



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Gary Robbins

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 6, 2010

The United States joins other delegations in warmly welcoming Ambassador Robbins back to the Permanent Council, and we thank you, Ambassador, for your very thoughtful and forward-looking remarks.

The OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina is doing important work helping the country to meet its OSCE commitments. Since your last report, there has been progress on some reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The BiH Presidency has agreed to move forward with the important priority of destroying surplus small arms, light weapons, and ammunition. Bosnia and Herzegovina has also enacted legislation necessary to create state-level Ombudsman institutions. The BiH Parliamentary Assembly and its staff have shown increased capacity to develop and adopt legislative texts.

However, we continue to be concerned by the rhetoric and actions of some politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina to undermine state-level institutions and challenge the authority of the High Representative in order to advance their nationalist policies. Bosnian leaders have been unable to reach consensus on the steps needed to resolve the 5-plus-2 objectives for OHR closure, improve the functionality of the state, and enact constitutional reforms needed for Bosnia's further European integration—this all despite the joint U.S.-EU efforts to secure agreement. As the country enters an election campaign, the prospects for compromise and agreement among political leaders are all the more challenging. But the election season also provides them an opportunity to address the issues and concerns of importance to ordinary voters and citizens as you pointed out, Mr. Ambassador. The election is not an excuse for inaction. BiH's leaders have an obligation to work in the best interests of their citizens, in keeping with their OSCE commitments, and continue their efforts to forge consensus on the defense, constitutional, and other reforms necessary to realize BiH's aspirations.

Despite the difficult political climate, the OSCE Mission continues to make meaningful and useful contributions to reform efforts in many areas, including judicial reform, war crimes prosecution, strengthening legislative bodies, and building local governance capacity, among others. Programs in democracy, core human rights issues, and rule of law continue to be of paramount importance. The mission's work to counter division and discrimination in education, a major problem with troubling long term implications, is also important. As well, we share your concern about political pressures being applied to the media and we encourage continued and coordinated efforts to reverse this disturbing trend, particularly in advance of elections in October.

We applaud the implementation of the new mission structure that went into effect with the approval of the 2010 budget. This will increase synergies and improve coordination, helping the mission leverage its resources and better tackle interrelated issues. As we know, major

changes to organizational structures are never easy, but in this case a transparent and carefully implemented reorganization served to minimize disruption.

Mr. Ambassador, we thank and commend you and your staff for your hard work and dedication. Thanks to you the OSCE is making a vital difference in helping Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.