



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Jan Braathu

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 12, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador Braathu, welcome back to the Permanent Council and thank you for your detailed report. The Mission to Serbia remains an indispensable element of this Organization's work to promote peace, democracy, and prosperity in the Western Balkans. Now more than ever, it is critical to reinforce the work being done on the ground to advance OSCE principles, and commitments.

We welcome your report of important steps by Serbia to strengthen judicial independence and the opening of the latest EU negotiation cluster, and your detailed observations on the conduct of the April 3 elections. We recognize your team's dedicated efforts to support institutional reforms across the range of issues.

We agree with ODIHR's conclusions following the April 3 presidential and early parliamentary elections that while the elections presented diverse political options, a number of shortcomings resulted in an uneven playing field that favored the incumbents. We also welcome ODIHR's assessment that fundamental freedoms were largely respected during the campaign, but remain concerned that unbalanced access to the media, undue pressure on public sector employees to support incumbents, campaign finance disparities, and the misuse of administrative resources created unequal conditions for the contestants. We note these are longstanding issues raised by ODIHR after previous elections and echoed by successive European Commission progress reports in recent years. We would welcome your assessment of how best to achieve progress on ODIHR's recommendations, especially on media freedoms, and your insights on how best to support their implementation.

The United States strongly supports Serbia's aspirations for membership in the European Union, and your Mission plays a vital role in assisting in the reforms critical for Serbia's EU accession. We welcomed the January 16 national referendum, which approved constitutional amendments that were significant steps toward depoliticizing Serbia's judicial appointment procedures in line with European standards. We are encouraged by the opening of a new EU negotiation cluster in December of last year and look forward to Serbia building further momentum along its European path this year.

The United States strongly supports a democratic, prosperous, and peaceful future for the Western Balkans and recognizes Serbia's important role in this regard. We encourage Serbia to take steps to normalize relations with Kosovo. As you know, the United States fully supports the EU-facilitated

Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia aimed at a comprehensive normalization agreement. This will require compromise by both sides. The *status quo* is unsustainable as it hampers the stability and economic prosperity of the Western Balkans and prevents both Kosovo and Serbia from fully integrating into European institutions.

Ambassador Braathu, we value your Mission's engagement not only on institutional issues and governance, but also in fields that directly affect the daily life of individuals. We thank you and your team again for the work you have accomplished. You have our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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