



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo Ambassador Jan Braathu

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 11, 2018

The United States welcomes Ambassador Braathu back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your efforts to facilitate intercommunal dialogue, enhance local governance, and ensure a better legislative framework to promote peace and prosperity in Kosovo. We value the timely distribution of your report, your participation in yesterday’s informal meeting, and your inclusion of an OSCE program beneficiary. Hearing directly from Kosovo Ombudsman Hilmi Jashari gives participating States valuable insights into the impact of field mission efforts. We look forward to all OSCE field missions continuing this practice.

Mr. Chair, the United States supports a democratic Kosovo that is fully integrated into the international community and part of a strong and free Europe. We look forward to the day when Kosovo will be present in the Permanent Council as an OSCE participating State. By ensuring and expanding the presence of Kosovo officials here, we can hear directly from them alongside the OSCE Field Mission in Kosovo (OMiK).

This reporting period has been defined by new challenges and opportunities for Kosovo. We commend leaders in Pristina and Belgrade for intensifying negotiations in the EU-facilitated Dialogue talks. We urge the parties to work toward a comprehensive normalization agreement that is durable, implementable, and paves the way for both countries accession to the EU.

In March, Pristina ratified the Border Demarcation Agreement with Montenegro and, along with its efforts to fight corruption, earned support for its visa liberalization aspirations. We were pleased to see the reaffirmation of unequivocal support for the Western Balkans’ European perspective in the European Commission’s February 2018 Western Balkans Strategy and in the Sofia Declaration at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in May.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo fosters a sustainable environment of mutual trust and tolerance. We welcome the Mission’s focus on gender mainstreaming and enhancing non-majority communities’ access to education, employment, and property to ensure sustainable results. Ambassador Braathu, your support to the Ministry of Communities and Returns is critical to Kosovo’s long-term stability and prosperity as a multicultural country. We applaud your work with the Ministry in the drafting of guidelines for the implementation of new regulations on the return of displaced persons, helping ensure displaced persons’ access to civil documents, and contributing to the passage of the Law on Immovable Property Tax. The Mission’s extensive advocacy has strengthened the rights and privileges of all religious

communities, promoted interfaith dialogue, and enhanced observance of Special Protective Zones.

The United States calls particular attention to OMiK's work in promoting judicial reform and integration in Kosovo. We agree with OMiK's statement from July that the Oliver Ivanovic murder case is a major test for the rule of law in Kosovo. We appreciate the role the European Union played in facilitating an information exchange between Pristina and Belgrade to pursue this case. We urge Kosovo authorities to conduct a thorough investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice. On a broader scale, OMiK's court monitoring efforts, preparatory Bar Exam trainings for integrated Kosovo-Serb lawyers, and workshops reinforce best practices and build the capacity of judicial officials.

Finally, turning to democratization, the United States applauds the OSCE Mission's support of exchange programs through the Dialogue Academy and through sports diplomacy. With Kosovo's large youth population in mind, OMiK has rightly fostered youth engagement in conflict resolution and political life and has promoted media and information literacy for young people. We are pleased to see the Mission's efforts with regard to the protection of journalists, a problem you highlighted in your last report. Of perhaps most immediate concern, the Central Election Commission lacks the staffing needed to do its job, and OMiK has stepped in to help with capacity-building workshops, although a longer-term solution is indeed required.

Thank you again Ambassador Braathu for the outstanding work of you and your staff to advance our shared goals in Kosovo. You have our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.