



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

### **Response to Ambassador Fletcher Burton, Head of OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 9, 2013

The United States joins with others in warmly welcoming you, Ambassador Burton, back to the Permanent Council. We appreciate your report and the deep perspective you bring to your job and indeed to all the work that you are doing in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As you have duly noted in your report, the people and governments of this region have shown they are ready to move beyond agendas of disintegration and replace them with goals of integration. To support and nurture that potential requires a nimble and forward-looking approach to the OSCE's work at the field mission level. You have led the way in the Mission and the region in meeting this challenge.

We commend the work you have done, through the budgeting and planning process, to outline a longer-term, multi-year approach to the Mission's objectives. Your development of a "Dayton+20" framework for the Mission's activities is exactly the sort of planning our field missions need in an era of tighter budgets and continuing European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Critical thinking about where the Mission still has work to do, and how best to partner with host country authorities and citizens, as well as other international actors, is essential for every field operation. We encourage other field missions in the region to undergo similar, comprehensive reviews of their activities and develop longer-term strategies to clearly lay out the OSCE's role in the Balkans in the years to come.

The United States continues to call for a reduction in the size and budgets of the OSCE missions in the Balkans. Greater attention to other challenges is needed, and shrinking budgets of many participating States require us all to use OSCE funds judiciously. The Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina has led the way in making critical budget and staffing cuts, and in exhibiting skillful management. There is a right way and a wrong way to carry out mission reductions. The right way preserves and extends good working relationships and reinforces a foundation of cooperation that lets the host government officials and citizens take the lead. It also shows consideration and extends transparency to OSCE mission staff, both those who are asked to complete their duties, and those who retain their positions. We have seen this exemplified by the Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we appreciate the amount of personal effort you and your staff have put into these challenging adjustments. We again encourage the other OSCE missions in the region to use this approach as an example to follow in their own budget reductions.

The extensive field offices across Bosnia and Herzegovina have proven their worth through the contact and relationships they have with local citizens and the activities they have

conducted. They serve as a valuable resource not just for the OSCE Mission, but for other international actors as well. The Mission must begin to consolidate those offices, but this consolidation can and should be done in a way that preserves the impact they have and the ties they have developed.

To keep pace with recent developments, the Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the other OSCE missions in the Balkans, have begun to adopt a more collaborative, regional approach. All these missions, and in particular in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have done a tremendous job of working together on the Regional Housing Programme (RHP). Addressing the needs of displaced persons by definition necessitates a regional approach, and remains a critical part of healing among communities subjected to conflict. We commend this regional collaboration, and encourage you and the other Heads of Mission throughout the Balkans to continue and even increase this regional approach to your work.

Another important area of work for the Mission has been the War Crimes Processing Project. Accountability for past crimes is a key element of reconciliation in any post-conflict environment, and this project has made tremendous progress in building the capacity of the host country's judicial system to deal with these cases. Many cases remain unaddressed, however, and more progress is needed. Authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina must continue to make these cases a priority and use the OSCE's assistance to resolve them.

Through all these activities of course, close coordination with Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities is essential. This can be challenging as people and parties shift in and out of power, but we encourage the Mission to continue working closely with authorities to ensure continuity of effort. Collaboration and cooperation with other international actors is also critical, and should continue to include the EU, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Office of the High Representative, bilateral diplomatic missions, and other international actors.

We note the municipal elections held last October. The role of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Central Election Commission (CEC) remains critical and it needs to be independent from political influence, particularly as we approach the 2014 general elections. The CEC's rulings, on residence and voter registration, as well as on election results, must be made in accordance with the relevant laws and the Constitution. In this light, it is necessary to consider whether additional OSCE support could be offered to the CEC and to those working with the CEC on the implementation of the 2014 elections and during the run-up to those elections, perhaps including the presence of ODIHR support. Further, the CEC should state clearly the problems and constraints in the election law, so that remedies can be sought and achieved prior to the 2014 elections. That is an additional matter where the OSCE may play a role.

We encourage the political leaders of the country to keep their focus on the larger European and Euro-Atlantic goals, to prevent Bosnia and Herzegovina from being left behind as its neighbors make progress on the integration road.

We again join the call by many others, including the OSCE Mission, for Bosnia and Herzegovina to amend its constitution to allow any citizen, regardless of ethnic background or identity, to stand for election to the Presidency, and to implement the decision of the European Court for Human Rights in the Sejdić-Finci case. Delay in moving forward on this case has gone on too long and this issue must be resolved once and for all. We also reiterate

our call last week for the House of Representatives to reverse its decision to bar the Centre for Civic Initiatives (CCI) from attending and observing Parliamentary proceedings.

Ambassador, we commend the work that you, and your staff, are doing. You combine policy savvy and the willingness to make tough management decisions. It is exactly the sort of approach the OSCE needs today in the Balkans, and we will continue to support this approach and you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.