



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, H.E. Dr. George W. Vella

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 4, 2015

Foreign Minister Vella, we warmly welcome you to the Permanent Council and thank you for your presentation.

In your remarks, you raised a number of issues and challenges that currently face the Mediterranean region and the OSCE region as a whole. In framing our collective work to address these contemporary challenges, you noted the principles and commitments from the Helsinki Final Act on which the OSCE was founded and now stands. We appreciate your highlighting that it is critical not only to safeguard these principles and commitments, but to ensure they are upheld and fully implemented. That premise should ground all of the work we do.

Your remarks also remind us of something this Permanent Council addresses each week—the unacceptable costs of the failure to uphold OSCE principles and commitments. Those grave costs, including the loss in human lives, are clearly seen in the crisis of Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine and attempted annexation of Crimea. A renewed focus on fully implementing the commitments we have made to each other must be at the core of the future of this Organization.

Mr. Minister, your focus on counter-terrorism as another area of shared concern among our countries is most welcome. We share your assessment that the OSCE has a vital role to play both in countering terrorism and in addressing the conditions conducive to violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. The Security Day event held just a few weeks ago here in Vienna was an example of the cross-dimensional and inclusive approach that is critical to addressing violent extremism. We support such efforts, as well as a focused approach to implementing last year’s Ministerial Council declaration on countering foreign terrorist fighters. Participating States last year showed their readiness to come together to enhance our commitments to address cross-border threats, and the OSCE continues to prove itself an important venue for collective action to counter-terrorism and violent extremism.

You highlighted other challenges facing the Mediterranean region, including irregular migration and criminal smuggling networks. The tragic drowning of hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea in April reminded us all of the dangers human smugglers pose to desperate individuals. We share your view that alongside efforts to save the lives of migrants in distress, there is considerably more work to be done to counter these migrant smuggling networks and, in particular, to provide assistance closer to points of origin so that refugees and asylum seekers do not put their lives in the hands of migrant smugglers and human traffickers. This is true not only in the Mediterranean region, but across the OSCE region.

Finally, you addressed concerns about the worrying situation in Libya. We also remain concerned about the growing threat from terrorist groups in Libya, including ISIL-affiliated groups, which have expanded their presence in Libya in the absence of a strong, united, central government in the country. We believe that the UN-led process to establish a national unity government provides the best hope for Libyans to stabilize the political situation and enable the Libyan government to address this terrorist threat. We strongly support the efforts of the UN Special Representative in that regard.

Thank you for your suggestion that a Special Representative might help us focus our work on a number of the issues that you raised. This idea deserves further consultation and reflection.

Mr. Minister, we thank you again for coming to the Permanent Council and sharing your insights today. The United States looks forward to continued cooperation and collaboration with Malta, bilaterally, through the OSCE, and in other forums and organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.