



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Ambassador Claus Neukirch

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 22, 2020

We welcome Ambassador Neukirch to the Permanent Council and appreciate your report on the developments in Moldova and on the work of the OSCE Mission. The global coronavirus pandemic continues to challenge the country, as well as the work of the OSCE. The pandemic and associated emergency public health measures only heighten the crucial role that OSCE Field Missions play in executing their mandates, particularly in reporting facts on the ground in a timely manner.

The United States is pleased the OSCE Mission to Moldova has increased its patrols to monitor the situation in the *Security Zone*. This shows it is possible to have freedom of movement between the banks, while ensuring health and safety. While the Mission's increased presence in the *Security Zone* is positive, we should not forget the Mission has been unable to monitor and report on the situation at the munitions depot in Cobasna, as provided in the expansion of the Mission's mandate from the *1999 Istanbul Summit* and *Permanent Council Decision 329/99*.

I think it's worth remembering just for a moment here at the Permanent Council the mandate of this Mission: to facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive political framework, particularly with an understanding about the special status for the Transnistrian region, and whether we have made progress after all these years in that regard; to gather and provide information, which is the duty of the OSCE Mission, on the situation concerning negotiations on an agreement on the status and the early, orderly, and complete withdrawal of foreign troops.

After these years, have we made progress on this mandate to provide advice and expertise in a framework for other contributions, and then of course, as was referred, the stepped-up mandate, that was done in 1999 with a preliminary meeting of the Permanent Council, that called for the transparency of the removal and destruction of Russian ammunition and armaments and coordination of financial and technical assistance to facilitate that withdrawal and destruction. In that regard there was a fund for voluntary financial assistance that was established, which apparently is not being used. The question is, is the Permanent Council entitled to assess what progress has been made, and, if very little has been made, what exactly should we focus on, is the stoppage of any of this.

Russia recommitted to withdraw its forces and munitions from the sovereign state of Moldova at the *1999 Istanbul Summit*. Any movement of Russian forces or munitions is a matter of security interest to the 57 OSCE participating States. We call on Russia to facilitate the Mission's access to all sites of concern. The United States stands ready to work with the Mission to Moldova, and other international partners, on the destruction and removal of ammunition and armaments at Cobasna,

under the OSCE aegis. My Russian colleague has said that the environment is not there right now for the fulfillment of that mandate. We need to focus exactly on why not and what steps can be affirmatively taken to create that environment.

We support your work, Mr. Ambassador, and that of the *Special Representative* to keep channels of communication open and to find ways to press forward with the settlement process, such as convening virtual meetings and advancing confidence building measures. We would like to see the *Special Representative* report together with the *Head of Mission* at future Permanent Councils.

Mr. Chairman, Moldova will conduct its Presidential election on November 1. We support the efforts of the people of Moldova to determine their future. We urge Moldova to hold free and fair elections in line with its international and OSCE commitments. We also encourage Moldova to intensify its work with the *Council of Europe's Venice Commission* and the OSCE to improve future elections, including through amending elements of the electoral code. We look forward to the assessment of the long-term OSCE observers of the November 1 presidential election.

We are pleased that the efforts of the *Joint Working Group* between Moldova's parliament and the *People's Assembly of Gagauzia* are paying dividends. The adoption of a *Joint Action Plan* is a concrete step forward. We attach importance to the Mission's work, together with the *High Commissioner on National Minorities*, to promote inclusive governance. We encourage Moldova to draw on the OSCE's resources as it continues to strive for a just, tolerant, and inclusive society. Implementing the action plan for Holocaust remembrance education and developing a new action plan for fostering constructive interethnic relations are key elements of achieving this goal.

We support the Mission's efforts to: advance respect for human rights, including for members of minority groups; train legal defenders; and promote best practices in multilingual education. The United States supports Moldova's anti-corruption and justice sector reforms and encourages the country to take advantage of all the OSCE has to offer. We believe the people of Moldova deserve a justice system that holds all individuals—regardless of wealth or status—accountable for their corrupt or other criminal acts. On banking, we welcome the Mission's commitment to ensure any potential solution abides by international best practices to safeguard Moldova's financial and banking sectors against money laundering and abuse.

Mr. Ambassador, your report describes the crucial role civil society plays in connecting government services within the community. During the coronavirus pandemic, domestic violence increased at an alarming rate in countries around the world. We encourage the Mission to collaborate with Moldovan authorities and civil society to adapt support channels to respond to increases in domestic violence under shelter-in-place and quarantine measures during the declared *State of Emergency* and subsequent *State of Public Health Emergency*.

In conclusion, the United States supports a results-oriented 5+2 Settlement Process for the Transnistrian conflict based on Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders with a special status for Transnistria.

The United States will continue to support a sovereign, democratic Moldova, firmly anchored in Europe, secure within its internationally recognized borders, and enjoying the benefits of effective and accountable government.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to present the American view on this matter.

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