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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Marcel Peško, Director of the Conflict Prevention Center

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 10, 2015

I warmly welcome you, Ambassador Peško, to the Permanent Council, and thank you for your assessment of the work of the Conflict Prevention Center (CPC).

We commend the CPC for its ongoing work to support the OSCE's response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, including the activities of the Chairmanship's Special Envoy, the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), and the Observer Mission at two checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border

The current ceasefire in eastern Ukraine is encouraging, and we must seize the moment while the ceasefire is largely holding to advance efforts toward full implementation of the Minsk agreements. The ceasefire remains fragile, however, and the CPC must stay focused on ensuring the SMM has the means to look after the safety and well-being of its monitors, and to mitigate interference with the SMM's vitally important activities. As such, we look to the CPC to ensure that the Secretariat has the resources to support the SMM fully, including the means to quickly increase the number of qualified and trained monitors. This includes relaying any new requests for personnel and technical assistance to participating States in a timely and clear fashion.

We look to the Secretariat to expedite procurement processes and other arrangements for contracting new UAVs and de-mining services. This is no ordinary time and extraordinary efforts must be brought to bear to accelerate the availability of human and technical resources.

The OSCE proved adept at responding to this crisis, setting up the SMM quickly, and expanding it from a small monitoring operation to a mission comprising 520 monitors and significant technical and support staff working in difficult conditions. We hope the CPC is able to apply this experience in future OSCE field missions and operations. To enhance the OSCE's crisis response capacity, the Organization should be better prepared to equip and deploy such missions, procure vehicles and emergency medical equipment, and contract for UAVs and other forms of advanced technology.

Ambassador Peško, the United States remains concerned that OSCE field operations in some participating States are prevented from conducting early warning and conflict prevention, which has a negative effect on the Organization's crisis response capacity. When we met in Helsinki to mark the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, nearly all participating States endorsed the goal of enhancing the OSCE's crisis response capabilities. For many participating States this meant improving the OSCE's existing Conflict Prevention Center. Others called for advancing the Organization's ability to engage in "peace operations" which seem to fall somewhere between the SMM's monitoring of the situation in Ukraine and actual

peacekeeping. We look forward to a more thorough discussion of how the OSCE can improve its crisis response capacity and the forms this might take. You laid out some of these issues entailed in such a discussion in your address this morning.

We appreciate the CPC's robust role in furthering the implementation of OSCE arms control and nonproliferation commitments, including the application of Vienna Document provisions in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Russian occupation of Crimea. We look forward to the appointment of the new head of the Forum for Security Cooperation Support Section, a key position for our work in the first dimension, especially the wide range of small arms and light weapons projects.

As I said at a previous Permanent Council session, the United States was disappointed by the closure of the OSCE Project Coordinator's office in Azerbaijan which we believe damages Azerbaijan's resilience and robs it – and the region – of a needed institutional resource. We are also concerned about efforts to restrict the mandates of OSCE field missions in other places. At the same time, we believe it is critical for the OSCE to be able to respond affirmatively in cases where participating States have expressed interest in, and would benefit from, an OSCE presence, as is the case with Georgia and Mongolia. It is no accident that some of the governments that are widely seen as most committed to pursuing reforms that would strengthen security, rule of law, anti-corruption, and human rights are the same governments that have the strongest working relationships with their local OSCE presences and with the independent institutions of the OSCE. On the other hand, when field missions are forced to close, or when they are not allowed to conduct activities that all participating States agreed to in issuing their mandates, this is not good for the OSCE, or for the comprehensive security of the region, or most particularly for the people of that host state.

Ambassador Peško, since today is your first appearance at the Permanent Council in your new capacity as Director of the Conflict Prevention Center, I would like to welcome you again, and say that we look forward to working with you and your team to promote peace and security in the OSCE region.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.