



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to 20th Anniversary of NATO Bombing in Serbia

As delivered by Acting Political Counselor Lane D. Bahl
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Twenty years ago, NATO launched Operation Allied Force to end a decade of bloodshed in the Balkans. NATO's intervention had clear and limited objectives: to save innocent lives, end a humanitarian catastrophe, and preserve peace, freedom, and stability in Europe. Every effort was made to compel the Milošević regime – through peaceful means – to end its brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing.

NATO's use of force was both necessary and legitimate. The UN Security Council expressed concerns about the threat that the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo and the mounting number of refugees posed to international peace and security. Today, we remember the hundreds of thousands of innocent people driven from their homes, and the thousands who were killed or went missing.

On the 20th anniversary of the NATO intervention, it is incumbent on the governments of both Kosovo and Serbia to ensure that victims and their families have full access to justice and information about the fate of their loved ones. We regret any loss of innocent life, and we remember and mourn with those who lost loved ones in the conflict, including civilians who died in the air strikes by NATO forces.

Today, the OSCE and its partners, including the United States, continue to facilitate the return of the remaining displaced persons to Kosovo. We support a multiethnic and independent Kosovo at peace with its neighbors, together pursuing a European path. At the same time, Serbia is a good friend of the United States and a close partner of NATO. Serbia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 2006, and cooperation has continued to evolve. NATO trains Serbian soldiers to contribute to international peacekeeping missions, has been working with Serbia on security force and institution reform, and has invested millions of euros to help Serbia destroy more than 200 tons of ammunition. In October 2018, NATO's Secretary General visited Serbia for talks with President Vučić and Prime Minister Brnabić. At the same time, Serbia hosted NATO's largest civil emergency exercise ever, helping NATO Allies and Serbia become better prepared to deal with natural disasters, such as flooding and forest fires.

Let us honor the memory of those who were lost by working together to build a future of peace and prosperity for our children. The best way to do that is for the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia to return to the EU-facilitated Dialogue to reach a comprehensive normalization of relations centered on mutual recognition.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.