



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Chairman in Office

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 15, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

We are honored to welcome Foreign Minister Bakoyannis to the Permanent Council as the Chairman in Office for 2009. The United States supports the objectives that you have set out here today. We can assure you that the United States will stand with you in your efforts to strengthen the OSCE, including by providing the OSCE with a legal personality.

As the OSCE begins the year 2009, we face a number of fundamental challenges to the OSCE's core mandate. But there are also some genuine opportunities.

Strengthening the protection and promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic governance, including free and fair elections, are key OSCE objectives and of enduring interest to the US government. These core human dimension commitments are increasingly coming under fire in several participating States. The OSCE is the only institution with the track record, common commitments and collaborative capacity to further these issues effectively throughout the region. The United States believes it is indispensable that the OSCE maintain its focus on promoting fulfillment of these core human rights commitments, which include, but are not limited to, the rights of Roma individuals and gender equality.

OSCE also has a vital role to play in highlighting and helping to resolve Europe's outstanding protracted conflicts. We welcome your already active and creative efforts to find a workable solution for the preservation of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, which can play a critical role in monitoring the military situation in the conflict regions, investigating human rights violations, responding to humanitarian concerns, and providing rehabilitation assistance. We hope the Mission can be preserved and that its mandate can be expanded to cover all territories covered by the August 12 ceasefire agreement brokered by French President Sarkozy. We also welcome your commitment to find peaceful, long-term solutions to the Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts.

Clearly, as these and other examples demonstrate, European security can and should be improved. In our view, existing institutions provide the right framework for doing so, and the OSCE is the right forum to discuss how best to move forward. The OSCE is ideally suited to this task, given its comprehensive approach to European security which incorporates economic, human, and political-military aspects.

But we should limit ourselves to discussion for the time being. There needs to be a truly compelling rationale before considering an OSCE summit or other high-level meeting.

Before we start down such an important path, we should have a good idea of where it can lead and good reasons for going there.

The commitments of the OSCE, developed over decades since Helsinki in 1975, are instrumental to our work. Our priority should remain fulfillment of those commitments, including CFE Treaty obligations, respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons, and a commitment to work together to resolve disputes peacefully. These should remain the fundamental basis for any next steps.

We wish you and your mission here the best of luck. Please be assured of the full support of the United States as you move forward into a very challenging year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.