



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, H.E. Didier Reynders, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Belgium

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 12, 2015

Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, we warmly welcome you to the Permanent Council and thank you for your presentation in your capacity as Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Your remarks made clear that issues of central concern to this Permanent Council – such as the situation in Ukraine and the transnational threat of terrorism - are also critical to the Council of Europe.

On Ukraine, we welcome the visits you made to Kyiv and Moscow in December in your capacity as Council of Europe Chair. You have made it clear that full and faithful implementation of the Minsk agreements is urgently needed, including full implementation by Russia.

We appreciate the strong statement you made in February calling for the release of Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov, and all other Ukrainian hostages and illegally detained persons in Russia.

Foreign Minister Reynders, those appeals for implementation of the Minsk agreements are echoed around this table every week, as OSCE participating States urge Russia and the separatists it backs to uphold all of the commitments made in Minsk and resolve this crisis peacefully.

Mr. Minister, the OSCE and the Council of Europe both look at countering terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalization through a broad lens, and both organizations bring many tools, including promoting tolerance, inclusion, and respect for human rights, to the table in addressing them.

As you and the people of Belgium know from direct experience, terrorist threats are global and do not respect national borders. We must work cooperatively to address these threats.

Just as the OSCE adopted ministerial declarations last year committing participating States to counter foreign terrorist fighters and combat kidnapping for ransom, the Council of Europe's

Committee of Ministers adopted a declaration on counter-terrorism. We understand that the Council of Europe is working toward a Plan of Action on Counterterrorism for its May Ministerial, and is planning an international conference focusing on tolerance as a tool to counter terrorism. The OSCE calendar for the year ahead also has a rich array of conferences and activities to address aspects of countering violent extremism. I hope that coordination between our organizations ensures that our work in this area does not duplicate or overlap but is complementary, and that we can learn from each other.

Combatting deeply disturbing trends in anti-Semitism in Europe is also high on the OSCE agenda, as reflected in a declaration made at our December ministerial.

Mr. Minister, you have taken actions to combat anti-Semitism, not only through the Council of Europe, but also at home in Belgium.

I understand that the shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels last May was all too real for you—as you were in the vicinity, and rushed to the scene when you heard the gunshots.

We welcome your continued leadership on combating anti-Semitism. We believe the creation by the Council of Europe of a Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, similar to the United States' own position, would be an appropriate and effective means of addressing the dangerous rise in anti-Semitism that has been plaguing European countries in recent months.

The protection of human rights is also a shared goal of our two organizations. The United States believes that the OSCE and the Council of Europe have significant, complementary roles to play in strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law. If I may express a personal note of gratitude, your own voice, Mr. Minister, has often been a strong one in defense of universal values.

We also appreciated the frank and thoughtful briefing given last year to the Permanent Council by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks. We support the Council of Europe's emphasis on Roma and Sinti inclusion and Commissioner Muiznieks' firm statement that the shameful situation of intolerance toward and exclusion of Roma and Sinti "cannot be further tolerated and could be reversed with a little political will."

Commissioner Muiznieks has also been active in monitoring and reporting on human rights in Russia occupied Crimea, and we support his work, as well as the work of the OSCE and its institutions, in this regard.

Mr. Minister, while the founding principles of our two organizations remain strong, states must exercise political will to implement the commitments they have made as members of these organizations. For example, political will is needed for Russia to implement the agreements it made in Minsk and to convince the separatists it backs to do the same. The international community's collective political will must be strong to counter the transnational terrorist threats our countries face. Protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms also requires the political will of states to uphold their obligations, to be open to criticism, and to listen to civil society.

We look forward to continuing to work together with you, Mr. Minister, and the Council of Europe to see that states devote their political will to upholding the principles for which our two organizations stand.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.