

Statement delivered by Col. Stephen Howard FSC Coordinator for the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security at the 101st Joint Meeting of the Permanent Council (PC) and the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC).

Security Dialogue- OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security: Conflict Related Human Rights Violations.

15 July 2026

Chairs,

It is my pleasure to take the floor in my capacity as FSC Chair's Coordinator on the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

Today's Security Dialogue topic enables participating States (pS) to reinforce understanding of States obligations under the OSCE Code of Conduct to prevent and respond to conflict related human rights violations.

I thank the keynote speakers for their insightful presentations. The Code of Conduct is a fundamental and unique OSCE document fostering democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law within the politico-military security dimension.

As evidenced by ongoing and previous conflicts in the OSCE region, the basic principles of International Humanitarian law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL), are systematically violated during warfare. We know that respect for and full implementation of IHL and IHRL is non-negotiable, especially as it applies indiscriminately to all participants in an armed conflict, whether they are state or non-state actors.

As a politically binding document, the Codes effectiveness relies on proactive participation by participating States to address both the

prevention of and response to conflict related Human Rights violations. Two key principles of the Code guide us in our actions here:

- The subjection of armed forces to International Humanitarian law (paras. 29-31 and 34-35) and,
- Respect for the human rights of members of the armed forces (paras. 23, 27-28, and 32-33).

Human rights, whether those of civilians or soldiers, male or female, are inviolable and non-negotiable. Paragraph 34 of the Code specifies that each pS will “ensure that its armed forces are, in peace and in war, commanded, manned, trained and equipped in ways that are consistent with the provisions of international law and its respective obligations and commitments related to the use of armed forces in armed conflict, including as applicable the Hague Conventions of 1907 and 1954, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the 1977 Protocols Additional thereto, as well as the 1980 Convention on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons”. Furthermore, paragraph 37 of the Code states that “the armed forces may not be used to limit the peaceful and lawful exercise of their human and civil rights by persons as individuals or as representatives of groups or to deprive them of their national, religious, cultural, linguistic or ethnic identity”.

But how can pS's address violations of States obligations relating to IHL and IHRL?

There is an onus on all participating States to continue to actively utilise the FSC to address such shortcomings. In this regard, as stipulated by paragraph 38 of the Code, “Each participating State is responsible for implementation of this Code. If requested, a participating State will provide appropriate clarification regarding its implementation of the Code. Appropriate CSCE bodies, mechanisms and procedures will be used to assess, review and improve, if necessary, the implementation of this Code”.

In the context of conflict related human rights violations, pS's are compelled to train, govern and hold accountable their armed forces as set out in article 31 of the Code, “armed forces personnel vested with command authority must ensure that its exercise is in accordance with

relevant national as well as international laws and are made aware that they can be held individually accountable under those laws for the unlawful exercise of such authority and that orders contrary to national and international law must not be given”.

But the key question we must consider is how can we here at the FSC-PC further support compliance, monitoring and dialogue to prevent and respond to conflict related Human Rights violations?

Participating States, when appropriate and with consensus, can resume the Annual Implementation Meeting on the Code of Conduct for review of implementation, pS's can also conduct analysis of information exchange with reports detailing national implementation of standards in tandem with reporting measures such as ODIHR's activities which monitor and document human rights (abuses and) violations of international humanitarian law within the OSCE region.

In conclusion, as we continue to witness systematic Human Rights violations in conflicts throughout our region, we must further underline the relevance of the commitments contained in the Code of Conduct – commitments that remain essential to uphold the rule of law, respect for human rights and IHL and to promote transparency and confidence-building among OSCE participating States.

Thank you.