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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement for the Joint Session of the Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) and the Permanent Council (PC)

Delivered by Ambassador James Gilmore

October 28, 2020

Thank you to both Chairpersons,

I want to begin by acknowledging the contributions that Ambassador Cuesta, the Spanish Chairman, has made to advance the Structured Dialogue this year, which are all the more notable given the unique challenges that arose from the coronavirus pandemic. We appreciate the Chair's ability to adapt in real time in order to ensure the continuation of this important dialogue. We hope the next Chairperson will adopt the same lessons that have been so valuably learned in order to enable robust and constructive Structured Dialogue exchanges in 2021.

The Structured Dialogue sessions this year have provided an opportunity for participating States to discuss urgent security threats, including concerns arising from conventional military activities, such as the deeply disturbing violence in the Caucasus and continuing conflict in Ukraine, as well as hybrid activities and shocking recent developments like the Navalny poisoning. We likewise deeply regret the use of force in Belarus against peaceful demonstrators and the political opposition.

We welcomed the discussions during the June Structured Dialogue session on the political-military aspects of security, including the impact of COVID-19 on military activities, arms control, and confidence and security building measures, as well as the discussion on hybrid, which remains one of the most critical threats facing the OSCE area. The October Structured Dialogue session also presented an opportunity to share perspectives on transparency, risk reduction, and incident prevention for stability; as well as to discuss other challenges to security.

A consistent theme throughout these and previous Structured Dialogue sessions has been lack of confidence in the intentions of neighbors, mistrust that is fueled by the failure of some nations – notably the Russian Federation – to abide by their

international commitments, including those based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, arms control agreements, and international law. Indeed, we share the view of many that Russia's violation of international agreements and rules, as well as its contravention of principles, is the fundamental reason for the current erosion of trust and confidence in Europe.

Our exchanges have confirmed that the best way to enhance military transparency, begin to rebuild trust, and affirm the role of conventional arms control is through Vienna Document modernization. The unitary Vienna Document modernization proposal tabled in October 2019 and co-sponsored by 34 pS is a sound and thoughtful basis for negotiations. We hope that all participating States will join us in committing to reach consensus on an update to the Vienna Document in 2021. We have the expertise, we know the challenges, we need to do this. We need to ask is there commitment from all parties including the Russian Federation, which has expressed reservations about the Vienna Document modernization? Is there a commitment to sharing information and creating transparency and visibility so that we can reduce tensions within the European area? If that commitment is there, then we should be able to proceed with Vienna Document modernization. If it is not there, then we would see the obstruction we are seeing now. Ultimately it is a political decision that must be evaluated and reached in order for us to proceed with Vienna Document modernization to reduce tensions in Europe.

Some participating States, perhaps recognizing that Vienna Document modernization is only possible when all participating States are willing to come to the negotiating table, have proposed voluntary information sharing, rather than firm commitments. We do not object to voluntary transparency measures, provided they are reciprocal, but voluntary measures are no substitute for firm political commitments, such as those set out in the Vienna Document, or for legal obligations. That is why we continue to urge all participating States to join us in substantive negotiations on Vienna Document modernization. If we can all agree to begin that important work together, the United States would also be willing to support mil-mil experts' dialogue in the SD format on voluntary measures and best practices that could complement an updated Vienna Document -- they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, the two should go hand in hand; voluntary measures cannot substitute for firm commitments and firm commitments breed security and confidence in the European space.

Some countries have also expressed interest in studying emerging security challenges, such as the impact of new technologies. We know several of our

friends feel that way. We welcome the opportunity to gain a better understanding about these issues and to explore their potential implications; however, we should recognize that many of the challenges put forward to date may not be susceptible to arms control solutions. Furthermore, any discussion of future security challenges should only be pursued with the explicit understanding that our immediate focus remains on the security challenges we are facing today. It may be easier to talk about the future, but we cannot use that as a pretext to avoid the hard issues of today. In that regard, we would strongly recommend separating discussions of future challenges from discussions of current security challenges.

The United States supports the continuation of the Structured Dialogue in 2021 as a forum where nations can discuss urgent security threats, with no area excluded as too sensitive or somehow outside familiar lanes of OSCE discussion. This should continue to include not only concerns arising from conventional military activities, but also pervasive threats such as hybrid activity and other actions and developments nations view as undermining the security environment. We continue to reject the desire of some to focus the Structured Dialogue agenda on what they view as “pol-mil” only, when in fact in today’s security challenges are much broader.

We look forward to the Chair’s Final Report and its suggestions for the way forward. We hope the report will reiterate the previous Structured Dialogue Chairs’ call for all participating States to fully implement and modernize existing confidence and security building instruments. We also hope it will urge participating States to continue to use the Structured Dialogue to exchange views on the full range of security concerns.

I would like to close with a word of caution as we prepare for next year’s Structured Dialogue discussions. This forum is valuable precisely because it enables constructive exchanges on the security issues that are actually occurring. Threatening to boycott discussion of specific topics -- particularly issues as pervasive and urgent as hybrid activities -- cuts to the very core of the Structured Dialogue by undermining the objectives we established in Hamburg. We must all be willing to fully participate in Structured Dialogue discussions if we want this forum to be relevant to current security challenges, and more effective in identifying ways ahead. And we should all welcome frank, focused exchanges, even on the most contentious of topics.

Thank you.