



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 1, 2011

The United States joins in welcoming Ambassador Almhofer back to the Permanent Council and we thank the Ambassador for his comprehensive report.

Given recent events, it is clear that 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. It is also clear that the OSCE Mission in Kosovo plays an important role in engaging communities, supporting democratic development, and promoting a functional state, including in the north of Kosovo.

We commend the work done by the Mission in partnership with Kosovo institutions and NGOs and are confident that this will continue to foster transparency and accountability through good governance. We are pleased to hear of the positive work done on the ground by OMIK field operations during and after the most recent incidents on Kosovo's border with Serbia. The staff has gained the trust of both the people and the government, a notable success.

I visited your offices in Pristina and Mitrovica and I was deeply impressed by your staff's dedication and hard work.

Unfortunately, the situation in northern Kosovo is unsustainable. We need to support OMIK's great work in the field and call for a renewed commitment to community and confidence building efforts among different ethnic groups throughout the country. The work of the Mission in the areas of democratization and communities remains critical to future development. We would advocate increased coordination between OMIK and OMIS in Belgrade to that end. Both OSCE Missions have strong relationships with government institutions as well as various local communities. This is the OSCE's value added in the region, and we should capitalize on this strength.

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 minority communities can build a sustainable future through improved local governance and services. Therefore, we strongly support the resumption of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade and remain hopeful that they can establish a condition of positive reciprocity at the border through which people and goods can move freely in both directions between Kosovo and Serbia. We call on both sides, in line with their European aspirations and the economic interests of their countries and the greater region, to resolve this impasse and end their respective trade restrictions.

We expect both to work in good faith and to cooperate on resolving customs and other key practical issues that will improve the lives of people on both sides of the border and help realize both countries' European perspectives.

On another note, we welcome the progress made by the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) in securing the necessary personnel, facilities and equipment for its task force investigating the serious allegations contained in Special Rapporteur Dick Marty's report to the Council of Europe. The selection of Clint Williamson as lead prosecutor, an eminently qualified and experienced prosecutor and former U.S. Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues, underscores the seriousness with which the United States and EU are approaching the task force's work. The task force has the full support of the United States, the European Union and EU Member States. We expect a thorough investigation, conducted with transparency and with the full cooperation of local authorities. We welcome pledges made by the governments of Kosovo, Albania and Serbia to cooperate fully with the EULEX investigation.

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, the Mission of the OSCE in Kosovo is an important component of the ongoing work toward this goal. 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 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.