



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Enzo Moavero Milanesi, Chairman-in-Office and Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
August 30, 2018

The United States warmly welcomes Foreign Minister Moavero in his first appearance in the Permanent Council as Chairperson-in-Office. We have enjoyed strong collaboration with the Italian Chairmanship in 2018, and we look forward to accelerating progress during its remaining months. In our view, a few key issues merit particular attention before the Ministerial meeting. In particular we have comments on three of the issues that you mentioned in your priorities, many of which we share.

Mr. Chair, let's cut straight to the chase. Moscow's ongoing aggression has resulted in the most significant security crisis in Europe since the Cold War. Its corrosive impact cannot be underestimated, as it undermines not only specific commitments and principles but, indeed, the core principle we all agreed to uphold at this Organization's founding to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every participating State. Mr. Minister, Russian aggression erodes the very trust and cooperation you cite as necessary to address the key challenges facing the region. This means that we must address Russia's ongoing aggression in Ukraine in contravention of OSCE principles. This is not, as my esteemed Russian colleague has mentioned, an internal Ukrainian conflict. Let's face it: every participating State at this table knows – with the exception of one – that this is a hot war started, fueled and maintained by Russia. In Crimea, Russia systematically abuses those who oppose its occupation, including many Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians. Russia – and the forces it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside in eastern Ukraine – puts civilians on both sides of the conflict at constant risk of death, displaces families, destroys livelihoods, and threatens environmental disaster.

Mr. Chair, the OSCE must continue to take a firm and united stance against Russia's aggression, and not just in Ukraine. Ten years after its 2008 armed intervention, Russia still occupies the sovereign Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a fact the Friends of Georgia will call attention to as long as the occupation continues. Although Russia has been a constructive participant in the 5+2 Transnistria settlement negotiations, it has not lived up to its commitment to remove its forces from Moldova, consistent with its 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit commitments. In Europe and the United States, Russia engages in malicious disinformation campaigns to amplify social discord and undermine elections – acts that seek to undermine confidence in democratic institutions.

Mr. Chair, in July, we heard credible media reports that Russian intelligence had acquired sensitive information on the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine, as Russia and its proxies continue their campaign to intimidate the Mission and degrade its capabilities. The SMM remains the international community's eyes and ears on the ground in Ukraine. It is imperative that the Chairman-in-Office continue to prioritize the safety of all of our monitors. The SMM must be able to carry out its work throughout the entire territory of Ukraine, up to its internationally recognized border with Russia. You can continue to count on our full support.

Mr. Chairman, we share your view that this last year has indeed been marked by real progress in the 5+2 settlement process. We thank the Italian Chairmanship for its commitment to this process, as seen in the appointment of Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transnistrian Settlement Process Franco Frattini. We look to the Italian Chairmanship to continue to work closely with the OSCE Mission in Moldova.

A strong commitment to implementing and strengthening existing conventional arms control agreements and arrangements is also crucial. At a time of increased tensions, we need to enhance military predictability and transparency in Europe to avert misunderstandings. There is no reason not to take initial steps toward this goal by achieving agreement on some Vienna Document modernization proposals before the Ministerial. Six such proposals already enjoy the co-sponsorship of one-half or more participating States – one proposal even has forty-five co-sponsors. The United States believes it is time to act.

Mr. Chairman, we are encouraged by progress in Uzbekistan. President Mirziyoyev continues to demonstrate his commitment to reform and has taken concrete steps to improve human rights. We encourage the OSCE to provide expertise and capacity-building in support of the President's reform agenda, and we urge the Italian Chairmanship to support a robust OSCE presence and engagement in Central Asia, and to ensure that the OSCE offices are able to work meaningfully in all three dimensions.

Finally, with the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) just two weeks away, the United States wishes to express our deep concern about the direction some participating States are taking with regards to civil society. We urge the Italian Chairmanship to stand firm against attempts to reduce or unduly restrict civil society access to HDIM and other OSCE meetings. We must also protect the independence, mandates, and budgets of the OSCE institutions. The United States commends Italy for hosting the Anti-Semitism Conference in Rome in January and a follow-up Conference on Religious Intolerance in October. Security indeed rests upon a strong foundation of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, the United States will continue to work closely with you to fulfill mission mandates, implement our collective decisions, and ensure all participating States live up to our shared commitments and principles. We pledge our full support to the Italian Chairmanship and wish you every success in the remaining months of your Chairmanship.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.