



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Statement on OSCE Project Coordinator's Office in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 8, 2015

We appreciate the Chairmanship calling this special meeting of the Permanent Council to discuss recent developments related to the Project Coordinator's Office in Azerbaijan (PCU). I found much to agree with in the statements of the European Union and of Canada, but I would like to add a few additional points.

Last Friday we learned from the Secretary General that Azerbaijan had declared its intention to revoke its signature to the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding), which contains a number of practical arrangements that pertain to the OSCE Project Coordinator's Office day to day function in Baku.

This is deeply disappointing, there's no other way to put it.

But it's important to remember that the Project Coordinator's Office operates based on a political mandate that was agreed to by all 57 participating States. Like any consensus decision of the participating States, it cannot be undone except by a consensus decision. The mandate clearly runs through the end of 2015 and, moreover, the participating States saw fit to signal their expectation that this was only an initial term, to be followed by continuation of the mandate passed 2015.

One of the ways in which governments demonstrate their commitment to improving the comprehensive security that their citizens enjoy is through direct engagement with the OSCE.

OSCE field presences have worked with citizens and governments of many States of the OSCE area to boost efforts at reform, and at continuous improvement of implementation of OSCE commitments.

It is no accident that some of the governments that are widely seen as most committed to pursuing reforms that would strengthen security, rule of law, anti-corruption, and human rights, are the same governments that have the strongest working relationships with their local OSCE presences, and with the independent institutions of the OSCE. These governments know that they have work to do on implementation. They also know that there is no shame in having shortcomings, only in denying them or refusing to tackle them head on. These governments know that constructive criticism, whether by NGOs or international partners and organizations, should be seen not as a threat, but as a political opportunity to push harder to make progress.

(As an aside, I would like to comment on our distinguished Turkish colleague's observations about the deterioration that he noted in the relationship between some governments and NGOs or international organizations --especially those working on reform issues. I think it has less to do with international organizations or NGOs, and more to do with the behavior of certain governments in the region, which, regrettably, over the last decade has regressed when measured against OSCE commitments. It is the trajectory --whether a government is making progress or whether it is backsliding--that determines whether or not partners are able to make observations that note worrying trends or positive ones.)

The OSCE Project Coordinator's Office in Azerbaijan has the potential to do valuable work that will help the government of Azerbaijan improve its implementation of OSCE commitments in all three dimensions. The mandate in force for the office was agreed by all 57 States, including Azerbaijan. The office should continue to operate, and we call on the Secretariat to dispatch a temporary Head of Office until a new permanent Project Coordinator has been appointed.

In the meanwhile, we encourage the government of Azerbaijan to reconsider its declared intent to revoke its signature on the MoU. Alternatively, if a new MoU is put in place, this should be done quickly and the new MoU should address some of the shortcomings of the current one, strengthening the PCU's ability to act.

Notwithstanding the discussions about MoUs, we of course continue to look to the government of Azerbaijan to ensure that all OSCE personnel, property, and office space are free from harm or harassment.

Mr. Chairperson, colleagues, in closing I'd like to point out that the early public reaction to the news that Azerbaijan wants to terminate the MoU because it would like to shut down the OSCE Project Coordinator's Office, has been both predictable and regrettable. Observers see the Azerbaijan government's move in the context of a broader crackdown and as part of Azerbaijan's significant backsliding in meeting international commitments and obligations, including with respect to human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is not good for the OSCE; this is not good for comprehensive security in the region; this is not good for the people or the government of Azerbaijan.

We hope that the government of Azerbaijan will work with the other 56 participating States to find a way forward that is consistent with advancing implementation of OSCE commitments and our shared security.

Thank you.