



United States Mission to the OSCE

Annual Security Review Conference

Opening Session

As delivered by Christopher Robinson,
Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

While I wish I could be joining you in Vienna today, I welcome the opportunity to participate remotely in this year's Annual Security Review Conference and look forward to our discussions on the challenges facing the OSCE area today.

It goes without saying that this year's ASRC is different. COVID-19 has given new resonance to the refrain that "we are all in this together." OSCE's axiom of the "indivisibility of security" likewise comes to mind. COVID-19 remains a global challenge that no nation will solve alone. Countries, including the United States, have reached out beyond their borders to help others combat this virus. Many countries have scaled back or cancelled planned military exercises and have paused arms control verification activities to avoid dangers to public health.

Unfortunately, not all participating States have behaved as responsibly. Some have used the pandemic to advance internal agendas and silence critics, or increase distrust among neighbors, diverting resources that should be focused on saving lives. These actions demonstrate just how far the European security environment has deteriorated.

Russia's actions in Ukraine continue to provide the clearest example of what happens when a state decides to set aside basic tenets of international law and core commitments. Despite facing daily restrictions on the movement of its personnel by Russia-led forces, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) continues to report daily ceasefire violations and instances of damage to civilian structures. Russia propagated and amplified Chinese disinformation about the origins of the virus; and Russia-led forces spawned the false suggestion that SMM monitors were spreading the virus and used that as an excuse to limit their activity, despite clear indications by SMM leadership that they have taken stringent steps to protect the monitors and local civilian populations from the Coronavirus. The harassment of SMM monitors and restrictions on their movement must stop; we should discuss this frankly in the special session.

I welcome the opportunity later in the ASRC to exchange views on what more we can do to bring an end to the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

We must acknowledge that the status quo in each of these cases is unacceptable. These conflicts fuel instability and mistrust, and they hold back economic growth and human potential. Their impact is most intimately felt in the countries directly affected, but their effects reverberate across the entire OSCE community.

We need to find ways ahead. In that context, 10 years after the conflict cycle decision, we need to do more than talk about the OSCE toolbox for conflict resolution. We need actions and help to build bridges and shine a light on the real conditions on the ground in the regions affected by protracted conflict. Maybe some of the technologies we have used to keep this organization active and operational despite the pandemic can help us. Perhaps they can be applied to conflict resolution or recovery from a crisis – like COVID.

I appreciate the chair's decision to include a special session on the Structured Dialogue (SD) on the ASRC agenda. The focus on transparency is timely and essential. But the basic problem remains. If we are to rebuild trust we need the political will to abide by the commitments we have made, and pursue solutions to conflicts, and to tensions, in ways that are consistent with the tenets of the Helsinki Final Act. That is not what is happening in the OSCE region today. We continue to witness violations of international law and basic principles of civilized societies, such as the use of force to change international borders. More broadly we face a resounding lack of respect for the sovereignty of neighbors, reflected today not only in efforts to change the map, but to undermine neighbors from within, via sophisticated hybrid activity to subvert the political and social structure of international partners. This is a significant source of tension and instability in the OSCE region and mitigating related threat perceptions, including hybrid threats, remains an appropriate focus for the SD.

SD discussions have also demonstrated the need to rebuild military stability, predictability, and transparency. The best way to do so would be through a substantive update of the Vienna Document (VDoc). We hope all participating States will engage constructively with this goal in mind. We encourage everyone to seriously consider the comprehensive VDoc modernization proposal on the table which now has the support of 34 co-sponsors.

Like COVID-19, crime, migration, terrorism, and related challenges are more effectively addressed when states cooperate. The OSCE is the right place to promote constructive dialogue on these issues, and we look forward to continuing these discussions in this forum.

Absent a crystal ball, we cannot predict how COVID-19 will impact the December OSCE Ministerial or other signal events like the Human Dimension meeting in Warsaw or the Second Dimension meeting in Prague. We hope in-person sessions will be possible. But at the end of the day the important thing will be that we come together physically, or virtually, or in some combination, to reflect on progress achieved and problems that must be addressed by this community if we are to move ahead cooperatively and in mutual confidence, with respect for all our people and our neighbors. This is not an ordinary year and I salute the chairmanship for the efforts it has made to keep this organization vibrant and fully operational in the face of a pandemic. As we look ahead, we must continue to focus on the need for progress in resolving the conflicts in Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus; and rebuilding military transparency and trust. But we must also work together,

here at OSCE, to repair the damage to our societies and our security that has been wrought by the pandemic.

The pandemic is proof of the validity of OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. It is an opportunity for OSCE to lead in identifying the impacts of COVID across all dimensions, the actions taken by governments in response, best practices and the way ahead.

I would like to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for its leadership. I look forward to a constructive exchange that reaffirms our shared OSCE values and commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.