

United States Mission to the OSCE

Annual Security Review Conference

Closing Session

As delivered by Christopher Robinson
Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs
Vienna, June 25, 2020



Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to express my appreciation to the Chair for hosting a rich and substantive ASRC in what we all recognize are exceptionally difficult circumstances. I also want to thank all my colleagues on this side of the Atlantic who rose before dawn to participate in a number of sessions. I think that's another measure of the importance that we continue to attach to this event.

I take away two key insights from our discussions this week. One is that the continuing deterioration of security in the Euro-Atlantic area is largely the result of the decision by one OSCE participating State to pursue policies that are inconsistent with longstanding principles, norms, and commitments. It is not, as Russia has argued, a result of any action NATO has taken nor is it the fallout from a so-called internal conflict in Ukraine. NATO is a defensive Alliance, and one that has for decades sought to build a relationship based on partnership with Russia. But NATO cannot ignore the reality of Russia's aggression against its neighbors and its hybrid attacks on so many others, including the United States.

The second insight we take with us is the impact of the COVID pandemic on our security environment. Ambassador Grau captured it in her remarks on the first day of our meeting. By making routine human contact exponentially more difficult, our diplomacy, our social structures, our economies, our institutions, and even our families are condemned to separation and isolation. It is hard to build trust between communities – especially in situations of tension and conflict – when public health measures require us to curtail travel, restrict the movement of people and goods, and limit in-person engagement. The exploitation of the pandemic by governments to deepen the isolation of some, and suspicion of others, is immoral as well as being contrary to OSCE principles.

Cooperation, not confrontation, is what will start to dispel the current level of tension on the continent.

This is particularly true in the context of Ukraine and the protracted conflicts. We call on all parties to these conflicts to implement their commitments, to engage in constructive dialogue,

including through creative use of technology to achieve that while we still face limitations imposed by COVID, and seek solutions that will bring about peace and improve the situation on the ground. We welcome the idea of a re-look at the conflict cycle: OSCE's crisis response toolbox needs to refocus on engagement in the field, not the conference room. And I take note of our Russian colleague's point on the need to remove military tensions.

And in this regard, the best way to begin to increase military transparency, rebuild trust, and address security concerns is through Vienna Document modernization. A comprehensive proposal with 34 co-sponsors is on the table. It's a great basis for work. I encourage all OSCE participating States, including Russia, to join us in a focused, confidence-building effort to update the Vienna Document by the end of 2021.

Finally, we appreciate the decision to include a special session on the Structured Dialogue. Based on what we heard yesterday, hybrid threats are a real-world security concern to I think a vast majority of participating States. That is exactly why this topic must remain on the Structured Dialogue agenda. I hope Russia will join that discussion. As my Canadian colleague said, we need all participating States to engage constructively in dialogue, even if they do not always like what they hear.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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