



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Marcel Peško Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 13, 2016

The United States welcomes Ambassador Peško back to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his report.

At the outset, let me commend the dedicated and talented staff members of the Conflict Prevention Center (CPC) and their work to support the OSCE's response to our shared security challenges – in particular, Russian aggression against Ukraine. The CPC's activities span both operational and diplomatic engagement, and include support to the Chairmanship's Special Envoy – who heads the Trilateral Contact Group – the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), the Project Coordinator in Ukraine, and the Observer Mission at two checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border.

While each of these institutional instruments of the OSCE has its own mandate, purpose, and capabilities, their respective activities are enhanced by effective coordination among them. Information sharing between the Observer Mission and the SMM is one example. Cooperation between the Project Coordinator and the SMM on demining is another. The CPC should anticipate, facilitate, and support continued constructive partnering among the field missions in Ukraine. In addition, the CPC should equip the OSCE to meet the growing operational challenges it faces in the field. Over the span of just a little over two years, the SMM has grown into a field mission of over 1300 personnel, whose monitors operate in a difficult and at times dangerous environment, and whose use of advanced technology in support of its vital monitoring and verification tasks is unprecedented for a civilian mission.

The Chairmanship's review of the conflict cycle, undertaken with all participating States, has identified important areas of improvement for the OSCE to consider. As you noted in your report, Ambassador Peško, the Secretariat can and should play a key role in exploring how to carry out these improvements. In particular, the Secretariat should find ways to deepen its expertise on the use of technology like UAVs, cameras, and other sensors as a means to enhance the OSCE's monitoring work. The use of UAVs has proven essential to the SMM's work, including weapons withdrawal verification, ceasefire monitoring, and facilitating agreements on infrastructure repair. The mission's use of cameras has provided an objective source of information on the contact line, especially at night. Other important technical tools have not yet been utilized, in part because the OSCE lacks the in-house expertise to operate them.

The OSCE's experience with the SMM has demonstrated the need to enhance its procurement mechanisms to allow the Organization to deploy assets quickly when and where needed. The Organization has not, unfortunately, been able to make these adjustments, as time-consuming tender processes involving UAVs and cameras needed by the SMM have shown. The OSCE should look into more nimble contractual arrangements that comply with the OSCE's requirements for transparency and cost efficiency.

Such improvements will not only enhance the OSCE's work in Ukraine, but will also improve its response to other conflicts across the OSCE area. We appreciate the OSCE's efforts to resolve the conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh through the established negotiating mechanisms and the Chairmanship's representatives. The CPC's support to these instruments is essential.

The OSCE works steadily to address our common security challenges across the OSCE space. In particular, we applaud the Forum for Security Cooperation's work on Small Arms and Light Weapons reduction, which also contributes to security in the region. We are ready to strengthen, consistent with our position, OSCE instruments and capacities to curb the illicit spread and destabilizing accumulation of these weapons.

Ambassador Peško, we highly value the work of the OSCE's field operations, and support the efforts described in your report to provide specific assistance to the field operations in Central Asia, as well as the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe. We see the OSCE's work in this region as essential. It is also critical for the OSCE to be able to respond affirmatively when participating States have expressed interest in, and would benefit from, an OSCE presence, as is the case with Georgia and Mongolia.

The United States supports the Chairmanship's effort to establish a conflict prevention fund that would assist the OSCE in preventing and responding to crises. Such a fund should provide future chairmanships and OSCE structures with the flexibility and independence to react quickly, objectively, and creatively to crises as they arise. We believe that both women and men should be actively engaged in conflict prevention and response. We encourage the Conflict Prevention Center, together with the Gender Unit, to promote greater involvement of women in OSCE activities. We also believe that it is important for the CPC to involve, as appropriate, persons with disabilities and members of other vulnerable populations to ensure that their needs and viewpoints are taken into account throughout the conflict cycle.

And the CPC should seek to employ a diverse staff as well.

Ambassador Peško, we thank you once again for your diligent efforts and for your report to this Council. In closing, let me again commend the CPC for its valuable work, which we fully support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.