



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Amb. Gary Robbins

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 7, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We join other delegations in welcoming Ambassador Robbins to the Permanent Council and thank you for your insightful report.

It is regrettable that little has changed in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the last Head of Mission report. Political tensions are undiminished, and some aspects of reform remain stalled.

We, like others, are concerned by the continued determination of some politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina to undermine state-level institutions to advance their nationalist policies in rhetoric and also in practice.

That said, there is some real progress. One bright spot was the enactment in March of the first amendment to the Dayton constitution to protect the multi-ethnicity of the Brcko District. The efforts that led to this amendment, which grew out of the Prud process, give some cause for optimism on moving ahead on additional reforms. We hope that this will translate into actions that meet outstanding 5-plus-2 requirements set by the PIC as soon as possible.

We welcome that the OSCE Mission continues to make meaningful and useful contributions to reform efforts despite the difficult political climate in the country.

Programs in democracy and human rights are of paramount importance. The Mission's activities in local government reform are commendable, and continued initiatives to support local assemblies and administrations should effectively build on past experience. Legislative assistance as well can help not only with strengthening democracy and the rule of law, but, as you mentioned, also to defend human rights by addressing weaknesses in the prosecution of hate crimes or trafficking.

We are increasingly concerned about threats to media freedom, and while we understand the Mission's Media Affairs Unit was closed, we encourage the Mission to continue actively complementing other efforts aimed at bolstering media freedom.

We welcome the focus on stronger strategic coherence in the Mission's activities, including through more robust use of the field offices, which are one of the Mission's unique strengths.

To this end, we also strongly endorse the plan to consolidate the three human dimension programs into one, with the purpose of increasing synergies and improving coordination. We welcome this all the more, given our understanding that the principal aim of the consolidation is to increase effectiveness, and not just reduce costs. Getting more bang for the buck is in itself a good thing, even if it is also true that the United States generally does support gradual reductions in some of the South East Europe Missions as a means of freeing up resources for other areas. If we can increase effectiveness by reducing some costs, all the better.

With Bosnia and Herzegovina's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration, the European Union and NATO have vital leadership roles to play, and we look for continued EU and NATO contributions to supporting reform.

There are many more activities we could commend. You and your staff are making a vital difference in helping Bosnia and Herzegovina address the multitude of challenges it faces. An increasingly effective mission, focused on where it adds the most unique value, will be a key force multiplier for your efforts and goals and help realize the aspirations of the Bosnian people to become full members of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Thank you, Ambassador Robbins and thank you, Madam Chairwoman.