



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Events in North Kosovo

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 8, 2010

At the Permanent Council on Monday, after the statement by the Ambassador of Serbia on the July 2 events in north Kosovo, my delegation reserved the right to return to this issue at today's PC.

Mr. Chairman, as we stated earlier this week, we regret the tragic death of Dr. Mesud Dzekovic, an ethnic Bosnian pediatrician, and the injuries to several others that occurred on July 2 in north Mitrovica during a protest related to the opening by the Government of Kosovo of a Citizens' Services Center there. We echo the calls for calm and restraint made by the Government of Kosovo, and we join in condemning violence and the threat of violence. We urge all parties to avoid any escalation of tensions.

As we learn more about the incident that led to the loss of life and injuries, it is becoming clearer that this was an isolated criminal act, not a planned act of terrorism. We urge local law enforcement authorities, Kosovo Police with the support of EULEX, to continue to investigate the incident and to ensure that those who are responsible for criminal acts are held accountable. We welcome the assistance offered by KFOR in responding to the incident.

We should also discuss the threats and intimidation against ethnic Serb citizens of Kosovo such as Assembly of Kosovo member Petar Miletic who was shot on July 5 by an unknown perpetrator who reportedly accused Miletic of being a traitor. We have consistently called upon all parties to avoid provocative statements and actions that serve only to undermine regional stability. In this regard we should also condemn the statement of a senior Serbian government official calling any Kosovo Serb who supports the work of Kosovo institutions an "accomplice to Albanian terrorists." We support Serbian President Boris Tadic's words at the UN on July 6, when he said that everyone needs to reject the extremist voices who find comfort in the old ways. It would also be helpful to hear President Tadic denounce the July 5 incident and the statement by a member of his government.

Mr. Chairman, the decision by the Government of Kosovo to open the Citizens Service Center was the right one and one that is within its prerogative as an independent and sovereign state recognized by many in this room and beyond. Recognizing sensitivities among minority communities in the north, the Government of Kosovo opened and continues to operate the center in a low-key, non-provocative, transparent manner. Opening the center was decidedly not, as Belgrade officials have claimed, "illegal," "forcible," or a "provocation." The center is part of a larger strategy endorsed by representatives of all of Kosovo's communities and by members of the international community to extend the benefits of good, accountable, legitimate government – principles of the OSCE – to all citizens, including its citizens in the north.

In the spirit of transparency, the Government of Serbia was informed in advance of the opening of the center. It is unfortunate that the Government of Kosovo's efforts to assist those most in need in the north were subsequently disrupted by attempts to politicize the Citizens Services Center and destabilize the situation in northern Kosovo. We must also emphasize that any violence or violent provocations by demonstrators are also unacceptable.

The July 2 incident is indicative of continuing underlying tensions that exist in the north and it points to the continuing need to strengthen the rule of law in the interest of all communities there. In this regard, the Kosovo Police and EULEX must continue their work, and must continue to use the resources at their disposal to ensure that those who would use violence or the threat of violence do not succeed in destabilizing the region.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo can also play a role in easing these tensions by continuing to facilitate better relations between Kosovo's communities, by helping to build institutional capacity at all levels in order that Kosovo institutions can reach and better provide services to all citizens, and by continuing to support the development of Kosovo's multiethnic, democratic institutions.

Finally, we urge the Governments of Serbia and Kosovo to work together as neighbors in order to foster further regional stability and to prevent further violence.