



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Reply to Dr. Nebojša Čović, President of the
Coordination Center of Serbia and
Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia
for Kosovo**

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires Paul Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 7, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Dr. Covic back to the Permanent Council. Much has changed in Serbia and Montenegro and in Kosovo since Dr. Covic's last visit two years ago, but many tough challenges remain, not least of which is ensuring sufficient progress on the "Standards for Kosovo" as Kosovo prepares for the comprehensive review of Standards later this year.

But before addressing this very important subject, we would like to congratulate you, Dr. Covic for the encouraging news that emerged from southern Serbia as you referred to in your statement a little more than a month ago. On March 3, three municipalities in this region agreed to appoint representatives to eight coordination groups coming under the Coordination Body for Southern Serbia, which you also lead. Ambassador Massari, who will address the Permanent Council later this morning, also deserves credit for helping to facilitate Albanian participation in these working groups.

We believe that the decision of these representatives to participate in coordination groups will stimulate dialogue between the Serbian government and the different communities in southern Serbia on a range of difficult issues relating to security, economic development, justice, and education.

The willingness to engage in dialogue, of course, is an important step toward reconciliation and conflict resolution. We would encourage all authorities in Belgrade to support inter-ethnic political dialogue also in Kosovo as firmly as you, Dr. Covic, have done in southern Serbia.

We would urge you, Dr. Covic, as President of the Coordination Center for Kosovo, as well as the governmental authorities in Belgrade, to immediately support Kosovo Serbs taking their positions in the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and rejoining the political life in Kosovo, so that their voices can be heard and their interests can be taken into account. Progress on key issues such as reform of local government must go forward.

We also urge the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina to continue to expand the direct dialogue on technical issues, which resumed March 16 in Belgrade. While that session was

devoted to the issue of missing persons, we hope this dialogue will soon be expanded to include other issues of mutual interest.

Mr. Chairman, we share Mr. Soren Jessen-Peterson's assessment of the situation in Kosovo as presented to this body two months ago, in which he highlighted the following points:

- Security has improved considerably in the last few months but remains fragile;
- Democratic institutions are functioning;
- Progress in implementing standards has been achieved, although many shortcomings remain, in particular with regard to freedom of movement for minorities, and the return of displaced persons;
- Headway has been made in the devolution of powers to the local level.

We are also encouraged by the generally calm reaction in Kosovo to the indictment of Mr. Hardinaj by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia last month, and his quick transfer to The Hague.

At the same time, we note that a positive standards review in mid-2005 is not assured and much remains to be done in terms of implementing the Standards, particularly on security and protection of minority rights, and on decentralization and reform of local government. The United States stands ready to work with the new prime minister, Bajram Kosumi, and his government on these and other issues.

If the outcome of the comprehensive review is positive - and we hope that the people of Kosovo will take the necessary steps so that it will be - we will support launching a process to determine Kosovo's future status. The U.S. - and the Contact Group - have made clear that we see a future for Kosovo that supports the stability of the region as a whole, and the rapid integration of the region into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we would like to restate our view that the OSCE's Mission in Kosovo should continue to focus on helping the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government meet the Standards. Our view is that we should leave the question of Kosovo's status to the United Nations and the Contact Group. We in the OSCE can do the most good for Kosovo by focusing on what this organization does best - institution and capacity building in Kosovo.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.