



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Response to the Report by the
Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre,
Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä**

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 29, 2020

The United States welcomes *Officer in Charge* Ambassador Yrjölä's report on the activities of Conflict Prevention Center at today's meeting of the Permanent Council. The CPC, as the nerve center of the OSCE, provides valuable support to the negotiators and mediators seeking to resolve conflicts in our region and it assists OSCE's field operations working to prevent future conflicts.

As we look towards the Ministerial Council, this is an appropriate time to reflect on the security situation in the OSCE area and take stock of our work to promote comprehensive security. Indeed, our assessment is somber. OSCE participating States are witnessing the worst fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the 1990s. Russia continues to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and violate its territorial integrity as it blatantly ignores its international law obligations and OSCE commitments and supports armed proxies in eastern Ukraine. Russia also continues to undermine Georgia's sovereignty and violate its territorial integrity, and the Transnistrian conflict remains largely unresolved.

These conflicts persist against the backdrop of a global pandemic that has killed more than a million people around the world. COVID has negatively impacted economies and made more daunting the efforts by governments and civil society alike to advance political and economic reforms. OSCE's comprehensive approach to security tells us that lasting peace and prosperity depend on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. So, too, does a rapid recovery from the pandemic. Wherever governments respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, societies are more resilient. That is why it is all the more unconscionable that some governments are using COVID-19 as an excuse to crack down on their people.

Adherence to the principles of the *Helsinki Final Act* provides the essential framework for ensuring security in the OSCE region. The network of OSCE field operations assists host countries in upholding their commitments, thus strengthening their own security, and that of the region. Regrettably, some host countries seek to limit or narrowly interpret the mandates of field operations, and by so doing, impede or prevent them from doing their work in all three dimensions of security. This is unacceptable.

Field operations must be able to carry out their mandates and report to participating States without interference. The limits placed on the *Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine* are a prime example.

We receive near daily reports that Russia and its proxies block the SMM's monitoring activities in eastern Ukraine, and Russia has never allowed SMM monitors to execute their duties in Crimea. Yet, the SMM is not the only mission struggling to carry out its mandate in full. The Mission to Moldova is unable to access the Cobasna munitions depot in the Security Zone. There is no longer an OSCE Mission in Georgia because Russia refused to extend its mandate in 2008 or allow a future Mission to operate throughout the full territory of the country within its internationally- recognized borders.

Nearly 10 years ago in Vilnius, participating States sought to stop this negative trend and strengthen the OSCE's capability to promote comprehensive security through the adoption of a *Ministerial Council Decision on the Conflict Cycle*. There were numerous calls at the *Annual Security Review Conference* on strengthening this decision on its 10th anniversary. We discussed several concrete proposals at the annual *Conflict Cycle Workshop* on September 11, 2020. The U.S. delegation proposed that the CPC provide recommendations on confidence-building measures that could be funded by participating States and on means for involving more women in conflict resolution. We also advocated for a mechanism to quickly deploy fact-finding teams to strengthen the OSCE's crisis response.

The common denominator is that we need the political will to use the OSCE's toolbox. We call on all participating States to look for ways to contribute towards building that political will where it is absent.

We appreciate the CPC's efforts to reap the benefits of the *Women, Peace, and Security* framework by partnering with the Gender Unit, field operations, and Special Representatives on gender-mainstreaming in their work. We commend the CPC's support to the field operations and the *Forum for Security Cooperation*. We hope the CPC will continue its efforts in these fields and look for ways to expand the OSCE's toolbox through confidence-building-measures and other practical instruments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.