



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Opening Statement by the Chairman-in-Office, Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 15, 2015

Minister Dačić, we welcome you back to the Permanent Council and offer our thanks to you, your excellent delegation here in Vienna, and all those working in Belgrade as part of the OSCE task force for taking on the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2015.

Minister Dačić, let me start by offering our heartfelt condolences to our French colleagues, and to the French people who have provided us all with an example of national solidarity in the face of tragedy. The terrorist attacks in Paris, which struck at both the freedom of expression and at the principle of tolerance, demonstrate the importance of the OSCE's cross-dimensional approach to security. In the wake of the attacks, the Chairmanship's plan to focus work in the Politico-Security Dimension on implementation of the declarations adopted in Basel on countering foreign terrorist fighters, and on kidnapping and hostage-taking for ransom, takes on added importance.

The terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo office underscores the need for us to redouble efforts within the OSCE to protect fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression both online and offline, and the freedom of peaceful assembly, through which people have expressed their outrage at the attack. The attack is also a reminder of the need to engage in new efforts to promote tolerance and religious freedom in 2015. We must not respond to hate with more hate. The anti-Semitic attack on the kosher grocery store in Paris comes after a year in which Europe saw an increase in anti-Semitism. This attack demonstrates that in 2015 we must implement the Basel Ministerial declaration on enhancing efforts to combat anti-Semitism and hate crimes within OSCE participating States, promote the freedom of religion, and continue our efforts to combat all forms of discrimination. We welcome the upcoming visit to Paris of all three of the Chairmanship's personal representatives on tolerance and look forward to hearing their recommendations on the way ahead.

Minister Dačić, when the decision was made on the Swiss and Serbian Chairmanships at the Ministerial Council meeting in Vilnius in 2011, none of us could have foreseen the security crises we currently face. But the crisis in and around Ukraine – a crisis which stems from acts of aggression of one participating State against another that violate international law and are clearly inconsistent with OSCE principles and commitments – is indeed the focus of our efforts in the OSCE and will demand significant time and attention on the part of the Chairmanship.

Mr. Minister, as you address the immense challenges stemming from the crisis in and around Ukraine, rest assured that our common OSCE commitments are rock solid and represent the best formula for achieving sustainable comprehensive security in our region and in our time. We look to you to defend OSCE principles and commitments – from the Helsinki Final Act to the decisions taken last month at the Ministerial in Basel – and to facilitate the use of the OSCE to respond to crises and to assist participating States to implement their OSCE commitments fully. The best approach is not politically splitting the difference; it is systematic fidelity to principles. We will also look to the Chairmanship to continue to support the Trilateral Contact Group and Special Representative Tagliavini's efforts to see the full implementation of the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum, to support the efforts of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, and to expand the mandate of the Border Observation Mission in Russia.

Minister Dačić, the current crisis has demonstrated the urgent need to update the Vienna Document to address more effectively the current security environment in Europe. We must be realistic about prospects for success—but the experiences of the last year demonstrate the importance of modernizing the Vienna Document to reflect modern military realities and to address shortcomings in the document that were highlighted this year. The United States stands ready to do so this year and encourages others to engage proactively in this effort.

Minister Dačić, there are a number of additional issues that the Organization should focus on in 2015:

We look forward to further progress in our cooperation on cyber-security issues, both through continued implementation of our first set of cyber-security confidence building measures and through developing and reaching consensus on a second set of practical cooperative measures to further reduce the risk of conflict stemming from the cyber realm. I thank the Serbian Chairmanship for its confidence in me to continue to chair the informal working group addressing these issues.

In the Economic and Environmental Dimension, we are particularly pleased that the Serbian Chairmanship will continue the OSCE's work on preventing and combatting corruption, including during this year's Economic and Environmental Dimension Implementation Meeting in October. The Basel Ministerial decision on preventing corruption can be an important and effective tool for us all if we begin now on its implementation. We look forward to the report in June from the Economic and Environmental Committee on how the OSCE can do more to prevent and combat corruption, and we urge the Committee to be thorough and aggressive in its recommendations. We note that the Chairmanship will also focus on water governance issues, beginning with this year's Economic and Environmental Forum session in Vienna later this month. The potential for greater cross-border cooperation on this issue is significant, and we look forward to learning from the experiences of Serbia and the wider Balkan region.

Finally, Minister Dačić, we urge you to keep OSCE principles and commitments at the forefront of efforts to support the resolution of the protracted conflicts in the OSCE region. The current situation in the conflict areas is alarming: outbreaks of violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan; the continuing occupation of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian regions of Georgia; and a potential loss of momentum in the 5+2 talks on the Transnistria conflict. Progress in the resolution of these conflicts is urgently needed.

Minister Dačić, Serbia's Chairmanship of the OSCE is representative of just how much political progress has been made in the Balkans. We look to your leadership to continue this trend in 2015, since there is more work to be done. The OSCE has played a vital role in supporting the Brussels Dialogue process, and we expect that will continue as those talks proceed. We commend the steps taken to involve Kosovo authorities in regional initiatives, and in fostering constructive working relationships between Belgrade and Pristina. I know those are steps that have been taken – many by you personally. We should all do our part to ensure that progress is reflected here in Vienna as well. Discussions at the Permanent Council should not be simply about Kosovo, but with Kosovo. Kosovo is part of Europe and has an important role to play in institutions dedicated to peace and prosperity on the continent.

Minister Dačić, Serbia has already demonstrated its ability to Chair the OSCE through its effective leadership of the 2015 budget negotiations. We look forward to continued leadership of this kind by you and your Chairmanship team throughout the year.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.