



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Serbian Foreign Minister, Vuk Jeremic

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 19, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Minister Jeremic back to the Permanent Council at a critical moment in his nation's history.

On February 18th, the United States recognized Kosovo's independence. Many European countries and others from around the globe have either recognized Kosovo or are in the process of doing so.

As painful as this may be for Serbia, we have no doubt that this decision is the correct one on every level - morally, legally, and in terms of promoting long-term security in the Balkans.

This decision was not reached easily or in haste. Nearly a decade ago, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under international administration and effectively put an end to Belgrade's authority. That remarkable step was taken only after a tragic history of extraordinary atrocities.

From that time, the international community made every conceivable effort to promote a negotiated settlement acceptable to both sides.

For over two years, Belgrade and Pristina negotiated Kosovo's status. For 15 months UN Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, conducted intense negotiations with the parties. Despite the wishes of the majority of the Security Council, a resolution implementing the Ahtisaari plan could not be passed. For four months last fall, the EU-Russia-U.S. Troika conducted still more exhaustive talks to find a solution.

It is painfully obvious that the positions of Belgrade and Pristina remain fundamentally and irrevocably opposed, and that no agreement between the parties is feasible no matter how long talks go on. And yet it is just as clear that the status quo in Kosovo was unsustainable.

In light of these failed talks, it became apparent that recognizing Kosovo's independence was the only viable option left, in order to assure continued peace and prosperity in the region. As part of their declaration, the Kosovar authorities have committed to implement the Ahtisaari plan, which includes critical provisions to fully protect the rights of Serbian and other minorities in Kosovo.

Kosovo's independence violates neither international law nor the Helsinki Final Act. Kosovo is, as we have said before, truly a special case, and one of the key reasons is that it is governed by UNSCR 1244.

The international community – acting through the Security Council – decided in 1999 to exercise its authority under the United Nations Charter to preclude Serbia from exercising sovereign governmental authority in Kosovo. This decision, and the resulting international administration of Kosovo for almost a decade, created a new and fundamentally different situation in Kosovo. Indeed, because of this decision, it would be no less radical (and arguably far more so) to now attempt to reintegrate Kosovo into Serbia, than to acknowledge its independence.

While UNSCR 1244 aimed for an agreement between the parties, however, it did not require one. More importantly, the resolution never excluded independence as an option. Resolution 1244 remains in place until such time as the Security Council decides otherwise.

Nor do we believe that Kosovo's independence will somehow serve as a precedent for other conflict areas. The conditions that set Kosovo apart from other territorial disputes around the world are unique and compelling.

Kosovo's status must be seen in the context of the violent break-up of the former Yugoslav federation, a country which no longer exists. The bloodshed and ethnic cleansing created such a significant threat to international peace that it necessitated repeated UN intervention.

In light of these facts, we have come to the conclusion that Kosovo's independence is a legitimate, fair and lawful outcome of all the events we have described. Recognizing it is the right thing to do. Kosovo's independence will allow all the states in the region to focus on their futures, especially membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

This includes Serbia. Mr. Minister, it is time for Serbia to let go of the issue of Kosovo. We encourage your proud nation to turn its considerable energy and potential to the task of full integration into Europe. It is this integration that will assure peace and prosperity for Serbia, just as it has for successive waves of countries before. But whatever Serbia does, it must also adhere scrupulously to its long-stated commitment not to provoke or support violence or destabilizing acts in Kosovo, which will undermine peace and stability for all in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.