



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to Chairperson-in-Office and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia Miroslav Lajčák**

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
January 10, 2019

Foreign Minister Lajčák, the United States warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council as Slovakia assumes the OSCE Chairmanship in 2019. Your focus on preventing, mediating, and mitigating conflict takes advantage of the OSCE’s strengths and aligns with its fundamental purposes. I wish to share thoughts on the top U.S. priorities for the OSCE in the coming year.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine is the most critical threat to our common security. The United States, therefore welcomes that Slovakia “feels the urgency of the matter,” as you mentioned in your opening statement. Moscow’s ongoing aggression has resulted in the most significant security crisis in Europe since the Cold War. Moscow has flouted not only specific OSCE commitments, but also the core principle that every participating State committed to uphold at this Organization’s founding: respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every participating State.

Mr. Minister, ensuring adherence to and respect for the fundamental principles and commitments of the OSCE will be necessary to achieve our shared goal of maintaining this organization’s relevance in the future, as well as meeting the future challenges that you described earlier. The participating States around this table know full well that Russia instigated and fuels the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We know full well this is not a domestic Ukrainian crisis. We know full well this is a hot war. And, we know full well it’s one that’s fueled, instigated, and maintained by the Russian Federation. Russia’s unjustified November 25 attack on Ukrainian naval vessels in the Black Sea near the Kerch Strait represents a dangerous escalation. In Crimea, Russia has engaged in a systematic campaign of coercion and violence targeting those who oppose its occupation, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians. Along with the forces it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside in eastern Ukraine, Russia puts civilians at risk, displaces families, destroys livelihoods, and threatens environmental disaster. Mr. Minister, the United States shares your assessment -- the situation is unacceptable.

We also share your view that the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine remains the international community’s eyes and ears on the ground in the parts of Ukraine worst affected by Russian aggression. It is indeed, as you said, one of our key tools. It is, therefore imperative that Slovakia assert the mandate of the SMM throughout the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and the Donbas. Every week, Mr. Minister, we see new evidence of Russia’s campaign to intimidate, constrain, and degrade the mission. This must stop. Mr. Minister, we owe it to the SMM leadership. We owe it to our monitors. We owe it to the memory of Joseph Stone. And we owe it to the people of Ukraine.

The OSCE must oppose Russia's occupation of the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's actions in Georgia contravene its OSCE commitments and violate Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Although Russia participates in the 5+2 Transnistria settlement negotiations, it has failed to fulfill all of its 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit commitments to withdraw its forces from Moldova. OSCE engagement in these regions is necessary to promote transparency and understanding of the situation on the ground; the OSCE mission in Moldova has our full support and we believe that greater OSCE involvement in Georgia would benefit us all. We, therefore should work together to promote steps by the OSCE and participating States -- including in the Geneva International Discussions and 5+2 talks and via enhanced OSCE discussion and engagement among delegations in Vienna as well as field missions -- to prepare the ground for peaceful resolution of these protracted conflicts. We therefore urge Slovakia to support the Minsk Group process to help the sides find a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Mr. Chair, progress in the military security dimension is essential if we are to begin to rebuild confidence. The deficit of military transparency and predictability among the members of this community fuels mistrust and the potential for misunderstanding. We commend last year's efforts to make progress on Vienna Document modernization, and we look forward to working with other States to secure agreement on an updated Vienna Document by the end of 2019. This must be our priority. Strengthening risk reduction mechanisms, enhancing military transparency, and engaging in dialogue can all serve to avoid miscalculation and misunderstanding, as well as prevent military incidents. The United States strongly supports the Structured Dialogue (SD) as a venue for open, frank exchange on participating States' most pressing threat perceptions. The SD must be open-ended; its focus should be directed by the participating States themselves and we look forward to a continued frank exchange this year.

The United States is deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation across much of the OSCE region, including the shrinking space for civil society. Overregulation of non-governmental organizations can hamper their operations to the point they are effectively neutered. We urge the Slovak Chairmanship to oppose attempts to reduce or unduly restrict civil society access to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) and other OSCE fora. We count on Slovakia's leadership in ensuring the protection of the independence, mandates, and budgets of all OSCE institutions.

Mr. Minister, we look forward to learning more about Slovakia's plans to expand this year the initiatives you led five years ago in the Economic and Environmental committee, and how these plans would enhance security across the OSCE region.

We appreciate your commitment to reach consensus on the Unified Budget, allowing this Organization to prioritize and ensure adequate funding for its core activities and purpose.

In closing, the United States will continue to work closely with Slovakia to fulfill and fully defend mission mandates, implement our collective decisions, and ensure all participating States live up to our shared commitments and principles. We wish you every success this year.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.