



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Kavalec

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 25, 2021

Ambassador Kavalec, the United States warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council. We recognize the critical role your mission plays in achieving progress towards regional peace and stability, and fully support your excellent work.

Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to constrain and shape the work of your Mission, and we commend your team's ability to carry out its mandate, despite these difficult conditions. On a more personal note, let me join my colleagues in expressing our sincere condolences on the passing of one of your key staff members, Elvedin Zijadić, and please convey our most sincere regret to his family and loved ones.

Not only has the pandemic stolen our colleagues, it has also amplified complex political tensions among political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We applaud your assistance to the government in advancing electoral reforms and ensuring peaceful elections. We welcome the successful conduct last fall of local elections by the Central Election Commission (CEC)—including in Mostar for the first time in 12 years. The CEC's ability to investigate allegations of electoral fraud and to repeat the elections peacefully in two municipalities provides additional ground for optimism. We recognize that the Mission's diplomatic and technical assistance were essential to this outcome, notably in the areas of election monitoring, fraud investigations, and voting under pandemic conditions. We encourage the Mission to continue its work with the Parliamentary Assembly on *Good Governance* to clarify rules of transparency, accountability, and oversight.

The Mission's efforts to advance the rule of law and combat corruption advance key OSCE goals in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without clear and continued progress in these crucial areas, confidence in public institutions, social cohesion, reconciliation, and greater Euro-Atlantic integration all will suffer or regress.

We support your ongoing efforts to prevent conflicts of interest through public registries and the development of new legislation, as well as your efforts to highlight problems in the judicial response to corruption and to rapidly adapt anticorruption assistance to the pandemic environment. And I wonder, is there any further support we here in Vienna can offer in this regard?

Though it has been over 25 years since the *Dayton Accords* were signed, much still needs to be done to build an inclusive and respectful environment for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We support the Mission's work on reconciliation and remind the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina

of the words of the BiH Presidency last year, when it noted, the importance of “strengthening trust, peace and mutual respect among all peoples and citizens in BiH.”

The United States will continue to support the Mission by prioritizing key areas in our funding of Extra-Budgetary projects. These include projects to support the conduct of elections, combat corruption through asset recovery, and promote good governance through the use of *Open Data*. We also are pleased to announce the United States is contributing €2 million to increase Bosnia and Herzegovina’s ability to mitigate risks related to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of *Small Arms and Light Weapons*, ammunition, and explosives.

Ambassador Kavalac, the United States remains a stalwart partner of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a strong supporter of the Mission.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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