismay at Russia's destructive actions and called on Russia to reverse course and start living up to its OSCE commitments and to stop violating international law.

Mr. Chairman, you reported in your summary statement yesterday that "Violations of the fundamental principles of the Helsinki Final Act have shaken the foundations of international order and security in our area." We agree. Russia's intervention in Ukraine and purported annexation and illegal occupation of Crimea has come at a high cost, and not only to the people of Ukraine and Russia. The toll in innocent lives is a disgrace to all of us who believe in the possibility of a cooperative international community that respects international law, and political and human freedom.

As Secretary Kerry said yesterday, the crisis we confront is not a flaw in the rules and underlying principles of the international system—it is the failure of the Russian Federation to abide by those rules and principles. This is a problem; not a puzzle. The solution is clear—just as Russia's destructive and illegal actions have exacted enormous human costs and damaged Russia's credibility, Russia can choose a different course and take different actions—beginning with the implementation of the Minsk Protocol and Agreement.

Russia has isolated itself. And no one benefits from Russia's isolation. Not the Russian people. Not the people of neighboring countries. Not the people of the United States. We want Russia to be a partner in confronting global challenges; not to **be** a challenge itself. In the 21st century, going it alone doesn't work. We have to work together. And to do that, governments have to play by the rules, and uphold universal values and principles.

The OSCE is an inclusive platform—and in the months ahead we should use the Permanent Council and other forums to continue to have a dialogue grounded in our common OSCE commitments and renewed determination to implement them.

We should also seize the opportunity to strengthen the operational capacities of the OSCE. We join the CiO in expressing gratitude to the many people and parts of this organization that have played creative, sometimes unprecedented roles in responding to events in Ukraine. We agree that this experience underscores the need to further strengthen the OSCE's capacity to act in response to situations of crisis.

We welcome the Chair's emphasis on the urgent need to advance solutions to the protracted conflicts. The United States believes that the participating States of the OSCE must make it a priority in 2015 to achieve concrete progress toward peaceful resolution of the conflicts affecting Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. We welcome the statement agreed here by the Minsk Group Co-Chair countries' Heads of Delegation and the consensus statement addressing the 5+2 talks. We support the Geneva International Discussions on the conflict in Georgia.

We are gravely concerned about the dangerous increase in violence on the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and by the so-called Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Georgian region of Abkhazia, with its possible implications for regional stability and for discussions in the Geneva format. These conflicts are not only protracted but also fraught with risk and suffering, and movement toward peaceful solutions is needed now.

President Burkhalter, you cited the erosion of trust and confidence among members of this community of states. The events of 2014 have underscored the need to improve military transparency and rebuild confidence – and also identified areas where we should improve the *Vienna Document*. My minister cited the contribution of Vienna Document teams in responding to the crisis in and around Ukraine. We believe the OSCE should work in 2015 on a comprehensive update of the Vienna Document that enables us to more effectively address current security challenges.

In closing, I want to note that the parallel civil society conference that also happened in Basel this week was far more successful than we were in coming up with substantive outcomes. They came up with a lot of them. President Burkhalter and Ambassador Šahović received their recommendations on behalf of the chairmanships, and we look forward to using that input as a basis for future work.

Secretary Kerry didn't have much time on the ground here in Basel. But before joining the Ministerial yesterday morning, he had an hour-long meeting with a small group of activists. These courageous folks are on the frontlines of waging peace in the OSCE region—their efforts to press governments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms are a crucial contribution to the security of all of us. We must stand with independent activists and journalists, for their work is critical and central to our work—in Baku and Budapest, Astana and Moscow, Tashkent and Ashgabat.

I must note that today we got news that Khadija Ismayilova, who is an independent journalist from Azerbaijan well known to many of us, and who attended the HDIM, has been arrested and remanded to court. We express our deep concern over this turn of events.

This is also why we were disappointed that, because of the obstruction of a few states, we were unable to adopt the draft decisions on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Assembly and Association that were tabled by the EU and cosponsored by more than 40 participating States. Those decisions may not have met consensus, but they have overwhelming support and future chairs would be wise to take them up. They are also relevant to the current crisis. Russia's aggressive actions abroad are linked to its failures at home to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people in Russia.

Over the past year, the OSCE has demonstrated its ability to help solve problems rather than merely ponder puzzles. The United States welcomes the OSCE's renaissance as an active solver of problems and looks forward to working with the Serbian chairmanship.

(I request that this be added to the journal of the day)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.