



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to the Address by Frans Timmermans, Foreign Minister of the Netherlands**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 10, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

The United States extends a warm welcome to Foreign Minister Timmermans. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, Mr. Foreign Minister, and thank you for your insightful, thought-provoking remarks. And I appreciate the fact that you spoke without notes: it's unusual in this forum and certainly makes for an engaging and inspiring experience. So thank you for sharing your time and your thoughts with us today, it's good to see you back, a strong friend of this organization.

Throughout our entire history as a nation, the United States has shared an extraordinarily important and successful relationship with the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Dutch were among the first to recognize and support American independence. The Hague hosted our first American Embassy, and Friesland and the United Provinces provided the United States with its first – much-needed – loan. Which leads me to ask, I could use... no, never mind [*laughter*]. Our excellent bilateral relations are based on close historical and cultural ties, as well as our common dedication to the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights online and offline. We share your goals for an open, market-led global economy, integrating new partners into global trade architecture and drawing us closer together. We commend Minister Timmermans and the Netherlands for their meaningful contributions at NATO, the UN, the OECD, and elsewhere.

Our close cooperation extends to the OSCE, where we share many of the same priorities. We particularly appreciate the active involvement of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee in the OSCE's human dimension work. We applaud its principled efforts at defending and promoting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of everyone – regardless of their race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or any distinguishing characteristic. We also thank you for the close focus that your delegation here in Vienna has maintained on these key issues of human dimension security that form the foundation for so much of our work.

Another important area of shared interest between our countries – indeed among all the participating States around this table – is the ongoing crisis caused by Russia's violations of international laws and breaches of its OSCE commitments in Ukraine. The Netherlands has been a leader in the OSCE's response to this crisis, making significant contributions to the Special Monitoring Mission – both in financing the Mission and in sending experienced monitors to contribute to the Mission's success. We thank you, Minister Timmermans, for that leadership. And like you, we are relieved to hear that the Dutch member of the SMM,

who had been unlawfully detained by pro-Russia separatists for a month, was released and in good health. We look to the Netherlands to continue to lead by example as the OSCE develops extra-budgetary projects to support a peaceful and prosperous future for Ukraine.

Mr. Minister, thank you for your thoughts on the evolution of this Organization over the last two decades. Your comment that the agenda of the OSCE is back on top of the European agenda is a perspective that we share. We do well to remind ourselves of the need for this Organization to respond to changes in the security environment with ideas and action, while maintaining our firm support for the principles that are the foundation of our work. A renewed focus on fully implementing the commitments we have made to each other and to our people must be at the core of the future of this Organization.

Making progress on arms control and increasing military transparency have been among President Obama's priorities. Recent events in and around Ukraine underscore the continued importance of conventional arms control and confidence-building measures as part of the European security architecture, now and in the future. Existing arrangements provide important mechanisms through which to share information about military forces and activities. However, our experiences in Ukraine and the evolution of conventional military forces in Europe since the end of the Cold War also demonstrate the need for these regimes to be improved and for certain mechanisms to be strengthened in order to provide meaningful transparency and predictability in the modern security environment. We remain determined to preserve, strengthen, and modernize the conventional arms control regime in Europe – including the Vienna Document – based on key principles and commitments.

Mr. Minister, before closing I wanted to say that your Ambassador spoke to a couple of us yesterday and mentioned that you welcome comments and genuine questions. So, if I may, knowing as you do my great admiration for your work across a range of issues, two things.

One, I wanted to pick up on your point about the choice resting with Moscow, about whether Moscow wishes – and really we should say with the Kremlin – about whether Russia wishes to be part of a common European and Eurasian community, and engage again in that project or not. Obviously, our desire is that they choose to be part of that community, and I wonder how you personally interpret the recent statements by President Putin and by Foreign Minister Lavrov, which quite explicitly state that they intend to head off in a different direction. You mentioned that just because things are bad today doesn't mean they have to be bad tomorrow, and by tomorrow I assume you were speaking figuratively. And so the question is: how do you respond to the challenge of convincing the Kremlin that the best future for the Russian people lies in engaging in a very difficult, but very important, common project with the rest of us – one that might threaten some of the people in power in Russia today, who are there and held there by corruption and clientelism?

The second, if I may, is on your comments at the end about LGBT people. At the risk of being more personal than the Permanent Council allows: I didn't choose to be gay. In fact, I spent a lot of time trying to choose not to be gay. So I don't think it's about letting people make a choice and then supporting them. It's about recognizing that people are born the way I was born, and recognizing that this should have no impact on the rights they enjoy in any society. And that when governments have obligations to respect the human rights of everyone, that means everyone including LGBT people. For that reason, on your comment that it's not that every country has to allow a gay pride parade, I think that actually every country does. To the extent that they are peaceful manifestations of the right of freedom of

assembly and association, every country around this table, every country in the world, has obligations to respect that right for all people. So, knowing that you have been a strong supporter in this area, I would offer those comments as well.

Mr. Minister, thank you again for spending this time with us at this Council today, and thank you for the Netherlands' leadership at the OSCE. We wish you all the best.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.