



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to President Martti Ahtisaari Personal Envoy for Central Asia

Delivered by Deputy Permanent Representative, Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I should like to join the EU and I am sure others in welcoming President Ahtisaari to the Permanent Council today. The United States shares the view that Central Asia deserves special attention, and we are delighted that a diplomat of President Ahtisaari's stature has agreed to serve as the Chairman in Office's Personal Envoy to the region.

Mr. Chairman we were struck by several points in President Ahtisaari's remarks and these are points we believe are worth reinforcing. First of all, most of the Central Asian countries have made important progress in key dimensions in the 13 years since the Soviet system collapsed. This progress is something that we do not acknowledge often enough. Still, it is our eagerness to see all participating States fully enjoy the benefits of democracy and market economies that leads us to press for far reaching reforms -- reforms that we know are neither swift nor painless.

As President Ahtisaari noted, we have to make sure that the reform process is going forward. It is the role of the OSCE to help participating States carry out the reforms they have initiated. To cultivate democracy, the OSCE should assist states in developing the framework for democratic institutions and the rule of law. This includes fostering a vibrant civil society, media freedom, and a well-trained, free and independent judiciary. As President Ahtisaari also noted, without effective institutions to implement the rule of law, states will not be able to protect human and minority rights. We welcome his specific ideas for improving human rights, including strengthening the Ombudsman and working with other international organizations, such as the ICRC.

Another important aspect of rule of law is changing attitudes toward law enforcement. Democratic societies are characterized by professional, humane and community-supported policing. The most important duty of the police is to protect citizens, not the State. Law enforcement agencies are directly responsible for protecting and upholding human rights.

Education, as President Ahtisaari said, is crucial, in order to take full advantage of the growing global economy. In addition to having business people and entrepreneurs poised to capitalize on business opportunities, countries need a full understanding of -- and a commitment to establishing -- the conditions that favor economic development.

In this regard, sound regulatory structures are critical, as are competent and impartial commercial courts, a streamlined bureaucracy, and investor-friendly policies, such as convertible currency, floating exchange rates, and zero tolerance for corruption.

Here again, a vibrant civil society and an independent media are essential, as they assume the role of watchdogs. Public awareness about corruption is a powerful tool for controlling it. And, in this regard, I would stress that in many legal systems, such as in the United States and in certain European countries, "unbecoming" stories published about public officials are slanderous only if they are untrue. Public officials are responsible to those they serve, and misdeeds should be brought to public attention.

Mr. Chairman, the United States whole-heartedly supports increased OSCE engagement with Central Asia. Moreover, we welcome ideas from our Central Asian colleagues on how the OSCE, both here in Vienna and through the field presences, can help them fulfill their OSCE commitments. We especially welcome their ideas on what, specifically, the OSCE can do to enhance security and stability. In this connection, we are grateful to our Central Asian colleagues for highlighting their concerns about dangers emanating from Afghanistan, and for first suggesting that the organization extend partnership status to Afghanistan. Engagement, after all, even on difficult issues, is the best method for conflict prevention.

Thank you.