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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Peter Burkhard, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 26, 2015

The United States joins in welcoming Ambassador Burkhard back to the Permanent Council, and we thank him for his comprehensive report. The OSCE plays an important role in Serbia, and we greatly value the work of Ambassador Burkhard and his staff.

We commend the positive and constructive relationship that continues to exist between the Mission and the Government of Serbia, including the various ministries directly involved with projects and programs led by the OSCE. This cooperation is an excellent example of how much can be accomplished when a host country recognizes the value that comes from an OSCE field mission. In the case of Serbia, the government's high level of cooperation with the field mission is a sign of Serbia's commitment to uphold OSCE principles and commitments.

Ambassador Burkhard, you have outlined an impressive array of activities in your written report and in your remarks today, several of which deserve specific mention. We are pleased with the work you and your team have done to assist Serbia in combatting corruption and promoting judicial reform. Your assistance with Serbia's public procurement law and with the drafting of the Financial Investigation Manual and the Public Corruption Map are excellent instances of an OSCE field mission supporting the initiatives of the host country. Moving forward, we would like to see further efforts on anti-corruption institution building and institutional capacity, particularly in the area of internal control mechanisms.

Similarly, the Mission's work to promote a more diverse and robust media environment is critical. With Serbia's passage of laws on Public Information and Media, Electronic Media, and Public Service Media, you have rightly pointed out that now is the time to support implementation of these laws. Access to governmental information facilitates media freedom, and we support your continued involvement in promoting a greater public understanding of the need for this.

Regional cooperation has been a core theme of the Serbian Chairmanship, and the Mission's work has reflected this. We appreciate the reference in your report to the ongoing Budva Process, which encourages dialogue between women from Serbia and Kosovo, and we are pleased that an Action Plan has been developed for additional activities under this initiative in 2015. We urge you to do more with this process, both in the current format, and also in additional iterations with new participants. We also call on the Secretariat to consider other regions that might benefit from this sort of initiative, and encourage other field missions to look to the Budva Process as a source of inspiration for their activities. We would welcome efforts by the Mission to continue pursuing greater regional cooperation, both among governments and also among OSCE field operations, on issues such as foreign terrorist fighters, illegal migration, countering violent extremism, and tolerance and non-

discrimination. Efforts to strengthen regional relations in the Western Balkans will help ensure a more prosperous and secure future for all.

When extensive floods struck Serbia and the wider region last May, we were heartened to see the quick response from the Mission to help coordinate relief efforts. Lessons learned by the Mission, both in terms of its own response and those of the Serbian government, civil society, and the private sector, should be shared with other OSCE field missions as they work to help their own countries develop the capacity to respond to natural disasters. The broader regional response to the floods also highlighted that strength through unity will help in innumerable ways to move the Western Balkan region forward. Of course the ongoing Brussels Dialogue with Kosovo and the EU accession process will continue to play a key role in Serbia, and your task is to find ways for the Mission to contribute to these processes. The Mission should continue to identify areas where the OSCE's supporting and monitoring role should decrease, and other actors, including civil society, can and should take its place.

The past 12 months have seen tremendous positive developments in Serbia, including a successful round of elections, a landmark Pride Parade in Belgrade in September, progress on important legislation and policy implementation on a number of key issues, and Serbia's assumption of the 2015 OSCE Chairmanship. As Serbia continues on this positive trajectory, we hope that the OSCE Mission to Serbia will continue to provide valuable assistance.

We again thank you, Ambassador Burkhard, for the tremendous work of you and your team in Serbia.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.