



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, H. E. Ambassador Gary Robbins

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 5, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States joins other delegations in warmly welcoming Ambassador Robbins back to the Permanent Council. Thank you, Ambassador, for your thoughtful and forward-looking remarks.

The OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina is doing important work helping the country to meet its OSCE commitments. We were pleased to see that despite a governmental impasse, the country has undertaken to meet commitments on non-proliferation and arms control, exemplified by the March 2011 decision to halt all exports of weapons and ammunitions pending the preparation of a new Book of Rules. Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued, even in strained times, to work with its neighbors with regards to apprehension of suspected war criminals across borders. This cooperation is key to stability in the region. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament and its staff have shown increased capacity to develop and adopt legislative texts, and with help from the mission, progress towards full establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman continues.

However, we share your concern regarding the political stalemate that has been afflicting Bosnia and Herzegovina since well before the general elections in October of 2010. We are troubled by the inability of the parties to form a state-level government. BiH's leaders should be focused on assembling a strong coalition government that is capable of making decisions and passing legislation efficiently, which would enable it to keep pace with its neighbors on the path to Europe to the benefit of all citizens of BiH.

But regrettably, some of its politicians remain focused on the politics of division, undermining state-level institutions and challenging the authority of the High Representative. As you noted in your report, the April 13 Republika Srpska National Assembly conclusions attacking State law enforcement and judicial institutions and calling for a referendum on these institutions and decisions by the High Representative are a major step backwards. The High Representative has made clear that these conclusions are illegal and anti-Dayton and that any referendum, while having no legal effect, nevertheless raises serious questions about the RS government's commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and aspirations for EU membership. They also will have a chilling effect on the economic situation and the Republika Srpska's ability to attract much needed foreign investment.

The BiH State Court and Prosecutor's Office are critical to the state's ability to combat organized crime and terrorism and to bring war criminals to justice. Any legitimate concerns

either entity may have regarding the operations or jurisdiction of State institutions can be addressed via their representatives in the BiH parliament and state government.

These attacks on BiH state institutions also are distracting from the issues that require urgent attention for the country: state government formation, the 5-plus-2 objectives for OHR closure, constitutional reform to improve the functionality of the state, and EU- and NATO-required reforms.

Additionally, we share your dissatisfaction with the status of those who are not eligible to participate in the democratic process; all citizens of BiH must be given equal access to government in order for there to be true democracy. BiH's leaders have an obligation to work in the best interests of all of their citizens, in keeping with their OSCE commitments. They should continue efforts to forge consensus on the defense, constitutional, and other reforms necessary to realize BiH's aspirations of regional stability and, ultimately, EU and NATO integration.

Despite the difficult political climate, the OSCE Mission continues to make meaningful and useful contributions to reform efforts in many areas, including judicial reform, war crimes prosecution, strengthening legislative bodies, and building local governance capacity, among others. Programs supporting democratization, core human rights issues, and rule of law, as well as war crime trials, continue to be of paramount importance and with the tight fiscal times ahead we must make sure each Mission is focused precisely on such top priorities. The mission's work to counter division and discrimination in education, a major problem with troubling long term implications, is also important. As well, we share your concern about political pressures being applied to the media and we encourage continued and coordinated efforts with the OSCE Office for the Freedom of the Media to reverse this disturbing trend. We congratulate the Mission on its 15-year anniversary and for your years of excellent leadership, Ambassador Robbins. We applaud the successful implementation of the new mission structure that went into effect with the approval of the 2010 budget. As we know, major changes to organizational structures are never easy, but in this case a transparent and carefully implemented reorganization served to minimize disruption.

Mr. Ambassador, we thank and commend you and your staff for your hard work and dedication. Thanks to you the OSCE is making a vital difference in helping Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I would also note that this is your final appearance at the PC as the head of the OSCE Mission. I am particularly pleased that it will not be our last opportunity to benefit from your collegiality and deep experience and wisdom in dealing with OSCE issues. Thank you again, and we look forward to working with you in the near future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.