



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, Ambassador Andrea Orizio

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

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Orizio to the Permanent Council for his second report as Head of the OSCE Mission in Serbia. Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much for your timely, balanced, and informative report. I also want to express my appreciation and that of my delegation for your willingness to participate in the informal briefing yesterday. The informal briefings together with the reports that are delivered in a timely manner and your presentation today I think is a best practice, and I want to congratulate you and your mission for doing that. Thank you again to the Chair, the CPC, and others who had a role in ensuring that this trifecta came together. We find it quite useful and thank you very much.

Mr. Ambassador, we also appreciate the important work of the Mission in Serbia, and the cooperative approach the staff of the Mission and you take in working with the host country and the Serbian people, with those of us in the international community, and with members of civil society.

Mr. Ambassador, the United States supports the Serbian government's ongoing commitment to EU integration and to making the necessary reforms to get there. We also welcome Serbia's constructive partnership and cooperation with NATO. The United States Embassy in Belgrade was proud to contribute 14 teams of accredited observers, including U.S. Ambassador to Serbia Kyle Scott, to the effort to monitor Belgrade's municipal elections on March 4.

Normalizing relations with Kosovo is a vital component of Serbia's efforts to integrate into Europe, and vital for regional stability. The United States remains firmly committed to the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which is improving lives in both countries. We applaud both sides for resuming technical Dialogue talks in Brussels last month after a long hiatus, as well as President Vučić's initiative to have a frank conversation with the Serbian people about their future. We encourage Belgrade and Pristina to redouble their efforts to fully implement all existing agreements, as well as to push to conclude the full normalization process. This will require compromise, but will result in a better and more prosperous future for the region. It is crucial that constructive engagement between Serbia and all of its regional partners continues to promote stability and reduce tensions.

Mr. Ambassador, as you described in your report, EU accession shapes Belgrade's own strategic goals. Critical in this regard is to further strengthen Serbia's democratic institutions.

The work of the OSCE Mission to Serbia remains important in this context. It is helping Serbia's efforts to build strong, independent, accountable, and effective democratic institutions, fight against organized crime, bolster the rule of law and human rights, democratize law enforcement, and support free and independent media. Also, as you rightly reported, this year will be crucial for strengthening the independence of the judiciary and passing constitutional amendments reinforcing the separation of powers. Such work occurs within the context of Serbia's ongoing security sector reform process. And we encourage you to share lessons learned in supporting Serbia in this regard with other missions in the Balkans.

Mr. Chair, a bright spot I would like to highlight is the commendable work of Serbian civil society in supporting democratic development and reforms. We are proud that the Serbian NGO "The Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability" (CRTA) won this year's Democracy Defender Award, to be awarded March 16. CRTA's projects have increased transparency in public institutions, brought more citizens into the democratic process, and, through its election monitoring efforts, provided the public with professional, impartial, and timely information in support of Serbia's democracy. We remain concerned, however, by threats and harassment against some NGOs, including CRTA, and independent journalists who have criticized government policies. We welcome the OSCE Mission's continued close engagement with civil society.

Mr. Ambassador, we share your assessment that the region's long-term success depends on the younger generation. You and the members of your mission clearly recognize this. Your office supported a regional conference on youth connectivity in the Western Balkans, which focused on cooperation and dialogue between youth in Serbia and Albania. The OSCE-supported film project "Kismet" further deepened mutual understanding of the realities for young women in both countries.

With youth in mind, Serbia's Aarhus Centers have helped young Serbians develop skills to raise environmental awareness as well as to build capacity for new green jobs. A national workshop this month in Belgrade, organized by your Mission and the OSCE Office of the Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, launched an initiative to help Aarhus Centers assist Serbia's transition to a green economy and resource efficiency. This creative approach to exploring new avenues to success is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when a host country, field office, and the Secretariat work together.

In conclusion Mr. Ambassador, the United States remains a friend and partner of Serbia. We look forward to continuing our work with the Serbian government and citizens to foster regional peace and prosperity. Thank you again for the work and dedication of you and your team. You have our support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.