



United States Mission to the OSCE

Farewell Remarks by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter

As delivered
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Natasha, and thank you, Maria-Pia, for those very, very kind words. And I want to thank all of you, colleagues, as well for this opportunity to bid farewell.

I arrived in Vienna in November of 2021 to a very different OSCE, one where delegations were diligently preparing for a Ministerial Council: focused not on atrocities or abuses, but on declarations and decisions that we could adopt by consensus. I remember feeling deeply uncomfortable at having to interrupt that normalcy with dire warnings of what was to come. Some brushed these warnings aside. I myself could hardly believe back then that such enormous barbarity, cruelty, and suffering were meticulously being planned. You see, I'm an optimist by nature; my generation's defining moment was the fall of the Iron Curtain and the liberation of the captive nations that had been trapped on the wrong side of it.

When I look back on these last two and a half years, it's clear that many here rose to the challenge. We focused immediately on exposing what was happening in Ukraine and pursuing accountability for war crimes, as we should have. If I am to be perfectly honest with all of you, though, we probably could, and almost certainly should, have done more.

But our professional training and, for many of us, our personal inclination is often quite different: it's to find common ground, to pursue dialogue, to identify areas where we can harness mutual understanding to arrive at common solutions. That's the heart of multilateral diplomacy.

It's just that sometimes there is no common ground. Sometimes you cannot and you should not seek mutual understanding. Certainly not of Bucha or Borodyanka or Irpin. Our calling at this moment of history is not to bridge this moat, but to build bridges around it.

Just imagine, colleagues, in the future, perhaps one day our grandchildren will visit Ukraine, and they'll see monuments like the ones in so many European cities that were ravaged by the Second World War. Perhaps they'll visit in the month of March, before the apple trees on Yablunska street have begun to bloom. There they'll read inscriptions to a bygone era. They will say something like: "on this spot, on this day, the townsfolk of this community were brutally murdered." Perhaps they'll see portraits of smiling families cut down in the prime of life. Maybe they'll even pause for just a second to think about what their grandparents did, or didn't do, at the time.

As William Butler Yeats once wrote about a very different era: “All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty has been born.” Let’s hope we can find some beauty in our values and principles. Because we desperately need it.

Finally, I’d just like to end with a word of gratitude to all of you. I want to thank each and every one of you for your kindness, for teaching me about your countries, and for providing so many examples of diplomacy at its finest, really. In spite of all the challenges of working in the middle of a war, I’ll always remember this as a deeply rewarding experience. Thank you all for making it memorable and for being such wonderful colleagues.

And to my team: thank you for your steadfast support, your creativity, your dedication, and your many sacrifices. You make the U.S. Mission better each and every day, and you put everything you’ve got into your work. Thank you all so much.

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