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**United States Mission to the OSCE**  
**U.S. Statement for the**  
**Forum for Security Cooperation:**  
**Security Dialogue on**  
**“Black Sea Region: Security Horizons”**

As delivered by Arms Control Counselor Daniel Wartko  
May 3, 2023

Thank you, Madam Chair, for organizing this timely and interesting Security Dialogue, and thank you to our panel of experts for sharing their very informative insights with us today.

Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine highlights the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea region and the need for the region to remain free, prosperous, and secure from threats. At the Madrid Summit last July, NATO explicitly recognized the strategic importance of the Black Sea to the Alliance in its newest Strategic Concept. And since then, the United States, our NATO Allies, and likeminded partners have responded with greater focus, increased economic and security assistance, and additional presence in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, our unwavering support for Ukraine’s self-defense and sovereignty remains a critical guidepost, forming the bedrock of this collective effort.

Due to Russia’s ongoing reckless and violent behavior outside of its borders, the Black Sea region will face long-term threats to its security. An example of such is Russia’s widespread and dangerous mining of the Black Sea, an action that has threatened both commerce and freedom of navigation with global impact. This wartime context has driven the need to strengthen regional cooperation in areas including energy resilience, food security, freedom of commerce and economic growth, and building the critical infrastructure necessary to achieve these objectives. For example, since it began last August, the Black Sea Grain Initiative has moved nearly 28 million metric tons of grain and related foodstuffs to the world’s needy and hungry. However, despite initial success, Russia’s stranglehold on the Black Sea Grain Initiative, regular threats to its renewal, and threats to shipping are keeping food prices high and imperiling the progress made on food accessibility this past year.

In November, Russia started slowing down ship inspections thus constricting the flow of grain from Ukraine. Last fall, the Black Sea Grain Initiative moved 4-5 million tons per month. But in January only 3 million tons moved. Russia is purposefully and systematically slowing shipments and using food as a weapon against the entire world. Twice in recent weeks, no ships at all were able to sail toward Ukraine's ports because of Russia's obstruction of the UN Joint Coordination Centre's procedures. Three dozen ships were waiting to sail inbound to pick up Ukrainian grain, and two dozen were waiting to exit. And each day a ship must wait adds \$20,000 to the price of the grain it will carry. As UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Martin Griffiths told the Security Council last October, each fraction of a percentage point rise in food prices pushes someone, somewhere in the world over the edge into extreme poverty. And the responsibility for this belongs to Russia alone.

To make matters worse, Russia is also now threatening the safety of commercial ships in the grain corridor unless its demands are met by its self-declared deadline of May 18th. Specifically, Russia has told the other parties to the deal that ships still using the grain corridor after this date face quote "possible security risks." This is a direct threat by Russia to end its commitment to allow grain ships to pass safely around the ports and safe corridor, endangering civilian ships full of food. This is outrageous behavior.

Madam Chair,

The Black Sea region has great economic potential as a connector between Europe and Central Asia, and it plays a vital role in intercontinental trade, especially global food and energy security. However, this potential cannot be realized while Russia continues to hold the Black Sea hostage in its attempt to blackmail the world and distract it from its illegal war against Ukraine. With these threats in mind, the United States is ready to partner with Black Sea region countries to address the region's medium- and long-term security challenges, including enhancing their capacities to defend against the threats posed by Russia's belligerent behavior. We recognize that the Black Sea region encompasses a diverse set of countries with at times diverging interests. Nevertheless, as Russia's brutal war in Ukraine and active conflict on the sea further constrains the environment, the destabilization and ongoing threats

introduced by this reckless war make our cooperation to address them all the more consequential and urgent.

Thank you, Madam Chair.