



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Annual Security Review Conference 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 and Eurasian Affairs John Heffern  
Vienna, June 24, 2015

Let me begin by expressing my government's concern over the failure again this year to include on today's agenda specific reference to the existing protracted conflicts affecting Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. These real conflicts in this region have cost lives and created instability and suffering over decades. They epitomize the challenges that we face in building peace on this continent and merit a focused discussion. They should be on the agenda.

Yesterday you heard General Hodges and many others condemn Russia's clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and encourage Russia to take steps necessary to de-escalate the crisis. Russia's actions violate international law and make a mockery of the founding principles of this Organization. In addition, these actions are disturbingly familiar. The violation of a neighbor's sovereignty and of its right to choose whether to allow foreign forces on its territory is a practice Russia has pursued – and maintains to this day – in Georgia and Moldova as well. This fact may have receded from the international headlines, but our collective responsibility for addressing these issues has not. We need to shine a light on this pattern of behavior, and to keep attention and resources focused on making progress in resolving these conflicts. There is no organization better placed than the OSCE to play this role.

In this year of Helsinki + 40, we are reminded that one factor is common to all these conflicts: the failure to respect the principles of the Helsinki Final Act has yielded decades of loss of life and loss of potential. I have seen some of the costs of conflict in the region first-hand. We must find ways forward to begin to build peace in this region.

Last year, we called on participating States to reinvigorate the conversation here on protracted conflicts and to consider what we can do to bring them to a peaceful resolution. I cannot, however, point to much progress on these issues in the last year. We really can and should do better.

There are practical steps that we should take in all three conflicts. First, we need to deepen our support for the relevant negotiating bodies: the 5+2 Talks, the Geneva International Discussions, and the OSCE Minsk Group, led by the three co-chairs.

Specifically for Moldova, access remains a problem, limiting the OSCE's ability to observe the facts on the ground, including in the Transnistrian region, an explicit part of our Mission's mandate there. Impartial reporting of facts is essential to avoid misperception. It is time to build bridges there – and to reopen the actual bridges that we already have. Obvious steps to build confidence, such as sharing information on military forces to further

demilitarize the conflict, or eliminating checkpoints and other barriers to free movement of goods and people, can make a real difference.

In Georgia, identifying concrete steps to increase access by the international community to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions would have a positive impact. An enhanced OSCE role in Georgia would allow the international community to do more on the ground to address humanitarian and security concerns and provide impartial reporting.

I must express, Madam Chair, my concern this morning at the tone of the Russian Federation's comments on the Geneva International Discussions, which are not suited to promote progress toward greater understanding. A clear statement by the Russian Federation that it will refrain from the threat or use of force to resolve conflict will doubtless be welcomed in Geneva and more broadly.

We can and should continue to use the OSCE as a platform to encourage Armenia and Azerbaijan to commit themselves to negotiations that would lead to a peace agreement, building on the substantial work already done. The status quo holds back the entire region. The OSCE is a place where security concerns can and should be shared openly. Talking is better than shooting. We can and should all ask hard questions to clarify the reality on the ground and to push the parties for creativity and flexibility. As one of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, the United States remains committed to helping resolve this decades long conflict.

Again, our thematic conflict cycle discussion here is no substitute for critical thinking and conversations about existing protracted conflicts, which represent actual threats to international security in this sphere. The experience of this Organization in responding to the situation in Ukraine demonstrates a clear need for the OSCE to be able to respond to crises quickly and without political wrangling. I have the greatest respect for all involved in the ad hoc establishment of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. But the OSCE needs a sustained rapid reaction capability as well, so that there is real-time, impartial reporting on a crisis from its inception, while longer-term needs and realities are still emerging. Whether that capability is achieved via an updated Vienna Document or through some other means, let's all work together to make this happen.

I hope that in the months between now and the December Ministerial, this Organization will focus on the protracted conflicts and take concrete steps to help build dialogue and find ways ahead, so that we can honestly say to ministers that the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act did not pass without tangible results on these pressing security challenges.

Thank you, Madam Chair.