



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Werner Almhofer

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 3, 2011

The United States joins in welcoming Ambassador Almhofer.

As your comprehensive report shows, major transitions are still underway in Kosovo. These transitions present challenges for the international community and demand that our respective roles continue to adapt and evolve.

The continued cooperation with EULEX throughout Kosovo has been key to increasing governmental transparency and good governance. We commend the work done by the Mission in partnership with Kosovo institutions and are confident that this will continue to strengthen the anti-corruption mechanisms already in place.

We are pleased to hear of the positive assessment by NATO of the security situation in Kosovo. The established track record of successful hand-over of duties to Kosovo police, which have performed professionally, is a strong indication of the increased capacity of local institutions and political will to uphold their obligations.

The handling of the elections in December is a further example of the resilience of democratic mechanisms in Kosovo. Although we were concerned to see serious irregularities in some areas, we were heartened to see the instances of fraud in the December 12th elections taken seriously and acted upon by Kosovo's electoral authorities. The orderly re-votes in January were a testament to the important work done to build in safeguards and strengthen institutional capacity. That said, significant work remains to instill trust in the electoral system and therefore we join, Ambassador Almhofer, your calls for further reforms in the electoral system.

These and other pressing reforms await the new Assembly and government, so we are hopeful for a smooth, democratic transition in the coming days, once final election results are certified.

The engagement of the ethnic Serb community in Kosovo's politics and municipal administrations is a critical element for the development of a prosperous, multi-ethnic, democratic state in which Kosovo Serbs can build sustainable, thriving communities that make life better for all of the people of Kosovo by improving local governance and services. Therefore, we strongly support the upcoming EU-facilitated dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade and expect both to work in good faith in the coming months and to cooperate on resolving key practical issues that will improve the lives of people on both sides of the border and help realize both countries' European perspectives.

Regarding the Council of Europe *Report by Rapporteur Dick Marty*, the United States takes the report very seriously. Rule of law is paramount to stability and progress in the Balkans. We fully support the need for a follow-on, impartial investigation by appropriate law enforcement authorities and welcome the Governments of Kosovo and Albania's publicly declared support for such an investigation on the basis of new information. There are voices, including in the Council, that have called for new institutions to be created for the purposes of such an investigation. This is unnecessary and would only delay efforts to pursue the truth. We support EULEX leading an investigation, according to its jurisdiction and mandate. We call on all involved to resist exploiting these allegations for political gain and to give EULEX their full cooperation into the allegations, and we encourage all parties to cooperate fully with follow-on investigations.

The United States continues to believe that OMiK serves important functions in Kosovo and for that reason we are pleased that we will be able to second your incoming deputy. At the same time, we have some concerns about possible duplicative activities of the international organizations in Kosovo, and believe that OMiK could be reduced further without compromising its mission. Now is a good time to look at things from a fresh perspective to ensure that the Mission's activities are complementary with those of other organizations and are focused in areas where the OSCE has proven competency. We would welcome your views, Ambassador Almhofer, on areas where you think OMiK's activities could be streamlined or improved.

The development of a multi-ethnic democracy in Kosovo, which protects minority rights and religious freedom, and which has government institutions that can deliver stability and prosperity for its people, is a goal that we should all support, and in our view, that should also include our Mission of the OSCE in Kosovo. The United States will continue to strongly support and assist Kosovo. Continued international engagement in Kosovo will help facilitate its integration into European and regional institutions, such as the OSCE. This will help secure the future for Kosovo and its citizens and will also contribute to stability for its neighbors in Europe and the wider OSCE region.

The United States is eager to work constructively with all participating States to identify ways the OSCE can continue to contribute to Kosovo's stability and the welfare and security of its people.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.