



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General in Kosovo, Michael Steiner

Delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes to the
Permanent Council, Vienna
May 8, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We also welcome to the Permanent Council, and are pleased to hear from the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General in Kosovo.

The situation in Kosovo, and in the Balkans more generally, continues to be of great importance to the United States. That is why Secretary of State Powell recently visited Belgrade and Tirana, and has a meeting scheduled to visit Sofia.

We fully support the work of the United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo, under the leadership of Special Representative Steiner. Building a multi-ethnic, democratic society that respects the rule of law throughout is essential, for the sake of all Kosovars and for the greater stability of the region.

The OSCE plays an essential role in this process, through its administration of UNMIK's third pillar, focused on democratization and institution building. We continue to see the OSCE Mission in Kosovo as a showcase for the numerous possibilities of OSCE field activities.

From the Kosovo Police Service School to the Elections Working Group, the mandate and objectives of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo cover all aspects of democratic society. The OSCE experience in Kosovo demonstrates the breadth and depth of expertise that OSCE participating states can summon to assist in crisis situations and in the rebuilding periods that follow.

Mr. Chairman, while the challenges in Kosovo do require considerable attention and resources from the international community, we must also do all we can to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. The transfer of all non-reserved authorities to the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government by the end of this year is a step in that direction.

With the assistance of the OSCE and other organizations, we will continue to work with officials of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to make these institutions fully-functioning, in order to improve the daily lives of all Kosovars.

There are a number of areas where improvements are needed. First, absolute respect for minority rights is absolutely required. This includes creating an environment to promote, support and sustain the return of all displaced people and refugees who wish to return to their homes in Kosovo.

The number of returns this year is already very encouraging. The U.S. will commit more than \$14 million this year to continue the momentum for sustainable returns to Kosovo. We would encourage donors who have already pledged financial assistance to UNMIK's return projects to follow-through as soon as possible to make 2003 truly a watershed year for minority returns.

Second, local leaders and politicians, particularly those in the Kosovo Assembly, should focus on legislation that addresses practical problems and fits within their mandate, rather than making declaratory motions that have no basis in law. UNMIK should work closely with the Assembly to ensure that all legislation is in line with constitutional safeguards and can be implemented quickly after Assembly passage.

Third, there must be respect for the rule of law. The United States and other international donors have made substantial contributions to the fight against organized crime in the Balkans, and will not tolerate acts of violence and terror. We therefore urge all local leaders in Kosovo to speak up and take a stand against violence and terror of any kind.

These are significant challenges to overcome, but the transfer of competencies cannot be delayed. We must support the transfer of non-reserved powers, while at the same time working closely with local leaders to improve the functioning of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, so that local authorities can indeed have the tools to handle their new responsibilities and authorities.

The effective implementation of Security Council Resolution 1244 requires a healthy dialogue between UNMIK and the international community. This includes more consultation with Belgrade, in the context of the Common Document and the High-Level Working Group.

The United States supports efforts to enhance and sustain a dialogue on technical issues between Pristina and Belgrade, not only through UNMIK and the Government of Serbia and Montenegro, but also through the OSCE field missions. We look forward to further progress on this issue.

We also look forward to progress by the Special Representative on decentralization. We welcome the Council of Europe's involvement in this area and we look forward to their report in June. Progress on decentralization and fostering increased communication between Pristina and Belgrade are steps UNMIK can take to ease tensions and reinforce ongoing efforts to promote meaningful Serb participation in the Provisional Institutions.

In closing, I would like to thank Special Representative Steiner for his report. This is a timely discussion and one that we are certain to recall when Deputy Prime Minister Covic comes to the Permanent Council on May 15, and then when Ambassador Fieschi reports on the plans and activities of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo on May 29.

We look forward to those discussions and to further progress in Kosovo on refugee returns, decentralization, and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Thank you.