



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 5, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Moore back to the Permanent Council for another comprehensive report. Thank you, Ambassador, for your excellent report on the activities of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since your first report in 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina has made progress on its path toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The commencement of a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union in 2015 and the submission of an application for EU candidacy in February of this year are important steps on this path. Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders must use this momentum to complete the core conditions necessary to continue advancing: adapting the SAA, establishing the coordination mechanism, and publishing the results of its census. The United States supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to integrate with NATO and other Euro-Atlantic structures and the democratic, economic, and security commitments that come with them. We are encouraged by Bosnia and Herzegovina's successful chairmanship of NATO's Adriatic Charter meetings and by the genuine progress made by leaders in working to activate the country's NATO Membership Action Plan. We encourage continued work in this area.

Over the past year, leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina have worked closely with their counterparts in Serbia to build a relationship focused on reconciliation and economic cooperation. The United States shares your assessment, Ambassador, that Serbia's successful OSCE Chairmanship in 2015 provided an effective platform to foster cooperation across the region, including with Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are pleased with the resulting improvement in relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and countries throughout the Balkans region. We appreciate the support of your Mission in this positive development, which has the potential to make a significant and lasting contribution to regional stability.

While we recognize that some progress has been made to address corruption and implement the reform agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina, significant work remains to be done. As Senator Roger Wicker, Co-Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, recently stated, corruption is "inhibiting Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy, stealing a more prosperous future from its citizens, paralyzing its progress toward European integration, and putting foreign investment at risk, including investment from the United States." Corruption remains widespread and endemic and is carried out with impunity. Few officials are ever indicted for such wrongdoing. The decision to combat corruption and implement reform is not always easy. Nor is it a zero-sum choice. Both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Moody's have determined that effective implementation of reforms could significantly accelerate economic growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina and help

unlock additional financial support. Bosnia's commitment to an IMF program is an important step to accelerate reform, while rebalancing the economy away from the public sector to private sector-led growth.

Education reform is also necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina to make progress. With 60 percent youth unemployment and a struggling economy, it is vital that the country's current students become its next entrepreneurs and innovators. Equal access to quality education and shared opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to grow and learn together, from kindergarten through university, are necessary elements of both political and economic progress.

Ambassador Moore, the active engagement of your Mission in supporting the country's priorities is crucial to ensuring that efforts to promote stability and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not lose momentum. We recognize the important role the OSCE Mission plays in assisting with implementation of reforms and strengthening the rule of law, democratic institutions, and mechanisms for the protection of human rights. The efforts by you and your staff to strengthen the OSCE Mission's relationships with domestic stakeholders, improve media outreach, and intensify coordination with international community partners are essential. We recognize your leadership in driving this increased engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will enhance the Mission's ability to achieve its objectives.

We are concerned that freedom of expression for the media remains a challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with frequent attacks against journalists and political pressure placed on media outlets. This week, when we celebrate World Press Freedom Day, it is worthwhile to note that when media and journalists are silenced, accountability erodes, putting democratic governance and other rights and freedoms at risk. We call on the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to protect journalists from physical harm and intimidation due to their work and to conduct investigations when crimes are committed against them to bring the perpetrators to justice.

In closing, let me emphasize that the United States remains committed to the Dayton Peace Accords, which brought peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to the democratic, multi-ethnic, sovereign, and independent state with full respect for its territorial integrity guaranteed by the Dayton Accords and the UN Charter. Any actions taken toward secession would be a violation of those Accords, and we encourage all parties to avoid inflammatory rhetoric that detracts from the important discussions needed to advance Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and economic progress. The United States encourages Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders to make the difficult decisions to keep the country moving in a positive direction toward a single, unified state that is stable, secure, and on a Euro-Atlantic path toward EU and NATO membership.

In closing, I would like to express appreciation to the Ambassador and delegation of the United Kingdom for organizing an upcoming trip for Permanent Representatives to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ambassador Moore, we look forward to engaging with you during our visit.

Thanks again to you and your team, Ambassador, for your tremendous work.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.