



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Serbian Foreign Minister VUK Jeremic

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 10, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Minister Jeremic back to the Permanent Council.

Mr. Minister, while recent events in Georgia have unquestionably drawn much attention to the situation in the Caucasus, we want to assure you that we have not lost track of important issues in Serbia and in Kosovo.

The United States is aware of Serbia's initiative requesting that the UN General Assembly refer the question of Kosovo's independence to the International Court of Justice. We do not support this initiative and see it as counterproductive. Kosovo's independence is legitimate and fair, and recognizing Kosovo was the right decision to make. Kosovo's independence contributes to greater stability in the region and allows all the states in the region to focus on their futures and on greater cooperation with the rest of Europe. Three quarters of both EU member states and NATO have recognized Kosovo's independence to date, as have a clear majority of the 56 OSCE participating states. This issue is resolved. Rather than continuing to cover this ground, we would encourage Serbia to pursue its expressed wish for a European future. In this regard, we stand ready to cooperate with Serbia to help your country find the peace it deserves at home and in its neighborhood.

Kosovo faces a challenge in finding a meaningful role in its society for its Serb community. The United States stands committed to working through the OSCE and directly with the government of Kosovo to ensure that we continue to reach out to the Serb community in Kosovo. We are encouraged that Kosovo governmental leaders continue to urge ethnic Serbs to participate as local leaders, police, justice officials, and municipal officials, and are keeping doors open to those ethnic Serbs who choose to participate. The Government of Kosovo has adopted new laws on decentralization and local government. These laws create new municipalities in which the Kosovo Serb community is in the majority. These Serb-majority municipalities will also enjoy enhanced competencies over their own affairs. The Prime Minister has also appointed an ethnic Serb to head the Office for Minority Communities to promote multi-ethnicity in Kosovo. Mr. Minister, your country can play either a constructive or an obstructive role in this process. We of course hope for the former.

We would also look to you, Mr. Minister, for changes that can help the OSCE Mission in Kosovo be even more effective in its efforts in the future. In particular, the current situation in which the mandate of that mission is renewed on a month-by-month basis is harming the Organization's ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. You could play a decisive role in correcting this situation.

Turning to the activities of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, the most recent report of the mission describes activities in police training and recruitment, support for democratic awareness-raising such as parliamentary simulations in high schools and co-operation with the National Assembly, and war crimes awareness events, among others. Serbia's support for these efforts is praiseworthy. The United States appreciates the close cooperation between the Government of Serbia and the OSCE mission, and hopes that with the help of that Mission, Serbia will continue to make progress, including on war crimes prosecutions, to reach its aspiration to fully integrate in Europe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.