

Original: ENGLISH



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, Ambassador Peter Burkhard**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
February 28, 2013

The United States joins in welcoming Ambassador Burkhard for his first visit to the Permanent Council and we thank him for his comprehensive report. The OSCE plays an important role in the progress Serbia is making, and we greatly value the work of Ambassador Burkhard and his staff.

We recognize the importance the Government of Serbia places on European integration and we fully support the steps the government is taking to achieve this goal. We applaud Prime Ministers Dacic and Thaci for their continued commitment to the EU-facilitated dialogue in Brussels. We welcome the efforts of the governments of Serbia and Kosovo to implement the Integrated Border Management agreement and to appoint liaison officers who will work to improve communication between Serbia and Kosovo. Both sides must continue to work constructively to reach an agreement on normalization of relations, which also addresses parallel institutions in northern Kosovo.

We commend the OSCE Mission, and in particular the OSCE personnel at the field office in Bujanovac, for their tireless work in facilitating dialogue between the various actors involved in the recent disputes over monuments. The Bujanovac and Novi Pazar field offices are perfect examples of what the OSCE does best, and we see their work as key to resolving conflicts and promoting strong democratic principles.

We applaud the good working relationships that have developed between the OSCE Mission and a number of government ministries through the various projects that the Mission has undertaken. Judicial reform is an area where we see tremendous potential for a fruitful working relationship that ensures greater access to justice for all citizens of Serbia. We also look forward to additional progress through assistance provided to the Ministry of Culture and Information on the implementation of the Media Reform Strategy.

We also wish to highlight a training program organized by the Senior Advisor on Gender Issues this week in Belgrade, to advance an initiative for OSCE Field Missions to establish and promote mentoring networks among women. The successful experience of the OSCE Mission in Serbia in developing a mentoring network serves as a model for training of this nature and we support this program's replication across the OSCE.

We continue to encourage greater interaction and cooperation between the Government of Serbia and the various independent institutions established to assist the reform process, as well as civil society organizations. As Serbia progresses on the path to greater integration in the Euro-Atlantic community, the OSCE's role will be able to decrease, and other groups will be able to play a more prominent role in advancing Serbia's integration.

We commend the recent verdict in Novi Sad in which a man was fined for discrimination against a co-worker on the basis of sexual orientation. This decision demonstrates that Serbia has the ability to protect all minorities in Serbia, and establishes an important example for the entire region. The cancellation in October of the annual Pride March in Belgrade, however, was deeply troubling. This marks the second year in a row that the Pride March has been canceled. We reiterate that Serbia must demonstrate its commitment to protecting the human rights of all persons, including the right to assemble peacefully, the right to freedom of association, and the right to freedom of expression.

We remain concerned about tensions between the Government of Serbia and ethnic Albanians living in the Presevo Valley. We again call upon the Government of Serbia and representatives of the local communities in southern Serbia to refrain from emphasizing their differences in localized disputes and to instead work constructively together to address the economic, social, and political challenges facing the area.

The United States stands ready to work with all participating States to support and extend the progress made on these issues, for the benefit of all the people of Serbia and the surrounding region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.