United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly George Tsereteli

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry R. Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 11, 2018

The United States warmly welcomes OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) President Tsereteli here to the Permanent Council.

The United States government and the U.S. Congress recognize the valuable contributions of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Members of Congress from both chambers and political parties regularly engage their fellow parliamentarians from other participating States through the OSCE PA.

We welcome the increased collaboration between the PA and the Permanent Council, including PA participation in various OSCE meetings and the PA *ad hoc* Committees on Migration and on Countering Terrorism.

Mr. Chair, I wish to highlight the important role of the Parliamentary Assembly in OSCE election observations and welcome the strong cooperation between the PA and ODIHR in conducting observation missions. We look forward to welcoming you and Mr. Tsereteli and your team to observe the midterm elections in the United States next month.

We also welcome the increased participation by the PA in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw this year and look forward to more such involvement. In our view, it is important that we hear the views of parliamentarians on the implementation of our commitments, as well as their ideas of how we can improve.

We agree with you on the importance of civil society participation in OSCE events. We note that in Berlin, the Parliamentary Assembly called on participating States "to welcome NGO participation in OSCE events, and to reject all efforts to restrict participation in OSCE human dimension events so long as these groups do not resort to or condone violence or terrorism, to ensure the broadest possible contribution from NGOs to the OSCE's work and a full and unrestricted exchange of information and opinions."

We also agree with you on the critical role of the OSCE field missions as well as the need for the OSCE to move towards a multi-year budget.

I would like to highlight a few more issues addressed by the Parliamentary Assembly during its annual session in Berlin. As in previous years, the PA has led the way in combating

trafficking in persons, this year by highlighting the importance of involving all sectors of society in fighting this abhorrent crime and assisting its victims. In Berlin, parliamentarians urged that we prioritize reducing **demand** as part of integrated strategies to combat trafficking in persons and we look forward to discussing how we can put this into practice.

Since 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly each year has condemned the breaches of Helsinki principles associated with Russian aggression against Ukraine and other neighboring countries, including your home – Georgia. The United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. Likewise, the United States considers Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be integral parts of Georgia, and our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity is clear. We urge Russia to fulfill all of its obligations under the 2008 cease-fire agreement, withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, reverse its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and provide free movement and free access for humanitarian assistance.

We take note of this year's PA resolutions that focused on abuses in occupied Crimea, as well as human rights violations in Russia itself – including a call for a new, thorough investigation of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov.

In closing, let me express appreciation for the excellent work of Ambassador Andreas Nothelle and the PA's team here in Vienna. We look forward to continuing our close collaboration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.