



Treaty on Open Skies is a vital CSBM that needs to be preserved for the future

Statement by Dr. Andrej Benedejčič, Ambassador for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, at the Conference of State Parties to the Open Skies Treaty, 20 July 2021

Mr. Co-Chairperson,

At the outset, I would like to thank Canada and Hungary as the Depositaries for calling this meeting. Slovenia joined the Open Skies Treaty seventeen years ago, because we felt it was incumbent upon us to contribute as well from our side to this vital confidence- and security building measure in the Euro-Atlantic area. We are therefore disappointed with the current situation, as evidenced by this conference of the States Parties under Article XV of the Treaty.

We regret the decision of the Russian Federation to leave the Treaty and are concerned about the effects of the withdrawal on what is one of the pillars of European arms control architecture. In this connection, I would like to recall that Slovenia was one of sixteen signatories of a letter addressed to the Russian side on December 30. Let me repeat part of the message: "We have consistently and clearly expressed our position in favor of the Treaty and of its full implementation, including regarding its provisions related to the sharing of data collected by sensors during observation flights". I would like to emphasize that this was a carefully drafted text.

Like many other States Parties we therefore hoped that the Russian side would reconsider its approach. After all, Open Skies is the only treaty that covers the area from Vancouver to Vladivostok. As things stand now, its area of application will be reduced by two-thirds by the end of this year. This represents a challenge for the future quota conferences and for future agreements on sharing the financial burden of the Treaty's structure. The development is also problematic from the perspective of personnel and air observation platforms. We need to think about how to safeguard the accumulated knowhow and experience. Slovenia therefore expects a discussion on these important issues at the coming meetings of the Open Skies Consultative Commission.

Regardless of everything, let me say that we continue to believe that the Treaty remains a credible and useful supervisory mechanism. In fact, we have said it a number of times in the past months that instead of questioning its merits, we should rather think about its universalization throughout the OSCE area. After all, not all the OSCE participating States are also States Parties to the Treaty. Perhaps this sounds ambitious under the current circumstances, but in our view it still represents the most constructive way forward. We therefore hope that we could consider collectively this possibility, while addressing as well the consequences of the withdrawal from the Treaty of the second of its founding members.

Let me therefore conclude by encouraging all the remaining States Parties to continue consultations on all the open issues of the implementation of the Treaty, formally and informally, with a view to preserving this visionary document for the future.

Finally, let me ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the conference.

Thank you.