



Deutscher Bundestag

Chairman
Subcommittee Disarmament, Arms
Control and Nonproliferation

The Honorable
U.S. Senator James E. Risch
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
483 RSOB, Washington, DC 20510
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Appeal to take action for the U.S. Government to remain in the Treaty on Open Skies

Distinguished Chairman Risch,
Distinguished Senators,
Dear colleagues,

The Treaty on Open Skies is and was the basis for 34 states in Europe and North America to carry out joint, unarmed observation flights across the entire territory of all member states. Despite occasional but limited implementation problems, it serves as a valuable tool for additional verification of arms control agreements, military transparency and the improvement of direct military contacts. It is one of the few remaining instruments of cooperative security in a time of eroding nuclear and conventional arms control agreements.

With the decision of the President of the United States to unilaterally terminate the participation of the United States in the Treaty on Open Skies, the future of the Treaty is uncertain.

As Members of the German Bundestag, we are, however, aware of the broad support that has been given to the Treaty on Open Skies by many Members of the U.S. Congress. For that, we express our appreciation and as colleagues as well as supporters of the Transatlantic Partnership, we would like to appeal once again to the elected representatives of the United States of America to take action for the U.S. Government to remain in the Treaty on Open Skies.



For us as Members of the German Bundestag, the Treaty on Open Skies represents an important instrument of military transparency and confidence-building, as it allows representatives of both the observing and the observed States Parties to collect data cooperatively within the limits of Treaty provisions. To that end, both sides cooperate in certifying and checking sensors and aircraft, agreeing on flight plans and carrying out observation flights together, i.e. with representatives of the observed state onboard the plane. Such data gained cooperatively cannot be disputed and, thus, offer a valuable basis for both situation assessment and security dialogue.

In our view, the Treaty also offers an important tool of independent information acquisition for states which lack national satellite observation capabilities, especially since all recordings made during overflights are available to all States Parties. Therefore, recordings can also be used in diplomatic exchange between States Parties, since, unlike military reconnaissance, they are not subject to classification inside the Open Skies community.

The large number of observation flights that have been carried out since 2014 in context with the conflict in and around Ukraine has proven that the Treaty is particularly useful in times of crisis. Furthermore, it seems that the willingness of the Russian Federation to cooperate towards pragmatic solutions to outstanding implementation issues helps to make the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the Treaty unnecessary. Russia has been taking pragmatic steps to allow full coverage of the Kaliningrad enclave by observation flights. In February 2020, Russia allowed an extended U.S.-Baltic flight over this region. According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia is prepared to waive the 10 km distance from the border of Abkhazia and South Ossetia if Georgia, in turn, allows overflights over its own territory by Russia. It appears that there is still room for discussion and reaching pragmatic solutions to outstanding implementation issues.



We appeal to you, our colleagues, to work together with European Allies and the Russian Federation towards cooperative solutions in order to maintain and strengthen the Treaty on Open Skies as one of the last remaining instruments of a multilateral security architecture. It offers important benefits to the United States and its allies. Therefore, upholding the Treaty is in our common security interest. We are confident that we as partners will find constructive solutions through dialogue, if there is a political will to do so.

To that end, we wish to express the interest of the German Bundestag and the Subcommittee on Disarmament, Arms Control and Nonproliferation in cooperating with you.

We avail ourselves of this opportunity to express to you the assurances of our highest consideration.

Matthias Höhn, Chairman

Nikolas Löbel, Karl-Heinz Brunner,
Robby Schlund, Alexander Müller, Katja Keul

Spokespersons on the Subcommittee



Co-Signatories:

Dr. Eberhard Brecht, Defence Committee
Petr Bystron, Foreign Affairs Committee
Bijan Djir-Sarai, Foreign Affairs Committee
Dr. Fritz Felgentreu, Defence Committee
Dr. Gregor Gysi, Foreign Affairs Committee
Dr. Barbara Hendricks, Foreign Affairs Committee
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