



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closure of the OSCE Office in Yerevan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 4, 2017

The United States regrets the impending closure of the OSCE Office in Yerevan. We lament the loss of the last OSCE field operation in the South Caucasus. Field operations provide invaluable support to their host countries by helping to strengthen adherence to OSCE principles and commitments, providing early warning and crisis management, and promoting dialogue between government and civil society.

We appreciate the determined effort of both the German and Austrian Chairmanships to resolve the impasse over the extension of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Yerevan. We regret that Azerbaijan refused to agree to extend the mandate unless the Office ended its humanitarian demining-related activities. Armenia, in the spirit of compromise, agreed that the Office in Yerevan would end these activities. Despite months of effort by the Chairmanship, it could not find language satisfactory to all participating States regarding a Permanent Council decision extending the mandate of the Office.

We recognize the Armenian government's cooperation with the OSCE. The Office in Yerevan has played an important role in supporting the host country with implementation of its OSCE commitments in all three dimensions. The Office's promotion of community policing; assistance with tax and regulatory reform; and support for human rights defenders, women's equality and media freedom, were bringing about positive results.

The United States encourages the OSCE to continue cooperation with the Republic of Armenia – with both the government and civil society. We call on the Chairmanship and the Secretary General to explore new ways of maintaining an OSCE presence in Armenia, and throughout the South Caucasus.

Finally, the United States would also like to thank Ambassador Avakov and his staff for their outstanding work and dedication, particularly during the past months of uncertainty over the future of the Office. We wish them the best in their future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.