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United States Mission to the OSCE



**Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management
in the OSCE Area**

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Joint FSC/Permanent Council, Vienna
March 10, 2010

Thank you Madam Chair, and thank you as well to Ambassador Salber for his thought-provoking presentation. We say it often but we really do mean it. We fully agree that the OSCE “remains the best possible regional framework for conflict prevention and crisis management, and for working towards sustainable peace” as you stated. It is inarguably in our common interest to strengthen the OSCE’s capacity and effectiveness in this regard.

We also welcome the comments by the European Union that address many of the key strategic reasons behind our efforts in this regard.

We believe issues of early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation are some of the most important topics in the Corfu Process, as they impact every other aspect of security and stability.

The June interim report is an important stage in our development of this process, but it is not the end point nor does it foreordain a specific stage of the process. So we should proceed with an eye on the clock but not be driven by it.

As a first step we should commence a period of inquiry and reflection on the many proposals now on the table. We need to take an in-depth look at each one, to make an initial determination as to what an effective OSCE response might look like. It will be important for us to hear from the practitioners on the front lines of implementing them, including past, present, and future Chairmanships and the Secretariat.

At the same time, we should also remain cognizant of the role, or lack thereof, of existing mechanisms and capabilities and seek a better understanding of where and how they may have fallen short.

We think an informal process in keeping with the Corfu Process is most appropriate. We are grateful to the Coordinator, Ambassador Molnar, for his initial ideas on how to proceed and, like the EU, reiterate our support for his work.

Following our review, we could turn to considering how the various proposals fit together or can complement one another. This response may entail the development of a group of interlocking, complementary mechanisms and capabilities that form a continuum of OSCE action. These may be based on existing, modified, and new mechanisms, and could be activated according to the given circumstances.

Now, we have recently heard concerns that the OSCE is becoming too “flexible.” We have the opposite concern – that the organization is becoming too rigid, and is hampered in carrying out the very tasks for which it was created. Whereas we were pleased to hear some

positive support from the Russian Federation for some of the proposals that are on the table, it was a bit surprising that some comments seemed to take us back in time.

I think I finished by saying, Anvar [Azimov], that we heard the concerns about the OSCE being too flexible, we have the opposite concern that the Organization is becoming too rigid. We were pleased to hear that the Russian Federation has some positive support for some of the proposals on the table but some of the comments seem to take us back in time:

- Dismantling the rule of consensus – never.
- Changing the nature of the OSCE – of course not.

What we want to avoid is paralysis, and we therefore call on the Russian Federation to join us and to work together to try and find a way forward on all the proposals that are on the table. I'm sure we will find a way forward.

We want to see the OSCE fulfill the promises of its founding documents and commitments. However, nice phrases without corresponding actions on behalf of the participating States will undermine our credibility on these important issues.

This is the only way to counteract the impression that the OSCE is out of touch and ineffective. We believe that conflict prevention and resolution is the place to start fulfilling these promises.

Consensus should not be used as a straightjacket, preventing the organization from acting within its core mandate – to prevent and resolve conflict – in the interest of all participating States. Instead, we see the value of “pre-positioning” consensus in such a way that capabilities could be deployed rapidly and effectively when and where needed. We were, therefore, disappointed that the Chair’s Perception Paper of March 4 did not include the U.S. proposal for “pre-positioned consensus”--which was also cited here today by Ambassador Salber in his presentation--to authorize the Chair to act on behalf of participating States, particularly in serious crisis situations. We would like to have seen that in the Paper.

We believe our proposed mechanism on conflict prevention is fully in line with existing OSCE mechanisms on conflict prevention and crisis management, adopted by consensus over the years. We agree with Ambassador Salber and others who have said that effective and efficient conflict prevention requires some degree of empowerment of the Chairmanship-in-Office.

So we need to take stock, move forward where and when we can. This will undoubtedly be an evolutionary process on which we can continue to build, but it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate some degree of progress and advancement on this important issue and not allow paralysis to take over.

Finally, I would like to just touch on a few of the ideas contained in Ambassador Salber’s presentation.

Regarding the proposed *aide-mémoire*, we believe it would indeed be valuable to draw up an indicative list of measures available to prevent and resolve conflict, and manage crises. Such a list would serve as a handy reference guide for the Chairmanship-in-Office, recalling in some cases long-forgotten mechanisms and tools. Such an *aide-mémoire* would of course not

prescribe a course of action, but present possible measures to deal with any crisis that may arise. Therefore we believe it might be better to speak not of an *aide-mémoire* but of a menu of options, not a sequence. We need to maintain flexibility – as Dan Smith said at the Conflict Prevention seminar February 23, every conflict is different. One size does not fit all.

Second, we think the suggestion to come up with a framework for collecting and communicating early warning signals within the OSCE is a useful one. This is perhaps something that could be developed further by experts in the OSCE's executives structures.

And third, the concept of a “tiered approach” is a practical, systematic way of describing what we are in effect already doing. It provides a conceptual framework to support and structure our work, but should not be interpreted as limiting the possibility to adjust our approach in accordance with the requirements of a particular situation. Each tier simply adds further options, without invalidating any of those from previous tiers – for example, we will still need the early warning of tier 2 even if we currently find ourselves in tier 4.

Thank you very much Mr. Salber for your excellent suggestions and we are looking forward to joining consensus with all of our colleagues and finding a way forward.

Thank you.