



United States Mission to the OSCE

Annual Security Review Conference

Working Session II: Conflict and Crisis Situations in the OSCE area: building security and confidence

As delivered by Lane Bahl, Acting Political Counselor
Vienna, June 24, 2020

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

I welcome this opportunity to discuss the protracted conflicts. I wish it were possible to highlight progress achieved toward resolution of these conflicts since our last meeting. I fear, however, that all we can reasonably say is that instances of actual violence on the ground are few. Beyond that positive fact, there has been little change in the last year. In Georgia, Russia and the de facto authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia continue to seek to transform the administrative boundary line established by the 2008 ceasefire into something resembling a permanent border. The International Prevention and Response Mechanism meetings that help keep the peace on the ground have been drastically curtailed and meet on an ad hoc basis, at best. In Moldova, there are a litany of reasons why movement toward greater cooperation has stalled, one of them being, reasonably enough, elections. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, progress on core issues appears glacial.

It is unfortunate that in the midst of this global pandemic the sides to these conflicts have, in many ways, become further apart than they were before this crisis. Some of the steps taken to curb the spread of COVID-19 – such as restrictions on travel and transit, as well as limitations on in-person meetings – have only made progress on peaceful resolution of these conflicts more difficult. We don't know how long COVID-19 will be with us; we need to find ways to continue to engage constructively on resolving these conflicts despite the challenges this pandemic poses.

I look forward to hearing from the states most directly impacted by these conflicts regarding their impression of the conflict resolution process and the actual situation on the ground. I hope we can identify creative, yet practical, steps that the OSCE can take to help resolve these conflicts, such as re-establishing an OSCE footprint in the Caucasus.

In **Moldova**, we can envision what a final settlement might look like. We need the political will to make that a reality. The United States supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and on that basis supports the 5+2 negotiations to find a comprehensive settlement that will provide a special status for the separatist region of Transnistria within a territorially whole and sovereign Moldova. Unfortunately, the progress we saw in the 5+2 settlement process in 2018 and 2019, when the sides committed to implement important aspects of the “package of eight,” has not been replicated in 2020. The spread of COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova and the separatist region of

Transnistria has provided an opportunity for cooperation, but the sides have yet to take advantage. The establishment of new "checkpoints" by Transnistrian "authorities" in the security zone have exacerbated relations between the sides.

We cannot lose sight of ongoing security concerns caused by the presence of Russian troops and munitions on Moldovan territory without the consent of the Government of Moldova. As we all know, Russia committed to withdrawing its forces and munitions from Moldova at the 1999 Istanbul Summit. Any movement of Russian forces or munitions in the sovereign state of Moldova is a matter of security interest to the 57 OSCE participating States. We look to the OSCE Mission to work with Russian and Moldovan authorities to keep this community informed. We stand ready to assist Moldova and the Mission on the destruction and removal of ammunition and armaments at Cobasna, under the OSCE aegis, and with U.S. and other international participation.

Russia's continued occupation of twenty percent of **Georgia's** territory undermines Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders. Russia has not fulfilled its obligation under the 2008 ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions or its commitment to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Russia has instead militarized the region, pursued "borderization" activities to seal off the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia, and prevented prompt access to medical care for residents of the occupied territories, possibly contributing to the unnecessary deaths of several ethnic Georgians, as was mentioned earlier. The Geneva International Discussions remain an important forum for addressing the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the conflict, but results are few. I believe there is more that OSCE can do, including promoting people-to-people contacts and helping Georgians on both sides of the ABLs address common humanitarian, economic, and agricultural challenges. We should also decide to establish an OSCE mission with access to all of the internationally recognized territory of Georgia in order to monitor and report on the situation on the ground.

The **Nagorno-Karabakh conflict** continues to cost lives and stifle the aspirations of innocent civilians caught in the middle of this conflict. As one of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, along with Russia and France, the United States is committed to working with the sides to find a lasting and peaceful resolution based on the principles shared by participating States of non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, and equal rights and self-determination of peoples, as embraced in the Helsinki Final Act. We urge the sides to exercise restraint and identify specific humanitarian and security measures to prepare the populations for peace and reduce tensions.

U.S. OSCE Ambassador Gilmore spoke at length about the situation in **Ukraine** yesterday. But it bears repeating that Russia's actions in Ukraine have played an outsized role in the general deterioration of the European security environment. It is time for Russia to honor its commitments under the Minsk agreements by withdrawing its military and security forces from eastern Ukraine and returning control of Crimea to Ukraine. The protracted conflicts and the conflict in Ukraine are inextricably connected to the broader European

security environment. We are all impacted by these conflicts in one way or another, and it is contingent upon us, as a community, to do more to bring about peace. Re-establishing an OSCE presence in the Caucasus would be a logical step.

The United States looks forward to continuing our discussions on the protracted conflicts as we prepare for the Ministerial Council this December.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.