



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President, Margareta Cederfelt

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 27, 2022

President Cederfelt, welcome back to the Permanent Council. We congratulate the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for sending a resolute message at this year’s Annual Session in Birmingham by adopting the joint resolution sponsored by the delegations of Ukraine, Lithuania, and the United States on *The Russian Federation’s War of Aggression against Ukraine and its People, and Its Threat to Security Across the OSCE Region*. The parliamentarians overwhelmingly condemned the, and here I’m going to quote: “ongoing, intensified, clear, gross and still uncorrected violations of Helsinki Principles, as well as of fundamental principles of international law, by the Government of the Russian Federation in its war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the complicity of Belarus in this war of aggression,” end quote.

The United States joins the OSCE PA in holding Vladimir Putin and his enablers responsible for horrific acts of violence against the people of Ukraine. We continue to call upon the Kremlin to immediately end the bombing of civilian infrastructure, the filtration operations, the deportations, the abduction of children, the killing of civilians. The Kremlin must end the atrocities, war crimes, and aggression against Russia’s neighbor and fellow OSCE participating State, Ukraine. We resolve to support the government and people of Ukraine in their valiant defense of their country and its democracy for as long as it takes. As President Biden has said, Russia must withdraw its forces from Ukraine completely and respect Ukraine’s sovereignty.

Madam President, the Biden-Harris Administration shares the Assembly’s concern about the increase in political prisoners in the OSCE region. We welcome your appointment in July of U.S. Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Steve Cohen as the first OSCE official ever to be named Special Representative on Political Prisoners. His mandate to collect and share information about political prisoners, raise awareness of the issue with participating States holding political prisoners, and advocate for their release is desperately needed.

It should appall everyone that speaking the truth in Russia has become a crime. Historians, journalists, and civil society activists have been poisoned, imprisoned, and worse for their dissent and exposure of the Kremlin’s lies and corruption. And yet, some – like pro-democracy advocate Vladimir Kara-Murza – continue to do so despite the cost to their freedom. Just last week, outrageous new charges were announced against anti-corruption campaigner Aleksey Navalny that could extend his cumulative prison term to 30 years. Meanwhile in neighboring Belarus,

Darya Losik, wife of political prisoner and RFE/RL journalist Ihar Losik, remains unjustly detained for participating in an interview with independent media regarding the Lukashenka regime's abuses. We also call attention to the ongoing detention of Mansur Mingelov in Turkmenistan and Buzurgmehr Yorov in Tajikistan, both of whom are being held for shedding light on human rights abuses by their governments.

We must keep the international spotlight trained on all those incarcerated or unjustly detained for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms and seek their release with the same determination they themselves demonstrate. Our Mission looks forward to working with Special Representative Cohen to press for the release of Mr. Kara-Murza, Mr. Navalny, Ihar and Darya Losik, Mr. Mingelov, Mr. Yorov and all others unjustly held in the OSCE region for — in the words of the Helsinki Final Act — knowing and acting upon their rights.

Madam President, we appreciate the unique value of parliamentary diplomacy in addressing the region's myriad security challenges. The Assembly's "Call for Action" dialogue series is a valuable tool for engaging parliamentarians on conflict resolution and accountability initiatives. As a Co-Chair of OSCE's *Group of Friends of Youth and Security*, I applaud the Assembly's decision to formalize the inclusion of youth voices in the Assembly and national parliaments through the creation of a network of young parliamentarians.

We also welcome the Assembly's ongoing and broad-based collaboration with the OSCE's Chairpersonship and OSCE institutions, namely at the recent Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, in joint statements condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine and in the field of election observation. On this, the 20th anniversary year of the first OSCE elections observation mission to the United States, we look forward to once again hosting the Parliamentary Assembly's largest mission in its history to my country for our upcoming elections.

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