



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Douglas Davidson

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Samuel Laeuchli
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 16, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Davidson back to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his comprehensive report on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is without a doubt a pivotal period for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have seen tremendous progress in the last eleven years as the country has gone from war-torn disaster to a state looking toward Euro-Atlantic integration. However, there is much work to do in order to consolidate this progress.

We again commend the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina for last month's elections, which ODIHR assessed as being generally in line with OSCE commitments and international standards. Now it is up to the newly elected leaders to determine the country's course as the Office of the High Representative phases out. They have an obligation to their citizens to set aside the nationalistic rhetoric that characterized the pre-election period and to form a government that will further consolidate the country as a multi-ethnic democracy, with a peaceful and prosperous future.

The United States reiterates the crucial importance of continuing the reform process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Police reform and constitutional reform are particularly urgent priorities.

As Ambassador Davidson has noted in his written report, police reform has foundered due to Republika Srpska's insistence on maintaining a separate police force and not actively participating in the meetings of the Restructuring Directorate. As we have stated before, the transformation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's police into a unified, multi-ethnic, professional force would contribute greatly to the country's internal safety and stability, as well as to its future European integration. We fully support the European Union's conditioning the signing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement on police reform, and call on the Bosnians to reach an agreement as soon as possible consistent with the European Union's three principles.

The Dayton constitution was written as part of an agreement to stop a war. A more functional and efficient government is necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet the challenges and responsibilities of the 21st century and to achieve its objective of full membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. The adoption of the package of constitutional amendments that political parties agreed to last March would be a significant step toward Bosnia and Herzegovina's Euro-Atlantic integration. This would be the first step in a longer

term reform process. The State Parliamentary Assembly should revisit this matter as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman, the United States once again emphasizes that the transfer of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic to The Hague is essential for regional reconciliation and full Euro-Atlantic integration. The Republika Srpska's cooperation with the ICTY has improved, but the Republika Srpska can and must do more to work with regional partners to locate the remaining fugitives and to root out their support networks. We welcome the efforts of the Bosnia and Herzegovina War Crimes Chamber, but we encourage them to take on more cases and to undertake efforts to improve cooperation with other regional governments on domestic war crimes prosecutions.

Mr. Chairman, the United States commends Ambassador Davidson and his staff for their role in assisting the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in amending its Law on Local Self-Government. We agree with the Mission's decision to focus further work on the development of municipal governance, since many of the tasks of governing Bosnia and Herzegovina are decentralized.

The OSCE Mission's role must obviously change as Bosnian authorities assume greater responsibility for their own affairs. We welcome the Mission's decision to focus on its work in areas such as local good governance and enhancing institutional capacity where the Mission has better access and experience than other international players.

As for education, Ambassador Davidson is right: ensuring that Bosnia and Herzegovina's schools foster a sense of common culture, rather than serving to further emphasize ethnic divisions, is a key to the future stability of the country. This does not mean that the OSCE should be involved in designing school curricula; rather, it should address educational reform as a confidence-building measure, particularly in areas of mixed ethnicity, and with the involvement of parents.

Again, we would like to thank Ambassador Davidson for his report, and we wish him all the best in his continuing efforts to bring about positive change in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thank you.