



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 2, 2017

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Braathu to the Permanent Council for his first report as Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Ambassador, thank you for leading this important mission. The United States supports your efforts and we look forward to continuing our close partnership with you and your dedicated team in support of Kosovo's development as a peaceful, stable, democratic, and multiethnic country that offers equal opportunity and protection to all its people.

Kosovo continues to make steady progress in several important areas, yet much work remains to be done. Ambassador, we encourage you to closely engage with the Government of Kosovo to continue addressing difficult challenges, including maintaining the fight against corruption, promoting closer collaboration with civil society, and strengthening the rule of law. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo is well placed to assist the host government in addressing these and other challenges, and we encourage you to continue exploring how the Mission can best support the government's efforts. We also support your work on electoral reform, and call on the opposition to participate in the process of developing the legal and policy framework to improve Kosovo's democratic processes. The Mission's ongoing work on gender equality, human rights, tolerance, freedom of expression – including for the media – missing persons, and electoral oversight mechanisms also remains vital.

The United States strongly supports the EU-facilitated Dialogue as the vehicle for comprehensive normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. To that end, we call on leaders in Pristina and Belgrade to work to reduce bilateral tensions and to press ahead toward concrete outcomes in the Dialogue that will improve the lives of all people. This also entails fulfilling existing Dialogue commitments, to include implementing agreements on establishment of the Association of Serb-majority municipalities, justice, and freedom of movement. We were encouraged by recent progress on implementing the agreement on telecommunications. The United States appreciates the important role the OSCE Mission in Kosovo continues to play in supporting the parties with implementation of Dialogue agreements.

Ambassador, your report highlighted several developments which risk destabilizing the political and security situation in Kosovo, including the January 14 incident of a train from Belgrade that traveled towards Mitrovica/e bearing Serbian symbols. We were relieved that no confrontations resulted on January 14, but the profound tension and heated rhetoric on both sides surrounding this incident were dangerous and deeply troubling. This underscores

again the critical importance for leaders in Kosovo and Serbia to actively work to avoid provocation, confrontation, and escalation, and to advance the Dialogue.

It is in that same spirit of restraint that all actors should refrain from taking unilateral actions, such as with respect to structures on the northern side of the main bridge in Mitrovica/e, and to instead work toward agreed outcomes. In this context the Mission's intensified outreach efforts and close monitoring of the situation on the ground remains very important.

The United States will continue to champion a democratic, multiethnic, inclusive Kosovo that is fully integrated into the international community and an integral part of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. We look forward to the day when Kosovo will be present in the Permanent Council as an OSCE participating State. We must continue to look for ways to expand dialogue and cooperation, including by ensuring the presence of Kosovo officials in these chambers in order to hear directly from the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and participating States about issues affecting their country.

Thank you again, Ambassador Braathu, for all the tremendous work that you and your dedicated team are doing to advance our shared goals. You have our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.