

**Statement delivered by Col. Stephen Howard, FSC Coordinator for the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security at the 98<sup>th</sup> Joint FSC-PC Meeting Security Dialogue: Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security - Treatment of Prisoners of War: Obligations and Responsibilities.**

25 February 2026.

---

Chairs,

Ambassadors, Colleagues,

I am taking the floor in my capacity as the Coordinator of the FSC Chair for the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

Today's Security Dialogue highlights how participating States' obligations and responsibilities regarding the treatment of Prisoners of War is explicitly linked to the Code of Conduct and to the overall contribution to stability and security in the OSCE region.

Paragraph 30 of the Code compels each participating State to instruct its armed forces personnel in international humanitarian law, rules, conventions and commitments governing armed conflict and to ensure that such personnel are aware that they are individually accountable under national and international law for their actions.

More specifically, paragraph 31 holds armed forces personnel accountable for violations and abuses of international humanitarian law. In consenting to the Code of Conduct, participating States pledged to assume the responsibility to ensure that their armed forces personnel vested with command authority

exercise it in accordance with relevant national and international law and are made aware that they can be held individually accountable under those laws for the unlawful exercise of such authority. This includes the humane treatment and protection of Prisoners of War. The Code stipulates that no order contrary to national or international law may be given. The responsibility of superiors does not exempt subordinates from any of their individual responsibilities.

We have seen from our panellists here today, with specific focus on the treatment of Prisoners of War, that the development of educational measures, involving training on IHL and IHRL is crucial. We have the tools here at the OSCE to further enhance awareness of our obligations through mutual cooperation, information exchange and the application of lessons learned. This includes the provision of particular conditions specific to women Prisoners of War. In this context, the Code's paragraph 34 specifies that each participating State will ensure that in peace time and in war, its armed forces are 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 as applicable to The Hague Conventions of 1907 and 1954, as well as The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional 1977 Protocols.

The Code of Conduct plays an important part in guiding officers and soldiers alike to realise their rights, however it also holds armed forces personnel accountable for violations and abuses of international humanitarian law, including those associated with the ill-treatment of Prisoners of War.

Adherence to the Code of Conduct remains paramount, all participating States are reminded of the commitments they have made to abide by the principles of the Code, particularly as we have seen here today in the treatment of Prisoners of War.

Thank you.

