



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 21, 2016

Ambassador Avakov, we welcome you to the Permanent Council and thank you for your comprehensive report and statement today.

The United States strongly supports the work of the OSCE Office in Yerevan as it assists Armenia in implementing its OSCE commitments across all three dimensions. We recognize the Armenian government's cooperation with the Office in Yerevan. As Armenians strive for a more participatory, decentralized, and accountable system of governance, the OSCE Office in Yerevan pays dividends for citizens throughout the country.

We appreciate the Office's attention to the constitutional reform undertaken at the initiative of Armenia's president and adopted by national referendum in 2015. The United States supports the Office's efforts to provide electoral reform guidance, while contributing to the strengthening of Armenia's overall legal framework. The upcoming municipal elections on October 2 and the subsequent parliamentary elections in spring 2017 will provide critical markers of democratic development for Armenia. We strongly recommend the Government of Armenia adopt previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations to help facilitate a free, fair, transparent, and credible election.

Regarding First Dimension activities, we value the Office's efforts to assist in reforms to the police education system. These will help strengthen the capacity of local law enforcement, promote the development of community policing methods, and address the issue of domestic violence. In line with OSCE and Security Sector Reform standards, we urge a continued focus on respect for human rights by the Office in its capacity-building efforts. We support continued efforts in public sector management, especially in the criminal justice sector.

On Second Dimension programs, the United States applauds the Office's focus on reforming regulations related to Armenia's economic development. This has been an effective anti-corruption measure, but it also has yielded practical results for businesses and the overall investment climate. Through its efforts, the Office has demonstrated that enhancing good governance – as expressed in the 2012 Dublin Declaration on strengthening good governance – can lead to broader economic empowerment throughout various sectors. Private investors seek predictable rules that are uniformly enforced, transparent tax and regulatory systems, and good governance free from the stain of corruption. We commend Armenia's efforts to

simplify its tax and regulatory structures, which have improved the country's business environment.

In the area of Third Dimension activities, the Office has the potential to make a significant impact, particularly in its support to Armenia's office of the Human Rights Defender. Maintaining this focus in the Office's workshops would bring greater visibility to human rights defenders in Armenia, while also providing concrete skill development. OSCE-sponsored human rights training for military police and the armed forces has generated valuable impact. We support strengthening the Office's work on the regional network of women's resource centers, as well as its work with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. More generally, the United States applauds efforts the Office is making to consult with local stakeholders, particularly civil society, and develop a results-based methodology for its programs.

We would welcome learning more about how you might intend to ramp up engagement with civil society across the Office's work in all three dimensions. We also noted appreciatively the Armenian Ambassador's statement today recognizing the value of the cross-dimensional projects related to gender equality and women's empowerment, including the women's resource centers as well as work on women, peace, and security.

Considering the scope of activities covered by the Office in Yerevan's mandate, we appreciate your spot reporting on events and issues of concern in Armenia. In this context, the United States would like to offer our condolences to the family of the police officer killed during the tragic incident in Yerevan's Erebuni district, and wish all those injured in this incident a full and swift recovery. We condemn the use of violence to effect political change in Armenia. We encourage Armenian authorities to handle the situation with appropriate restraint and with a view towards ensuring everyone's rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and the importance of access to information.

Armenia is an important partner of the United States. We have a broad and strong relationship spanning a range of shared interests, including preserving peace and regional security, promoting trade and investment, and advancing democratization and the rule of law.

We would like to again thank Ambassador Avakov for his efforts and those of his team, and pledge our support for the Office's future work.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.