



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of Movement in Kosovo

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 15, 2011

The United States notes with concern recent developments related to the shipment from Russia of alleged humanitarian assistance to northern Kosovo.

The Government of Kosovo, in close coordination with the European Union's Rule-of-Law Mission, EULEX, and NATO's Kosovo Force, have developed reasonable procedures to receive the Russian shipment, consistent with international practice at international borders. We welcome the willingness of the authorities of Kosovo to accommodate entry of the goods through the northern border gate. We fully support taking steps in cooperation with EULEX to ensure effective border controls, in line with European norms for border security.

It is unfortunate, however, that the parallel Serb authorities in northern Kosovo appear determined to prevent the implementation of this coordinated and reasonable plan to facilitate the movement of the Russian goods into Kosovo. These parallel authorities continue to deny freedom of movement to EULEX personnel and Kosovo officials throughout northern Kosovo. The illegal roadblocks they have erected are preventing appropriate screening, processing, and movement of the goods from Russia.

Mr. Chairman, in full candor, we do not understand the reason for Russia's shipment. We have heard the shipment described as humanitarian assistance, but international organizations have not declared a humanitarian crisis in Kosovo, and the shipping manifests do not describe traditional humanitarian supplies.

It is regrettable that the organizers of the Russian convoy are demanding to enter Kosovo through the Gate One border crossing, which has been the focal point of political unrest and violence. We all must recognize that we cannot expect the Russian convoy to have freedom of movement throughout northern Kosovo when EU, NATO, and Government of Kosovo personnel do not enjoy the same freedom of movement and thereby cannot fully perform their duties.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.