



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Jan Braathu

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry R. Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 15, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Braathu back to the Permanent Council. As Kosovo prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary as an independent nation, the United States will continue its close partnership with you and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) to help Kosovo develop as a peaceful, stable, democratic, and multi-ethnic country at peace with its neighbors.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for your timely, detailed, and informative report. I also want to extend my appreciation for your willingness to participate in the informal briefings that precede the Permanent Council. My delegation and I find these exchanges complement well the information provided in the report – as well as the exchange of views that we have today – and consider them a best practice that we hope you and other heads of missions will continue. So, thank you very much for that. As you emphasize, the Kosovo government that formed after you last appeared before the Permanent Council has made great strides on a range of issues, addressing a number of political concerns, working to improve coordination with Kosovo-Serb coalition partners, and resuming technical Dialogue talks with Serbia. In December, the government signed a contract that will bring in significant foreign investment to build a desperately needed power plant. And in February, Kosovo police collaborated with judges, prosecutors, and international law enforcement entities in bringing down an international cybercrime ring.

However, we have also seen some troubling developments, including some that you highlighted in your presentation this morning. The United States was deeply concerned by attempts in December and January by some members of the Kosovo Assembly to abrogate the law on the Specialist Chambers. The law was established in relation to allegations of grave trans-boundary and international crimes committed during and in the aftermath of the conflict in Kosovo. Repealing or amending it would undermine the rule of law and our shared values. Kosovo would be choosing isolation, and not integration. We also remain disappointed by the Kosovo Assembly's failure to ratify the Border Demarcation Agreement (BDA) with Montenegro.

We reiterate our condemnation of the murder of Kosovo-Serb politician Oliver Ivanović and join you and others in urging the relevant Republic of Kosovo institutions to bring the

perpetrators to justice. The United States welcomes the resumption of EU-facilitated Dialogue talks on normalizing relations between Kosovo and Serbia. We encourage both Serbia and Kosovo to seize the moment, implement existing agreements, and to work hard to achieve a comprehensive normalization agreement now. After recent successes in judicial integration, freedom of movement, and other areas, do *not* lose momentum.

As another sign of our ongoing support for Kosovo's development, the United States signed a \$49 million Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold program agreement with the government of Kosovo that will spur economic growth, reduce poverty, improve transparency and accountability, and boost energy efficiency.

In October, municipal elections were successfully conducted across the country, as you noted. Following a tense campaign period marred by intimidation in ethnic Serb-majority municipalities, the OSCE helped facilitate peaceful and inclusive voting throughout all of Kosovo. OMiK continued to demonstrate its value in promoting and protecting local communities. And during this reporting period, you have helped the government punish hate crimes, strengthened municipal safety councils, advocated for the protection of language rights under domestic law, and promoted an independent media. Within the Dialogue process, you and your Mission have also played an important role in helping Serbian legal professionals find employment in Kosovo's legal system. We welcome OMiK's willingness to help address at the community level the challenges of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. And given the level of interest in this complex issue, we encourage you to coordinate closely your efforts with other partners.

Mr. Chair, the United States supports a democratic Kosovo that is fully integrated into the international community and part of a Europe that is strong and free. We look forward to the day when Kosovo will be present in the Permanent Council as an OSCE participating State. By finding ways to expand dialogue and cooperation, including by ensuring the presence of Kosovo officials in these chambers, we can hear directly from them, as well as from the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, about how best to advance solutions to issues affecting their country. This will better enable the OSCE to carry out its important mission.

Thank you once again, Ambassador Braathu, for the great work you and your staff have been doing in advancing our shared goals in Kosovo. You continue to have, and will continue to have, our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.