



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Ambassador Kelly Keiderling

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 23, 2023

Ambassador Keiderling, dear Kelly, welcome back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your detailed report.

Let me begin by recognizing your tremendous work and that of your Mission under difficult circumstances. I note that Russia still refuses to complete its 1999 Istanbul Summit pledge to withdraw its troops and ammunition from Moldova's territory. The continued stationing of Russia's troops there without Moldova's consent is a breach of international law.

Yet despite these obstacles, and at a time when the 5+2 process is on hold due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, you and your Mission have performed admirably. Your ongoing efforts to facilitate 1+1 meetings of the chief negotiators and advance the working groups' dialogue and confidence building measures tied to the settlement process underscore the value of the OSCE Mission.

The Mission's monitoring function in the Security Zone is increasingly important. Objective information and assessment of facts on the ground provide all parties confidence, and transparency is essential. We are alarmed by reports of rocket fragments landing in an individual's backyard near the village of Chitcani and elsewhere on September 25, and look forward to learning the results of Moldova's investigation. For the Mission to perform its monitoring function, free movement is essential. We welcome the removal of some concrete blocks installed by the so called Transnistrian "militia" at some checkpoints in Tiraspol and Dubasari and call on the relevant authorities to remove the remaining barriers and facilitate the Mission's free movement throughout the Security Zone and entire country, including on the left bank.

We are also concerned about the de facto authorities' detentions of several Moldovan citizens. We encourage the Mission to engage the relevant authorities to ensure that no one is detained unlawfully.

We commend Moldova for its continued progress on its rule of law reforms and anti-corruption efforts in spite of the security challenges caused by Russia's assault on Ukraine. We congratulate Moldova on its first round of local elections held November 5 – the first elections after the parliament adopted several ODIHR recommendations. The International Election Observation Mission report described these elections as "well run under challenging circumstances." We also share the International Election Observation Mission's strong concerns about foreign interference aimed at preventing the Moldovan people from democratically electing their leaders. We encourage Moldova to continue to address the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations highlighted in the Election Observation Mission's report.

Regrettably, the Kremlin, as we know, has a long track record of malign influence operations seeking to undermine Moldova's democracy and elections. The United States sanctioned Ilan Shor for acting on behalf of the Russian Federation, as well as members of a Russian intelligence-linked malign influence group, for their efforts to influence Moldova's elections. The United States stands by Moldova and will continue to hold to account those who attempt to undermine democracy through election interference.

Madam Chair, the United States is committed to helping Moldova on its democratic path towards full integration with Europe. This requires continued progress on rule of law and anti-corruption reforms, and the peaceful settlement of the Transnistria conflict with full respect for Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

We are also committed to pressing for releases of all unjustly detained political prisoners in Transnistria and for an improved respect for human rights there. We welcome the de facto authorities' positive response to an access request from the Mission to visit Victor Pleshnikov and Mihail Ermurachi. As we have done in previous sessions, we call for the unconditional release of all those unjustly detained for exercising human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Ambassador Keiderling, in conclusion, I want to convey my appreciation for the tireless work of the Mission, in challenging times, under your leadership. You have our full support for a one-year mandate extension. I also want to wish you, personally, a Happy Thanksgiving, and thank you for your unwavering dedication.

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