



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Jean-Claude Schlumberger

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., Kate M. Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 4, 2016

The United States welcomes Ambassador Schlumberger back to the Permanent Council for another comprehensive and detailed report.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) remains a valuable tool for the international community. At a time of heightened tension and difficult challenges in Kosovo and the Balkans, OMiK's mission is vital. Ambassador Schlumberger, we applaud OMiK's ongoing work on gender equality, human rights, tolerance, freedom of the media, missing persons, and electoral oversight mechanisms. The Mission continues to contribute to Kosovo's development as a peaceful, stable, and multi-ethnic country that offers equal opportunity and protection to all its citizens.

Ambassador, as your report detailed, escalating tensions between the government and opposition, and the resulting series of violent incidents in parliament and on the streets, have darkened Kosovo's political landscape. The United States again calls for peaceful political dialogue within Kosovo's institutions. We agree with President Jahjaga that political differences should be resolved through dialogue and debate between leaders of the government and opposition parties. Violence is absolutely unacceptable and is hurting Kosovo and its people. We call on the opposition parties to end immediately their use of violence inside the assembly chamber and to publicly denounce those who employ violence during demonstrations. Tear gas and Molotov cocktails have no place in resolving political differences. The freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, including peaceful protest, are fundamental to any democracy. Kosovo's parliament should be a place where meaningful debates on public policy are conducted and where people listen to each other respectfully, even when they do not agree. Genuine debate is what spurs new ideas and helps leaders find common ground.

The United States continues to support the Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo on normalization of relations facilitated by EU High Representative Mogherini. We welcome the latest meeting on January 28 between Prime Ministers Mustafa and Vučić. We call on all sides to sustain momentum by implementing fully existing agreements and taking forward the talks on new areas for normalization. The Dialogue has already brought numerous concrete benefits to the people of Kosovo and Serbia. Every step towards the full normalization of relations strengthens peace and stability in the region and Europe.

Ambassador Schlumberger, your report also highlighted the importance of Kosovo's conclusion of a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, a significant milestone in Kosovo's European integration. We are also encouraged by progress toward establishing the Special Court and welcome the conclusion of negotiations on a Host State Agreement between Kosovo and the Netherlands. We look to Kosovo to sign and ratify the full Host State Agreement as soon as possible, which will clearly demonstrate the value Kosovo and its people place on human rights and respect for the rule of law.

We appreciate the ongoing progress OMiK is making to improve cost efficiencies and streamline programs, while focusing on initiatives that clearly add value. Nonetheless, it is important not to lose sight of the crucial role the Mission plays in assisting the government, civil society, and communities. Amidst a political crisis in Kosovo, when the country is deciding whether to continue on its path toward European integration, we encourage you, Ambassador Schlumberger, to evaluate continually how the Mission can best support the country's efforts. We reiterate the importance of OMiK providing objective, unvarnished political reporting that conveys the facts on the ground in a timely and clear way, and without outside influence.

As Secretary Kerry said during his recent visit to Pristina in December, the United States remains Kosovo's strong and committed partner. In addition to our ongoing assistance, which totals over one billion dollars since 1999, we are pleased that Kosovo has qualified for a compact with the Millennium Challenge Corporation. This has the potential to provide significant new development assistance to the country, and is a clear sign of the United States' continued commitment to the people of Kosovo.

Thank you again, Ambassador Schlumberger, for all that you and your dedicated team do to advance our shared goals. At a time when Kosovo faces a number of challenges in its democratic progression, we should look for ways to expand dialogue and cooperation, including by allowing Kosovar officials to hear directly from OMiK and participating States about issues affecting their country.

In closing, let me reiterate that the United States looks forward to the day when Kosovo will be present in the Permanent Council as an OSCE participating State.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.