



United States Mission to the OSCE
U.S. Statement for the
Forum for Security Cooperation:
Security Dialogue – Code of Conduct

As delivered by Deputy Arms Control Delegate Spencer Fields
February 8, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our distinguished panel of experts for sharing their insights with us today.

Before I begin, I would like to offer, as Secretary Blinken did on Monday, the United States' profound and deepest condolences to our Turkish colleagues, their government, and the people of Türkiye following the devastating earthquakes and aftershocks that struck this week. Our initial assistance response to Türkiye is already underway, and we are determined to do all that we can, in close coordination with the Government of Türkiye, to help those affected by this tragedy in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

Mr. Chair,

The Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security is one of the OSCE's cornerstone documents and provides a clear framework for us all to follow. Indeed, if all participating States abided by this code, the security situation in the OSCE region would be immensely improved. We do look forward to the day when we can discuss the full spectrum of items covered by the Code, but we find that impossible when we have a major war of aggression – and it is a war, not a “conflict” – raging in the heart of Europe with two participating States, Belarus and Russia, flagrantly contravening the Code at the expense of a third, Ukraine.

While we understand the Chair's inclination to pursue an impartial stance, we strongly disagree that the war against Ukraine stems from contraventions of the Code of Conduct's principles by “warring parties.” I'll be direct: Russia started this war of choice, not because it needed to, not because Ukraine posed any threat to Russia's territorial integrity or political independence, but because Russia thought it could get away with it. Russia attacked, Belarus helped, and Ukraine is defending itself.

It's useful for us to examine in more detail Russia's actions against the principles in the Code of Conduct that we have all committed to:

Paragraph 1: “The participating States emphasize that the full respect for all OSCE principles embodied in the Helsinki Final Act and the implementation in good faith of all commitments undertaken in the CSCE are of fundamental importance for stability and security, and consequently constitute a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all of them.” Article I of the Helsinki Final Act – front and center – is, “The participating States will respect each other's sovereign equality and individuality...including in particular the right of every State to ... territorial integrity and to freedom and political independence.”

Paragraph 3: “[Participating States] will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States.”

Paragraph 4: “Reaffirming their respect for each other’s sovereign equality and individuality as well as the rights inherent in and encompassed by its sovereignty, the participating States will base their mutual security relations upon a co-operative approach.” It should go without saying, but invading your neighbor is not a co-operative approach.

For Belarus, we need look only to paragraph 8: “The participating States will not provide assistance to or support States that are in violation of their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.”

By highlighting Russia’s and Belarus’s transgressions, I do not mean to imply that the Code of Conduct applies only to them or other aggressor states. It is proper and fitting that we also look in the mirror and examine our own conduct against relevant commitments:

Paragraph 3 states, “Security is indivisible and that the security of each [participating State] is inseparably linked to the security of all others.”

Paragraph 5: “Participating States are determined to act in solidarity if [OSCE] norms and commitments are violated and to facilitate concerted responses to security challenges that they may face as a result. They will consult promptly...with a participating State seeking assistance in realizing its...self-defence. They will consider jointly the nature of the threat and actions that may be required in defence of their common values.”

Paragraph 9: “The participating States reaffirm the inherent right, as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, of individual and collective self-defence.”

It is vital that we keep in mind that Russia -- aided and abetted by Belarus -- has attacked not only Ukraine, but the whole of our comprehensive security. The United States and many other participating States have acted in solidarity with Ukraine, whose sovereignty and territorial integrity Russia continues to violate, to facilitate a concerted response in keeping with Code of Conduct paragraph 5. We have considered jointly the nature of the threat Russia poses and have taken action to uphold the UN Charter and OSCE principles.

So, when we hear the Russian delegation here in the FSC, or the Russian Foreign Minister in Moscow, criticizing the United States, other NATO members, or other participating States for providing arms and other support for Ukraine’s self-defense, we should hear this for what it really is: Russia wants us to turn our back on our commitments to one another under the Code of Conduct. Russia wants us to look away while it wages a brutal war of aggression against its neighbor and to hope that we are not next. Russia wants us to ignore this Code of Conduct as it has itself done with utter contempt.

Mr. Chair,

The United States, other NATO Allies, and the other participating States that have stepped forward to help Ukraine defend itself will not turn away. We will not forget our promise to abide by this Code of Conduct, and we will support Ukraine as long as it takes until Russia stops its war of aggression and withdraws from the territory of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.