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United States Mission to the OSCE

US Statement for the Reinforced PC

As delivered by EUR/RPM Director, Gary D. Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 8, 2007

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

This reinforced PC is an excellent opportunity to review where we stand on preparations for the Madrid Ministerial. We look forward to positive decisions on cooperating with Afghanistan to enhance its border security, on combating trafficking in persons, on combating child sexual exploitation and promoting public-private partnerships in counterterrorism. We hope there will also be a decision on the chairman in office of the OSCE. At the same time, we all recognize that this Ministerial appears to be coming at a critical juncture for the OSCE in a much larger, existential sense.

From my government's perspective, the institutions we created through the 1990's continue to be vital elements in support of transformation. The OSCE is safeguarding human rights, building democratic institutions, monitoring our adherence to commitments we have undertaken together, enhancing confidence, resolving conflicts, and intervening in times of crisis.

But we must also be frank: OSCE ministerial meetings have not broken any substantial new ground since the 1999 Istanbul Summit. As you well know, it is increasingly difficult to bridge gaps or broker agreements amongst us.

Even worse, issues we had taken for granted are increasingly being questioned, and attempts are being made to reverse the progress we have made together. Our joint human rights commitments, which go to the heart of what this organization is about, are now being questioned, or blatantly ignored. This ministerial will face unprecedented proposals that are little more than transparent attempts to dismantle the structures we have put in place over the years. We face threats to the CFE regime -- a cornerstone of European security. Proposals are being circulated -- such as the Russia-led draft on election monitoring -- that would undermine the autonomy, independence and effectiveness of ODIHR, which is this Organization's most visible and successful operation. Also in practice, Russia is not living up to the spirit of its commitments to OSCE election monitoring through the limitations it is imposing even today on observation of the December Duma elections.

The Madrid Ministerial should attempt to come to grips with these issues, and focus on decisions on a discreet number of crucial issues for the security of the OSCE region. We would suggest the following:

First, related to CFE: We should draw positive conclusions about the validity of the overall CFE framework, and the way forward to preserve the CFE regime. CFE is the most successful arms control regime of its kind, providing unprecedented transparency regarding States Parties' military forces. This is a regime that benefits all the members of the OSCE; we need to work together to preserve it. The current Treaty does need to be updated, which is why the U.S. supports, now as it did in 1999, entry into force of the Adapted CFE Treaty. My country has held several rounds of discussions with our Russian counterparts in an effort to find a creative, practical package approach that will help preserve this vital agreement. To move ahead, both sides must make progress on each other's issues of concern. NATO countries are ready to move ahead on ratification of the Adapted Treaty in the context of an agreement with Russia that addresses key concerns of all Treaty partners, including Georgia and Moldova. We hope to find a way forward that addresses key concerns raised by Russia during the CFE extraordinary conference this past July.

But to get there, we will all need to work together flexibly and creatively. No one country can receive satisfaction for its concerns without also taking into account the security concerns of others. The U.S. hopes that we can use the Ministerial to record agreement on a way ahead that ensures the long-term integrity of the CFE regime, and avoids Russian suspension of implementation of CFE, which can only undermine the future of this core regime. Such a suspension could also have seriously adverse effects going beyond the Treaty itself.

Secondly, on Kosovo: We should commit to continuing the OSCE's activities in Kosovo no matter what the outcome of the UN-mandated troika process. Negotiations in the troika format will be reaching the final stages as the OSCE Ministerial takes place. The Ministerial is not the place to debate the issues being discussed directly between the parties with the help of the troika partners. But we in the OSCE do have the responsibility to squarely face the question of the future of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo -- our largest undertaking as an Organization.

Whatever the outcome of the troika process, what the OSCE is doing today in Kosovo is extremely valuable for all parties. OMiK is protecting the rights of minorities, providing valuable hands-on technical assistance to Kosovar and Serbian municipalities alike, and undertaking important capacity-building at all levels of government. These are the tasks which will be critical to a stable and peaceful Kosovo no matter what the outcome of the status talks.

We have heard in this hall voices proclaim that if the outcome is not to their liking, they will demand an immediate closure of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo -- our largest field presence and arguably the one mission which has the potential to do the most to protect security in our region. The Madrid Ministerial should commit to continued OSCE engagement in Kosovo.

A third key issue for the ministerial is Central Asian Border Security and Afghanistan: The Spanish Chair is to be congratulated for launching discussions and presenting proposals for expanded OSCE activities in Central Asia, with a particular focus on border security. It is clear that the success or failure of the international effort in Afghanistan can have a profound impact on security in the OSCE region. Narcotics trafficking and possible terrorist infiltrations over the border from Afghanistan are having an impact throughout Central Asia. 90% of the heroin consumed in Europe comes from Afghanistan. My government has sought to integrate

Afghanistan more completely into the region, but providing secure border regimes is critical to that effort.

The Madrid Ministerial should tackle this issue head on: does the OSCE want to make improved regional cooperation on border security in Central Asia a major element of its work? And as part of this, is the OSCE able and willing to play a role in support of international efforts in Afghanistan by launching a meaningful program of border police and customs training along the Afghan border? We believe the OSCE can and should contribute; we are looking to this Ministerial under Spanish leadership to take a decision.

And finally, a brief comment on process: I began by stating that this Ministerial comes at a critical juncture for the OSCE. We would welcome a decision on the chairmanship in office over the next few years in accordance with the decision we took in Brussels -- that a Chairman-in-Office is expected to demonstrate the willingness and capacity to exercise leadership in helping fulfill OSCE commitments, norms and values.

Likewise, we would welcome a finalization of a convention on privileges and immunities, and congratulate the Dutch Chairperson of the working group for all she has done to help finalize a text.

But the worth of the OSCE will not be measured in these agreements.

A Chairmanship is not as important as the OSCE's activities. A Charter won't help the OSCE do its job any better than it does today. The real worth of our endeavors will be in work we are doing along the southern borders of our Central Asian partners, in the Caucasus, on advancing settlements for protracted conflicts, in helping rebuild a stable Balkans region to prepare for its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, or in supporting the values of human rights, democratic freedoms, and rule of law throughout the OSCE area.

Our institutions and field missions, supported by the Secretariat, are where the rubber meets the road. We, as diplomatic representatives, should strive to pave the way for their work through clear political guidance and by decisively facing up to the threats and challenges before us. I look forward to joining all of you in Madrid at the end of this month in this effort.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.