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STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF UKRAINE

98th FSC and PC Plenary Meeting

(25 February 2026)

Agenda Item 1, Security dialogue: Code of Conduct, treatment of prisoners of war, obligations and responsibilities”

Mme Chairperson,

Ukraine welcomes the initiative of the French Chairpersonship to dedicate today’s Security Dialogue to one of the most harrowing and urgent issues of modern warfare – treatment of prisoners of war.

We also express our appreciation to today’s speakers for their insightful interventions, which have helped shed light on this grave issue.

Esteemed colleagues,

For Ukraine, this is not an abstract legal debate. It is a daily reality of war. Thousands of Ukrainian families are waiting for news about their relatives in captivity. For them, the legal terms we use in Vienna - “status,” “detaining power,” “obligations,” “repatriation” – mean survival, dignity, and hope.

At the same time, we must speak plainly: Russia’s conduct regarding Ukrainian prisoners of war has been repeatedly documented by international mechanisms as deeply alarming. As reflected in ODIHR reports, serious violations have been documented in places of detention under Russian authority, including torture and other forms of ill-treatment of Ukrainian POWs and detained civilians. This is proved not only by reports and surveys, but by the bodies of Ukrainian POWs, which are clear evidence of torture or ill-treatment.

Mme Chairperson,

Ukraine therefore stresses three points.

First, the humane treatment of prisoners of war is not optional, reciprocal, or conditional. It is a binding obligation. No military necessity, no political narrative, and no attempt to manipulate legal categories can justify torture, humiliating treatment, denial of medical care, or pressure during interrogations.

Second, access matters. Full, regular, and unimpeded access by competent international humanitarian actors to prisoners of war is essential - both to protect detainees and to prevent impunity. Transparency in this area is not a concession; it is part of compliance.

Third, accountability matters. Violations against prisoners of war do not disappear with time. They must be documented, investigated, and prosecuted. This is indispensable for justice, deterrence, and any future sustainable peace.

Mme Chairperson,

Ukraine remains firmly committed to fulfilling its own obligations under international humanitarian law and the OSCE Code of Conduct.

Even under conditions of full-scale war, Ukraine continues to strengthen a state-level, institutional approach to issues related to prisoners of war and persons deprived of liberty as a result of Russia's aggression.

Ukraine also reaffirms, as a matter of principle and law, that all prisoners of war held by Ukraine are treated humanely and in full compliance with international humanitarian law. This is not only our legal obligation – it is a reflection of who we are as a State defending itself against aggression.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to those countries and partners that helping Ukraine with the release of POWs through humanitarian facilitation, mediation efforts, and quiet diplomacy.

We particularly acknowledge the role of partner States that support contacts and exchanges, as well as the efforts of international humanitarian actors and institutions engaged in monitoring, documentation, and protection-related work. We also value the contribution of ODIHR and other international mechanisms that help ensure that violations are not hidden and that victims' testimonies are heard.

Such support saves lives. It also reinforces the international legal order at a moment when that order is under direct attack.

Esteemed colleagues,

Russia has also demonstrated a particularly cynical pattern of conduct by exploiting the vulnerability of families of Ukrainian prisoners of war. Ukraine has documented cases in which relatives were threatened and pressured to register Starlink terminals in their own names for subsequent use by Russian forces against Ukraine, which once again underscores the need for sustained international attention and accountability.

Mme Chairperson,

Therefore, today's discussion is timely and necessary. It reminds us that the treatment of prisoners of war is not only a humanitarian issue, but also a matter of security, military professionalism, and trust between States.

Ukraine believes that the OSCE, and the FSC in particular, can continue to maintain sustained political attention to documented violations in the context of the ongoing illegal aggression against Ukraine.

Respect for the law in war is one of the last barriers against complete barbarization. If we allow that barrier to collapse, the consequences will extend far beyond.

Ukraine therefore calls on all participating States to remain principled, consistent, and vocal in defending the rights and protections guaranteed to prisoners of war under international humanitarian law.

I thank you, Mme Chairperson.