



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Remarks OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Ministerial Council, Tirana, Albania (Virtual via Zoom)
December 4, 2020

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to do this closing statement.

While each of the OSCE's 45 years has seen its share of difficulties, 2020 has been one of the most challenging. As we collectively grappled with the impact of the COVID pandemic, the OSCE also faced a significant leadership gap as the four senior positions of this organization stood vacant for nearly six months.

Yet we have managed to reach consensus on an outstanding leadership slate. We congratulate the Albanian Chairmanship for its success in shepherding this process, and for guiding the OSCE through this most difficult year. The accomplishments that you have achieved already in this Ministerial, particularly with the Big Four, I think make a very nice birthday present for you, dear Igli. So congratulations, both on your day and for the achievement that we are seeing today. Under the Chairmanship's principled leadership, we maintained our course, ensured that the important work of this organization continued in all three dimensions of security, and positioned the OSCE for enduring relevancy and for future successes.

Significant security challenges remain. The only way to meet them and achieve lasting peace, prosperity and the full enjoyment of human rights in this region is for all participating States to implement the OSCE commitments that every one of us has freely adopted. Even as the circumstances have changed over the years, no country has revoked or backed out of its membership commitments. We are still all committed to the same goal.

We are grateful that the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia is holding after weeks of bloody conflict that cost far too many lives. The OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs must continue to play a key role in efforts to bring the sides toward a lasting peace based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The existence of the Minsk Group over the years and even active through this year, we believe, has made a contribution to the ceasefire and to the ongoing discussions that are underway right now, which must continue to proceed. And the OSCE Minsk Group is the only and best option to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh.

We remain seized with the situation in Belarus, as my colleague from the United Kingdom has just discussed. We encourage the government in Minsk to accept the OSCE Chair's offer to facilitate dialogue with civil society and the opposition. This presents the best opportunity to resolve this crisis in a manner that respects the rights and will of the people of Belarus and upholds the democratic principles of free and fair elections.

Mr. Chairman, with the respect to the United States' position with regard to Belarus, it should be perfectly clear and perfectly obvious that the United States and Belarus have begun to enter into a partnership regarding Trafficking in Persons. While we are unhappy with Belarus in many ways and look for a more positive future for Belarus, nevertheless, we have begun to try to work together on an important joint program on Trafficking in Persons. That negotiation has now been going on for months and in fact continuously for hours during this Ministerial and at this point it seems that the parties cannot come together to support the statement against trafficking in persons proposed by the United States and Belarus.

We will see whether in the end it is not successful, but I wish to say that the United States is very seized on this issue. We care a great deal about it, we care a great deal about many of these issues. I want to point out that the United States has financially supported many of the programs and goals that are under discussion both peripherally and directly through this proposal that combat trafficking in human beings. The United States has contributed toward several OSCE programs on this issue, such as WIN - Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality \$1.2 million; promoting human rights and gender response to security \$250,000; supporting and strengthening the women's resources center in Tajikistan almost \$200,000; and now we are under discussion to perhaps have a major trafficking in persons program in the multi-million dollars in partnership with Belarus.

I mention this money not to be arrogant or bragging, but instead to point out to fellow participating States that the United States cares about these issues and also we need to recognize that these finances are the money of the American taxpayers. If these are not programs that give result in a Ministerial Decision that support a major trafficking program like this, it becomes more difficult to explain to the American taxpayers what we are doing, by offering to finance this. The answer of course is, that we care about the women and children that are subject to these kinds of abuses in the OSCE region and we call on our fellow participating States to care as much as we do and to help us bring about a Ministerial Decision.

Now, on another matter, Moscow's aggression toward its neighbors continues to rank among our highest concerns. We greatly value the work of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, which was mandated by this organization to monitor and report on the conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's occupation of Crimea. The SMM should have full access to Crimea. Moreover, the United States joined with other delegations here in calling for the SMM to be given safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the areas along the internationally recognized border between Russia and Ukraine. We are encouraged by lower levels of ceasefire violations and civilian casualties since the implementation of additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire in July. But make no mistake, there can be no real solution to this conflict until Russia changes its behavior and takes concrete steps to meet Ukraine's commitment to a peaceful and diplomatic solution.

By its manufactured conflict in eastern Ukraine, its seizure of Crimea by force, and the mounting human rights abuses it perpetrates in the process, Russia has shown its contempt for the ten foundational principles of the Helsinki Final Act. This is a perilous path that can lead to conflict in the wider OSCE region and beyond, as other countries observe this behavior and might seek to mimic it, until finally conflict after conflict becomes something much more serious. Every one of our countries has been down this road before, with devastating consequences in the Twentieth Century.

The Helsinki Final Act's foundational principles guiding relations among States were adopted to prevent such conflict and we all committed to abide by them. The problem is not that OSCE or its institutions and principles are outdated, as Minister Lavrov suggested, that is not true. The problem is that Russia has chosen not to abide by these core tenets.

It is unfortunate that we were unable to reach consensus on either of the Ukraine texts. It is, however, illustrative of the great divergence between the positions of Russia and those of the vast majority of the participating States. Crimea, which is part of Ukraine-- and saying something different or trying to change it by force, does not change this fact--lies at the heart of these differences, and the United States remains unwavering in our position: we do not nor will we ever recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. It should be considered whether this type of conduct has much wider consequences for the security, structure, and rules, and common thought in the OSCE region. It is one of the fundamental problems that this Organization faces today.

My government welcomes agreement of all 57 participating States on a Ministerial Council statement regarding the 5+2 talks on settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. We recall as well the need for fulfillment of OSCE Summit commitments regarding the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Moldova, as the Foreign Ministers discussed in detail in this Ministerial Council.

The United States is pleased to join the Friends of Georgia in expressing unwavering support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reach consensus on a statement on the Russia-Georgia conflict. We would welcome discussion of opportunities for an increased OSCE role in Georgia.

We regret that we were unable to reach consensus in the Forum for Security Cooperation on the anniversary declaration of the Vienna Document and a decision to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325. We are among the 45 participating States that subscribed to a joint statement calling for substantial progress on Vienna Document modernization in 2021. We are proud to join the overwhelming majority of participating States in calling for implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in the FSC. We regret a significant decision on Small Arms and Light Weapons has not been agreed to by one participating State, and as a result, no FSC decisions were adopted in the Ministerial Council this year, despite the able leadership of the German Federal Republic. Nevertheless, rest assured that these important initiatives will figure prominently in our upcoming Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Cooperation.

We must redouble our creative work in the second dimension. The 57 OSCE participating States need to set an example by our response to the economic impacts of the COVID crisis, and by our leadership on environmental challenges, like wildlife trafficking. It is easy to speak in broad language about environmental issues, but here at OSCE, we have experience in shaping a common approach on specific issues. That is worth doing.

The environmental text for consideration for this Ministerial Council is still under discussion. A great deal of thinking and work has gone into this as the United States has vigorously supported this environmental declaration. In fact, in the importance that we have attached to the wildlife discussion we had a dispute with our friend Turkey and we were able to negotiate that and to settle that and to resolve it. Now it is our hope that any discussions regarding natural resources can likewise be accommodated so that we can have this declaration.

I am pleased that we are dealing with these issues in the way that we are. After three years of work on this issue in the second dimension, it is a statement of our ability to make compromises for the greater good to see this decision reached today.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, while we strive for a common approach to shared security challenges, we also must confront reality. We cannot build comprehensive security if we allow the very principles that form the foundation of that security to be weakened by blatant violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and the inherent human rights of the people in this region. The United States will always engage in good faith efforts with fellow participating States to find consensus on practical ways forward, but we will not compromise the foundational principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The OSCE must remain the premier place for honest dialogue among participating States and with civil society in a common effort to fulfill the promise of Helsinki.

We delivered a decision on the prohibition of torture. That shows that all 57 can find consensus on hard problems. Now we must put our words into action and eradicate torture in our region. We need to live up to all of our commitments, those that are longstanding and the ones we have adopted during this Ministerial.

I know the Swedish chair will take the lead, and I echo Deputy Secretary Biegun, who spoke on behalf of the United States at this Ministerial: we must have a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in 2021 to give a voice to civil society and to hold each other to account for our actions. The HDIM is an essential contribution to strengthening the security of our region and its suspension this year was solely due the CoViD pandemic.

It has been a challenging year. We commend the Albanian Chairmanship, under the able leadership of Albanian Prime Minister Rama, for its resolute leadership and for its innovative flexibility in addressing a constantly changing environment. We look forward to working closely with Sweden as they take up the Chairmanship in 2021. Finally, we offer our congratulations to North Macedonia as they prepare for their Chairmanship in 2023. We also look forward to the coming chairmanship of Poland.

The United States continues to place great value on this organization, its principles and commitments, and its independent institutions. As the United States transitions to a new administration in the U.S. in January 2021, you can be assured of our country's continued commitment to the OSCE and the goal of building a peaceful and prosperous region, where all people are free to exercise their human rights.

Mr. Chair, we request that this statement be attached to the decision and the journal of the day.

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