



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the 15th Anniversary of the Murders of Bytyqi Brothers

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 17, 2014

Mr. Chairperson, I wish to note for the Permanent Council that this month marks the 15th anniversary of the murders of three American citizens by Interior Ministry forces in Serbia – Ylli, Agron and Mehmet Bytyqi. I urge the Serbian Government today to take needed action now to apprehend and prosecute those responsible for these murders.

To recall the basic facts of this crime: In June 1999, the three Bytyqi brothers – who were ethnic Albanians in their twenties – were apprehended by Serbian authorities after crossing a then-unmarked border into Serbian Government-controlled territory, while escorting Roma neighbors from Kosovo to safety. They were jailed for two weeks for illegally entering Serbia, then transported to a camp in eastern Serbia, executed, and their bodies dumped in a mass grave. The grave was exhumed and the remains identified about two years later.

The U.S. Government and the surviving Bytyqi family in New York state have been repeatedly assured by Serbian authorities, including at senior levels, that action will be taken in this case. Serbia's new prime minister has recently renewed to us his government's assurances of action to solve this case, which we appreciate and hope will be realized in short order. Up until now, however, after considerable time, we have unfortunately still not seen clear action.

I raise the Bytyqi case today not only to note the 15 anniversary of the crime, but to note that in six months Serbia will chair this organization. The United States views this as an opportunity both for Serbia and the OSCE. Serbia has come a long way in 15 years, and it has actively sought OSCE resources, including the field mission it hosts, to help move forward. This is in contrast to other participating States who resist OSCE expertise and seek to downgrade or close any OSCE presence. Serbia, supported by courageous representatives of its vibrant civil society, has also taken some concrete steps to shine needed light on a recent and very dark past. This is also in contrast to the many official denials we continue to hear repeated at this table of what we all know are the stark realities in many other participating States.

The international response to Serbia's transition has been positive. The participating States have agreed to Belgrade's request to chair the organization where its participation was once suspended, and Serbia has taken important, concrete steps along its promising path to European integration. Like other countries in the Western Balkans, Serbia is welcomed as a contributor to European security and cooperation. This fact was particularly noted by the U.S. Delegation to the recent OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session in Baku.

Let me strongly urge Serbian officials to take action on this case now as a demonstration of their political will to implement their OSCE commitments, setting an example for others. This will only strengthen their ability and authority as Chair-in-Office in 2015 to urge others to do the same. This is an opportunity for the authorities in Belgrade to ensure justice so long denied, and this opportunity should not be lost.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.