



United States Mission to the OSCE

Remarks by U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE Daniel Baer at the Closing Session of the 2016 OSCE Ministerial Council

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Hamburger Messe und Congress
Hamburg, Germany

Mr. Chair, let me begin by thanking the German Chairmanship, obviously, the Chairman in Office, but also those who do the work throughout the year that has fueled the German Chairmanship – the team in Vienna, in Berlin, and now the expanded team of many here in Hamburg. Thank you for doing such able work on behalf of all of us.

Thank you also to all of the security personnel who have kept us safe this week and to the people of Hamburg who have put up with the disturbances of having motorcades going through their town over the last few days.

Thank you to the Secretariat for the help in organizing these meetings throughout the year and this meeting, of course, as well. And thank you to the Institutions for the inspiration and contributions that you make to our work. I'd like to offer five points in closing out this Hamburg Ministerial meeting:

First, this was a political meeting of ministers, and as we might expect in a political meeting about European and Eurasian security in December 2016, the top item on the agenda remained what we call in this forum "the crisis in and around Ukraine." In fact, my delegation counted among the Ministers' statements 53 mentions of Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea or Russian aggression against Ukraine – or both – over the ministers' statements.

The continuing crisis precipitated by Russian aggression against Ukraine overshadows our collective efforts to enhance European security and represents a risk to security, including the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, far beyond Ukraine's borders. Despite several agreements in Minsk to stop the fighting, reports by the Special Monitoring Mission reveal a highly volatile on-going level of violence, with a clear trend of provocation by combined Russian-separatist forces in the Donbas, as recorded by the Special Monitoring Mission's cameras on the contact line.

For progress on the political aspects of the Minsk Agreements to be achieved, a comprehensive ceasefire must be secured, and Russia must, at last, uphold its responsibilities in this regard. As the fighting enters its third winter, it's the people of Ukraine who are

forced to pay the highest price. The SMM has counted hundreds of civilian casualties this year alone. To ease the suffering, Russia and its separatists must reciprocate Ukrainian actions to open crossing points on the contact line and ensure at-risk communities have uninterrupted access to water, electricity, and humanitarian provisions.

We express our hope that prisoners and detainees will be released before the end of the year on the basis of the all-for-all principle, in keeping with the commitments made in the Minsk Agreements. We call on all parties to comply fully with the Minsk Agreements, including upholding the ceasefire, withdrawing proscribed weapons, making progress on disengagement and providing the SMM full and unfettered access to all parts of Ukraine – particularly the territory controlled by combined Russian-separatist forces.

Russian authorities commit serious abuses in occupied Crimea against the Crimean Tatar population and others who have opposed the occupation, and we reiterate that Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia ends its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and returns this territory to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments under the Minsk Agreements.

The second point I'd like to make, colleagues, is yesterday we heard from the Russian Foreign Minister calling for a change in the tone of our debates. This is bullying dressed up as politesse. Our debates are fervent not because we want them to be, but because the damage done to European security by Russian actions is so severe. Russia would like to persuade you that our calls for Russia to reverse its destructive actions are the problem, rather than the actions themselves. Don't fall for it. Russia would like to silence you by persuading you that good manners demand that you refrain from criticizing Russia's blatant violations of our trust and Russia's gross failures to uphold its OSCE commitments. Don't fall for it. Strong, justified statements aren't the cause of our current challenges, and nice words won't repair the damage that Russia has done. Russian action must be the starting point.

It's also worth noting that even as the head of the Russian delegation counsels what they call "mutual respect," we've seen a stunning display of disrespectful bad faith throughout the negotiations here at Hamburg and in the lead-up to the Ministerial. The German chairmanship worked tirelessly and produced high-quality draft decisions that would have advanced our work and strengthened our organization.

Let me remind you of just a few of them that died on a Russian sword: the Ukraine declaration, where Russia was the only participating State to block consensus despite significant concessions by Ukraine and others on specific language. Russia was totally isolated. The decision on strengthening the capabilities of the OSCE in addressing the conflict cycle, where Russia attempted to use the text to advance its efforts to fundamentally remake the nature of the OSCE.

The decision on the definition of anti-Semitism, where Russia proposed to radically alter this text – which had received wide support – and as a result, we missed an opportunity to provide participating States a much-needed tool to fight anti-Semitism in all its many forms. Obviously, the definition remains available to all of us and to OSCE institutions to use in our work going forward.

The decision on torture, which was blocked at the last minute today after two years of tireless work. This will not stop us from raising specific cases, like the case of Ildar Dadin, which we raised in the Permanent Council just a few weeks ago. The decision on combating hate crimes – Russia insisted on language on neo-Nazism and Nuremburg knowing that others disagree with the political manner in which Russia wields these terms. The decision on Roma and Sinti -- Russia bracketed nearly the entire text and refused to engage, claiming an inability to get instructions despite the large size of its delegation.

And I join my Finnish colleague in expressing regret that Russia blocked the decision on persons with disabilities because it couldn't get a reference to the Paralympics in this text. And I think it's important for all of us to acknowledge – I would guess that nobody around this table has any problem with the Paralympics, indeed, many of our countries invest a great deal in supporting this valiant effort. But what we refused to do was to allow the Russian Federation to instrumentalize a text that should have applied to tens of millions of people across the OSCE region to use it for its own propaganda to cover the state-sponsored doping efforts that led to the suspension of its Paralympic team. And it is a strange coincidence that just today a report comes out that more than 1,000 athletes were involved in the state-sponsored doping program of the Russian Federation. And the leader of this report said, "it's impossible to know how deep and how far back this conspiracy theory goes. For years, international sports competitions have unknowingly been hijacked by the Russians." So let's remember why that decision failed, because we refuse to allow Russia to use it for its own propaganda.

On each of these, the Russian Federation was, if not the only, then a determinant obstacle to consensus. In negotiations, Russia routinely inserted amendments it knew were unacceptable to many others with the sole purpose of obstruction or scoring political points. They refused to offer rationales for removing quality content, or offered rationales that were illogical and unserious. And even on the very few decisions on which Russia joined the rest of us in consensus, it only did so after significantly weakening the texts, removing much of their content and thereby throwing out much of what could have been the basis for the kind of cooperation that at other times the Russian Federation claims to want.

Obviously, this is regrettable, but not new. But there's a risk here that we allow Russian behavior to change the way we all interact at the OSCE. When a delegation consistently fails to show good faith, we not only lose respect for them, but we start to accept that kind of engagement as normal. But this is not normal. And we should remember to hold each other accountable. That is, after all, a central component of mutual respect. And so, my delegation, in line with a respectful mode of engagement, is clear – we hold Russia accountable for its failure to engage in good faith, and for the destructive approach it has taken to the work in this organization, as we do for its violations of international law and its failures to uphold its OSCE commitments domestically and internationally.

Third, we share many of the views of the European Union on a number of issues, including the urgency of making progress on resolving the protracted conflicts. We remain committed to confidence and security building measures and conventional arms control, and we are ready to work on the much-needed modernization of the Vienna Document and to engage in dialogue on key issues in the political-military dimension.

Fourth, colleagues, I want to say something about the lack of decisions at this Ministerial in the Human Dimension, which several others have mentioned. The United States shares the deep regret of many around this hall that we were not able to agree on a single decision in the Human Dimension. This is obviously a missed opportunity, for there is urgent work to do in the Human Dimension. As Secretary Kerry made clear yesterday, the U.S. is deeply concerned by the crackdown on independent voices and backsliding on democracy and rule of law in too many places. As Secretary Kerry said, “let me be clear: bigotry, repression, and the silencing of dissent cannot become the new normal for any of us. Every chip away at the fundamentals of freedom is actually an ugly building block in the road to tyranny. And the fact is that we all need to be aware of the danger of authoritarian populism.”

But colleagues, even though there were no decisions in the Human Dimension, we should remember that the OSCE acquis contains a great wealth of commitments by participating States. And there’s plenty of progress to be made by diligently assessing implementation of this acquis, calling attention to gaps and working in good faith to do better. That is what we know that people across the OSCE area count on us to do, whether they are in Central Asia, or Central Europe, or the South Caucuses, or elsewhere. That is what the participants in the parallel civil society conference called on us to do.

There is good work to do together, and none of us needs consensus to start doing it – only courage.

Fifth: today is International Anti-Corruption Day. Tomorrow, as we heard from our Norwegian colleague is International Human Rights Day, and the culmination of this year’s Orange the World campaign to counter violence against women, which is why a number of us wear orange today. These days, these campaigns are meant to draw affirmative attention to our urgent work on behalf of human dignity. In a number of places around the world, violence and instability remind us of the consequences of failing to do so.

The failures of participating States to implement their OSCE commitments do not make the fundamental truth underlying the OSCE concept of comprehensive security any less true. States with governments that respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, that foster shared prosperity through openness and good governance, that respect the rules of the international system, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their neighbors, are states that are more stable, more resilient, and more innovative – that are better partners and better able to provide a stronger future for their people.

So as Foreign Minister Steinmeier urged us, let us remember the visionary wisdom of Helsinki, and let us let it guide us going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

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