



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
February 16, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Orizio to the Permanent Council for his first report as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. Mr. Ambassador, thank you for leading this important mission, which has developed a constructive working relationship and mutually beneficial partnership with the government and people of Serbia.

On the occasion of Serbia's Statehood Day yesterday, Secretary of State Tillerson highlighted the history of friendship and cooperation shared by Serbia and the United States, and reiterated the U.S. commitment to deepening our relationship. Secretary Tillerson emphasized the importance of Serbia's continued efforts to promote economic reform, strengthen the rule of law, and improve relations with its neighbors. Mr. Ambassador, your Mission plays an important part in helping Serbia to advance these reforms, providing expertise and assistance in the fight against organized crime and terrorism, police reform and accountability, anti-corruption efforts, judicial reform and access to justice, promotion of independent journalism and media, and protection of the human rights of all, including those members of minority groups. We encourage the Mission to continue its work with the government to address concerns related to the operating environment for civil society organizations, including the need for investigations into harassment and threats targeting human rights activists. With presidential elections on the horizon, ensuring an open space for civil society and freedom of expression is crucial to strengthening Serbia's democracy.

The United States strongly supports the Serbian government's ongoing commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration. We welcome Serbia's constructive partnership and cooperation with NATO. Additionally, as Ambassador Orizio noted in his report, Serbia has made tangible progress in its EU accession process and reform agenda. In 2016, Serbia closed its first chapter under the EU acquis, and opened four new chapters, bringing to six the total number of chapters that have been opened as part of the country's EU accession. Advancement in this process provides both powerful incentives and tools to continue implementing reforms. We encourage the government of Serbia to continue these efforts.

The United States strongly supports the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue on normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Active and productive dialogue has improved people's lives and remains vital for both countries' advancement on their respective European paths. Sustaining momentum has been difficult, but both sides can point to notable

recent successes, including on freedom of movement and telecommunications. The parties should redouble their efforts to fully implement all agreements reached to date and push forward towards the full normalization of relations. This will entail compromise on all sides, but is necessary for the peoples of both Serbia and Kosovo to achieve a brighter future.

Mr. Chair, throughout the migration and refugee crisis, which in 2015 alone saw more than 600,000 migrants and refugees transit the country, Serbia's humane response set an example for the region. Serbia reacted with compassion and dignity, upholding OSCE commitments and Serbia's international obligations. The OSCE Mission to Serbia played a constructive and complementary role during the crisis and today, including through its joint work with UNHCR to implement the regional housing program for refugees. As highlighted by Chairperson-in-Office Minister Kurz in his visit to Belgrade earlier this week, the Mission provides critical assistance in helping Serbia respond to emerging challenges related to migration. We encourage Serbia to maintain its humanitarian approach, identify those in need of international protection, and further improve the registration process. As efforts intensify, including through the OSCE, to fight exploitation and smuggling, it is essential that the delicate balance between state and human aspects of security be maintained.

The United States is pleased with the Mission's contributions to the Serbian government's National Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Terrorism. Working closely with the Ministry of Interior, the Mission effectively promoted a comprehensive and holistic approach to address violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism. Now that the draft is completed, we encourage the government of Serbia to adopt and implement this National Strategy, including through regional efforts.

Despite progress in a number of areas over the past year, regional stability remains a concern. Ambassador Orizio, you noted in your report that Serbia is committed to regional stability and cooperation, and took a number of important steps in 2016 to intensify coordination with international and regional partners, including with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. It is crucial that dialogue between Serbia and its regional partners continue to promote stability and reduce tensions.

As a friend and partner of Serbia, the United States looks forward to continuing our work with the Serbian government and people to foster peace and prosperity throughout the region.

Thank you again, Ambassador Orizio, for the tremendous work and dedication of you and your team. You have our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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