



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Mr. Didier Burkhalter Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 16, 2014

The United States warmly welcomes you, President Burkhalter, to the Permanent Council as our Chairman-in-Office for 2014. We thank you for the presentation of your priorities, for your cooperative work with Serbia to ensure consistency across your joint Chairmanships, and for your country's commitment to the OSCE. Over the last year, Switzerland's OSCE Task Force has been present in many of the OSCE meetings and events—and so we know that the hard work began well before your presentation today. The United States is committed to working with you on your priorities, as well as to presenting our own ideas and proposals, to advance the work of the OSCE and the strengthening of and fulfillment of commitments of participating States.

We are pleased to see that Switzerland's priorities for the OSCE in 2014 include emphasizing the implementation of existing OSCE commitments and enhancing the involvement of civil society in the work of the OSCE across all three dimensions. The U.S. believes none of the participating States around this table should shy away from pointing out when another participating State has not or is not living up to its commitments. The OSCE commitments are promises we have made to one another, and it is right that we are held to account for the promises we've made. We should welcome the light that civil society and independent journalists can shine on areas wherever we can do better.

We applaud your focus on protracted conflicts. Addressing the protracted conflicts is not optional for the OSCE. Concrete steps towards the resolution of Europe's protracted conflicts should be in the forefront of our work, now and in the future. We welcome the joint appointments with Serbia of two Special Representatives for the south Caucasus and Moldova, respectively. We also welcome attention to these conflicts within the Helsinki + 40 process. The Ministerial Declarations on the 5+2 process and the Minsk Group co-chairs at the Kyiv Ministerial sent messages of support for their work. Yet, this is not enough. As participating States, we have a responsibility to turn our declarations into actions and to make clear that the international community does not accept the status quo. In the run-up to the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, we must make tangible progress towards resolving the protracted conflicts by identifying and implementing steps in all three dimensions that will promote progress toward peaceful settlements. We must reinvigorate momentum in resolving the Transnistrian conflict, including living up to solemn OSCE Summit commitments. We must work to restore a meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia, while seeking creative ways to achieve concrete improvements in the security and humanitarian situation there. Similarly, we should continue to work toward the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

We believe the OSCE has much to offer our partners in Central Asia, including helping them achieve improved border management, attract investment by countering corruption, strengthen rule of law that reflects democratic values and human rights, and reduce illicit trafficking to promote trade and economic development. Countries that welcome field presences should be proud—their work with field offices should be seen as evidence of their fidelity to the long-term project that unites us all: implementation of OSCE commitments.

In 2013 Mongolia requested the OSCE to establish a field presence in Ulaanbaatar. The United States supports the establishment of a small field presence in Ulaanbaatar as recommended under the Ukrainian Chair's auspices, and we hope that the Swiss Chairmanship can lead us to consensus on this request.

On your agenda, you emphasize issues of reconciliation and co-operation through the work of your Special Representative on the Western Balkans. We urge you to be ambitious, to set your sights high. In the wake of the historic agreement between Serbia and Kosovo reached in the EU-led Dialogue, we look optimistically to a time when Kosovo can be fully and properly represented in this room, and we look to the Special Representative to help move us towards bringing Kosovo to this table as an OSCE participating State. In a national election year in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we will be keen to work with your Special Representative in helping that country become more functional, prosperous, and tolerant.

The United States strongly supports Switzerland's call to the OSCE to continue active engagement with Afghanistan, particularly during this year's political, security, and economic transition. Achieving a stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan, including improving border management and business practices, countering corruption, promoting human rights and democratic values, transparency in governance, and reducing illicit trafficking, is of paramount importance to Afghanistan and to the entire OSCE space. In this regard, we urge all participating States and Partners for Cooperation to redouble their efforts to support the OSCE's response to assistance requests from the Afghan government.

We commend your expression of support for OSCE's valuable work in the politico-military dimension and, particularly, for pledging to address transnational threats founded on a cross-dimensional approach. We also applaud your commitment to enhancing the professional skills of customs, border control, and police officers in the OSCE region, and we urge Switzerland's Chairmanship to ensure that the organization has the necessary tools in place to fully support this endeavor. As such, we want to stress the importance of the Border Management Staff College—an institute that can play an important role in broader efforts to reinforce regional security.

Like you, we remain committed to modernizing the Vienna Document to make it relevant to today's security environment. Participating States agree there is need for revision or "modernization" to take account of changes in military affairs since the end of the Cold War. We want to keep the focus of the Forum for Security Cooperation on updating the Vienna Document to enhance military transparency, while also seeking to strengthen the OSCE's other political-military tools to enhance European security. A chapter-by-chapter review of the Vienna Document would provide a method for updating this key document to reflect these modern military realities. This work on the Vienna Document will be part of the FSC's contribution to the Helsinki +40 process now underway.

On cyber security, the OSCE has established the first set of cyber confidence-building measures by a regional organization; this is a major accomplishment and an opportunity to increase transparency and build trust among participating States. This landmark achievement places the OSCE on the leading edge of a global issue and serves as a building block for cooperation on future cyber-related endeavors. Therefore, we welcome Switzerland's expertise and engagement.

Turning to the Economic and Environmental Dimension, we all understand the impact that natural disasters can have on our comprehensive security, and we support the Chairmanship's efforts to examine how we as participating States can be better prepared to confront them. We look forward to in-depth discussions on this topic beginning in just a week and a half here at the Hofburg, during the First Preparatory Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum, and we encourage all participating States to ensure strong participation. It is also time for the OSCE to begin a more rigorous, practical, and solution-oriented discussion of the fight against corruption, and we invite all here today to examine new ways and means by which we might tackle this challenge.

In the Human Dimension, your emphasis on Human Rights Defenders is timely and appropriate given reprisals in a number of participating States against human rights advocates and independent journalists. Human Rights Defenders, whether they are citizens trying to exercise their fundamental freedoms, attorneys representing those peacefully advancing views that differ from those of governments, or activists defending the human rights of members of vulnerable minority groups, to name just a few, deserve our protection and respect. We look forward to receiving ODIHR's guidelines on the protection of Human Rights Defenders later this year as an opportunity to engage in a robust discussion.

Unfortunately, governments of certain OSCE participating States continue to crack down on independent media, civil society organizations, nonviolent protesters, and political opposition figures, too often employing brutal force in doing so. We need to work closely with our civil society counterparts to strengthen OSCE protections for the exercise, online and off, of the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly and religion.

As we have seen highlighted recently, the exercise of journalism in repressive conditions can be particularly hazardous. Thanks to the efforts of the Ukrainian Chairmanship, we came very close in Kyiv to a new decision on the safety of journalists and the issue remains of critical importance for all participating States. We urge the Swiss Chairmanship to sustain the momentum gained last year and vigorously pursue consensus on a decision consolidating and strengthening OSCE commitments to protect journalists and advance media freedom in the OSCE region this year.

Given widespread interest in and growing concern about the full range of tolerance-related issues at the HDIM, we must think creatively to make progress as an organization against all forms of discrimination and intolerance. 2014 is also the 10th anniversary of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. It is timely and appropriate to renew our efforts to combat violence against women, enhance women's political participation, and advance our efforts to implement UNSCR 1325. It is also the 10th anniversary of the historic conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin, and there is an opportunity to redouble our efforts to combat this and other forms of intolerance.

We must ensure that across the OSCE space we protect against all forms of intolerance and discrimination, including against LGBT communities and persons, who face intolerance, restrictions, and challenges in exercising their fundamental freedoms in too many participating States. We look to the Swiss Chairmanship to ensure that the OSCE is a forum for discussing these concerns and ensuring that our commitments apply to all persons. As we seek to ensure that we are addressing intolerance issues, we must ensure full implementation of the Kyiv Ministerial decision on implementation of the action plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti. In tough economic times, we must pay careful attention to the rise of nationalist and nativist elements that speak in favor of hate and intolerance against Roma and Sinti and other minority groups.

The United States remains eager to engage on the full spectrum of Human Dimension issues. We must all keep our focus on the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly and religion, which are the birthright of every human being and which are essential for the health and success of democracies and the achievement of lasting peace within our societies and among states.

Regarding the Helsinki +40 process and discussions regarding OSCE modalities, institutions, procedures, legal personality and work schedule, the United States remains prepared to consider any and all constructive ideas aimed at strengthening the OSCE by enhancing the effectiveness of its work and furthering the implementation of OSCE commitments. We will not, however, support any proposals that we think will result in weakening of the OSCE, watering down existing commitments or undermining its institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.