



United States Mission to the OSCE

Right of Reply at the Closing Session OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Ministerial Council, Tirana, Albania (virtual via Zoom)
December 4, 2020

I have already had an opportunity to do a closing statement that was quite thorough as you listeners are I'm sure aware. During the time of that statement, however, a Preparatory Committee was held that, in fact, disallowed moving the Environmental statement forward to the Ministerial Council.

I want to take the floor here to point out that one country, Azerbaijan, decided to block this Environmental statement and speak about it for just one moment. The wildlife trafficking discussion in that statement was originally objected to by another country, Turkey. But nonetheless, after some discussions we were able to resolve their objections and move forward with the environmental text.

In addition to that, the wildlife part was important because we have seen a pandemic that may have been either caused or exacerbated by the situation with wet markets and illegal wildlife trafficking, resulting in the death of 1.5 million people worldwide to date, and millions of others who have been infected. And yet, we have also not been able to agree on a COVID statement either.

But to bring us back to the statement on the environment, in that statement there was a discussion about climate issues, which the United States disagreed with at first. However, we ultimately agreed to the discussion of climate in order to make sure that this statement on wildlife trafficking and trafficking in natural resources could go forward.

The draft decision had been under debate and discussion for quite a long time, but then at the last minute Azerbaijan came in trying to add an additional list of natural resources within the statement. The initial list in the draft statement mirrors what we've seen in other international agreements, namely including wildlife and wildlife products, timber and timber products, and precious metals. This had been agreed to by consensus between the United States and other participating States, including the Russian Federation, in order to move this issue forward. Unfortunately, this language was blocked at the last minute, and I'd like to call on Azerbaijan to state their reasons why the good that could have come from this environmental statement could not go forward.

I believe that this veto of this statement opens the door to further discussion of this issue and other issues within the second dimension. Every country has the right to stop or block a statement, but the exercise of that right doesn't mean that it is doing the right thing.

I once again say to you, Mr. Chairman, congratulations on your chairmanship this year and your successes. My comment here today is in no way meant to diminish the successes you and Prime Minister Rama have enjoyed during this very challenging year. Congratulations.

\

I would ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.