



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Opening Address of the Chairperson-in-Office and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta, Hon. Dr. Ian Borg

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 25, 2024

Minister Borg, welcome to the Permanent Council and congratulations on assuming the OSCE Chairpersonship for 2024. The United States is grateful to Malta for accepting this tremendous responsibility on such short notice and without the benefit of the customary two years to prepare.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank North Macedonia for its principled and successful chairpersonship in 2023 under the leadership of Ambassador Igor Djundev and Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani.

Going forward, participating States must do the hard work to ensure the OSCE remains functional and resilient and that it continues to advance its founding principles to build comprehensive security for the people we represent. Malta's willingness to serve as chair fills an indispensable role in that effort. You and your team have the full and unwavering support of the United States.

We are confident Malta will demonstrate principled leadership throughout the course of this year. Your pledge to safeguard and uphold the fundamental principles and commitments enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter recognizes this Organization draws its strength from its core values. Unfortunately, one participating State, Russia, shows contempt for these values every day through its repressive actions at home, its aggression against Ukraine, and its malign behavior across the entire region. An overwhelming majority of participating States here in this forum agree that support for Ukraine and its people in the face of the Kremlin's violation of the UN Charter and its flagrant disregard of the OSCE's founding principles must remain our shared priority.

February, next month, marks ten years since Russia began its aggression against Ukraine with its illegal invasion and ensuing occupation of Crimea. February further marks a full two years since Russia, aided by Belarus, launched its full-scale war against a fellow participating State. Russia's waves of attacks over the New Year are a stark reminder to the world that President Putin's objective remains unchanged. He seeks to obliterate Ukraine as an independent state and subjugate its people, denying them their democratic voice and sovereignty. Minister Borg, we welcomed your January 2nd statement with the Secretary

General, condemning Russia's New Year's attacks, which were an affront to peace early in your chairpersonship and sadly will not be the last.

The plain words of Putin and his accomplices are telling. On January 16, Putin openly described to his officials in Moscow the Ukrainian territory Russia currently occupies as "conquests." There can be no doubt that the Kremlin views its war in imperialistic terms. If that were not clear enough, Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia and former President of the Russian Federation, went even further on January 17 to claim, "the existence of Ukraine is deadly *for Ukrainians*." He added, "No matter how much they aspire to the mythical European Union and NATO, Russia will force them to capitulate or die." It is clear, Putin and his cronies see Ukraine not as a sovereign, independent state, but as a prize piece of real estate for an imagined Kremlin-run empire filled not with free people but by a population they hold in contempt and seek to bend to their will by force.

Contrary to what the Kremlin might wish to be true, Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic future is very real. The vast majority of Ukrainians know their destiny lies in Europe, not under Russian subjugation. Ukraine's people have chosen democracy, the rule of law, and a European and Trans-Atlantic path. Ukraine's people have chosen to fight to defend their homes, their freedom, and their country's independence. Ukraine must win this fight, and the United States stands with Ukraine.

Despite Russia's obstructionism, the OSCE has in fact shown it can and will respond in ways that buttress efforts towards President Zelensky's 10-point peace plan and EU integration. Participating States have invoked the Moscow Mechanism and the Expert Mission reports, which will inform accountability efforts to hold Russia, and its enabler Belarus, accountable. Participating States have launched the Support Programme for Ukraine, or SPU, that is actively assisting Ukraine within OSCE mandates. The SPU's work aligns with our own commitments to help Ukraine rebuild, recover, and reform, and bolsters multiple priorities described in President Zelensky's 10-point plan. We urge other participating States to contribute funding for the SPU as well.

Minister Borg, even as we keep an unrelenting spotlight on Russia's aggression abroad and on the deepening internal repressions in Russia and Belarus, we will not lose sight of concerns in other parts of our region. In a number of countries, we see intensifying pressure on civil society and independent media, as well as challenges to democracy and the rule of law. We are witnessing rising intolerance and hate crimes. In several countries, torture persists. The number of persons detained or imprisoned for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms continues to grow.

Minister Borg, we look forward to Malta's chairpersonship and will strongly support your work across the region in all three OSCE dimensions to deal with these aforesaid issues.

The OSCE's unique approach to security offers participating States practical tools to move towards peaceful resolution of protracted conflicts and can yield real progress this year. We commend your focus on women, peace, and security; youth perspectives; cybersecurity; corruption; trafficking in persons; safety of journalists; and digitization. Robust civil society participation in all of these areas will improve the development of effective programming

and amplify the benefits of these efforts. Securing robust and predictable support to the field missions and independent institutions will also pay dividends for many years to come.

Minister Borg, we have no illusions about the challenges we face in 2024. Whether the Chair had two years or two weeks to prepare, the difficulties ahead remain the same. Though you have assumed a tremendous responsibility, you also have a tremendous opportunity, and you have the full backing of the United States. We look forward to working closely with you and your capable team to achieve our common goals and strengthen the three dimensions of security in our organization. Welcome again and thank you for accepting this role at this extraordinary moment.

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