



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **24<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NATO Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Kosovo**

As delivered by Political Counselor Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 23, 2023

Twenty-four years ago, NATO launched Operation Allied Force to end a decade of bloodshed in the Balkans. This intervention came only after exhausting all diplomatic avenues to put an end to a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing sponsored by the Milosevic regime.

NATO's use of force in this case was both necessary and legitimate. The UN Security Council had expressed its concerns about the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo, the mounting number of refugees, and the threat posed to international peace and security. We remember the hundreds of thousands of innocent people driven from their homes and the thousands who were killed or remain missing due to the violence of Milosevic's ethno-nationalist regime and its forces.

It is incumbent on the governments of both Serbia and Kosovo to ensure that all victims and their families have full access to justice and information about the fate of their loved ones. We urge both governments to support justice and accountability efforts, including by speaking out against the glorification of war criminals.

We deeply regret the loss of innocent lives, including those who perished during Operation Allied Force. When visiting Belgrade in 2016, President Biden expressed his personal condolences to the families of those whose lives were lost during the wars of the 1990s, including as a result of the NATO air campaign. And I add my heartfelt condolences today as well. However, we must also never forget how this conflict started and why.

Mr. Chair, the United States strongly supports a democratic, prosperous, and peaceful future for the Western Balkans, and welcomes the accord Kosovo and Serbia reached through European Union facilitation to implement the Agreement on the Path to Normalization of Relations. As Secretary Blinken said, the United States will remain actively engaged, in coordination with EU partners, to support Serbia and Kosovo in making implementation work in pursuit of a predictable and peaceful relationship. We will continue to support the advancement of democratic governance, good neighborly relations, and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

Let us honor the memory of those who were lost by working together to build a future of peace and prosperity for everyone in the Western Balkans.

###