



PC.DEL/87/09
5 February 2009

ENGLISH only

PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 749th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 FEBRUARY 2009

**RE: REPORT OF THE HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION IN KOSOVO,
AMBASSADOR WERNER ALMHOFER**

Madame Chairwoman:

1. The Holy See joins other Delegations in welcoming Ambassador Almhofer to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his written report and oral presentation.
2. As is known, it is not the place of the Holy See to enter into issues which are strictly "hard security" related or political and neither it wish to do so.

However, I read with interest and concern the comments of Ambassador Almhofer concerning the break-ins to different properties of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as concerning the damaging of a Serbian Orthodox Church in a Kosovo Serb village (cf. pp. 5 and 6 of Ambassador Almhofer's Report). Thank you, Ambassador Almhofer, for calling attention to these troubling incidents.

3. These incidents reveal that it is still necessary to dedicate particular attention to safeguarding democracy and the rule of law. Thus, also in Kosovo, international standards of respect for the rights of minorities and of all inhabitants, without distinction of ethnic origin, language or nationality, must be applied. Furthermore, it is necessary to exercise vigilance over the protection of the precious Christian artistic and cultural patrimony. Stability in the region is to be promoted with commitment; for this reason, the international community has an important role to play.

In fact, in his 2009 New Year's Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Benedict XVI said: "*With regard to the Southeast of Europe, the Holy See pursues its commitment to stability in the region, and hopes that conditions will continue to be created for a future of reconciliation and of peace between the peoples of Serbia and Kosovo, with respect for minorities and commitment to the preservation of the priceless Christian artistic and cultural patrimony which constitutes a treasure for all humanity.*"

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman.