



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, Personal Representative of the EU Secretary General/High Representative on Montenegrin Dialogue

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 18, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Lajcak, the United States joins others in welcoming you back to the Permanent Council. We commend once again the pivotal role you played in facilitating agreement on the modalities governing Montenegro's May 21st referendum on independence as well as your efforts to promote dialogue between all parties on this emotionally-charged issue.

Your mediating efforts, Mr. Ambassador, set the tone for a referendum process that has been carried out in a largely constructive and transparent manner to date. We applaud the general calm that has prevailed in Montenegro throughout the referendum campaign.

The United States encourages all Montenegrins to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and negative campaigning in these remaining few days before Sunday's vote.

We also encourage all Montenegrins who have registered to vote – and that is nearly 480,000 according to ODIHR's most recent report -- to go to the polling stations this Sunday and make their voices heard. A high voter turnout will add legitimacy to the outcome, as well as to the process and it is a clear indication of the success of a democracy.

The presence of hundreds of international election monitors will also build confidence in the results, provided that free and fair elections standards are upheld by election officials. ODIHR is deploying enough short-term observers to ensure that all polling stations in Montenegro will be visited at least once. This is impressive coverage. ODIHR's constructive reporting on the electoral process should help all Montenegrins accept the outcome, whatever it is, and move on.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ambassador,

We appeal further to the people of Montenegro, the government and the opposition to look beyond the election. The United States supports the aim of integrating Montenegro into Euro-Atlantic institutions, a goal that should not be affected by the referendum outcome. Whether Montenegro chooses independence or to remain in the State Union, we hope it will recommit itself with new energy to fighting corruption and to reforming the economy once May 21st has come and gone. We wish the people of Montenegro every success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.