



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to the Presentation by Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Nils Muižnieks**

As delivered by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Michele Siders  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 16, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner Muižnieks, the United States warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council. The United States values your work on promoting and protecting human rights, in particular on the plight of human rights defenders and the shrinking space for civil society in the OSCE region. These are courageous individuals, and their work is vitally important.

Respect for the rule of law, human rights, and democratic institutions is a fundamental pillar of a rules-based international order and a keystone to the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. When international legal obligations and OSCE commitments are undermined and democratic governance is eroded, security is weakened. That is why it is important for organizations such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe to work in concert to defend and promote human rights and democratic values.

In that regard, we join the EU in welcoming your attention to the situation in Ukraine, including your country visit and report this past July. The United States shares your concern regarding impunity for abuses in Crimea and areas of eastern Ukraine not under government control, including enforced disappearances and torture. We reiterate our profound worry about the situation in occupied Crimea. Your thoughts on concrete ways in which the OSCE and the Council of Europe could further cooperate in addressing the most urgent human rights concerns stemming from Russia's aggression in Ukraine would be appreciated.

The exchange of information between the OSCE and the Council of Europe helps ensure that our activities are complementary. Our two organizations are most effective when they are mutually supportive, particularly in efforts to measure the health of democracies and the rule of law. The United States welcomes the continued cooperation between your office and the OSCE's three independent institutions.

We should build on the many well-established areas of cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe on democratic election processes and election legislation, the human rights of members of national minorities, and freedom of expression. We look forward to deepening cooperation between the two organizations in countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism, and on internet freedom issues, which are also priorities of

the Austrian Chairmanship. Efforts are also underway to share more data relating to trafficking in persons, a priority for the incoming Italian Chairmanship.

Finally, the United States continues to share your deep concern over the rise of intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE area. It is unacceptable that individuals face abuse because of their religion, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation or identity, disability, or migration status. We welcome the attention your office helps bring to the often difficult conditions that some Roma and Sinti individuals endure. Coordinated efforts by the OSCE and the Council of Europe to counter intolerance are critical to ensuring comprehensive security throughout the OSCE region.

Commissioner Muižnieks, we thank you for your presentation and wish you every success in your important efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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