



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák of Slovakia

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 18, 2014

The United States warmly welcomes Minister Lajčák to the Permanent Council. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for taking the time to share your thoughts with us today. It was a pleasure to see you last week in Kyiv, where I appreciated your thoughtful remarks, and it's a pleasure to have you here today as well.

You and the Slovak delegation in Vienna have shown a strong commitment to the OSCE through your Chairmanship of the Economic and Environmental Committee these past two years. We commend your efforts to raise the issue of energy networks in this organization, including through your introduction and successful promotion of last year's Ministerial Decision on Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection. We look forward to the Bratislava Energy Charter Forum next month as an additional opportunity to look more closely at this topic, and offer our support for additional activities to implement last year's Ministerial Decision.

We commend the government of Slovakia for its leadership in advancing Security Sector Governance and Reform initiatives by founding and chairing the SSG/R Group of Friends both in the UN and the OSCE. We recognize that upholding principles of good governance in the security sector is a responsibility of all OSCE participating States and we welcome the discussions your government has led on this topic as well as the extra budgetary project to which you have contributed that will seek to advance these important principles within the OSCE.

In addition to Slovakia's contributions to the first and second dimensions of the OSCE, we appreciate the opportunity to work with Slovakia across a range of human dimension commitments. Mr. Minister, Slovakia has a large and vibrant Romani community. We welcome efforts to regularize the status of Romani housing, which, if successful, may have a very significant impact. We also encourage greater efforts at social inclusion of Roma in areas of education, employment and health care, as well as the removal of physical and societal barriers to integration across communities. We also commend the work of Slovak ombudswoman Jana Dubovcova in her efforts to address public policy considerations regarding policing and other issues.

It is essential that we push back on the resurgence of assaults against the Helsinki principles throughout the OSCE region, in particular with respect to Ukraine – and especially as we approach the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. We should use that anniversary to honor the work of generations who sought to forge a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

Minister Lajčák, we welcome the role your government played in helping provide a critical supply of energy to Ukraine to temper the adverse effects of Russia's decision to halt its gas supply, by inaugurating a reverse flow natural gas pipeline between Slovakia and Ukraine. This pipeline not only provides critical energy to the people of Ukraine, but it also greatly contributes to regional energy security. It is crucial that the United States and our European partners stand united - in word and deed - to support Ukraine, including through economic sanctions on Russia, which, as you say, are only a tool, as we seek a solution to the crisis that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which is rightly our objective.

Mr, Minister, thank you for your presentation today and for the strong bilateral relationship our countries share.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.