



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, H.E. Igor Crnadak, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
June 9, 2015

Foreign Minister Crnadak, we warmly welcome you to the Permanent Council and thank you for your presentation in your capacity as the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. I appreciate the overview of your priorities and thank you in particular for prioritizing combating violence against women and domestic violence, also priorities here within the OSCE.

Mr. Minister, the crisis brought on by Russia's aggression against Ukraine has dominated the conversation at the Council of Europe, as it has here, and we anticipate much of our collective attention will continue to be focused on this topic. As has been repeated time and time again by ministers at the Council of Europe and by delegations here at the Permanent Council, Russia and the separatists it backs must fulfill their commitment to implement the Minsk agreements without any further delay.

Two of the critical issues facing both of our organizations are the threats of terrorism and violent extremism. Mr. Minister, the Council of Europe took an important step in the fight against these threats last month, when it adopted the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, criminalizing the facilitation of activities of foreign terrorist fighters, and simultaneously developed the Action Plan Against Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism. We welcome the Council's plans to focus on ways to counter radicalization leading to violence during its World Forum for Democracy this November. We continue to encourage close collaboration between our two organizations, guided by the COE's new Protocol and Action Plan and the OSCE's 2014 ministerial decisions on countering foreign terrorist fighters and combating kidnapping for ransom, to ensure our work is complementary.

Foreign Minister Crnadak, the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2015 to 2017 will be a valuable road map for your country over the next several years. We appreciate its focus on several key areas, including anti-discrimination, justice sector reform, combating corruption, ensuring freedom of expression, and building up a culture of democratic governance that includes strong public participation. Clearly these are issues of great interest here in the OSCE, and we know that the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina is heavily involved in supporting your country's efforts to make progress in all these areas.

Mr. Minister, your Chairmanship comes at an important stage in Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. We welcome the commencement

last week of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union. This agreement represents a strong recommitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's future by both parties, and we encourage you and your fellow ministers in Sarajevo to put that commitment into action as you work to realize the incredible potential of Bosnia and Herzegovina's diversity and resources. We similarly welcome your leaders' commitment to engage in meaningful socio-economic reforms in cooperation with the EU, IMF, World Bank, and other members of the international community, and we look forward to seeing a robust agenda for reform following the roundtable your government is hosting in Sarajevo on June 11.

Next month will mark the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. July 11 will be a day to pause and reflect on the events of the past and to pledge our collective efforts to ensure nothing like it occurs ever again. As part of that process, it is important both to acknowledge the past and pay respect to the victims and their survivors. In that light, we urge you to continue working closely with the OSCE Mission to resolve outstanding missing persons cases and to make progress toward completing war crimes trials. We should also use this somber anniversary as a time to look to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as its leaders and citizens work to create a society that is inclusive and that values the contributions of all.

Building that culture of inclusion requires ensuring that civil society is able to function freely and openly. We encourage the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to avoid passage of legislation that would unduly inhibit NGOs from operating. These groups strengthen democracy, and ensuring the space for citizens to be able to freely associate with them is an important commitment made by all OSCE participating States.

We welcome the invitation issued by Bosnia and Herzegovina to Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović to visit at the end of this month. We strongly support the work of the RFOM and believe that her office's expertise could inform efforts by your government to uphold its commitments and obligations with regard to media freedom and freedom of expression.

As Ambassador Leko stated in the Permanent Council last month, the progress of the last 20 years has come because the Dayton Accords brought peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States remains committed to the Dayton Peace Accords and the democratic, multi-ethnic, sovereign and independent state that is Bosnia and Herzegovina with full respect for its territorial integrity as guaranteed by the Dayton Accords and the UN Charter, and any actions taken toward secession would be a violation of those Accords. We encourage all to avoid inflammatory rhetoric about secession, as it detracts from the important discussions needed to advance Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and economic progress.

Mr. Minister, your presence here as the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers is a strong indication of how far Bosnia and Herzegovina has come in the past 20 years. The road ahead will take just as much work, and the United States is confident that Bosnia and Herzegovina will rise to that challenge.

We look forward to continuing to work with you, Mr. Minister, and the Council of Europe to uphold the principles and commitments embodied in our two organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.