



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by UN SRSG for Kosovo, Mr. Joachim Rucker

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 15, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Special Representative Ruecker to the Permanent Council for this very timely visit.

Our delegation appreciates the close cooperation that has developed between UNMiK and OMiK over the years. We will need to ensure our common efforts are closely coordinated in the weeks and months to come.

This will start with elections scheduled just two days from now, on November 17th. With three separate ballots - parliamentary, municipal, and mayoral - these elections have an unusual number of moving parts, and are more complicated than those in the past.

And now OMiK has been given the responsibility of helping Kosovo authorities organize these elections. We commend the mission for the solid work it has done to date and applaud the energy and effort mission staff have applied to this important task. We note that over 12,000 observers have been accredited by the Central Election Commission to observe these elections - a strong reflection by this organization of the importance we put in impartial electoral observation.

We have every hope that these elections will be held in a manner consistent with the highest international standards, in turn inspiring confidence in the results.

We believe all the people of Kosovo have the right to have their voices heard. We therefore join you, Mr. Ruecker, in calling on Belgrade not to impede Kosovo Serbs from participating in these elections by otherwise attempting to disrupt them.

The upcoming elections are of great significance to political life in Kosovo, but the current Troika-led negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, which are due to reach their conclusion on December 10th, will also have far-reaching importance. The United States supports these negotiations actively and energetically.

We urge Belgrade and Pristina to make the most of the remaining two negotiating sessions in Brussels on November 20th and in Baden, Austria on November 26-28. We encourage both sides to be flexible, to engage constructively with the Troika, and to think creatively about their future relations. We also believe a negotiated settlement is clearly in the best interests of all parties.

But these negotiations are not, and cannot become, open-ended. We agree strongly with Secretary General Ban's assessment that the status quo is unsustainable.

We also agree with you, Mr. Ruecker, which is probably a good idea, that Kosovo's progress in achieving the standards set for them by the UN has been good. UNMIK had done nearly all it can in the absence of final status determination. We risk the unraveling of UNMIK's progress and new instability in Kosovo without status clarity.

Finally, as our own Ministerial approaches, we note with concern that some participating States have called into question the future of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo - by far this organization's largest field mission.

We believe the international community will still have work to do following a final status determination. One delegation put it succinctly last week at the Reinforced PC when it was said that it is difficult to imagine circumstance under which the important work done by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo would not be as valuable next year as it is today. Under these circumstances, we hope this organization will agree to extend the mandate of the Mission as a matter of routine, and for a full year, as called for in paragraph 3 of Brussels ministerial decision 18/06.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.