



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik

As delivered by Deputy Representative Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 2, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister Plassnik, the United States warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council. I would like to thank you for your detailed statement. We're convinced that your leadership will be critical as the Austrian presidency helps move Europe's agenda forward.

Dr. Plassnik, as you well know, support for the expansion of human freedoms is a cornerstone of the United States' foreign policy. It is also a task in which we see ourselves working in close concert with the European Union. Together, we can put the political, economic and security assets of the transatlantic community to work transforming our world. We believe the OSCE has an important role to play in this regard.

In the Balkans, we continue to work together to resolve the question of Kosovo's future status within the course of 2006. Stability can be enhanced throughout this region through the prospect of a European future for all states. This organization will be critical in helping countries implement the steps needed for that goal. The European Union can continue to count on the United States for support in efforts to encourage democracy and stability, both within the OSCE context, and bilaterally through our Embassy here in Austria. I know that Ambassador McCaw and her excellent team stand ready to work closely with you in this regard.

Another example of such cooperation concerns Belarus. We applaud the EU's strong stance on relations with Belarus and the EU's support for democratic development in that country. We are greatly encouraged by EU efforts to transmit balanced and unprejudiced news reports to the Belarusian people. Such efforts are vital to growing a civil society and helping peaceful opposition, especially at a time when they are subject to harassment and persecution. Moreover, we note the recent statements by EU foreign ministers calling for presidential elections to take place in a "free and normal fashion." In the case of election violations, the ministers made clear the European Union is ready to take "new and appropriate restrictive measures against the responsible people" in the Belarusian government. Mr. Chairman, we commend such a principled stand and will continue to work closely with the European Union to help bring freedom to the Belarusian people.

The United States also shares the EU's interest in supporting the OSCE's work on tolerance and non-discrimination. We see the year 2006 as one to focus on implementation of earlier agreements to intensify the fight against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, as well as intolerance and discrimination against

Christians and members of other religions. We look forward to continuing work with the Austrian EU Presidency to ensure consolidation of ODIHR's Tolerance Program, as well as the success of expert-level implementation meetings scheduled for this year.

We agree with you, Minister Plassnik, that the OSCE has an important role to play in international efforts to combat trafficking in persons. That role can be strengthened through cooperation with other organizations. The United States supports the continued focus on victim identification and assistance, and on combating trafficking in children. We will work for full implementation of the Ljubljana Ministerial decision on "Ensuring the Highest Standards of Conduct and Accountability of Persons Serving on International Forces and Missions." It is crucial we ensure our own personnel not contribute to the problem.

The United States will continue to work with the Members of the European Union, as well as with other OSCE participating States, to further the cause of peace in regions long scarred by regional conflict. We call on all the sides in the South Ossetian conflict to begin implementing the Peace Plan proposed by the Georgian government. We look forward to receiving the results of the Needs Assessment Study, which we hope will lead to the peaceful reintegration of South Ossetia into Georgia. We remain hopeful that Armenia and Azerbaijan will seize the opportunity to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully this year, and we hope that we will soon be at a stage where we can cooperate with the EU and other interested parties to implement a peace agreement. In Moldova, we welcomed the opportunity to join, along with the European Union, the "5+2 Talks" on Transnistria last October. We hope the parties to that conflict will find a way to move toward a resolution after the limited success of the most recent rounds of negotiations.

Finally, we would like to stress that while we should work to strengthen and improve the OSCE's effectiveness in all dimensions, institutional reform efforts are secondary to carrying out OSCE's substantive tasks and cannot be allowed to undermine the very organization they are meant to help.

In this vein, it is incumbent upon all 55 participating States, who entered into the OSCE's commitments voluntarily and by consensus, to continue to further our common goals for a free, prosperous and secure OSCE region.

I thank you, Minister Plassnik, for taking the time to address us today. You can count on the United States as a partner in addressing all the challenges that face this organization.

Thank you.