



United States Mission to the OSCE

Working Session I: Early Warning, Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation: Lessons Learned and the Way Ahead

As delivered by Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Brent Hartley
to the Annual Security Review Conference, Vienna
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Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank our two keynote speakers for their very informative presentations. I was very interested in Dr. Kemp's comments on the important issue of organized crime and corruption which has also been a focus of U.S. concern.

With regard to my formal remarks, I am instructed to note at the outset my government's deep concern about the agenda of this meeting which omitted a specific reference to the need for focused attention on the existing protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, and Nagorno Karabakh. We hope and expect that future agendas for this meeting will appropriately reflect these critical aspects of European security. Theoretical discussions have their place. But the events that have taken place in Ukraine earlier this year underscore the need to identify ways ahead on individual conflicts.

In yesterday's session on Ukraine, I cited Russia's clear violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and encouraged Russia to take the steps necessary to deescalate the crisis. The OSCE has – unfortunately – significant experience in dealing with situations where one participating State maintains forces on the territory of another without that state's consent. The international community has an obligation to make clear—in Ukraine as well as in Georgia and Moldova—that we do not accept as legitimate such military presence. We firmly reject Russia's purported annexation of Crimea in this regard.

In this session I would like to turn to the conflicts elsewhere, including in Georgia and Moldova, as well as the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

We need to reinvigorate the conversation at the OSCE on the protracted conflicts. We should consider what concrete steps the OSCE can take to address the existing protracted conflicts, whether that is through consensus agreements, extra budgetary projects, or discussions among core groups of interested participating States.

In addition to our continued support for the 5+2 talks and the work of the OSCE Mission in Moldova, we should develop specific steps to promote demilitarization of the conflict, such as reducing the number of checkpoints or eliminating excess military materiel, including withdrawal of remaining Russian munitions at Kolbasna. One of the most important steps that could be taken to build confidence and reduce tension would be the elimination of the restrictions placed on the ability of the OSCE Mission in Moldova to conduct patrols throughout Moldova, including in the Transnistrian region, which are explicitly part of its mandate. Now, more than ever, it is critical that the international community have impartial reporting in order to assess the security situation on the ground.

In conjunction with the important work of the Geneva International Discussions on the conflict in Georgia, there are clear steps the OSCE can take to improve the situation in areas affected by that conflict. Particularly in light of recent and unfortunate borderization activity in Georgia, steps to increase access to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions by appropriate international and local organizations, as well as diplomatic and consular personnel, would have an important and positive impact. Reestablishing an OSCE presence in Georgia would also allow the international community to do more on the ground, including facilitating people-to-people contacts and developing civil society organizations.

While the OSCE role in Nagorno-Karabakh is shaped by work of the Minsk Group, as an organization we can and should continue to encourage Armenia and Azerbaijan to commit themselves to negotiations that would lead to a peace agreement, building on the substantial work done to date. We hope that the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan will accept French President Hollande's offer to meet soon in Paris. Swiss President Burkhalter's call for "structured negotiations" is also an opportunity for the sides to advance the peace process. Track II efforts to build people-to-people contacts between Azerbaijanis and Armenians can also contribute to a lasting settlement by helping citizens of both countries prepare for peace. As one of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, the United States remains committed at the highest levels to this process.

Of course, the OSCE also has important work to do related to the conflict cycle. Events in Ukraine have again demonstrated the critical need for this organization to be able to respond quickly to crisis situations, without the possibility of a veto by a participating State, particularly the one perpetuating the crisis. It is clear that we need to develop specific ideas on how to empower the OSCE to react quickly and effectively in the future. A number of ideas have been proposed in the past, including in the arms control context, and we need to redouble our efforts to develop ways to address this obvious gap in the OSCE's crisis response capability.

The crisis in Ukraine has confirmed the role this organization has in addressing conflicts in this OSCE space. It has also exposed weaknesses that must be addressed. We must be prepared to take the steps needed as an organization and as individual participating States to address some of the most pressing dangers to European security today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.