



United States Mission to the OSCE

Plenary Statement
31st OSCE Ministerial Council
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As delivered by Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State

Ian, Chair-in-Office Borg, thank you so much. Thank you to you. Thank you to all of our Maltese hosts for a very productive ministerial and for being such a strong, successful chair-in-office.

Half a century ago, our countries came together to forge a shared vision for preserving peace and stability in Europe. The group that would eventually become the OSCE agreed that military and economic security are inseparable from – indeed, rooted in – the upholding of fundamental freedoms.

Thirty years ago, I was with President Clinton in Budapest when the CSCE became the OSCE, and as he said then, we “seek to increase the security of all; to erase the old lines without drawing arbitrary new ones; to bolster emerging democracies; and to integrate the nations of Europe into a continent where democracy and free markets know no borders but where every nation’s borders are secure.”

Today, the majority of our members are united in a commitment to that foundational principle set 50 years ago and to the vision that President Clinton set out 30 years ago. And despite Russia’s sustained attempts to violate this institution’s spirit and obstruct its work, the OSCE has continued to carry out its vital mission.

This year, the OSCE observed more than a dozen elections – including the recent United States election – delivering assessments that remain the gold standard for free and fair contests. In Moldova, the OSCE affirmed a well-administered runoff despite Russian interference, and now Romanian authorities are uncovering a Russian effort – large in scale and well-funded – to influence the recent presidential election, contrary to OSCE standards. Meanwhile in Georgia, observers shed light on troubling reports of voter intimidation and efforts by the ruling party to tilt the playing field in its favor.

The United States shares the concerns of many OSCE members about Georgian Dream’s decision to suspend Georgia’s EU accession process. This has eerie overtones of 2014. We support the right to peaceful protest and condemn the brutal aggression of – repression of those calling for their country to stay on the path to closer ties with Europe – in particular, the reported assaults and detention of journalists.

Georgian Dream's anti-democratic actions underscore the importance of the OSCE's work to strengthen civil society, to strengthen freedom of the press, to bolster protections for journalists, anti-corruption activists, and human rights defenders.

When Russia blocked the annual conference where we take stock of our progress on human rights, the OSCE instead convened member-states and civil society in Warsaw to hold ourselves and one another accountable. At a time of increasing restrictions on civil society and independent media in the OSCE region, efforts like this one are more important than ever.

Finally, Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has undermined the ideals of sovereignty and sovereign equality of nations, territorial integrity of states, self-determination of peoples. In response, the OSCE has used the Moscow Mechanism to call out Russia's violations of international law, including the forced relocation of children.

After Russia forced the Special Monitoring Mission to stop reporting from Ukraine's front lines, we stood up the Support Program for Ukraine, which is helping local law enforcement identify abducted children, as well as providing anti-corruption training and whistleblower protection. The OSCE is also helping locate and return Ukrainian artifacts that Russia has stolen.

Now, one of our colleagues talked about escalation. He's exactly right. Let's talk about escalation. Let's talk about the introduction of North Korean forces into Europe. Let's talk about the use of intermediate-range ballistic missiles to attack Ukraine. Let's talk about lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons by Russia. Let's talk about the ongoing assault on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including its nuclear transmission grid, which poses a grave threat to every single country in this room. That is escalation.

Now, I regret that our colleague, Mr. Lavrov, has left the room, not giving the courtesy to listen to us as we listened to him. And, of course, our Russian colleague is very adept at drowning listeners in a tsunami of misinformation. So I won't parse everything that he said, but I will just note two things.

First, he speaks of the indivisibility of security. That's right, but it cannot be and must not be a one-way street, good for Russia but not Ukraine. But let's not fool ourselves and let's not allow him or anyone else to fool us. This is not about and has never been about Russia's security. This is about Mr. Putin's imperial project to erase Ukraine from the map.

And don't believe me, don't take me at my word. Listen to Mr. Putin's own words. Way back in 2008 at the NATO summit, Putin claimed, and I quote, "Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territory [in] Eastern Europe, but part, a significant part, was a gift from us." And in 2014, marking the illegal annexation of Crimea, Putin declared that Russians and Ukrainians are, and I quote, "one people." In February 2020, Putin again said in an interview that Ukrainians and Russians are one and the same people and that Ukrainian national identity was a foreign construction aimed at weakening Russia. In July 2021, in an article – a quasi-academic piece attempting to provide historical justification for the invasion – Putin rejected the idea of a distinct Ukrainian people and nation, and I won't bother to quote from it, but I could at

length. Just a few months ago, this year, Mr. Putin said in an interview, “So in [a] sense, we have every reason to affirm that Ukraine is an artificial state that was shaped at Stalin’s will... Everyone in the West thinks that the Russian people have been split by hostilities forever. No. They will be reunited.”

That is what this is about. That’s what it’s always been about. And that’s why we have to stand strongly against it.

Mr. Lavrov spoke about the sovereign right of every member-state to make their own choices. That’s exactly what this is about: the sovereign right of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people to make their own choices about the future, not to have those choices made in and by Moscow.

In this challenging environment, sustaining the OSCE’s work requires equipping the organization with strong leaders who will vigorously defend and advance the Helsinki principles. So I’m pleased we’ve made progress on vacant leadership positions. It’s crucial that we do the same for future chairs, as well as for a unified budget, and that Russia pay its fair share of that budget. The United States welcomes Cyprus’ willingness to serve as CIO in 2027. I hope we can agree on that and on a strong candidate for 2026.

This organization upholds the highest standards of democracy, human rights, the rule of law – and it’s able to do so, above all, because of the people who serve the institution. On behalf of all participating states and the combined 1 billion people that we represent, I want to thank the OSCE’s public servants for their commitment to this organization’s enduring work.

Thank you very much.

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