

United States Mission to the OSCE



Response to the Address by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms. Marija Pejčinović Burić

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 10, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Secretary General, the United States welcomes you back to the OSCE’s Permanent Council. We appreciate your overview of the *Council of Europe’s* work during these past six months as our organizations and memberships have grappled with the pandemic and the process of recovery.

This year marks the United States’ 25th as a *Council of Europe* Observer, and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to its efficacy. Today, our Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs is addressing the Council’s Ministerial Conference on *Challenges and Opportunities for Media and Democracy*. We are proud to be full members of the *Venice Commission* and of *GRECO—the Group of States Against Corruption*.

We work closely with the *Council of Europe* to counter terrorism, including as members of the *24/7 Networks of Contact Points on Foreign Terrorist Fighters and on the Exchange of Information Regarding the Legal Standing of Victims of Terrorism*, as well as a number of other *Working Groups*. The United States is pleased also to regularly contribute to the work of the *Budapest Convention on Cybercrime*, which over the past 20 years substantially improved the international community’s capacity to address cybercrime, an issue that is very relevant these days.

We share your alarm concerning the democratic backsliding prior to and during the pandemic, as discussed in the *Council’s* recent report on “Democracy in Distress” and we welcome thoughts on how our two organizations can work together to reverse this dynamic.

Regrettably, the principles of the OSCE and the *Council of Europe* have been under attack for some years as Russia challenges our rules-based international order. Moscow undermines the democratic systems of other countries while it deepens repression of its own people in clear violation of its human rights obligations and commitments. Russia’s occupation of parts of Georgia and Ukraine and its instigation and continued fueling of the conflict in eastern Ukraine show blatant disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other European states.

Madam Secretary General, this conduct—at home and toward neighbor—is unacceptable, and we must not let it determine our region’s future.

The OSCE and the *Council of Europe* must work together to protect human rights, strengthen democratic processes and institutions, support the role of independent civil society and media, and promote the rule of law—all essential components of comprehensive security. The collaboration

between the *Venice Commission* and the OSCE on topics such as election-related legislation support participating States in implementing their international obligations and commitments. Our joint international Election Observation Missions bring transparency to elections throughout the OSCE area, underscoring the importance of holding governments accountable to their people.

The regular meetings of the *OSCE-CoE Coordination Group* and the joint reports of *OSCE-CoE Focal Points* ensure both organizations are well-equipped to protect the rights of members of national minorities, promote tolerance and non-discrimination, and combat terrorism and trafficking in human beings.

Madam Secretary General, gender equality and promoting women's meaningful political participation and economic empowerment, preventing and responding to all forms of gender-based violence, and advancing *Women, Peace, and Security* agenda are crucial to achieving peace, prosperity, and stability in our region. As Vice President Harris has stated, the United States firmly believes the status of women is the status of democracy.

We must redouble our efforts to promote gender equality as our countries recover from the pandemic. The United States would like to see our two organizations collaborate to combat violence against women and girls and promote the goals of UNSCR 1325 on *Women, Peace, and Security*.

We would also like to see more collaboration between the OSCE and GRECO, the *Council of Europe's* anti-corruption body. We welcome your thoughts on how States can use this tool to hold each other accountable.

Finally, we commend the *Council of Europe* for encouraging its members to meet their obligations—for example, abiding by and implementing judgments handed down by the *European Court of Human Rights*, paying all debts owed to the institution, and facilitating access of monitoring bodies to their territories.

In conclusion, Madam Secretary General, you can count on the United States' continued support, as an OSCE participating State and *Council of Europe* Observer, for the complementary work of both our organizations. Please continue this valuable cooperation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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