



United States Mission to the OSCE
U.S. Statement for the
Forum for Security Cooperation:
General Statements –
Russia’s War of Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Chief Arms Control Delegate Daniel Wartko
November 15, 2023

Thank you, Madam Chair,

I would like to revisit last week’s excellent FSC-PC discussion on “Mental Health Impacts of War.” As we all know, Russia and Belarus chose not to participate, but as the session was drawing to a close, we all received a strange written statement from the Russian Delegation calling the session a “political trick” that was a “breach of the OSCE consensus rule.” Russia further asserted that the subject of “Mental Health Issues of War” was “outside the competence of both the FSC and the PC.”

Madam Chair,

These assertions are absurd and need to be rebutted for the record. On the first point, Mr. Gavrilov complained in his note that holding the combined FSC-PC was a “breach of the consensus rule.” But two things would be required for a “consensus rule” to be breached: first, there must be a rule requiring consensus; second, a participating state must show up to break consensus. So, on the first point, the Rules of Procedure simply do not require consensus on the agenda of an FSC-PC meeting. You can look it up. And on the second point, the Russian delegation did not show up and try to break consensus. Why? Because they knew very well that the Rules of Procedure would not allow it.

That handles the procedural aspect, but what about the spirit of Russia’s objection? Is “Mental Health Issues of War” a subject truly “outside the competence of the FSC and the PC” because, as Russia asserted, the issue lies beyond the politico-military, economic-environmental, and human dimensions? Are we to believe that we are “allowed” to talk about prosthetic limbs for a wounded soldier but not psychological treatment for that same soldier’s Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? That we could talk about the harm of a school being

destroyed but not the harm being done to the mind of the child that was to be educated?

Russia didn't used to think that this was inappropriate. In fact, the Russian delegation has spoken many times and at great length in the FSC about mental health. Here are some examples from just the past two years:

- February 15, 2023: Russia accused Ukraine of actions “done solely to inflict physical and **psychological harm on civilians.**” If it's not relevant, why bring it up?
- May 17, 2023: Russia condemned the Armed Forces of Ukraine for supposedly “inflicting physical and **psychological damage on civilians.**”
- September 2022: During a discussion on Children in Armed Conflict, Mr. Gavrillov praised the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for her “special attention paid to families with minors... including **psychological rehabilitation...to help children to forget all the horrors they have suffered.**”

Well, that's what we were talking about last week. It was an appropriate topic last week, and it was an appropriate topic when Russia raised it in September 2022. It belongs in this Forum.

Madam Chair,

I want to thank you again for putting it on the agenda. I thought it was excellent. But this isn't all, it isn't just in this Forum. The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation also recognizes the importance of mental health in the military.

- In 2017, The Minister of Defense issued Order No. 60, “On Medical and Psychological Rehabilitation of Military Personnel” that talked about care for soldiers after they have been in conflict.

- The ministry has a Military Medical Directorate with a unit devoted to psychological care. They care about this back in Russia. They work on this back in Russia.
- And just this year, a new journal was published, titled simply, “The Russian Military-Psychological Journal.” Its editorial board is made up of Russian government doctors, psychologists, and academics, and it covers a variety of psychological issues, including psychological rehabilitation for returning soldiers.

So, through its government’s policies and its statements here in this Forum, the Russian Federation acknowledges that “mental health impacts of war” lies at the intersection of the politico-military and human dimensions, clearly within the mandate of the FSC and PC, and should continue to be a topic of discussion.

Madam Chair,

I also would like to briefly address Russia’s propensity for quoting politicians and press from the United States and from other participating States, who have views about Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine that differ from their own government’s position. Russia has interpreted these dissenting signals as a sign of weakness or of so-called “war fatigue,” but these are signs of our greatest strength.

It is easy to understand why the Russian delegation would make that mistake. It is the case, in Russia, that speaking out against Putin’s war can land you in prison, or worse. Even children are not even allowed to have dissenting thoughts on Russia’s war: Just recall the March arrest of Alexei Moskalyov because his 13-year-old daughter expressed her thoughts in an anti-war drawing.

So, it is easy to cherry-pick or take out-of-context political or journalistic commentary that seemingly supports Russia’s echo-chamber narrative, but it would be a mistake to interpret that as anything beyond the free exchange and debate of ideas in a liberal and free society.

So, I will remind, as President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and Ambassador Carpenter have made clear on numerous occasions, the United States will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.