



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Christine Muttonen

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 27, 2016

The United States warmly welcomes OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Christine Muttonen to the Permanent Council, and thanks her for her report. The United States highly values the work of the Parliamentary Assembly, and the contribution that parliamentarians make to our common goals and objectives for the OSCE region.

Madam President, the United States welcomes your emphasis on dialogue among the participating States, especially at a time when unresolved tensions and open conflicts within the OSCE region challenge security. The OSCE, as the most comprehensive regional organization, is particularly important in this regard. If we are to overcome our differences, we must be frank. Above all, we must strive for objectivity, not artificial neutrality. As you pointed out, Madam President, it is encouraging to see representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine engaging in dialogue to reach a settlement to the current crisis. We cannot, however, ignore the reality that the Russian Federation has intervened militarily in Ukraine by occupying and illegally attempting to annex territory, and by continuing to fuel the conflict in the Donbas.

Madam President, parliamentarians active in the Parliamentary Assembly excel as Special Representatives, as committee officers, and as leaders of election observation missions. They speak out candidly, and devote time and effort to travel to troubled areas to hear from refugees, to meet with human rights advocates, and to lend support to civil society where it is most under threat.

A good example of activism by OSCE parliamentarians is your recent Op-Ed on the U.S. election process. Madam President, you cited several problems you see with the process. I can tell you that many Americans also support ongoing efforts to continuously improve our electoral processes. You mentioned how U.S. courts and other institutions preserve and protect the democratic essentials of our government, and are ready to ensure the rule of law prevails. We appreciate your acknowledgement of the fundamental integrity of our political system. We will duly consider the conclusions and recommendations reached by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly when it participates, along with ODIHR, in the OSCE's observation of U.S. elections in less than two weeks' time. And we look forward to welcoming you, personally, in your personal capacity to that mission.

Madam President, the United States welcomes the views of the Parliamentary Assembly as expressed in its Tbilisi Declaration, and the emphasis placed on counterterrorism, addressing migration issues and the rights of refugees, fighting corruption, promoting gender equality, and strengthening international law enforcement cooperation to combat the sexual exploitation of children. We appreciate that in Tbilisi, as in Baku and Helsinki in previous years, the Parliamentary Assembly has expressed unequivocal support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while reminding us of the ongoing threats to Georgia and Moldova. We believe the views expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly reflect the overwhelming sentiment here.

Some Parliamentary Assembly resolutions and statements have been critical of the United States. Whether we ultimately accept those criticisms or not, we listen to them carefully and consider them to be genuinely and sincerely expressed. And we try to act on those that are well-founded. We wish all participating States were open to constructive criticism.

The United States welcomes the work of the Parliamentary Assembly on combating trafficking in persons, as well as countering anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance. These are issues the Assembly first put on the OSCE agenda, and they need to remain priorities for action. The United States is proud that two of our own Members of Congress are OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representatives: Senator Benjamin Cardin on Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance, and Congressman Christopher Smith on Human Trafficking Issues. Congressman Smith is also Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. We believe PA Special Representatives can make a valuable contribution to our work, and we will look forward to hearing from newly-appointed Special Representative on Mediation, President Emeritus Ilkka Kanerva, on how the PA and the PC can work more closely together to prevent and respond to crises.

We are also proud that two Members of our Congress serve as officers in the Assembly: Senator Roger Wicker as Chairman of the First Committee, and Representative Robert Aderholt as Vice-President. Senator Wicker, as you know, is also co-Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Madam President, in closing, let me also express appreciation for the excellent work of Ambassador Andreas Nothelle and the Parliamentary Assembly's team here in Vienna. Like our U.S. Helsinki Commission back in Washington, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE ensures that diplomacy is conducted in the context of democratic government, and that the views we express here reflect the values of the citizens we represent.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.