



United States Mission to the OSCE
Response to Report of Head of OSCE
Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Ambassador Fletcher Burton

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 8, 2014

We welcome Ambassador Burton to the Permanent Council – although we also express sadness that this is his last report to us on the activities of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ambassador, we are proud of the work you and your team have done for the past three years across the country. I should say personally I find it always very inspiring how quick you are and how instinctive it is for you to recognize the work of your team. It is not surprising that your team recognizes your leadership with such obvious heartfulness because the feeling is so obviously mutual.

Under your leadership, the Mission has undergone significant changes and has become more efficient and more effective in carrying out its crucial role in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There have been significant developments in the Balkans over the last year, including Croatia's accession to the EU, Albania's most successful elections, and the EU-led dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a long-needed census was completed, the election law was amended to pave the way for general elections to be held in October of this year, and Bosnia and Herzegovina contributed important deployments of military police and soldiers to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

Much work remains to be done, however, and we urge the citizens and leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to work together so that their country can live up to its potential. We profoundly disagree with those who question the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such statements go against the Dayton Accords. The emergence of large public protests earlier this year showed the desire for constructive discourse, given the deep economic frustrations felt by many across much of the country. The OSCE Mission showed tremendous skill both in reporting on these demonstrations, and in incorporating the civic plenums which emerged from them into its dialogue with government officials. Politicians must be held accountable for a government that is transparent and focused on delivery of services and rule of law, economic development, greater accountability for economic decisions, and progress on EU accession. The elections in October provide a fundamental opportunity for Bosnia and Herzegovina's voters to demand a strong commitment to these sorts of results from both parties and candidates.

We underline our concern about the status of media freedom and plurality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A free and open media environment plays a critical role in enabling citizens to demand transparency and good governance from their political leaders, and this remains particularly relevant across much of the Balkan region, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Lastly, we commend the strategic planning process carried out by the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina under the “Dayton +20” plan. We reiterate our position that this is the sort of strategic planning, including smart, tailored staffing and resource reductions, that can lead to smaller but more effective missions, as it has done so well in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other missions in the region, including the Presence in Albania, have begun similar processes; all should, if they have not.

Ambassador Burton, once again we commend your work and the work of your staff, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in support of OSCE goals elsewhere. The Mission provided critical support to the Mission in Kosovo as it worked to facilitate local elections in Northern Kosovo and you and your team recognized the defining role played by the OSCE’s responses to events in Ukraine, and contributed resources, and personnel to the Special Monitoring Mission immediately. Above all, we thank you for the strong leadership you have brought to the Mission as we look forward to continuing to support its work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.