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Statement delivered by Col. Stephen Howard FSC Coordinator for the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security at the 1149th Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation.

Security Dialogue - OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security: Strengthening Implementation and Accountability Mechanisms.

14 October 2026

Chair,

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.

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.

Today's Security Dialogue topic enables participating States to reinforce understanding of States politically binding obligations under the OSCE Code of Conduct with a focus on how to further enhance implementation and highlight effective accountability mechanisms.

How can we genuinely strengthen the implementation of the Code of Conduct?

- Democratic Oversight: We must find concrete ways to enhance democratic oversight of security forces, as outlined in paragraphs 20 and 21.
- Transparency and Command Responsibility: We need to increase transparency in military activities and shed light on the responsibilities of commanders and military personnel under national and international law (paragraphs 29–31).
- Training and Compliance: This requires that all participating States ensure their armed forces are trained and operate strictly in conformity

with the international law applicable to armed conflict (paragraphs 34–36).

The Code is much more than text setting out political commitments—it is a living instrument. It remains incumbent upon all participating States to ensure that they respond effectively to today's complex security challenges.

To strengthen implementation and enhance accountability, I offer three practical areas for our consideration:

Peer Review of the OSCE Code of Conduct.
Peer review under the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security provides participating States with an opportunity to discuss and assess each other's implementation of the Code in a cooperative and transparent setting. Through peer review, States can exchange views on how they interpret and implement the Code's commitments, raise questions, share experiences and identify good practices. The process is intended to promote transparency, accountability, confidence and mutual understanding, rather than to function as a formal inspection or enforcement mechanism. In this sense, peer review complements the Code's information-exchange provisions by creating a dialogue among participating States about their implementation of the commitments.

Voluntary info exchanges.
Voluntary information exchanges – on UNSCR 1325, Children and Armed Conflict, and PMSCs, are one of the practical ways in which participating States can increase transparency beyond the information exchanges that are formally required by the Code. States may voluntarily share additional information on their military policies, defence structures, activities, or other politico-military matters. The purpose is to build confidence and mutual understanding, reduce the risk of misunderstandings, and contribute to greater openness among participating States. Voluntary exchanges are not binding (in a political sense) in the same way as the Code's mandatory information-sharing provisions; rather, they depend on the willingness of individual States to provide additional information. In practice, greater engagement by participating States in voluntary exchanges can therefore serve as

further enhancement of confidence and security building measures, particularly when participating States wish to clarify their intentions or provide greater transparency about specific areas of their military and security policies.

National Tables

National tables are informal sessions in which participating States present their national approaches to implementing the Code of Conduct, including relevant training, education, institutional arrangements, and awareness-raising activities. The purpose is to allow States to share experiences, practical examples and lessons learned, and to give others ideas for strengthening their own implementation. They can also provide an opportunity to discuss challenges and identify areas where further cooperation or assistance might be useful. Unlike a formal review or inspection, a national table is primarily a learning and information-sharing mechanism. It can therefore complement both voluntary information exchanges and peer review by providing a more practical, country-focused look at how the Code is implemented at the national level.

In conclusion, as armed forces face a more and more complex operating environment, as evidenced in conflicts throughout our region, we must focus our efforts on enhancing the Codes implementation and accountability mechanisms - activities such as todays Security Dialogue should actively be supported by all participating States because it is in these difficult times that the Code, as a politically binding document, needs to be strengthened, not diluted.

Thank you.