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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by HoM Kosovo, Ambassador Tim Guldemann

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 31, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States joins other delegations in welcoming Ambassador Guldemann.

It is fair to say, Ambassador, that you have taken over stewardship of OMiK at perhaps the most difficult and uncertain time in the Mission's eight-and-a-half year history.

You took the reins of the Mission on October 1 in the final stretch of the run-up to the November 17 elections. With three separate ballots—parliamentary, municipal and mayoral—these were complicated elections with many moving parts and only a short time to prepare. You and your mission staff are to be congratulated for your efforts: election day passed without any significant irregularities or security incidents, and the Council of Europe Observation Mission declared the elections to be in line with international and European standards.

But now the Mission is faced with a new, and probably much more daunting, challenge. OMiK has become a pawn in the debate over Kosovo's future. Two delegations have threatened to terminate the Mission on a moment's notice depending on how this debate plays out. They have insisted in the meantime that the mission operate on a month-to-month, hand-to-mouth mandate.

Such uncertainty is bound to have a negative effect on the morale and retention of your staff, and complicate your efforts to manage effectively the mission and plan future activities.

This is nonetheless the current reality that the Mission is facing. In the last twelve months, international professional staffing has dropped more than 10%. Our people read the writing on the wall, and are literally voting with their feet. The time may have arrived for this organization to start thinking creatively on whether and/or how the OSCE might continue to play a role in Kosovo post status.

The United States believes the work of the OSCE in Kosovo is unfinished, and that the OSCE can still make certain important contributions there regardless of how the status process is resolved.

Clearly, the Mission is the only civilian international entity with a comprehensive field presence throughout Kosovo. Mission staff are present in every municipality, where they help ensure respect for human rights.

Elements of this network are especially vital for monitoring and reporting on the safety and security of Kosovo Serb communities. The Mission's sudden closure and the disappearance of OSCE monitors without a viable replacement could result in a heightened sense of vulnerability in Kosovo Serb communities that could lead to flows of refugees or heightened tensions. Surely we can all agree that preventing a new refugee flow is a goal the OSCE can and should support.

As has been the case, Mr. Chairman, the United States is eager to work constructively with all participating States to identify ways this organization can continue to contribute to Kosovo's stability and the welfare and security of its people.

The situation in Kosovo will not wait for us to deliberate on the future of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo indefinitely. The reality on the ground will move on, and any failure on our part to react to changing circumstances on the ground in Kosovo would lead to a vacuum that will be filled by others. We cannot assume the continuation of the OSCE's work and presence in Kosovo. We can only assure it by making difficult decisions in the coming weeks in the spirit of compromise and cooperation by all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.