



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Deputy Political Counselor Lane Darnell Bahl
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 15, 2020

The United States warmly welcomes you, Ambassador Braathu, for your final address at the Permanent Council in this capacity as Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Thank you for your Mission's timely submission and detailed report of its activities over the last few months. We also appreciated the opportunity to engage with you and one of the Mission's beneficiaries at yesterday's informal briefing, which was very, very impressive. As we have said before, stability, prosperity and lasting peace in the Western Balkans are achievable only when Kosovo is integrated as a full and equal partner. The OSCE plays a role in moving the region toward that goal.

During a challenging year, we have seen major successes toward achieving long-lasting regional peace and stability in the Western Balkans. As you mention in your report, the United States government has sought to advance ties between Pristina and Belgrade.

Through the work of President Trump's administration, including that of Special Presidential Envoy Richard Grenell, in September of this year, Serbia and Kosovo committed to historic economic normalization agreements. We believe these agreements will bring needed economic growth and jobs to Serbia and Kosovo. As we mentioned at the Permanent Council last month, by increasing confidence and cooperation among the parties, these agreements provide momentum for the EU-facilitated dialogue talks between Serbia and Kosovo, with the goal of a comprehensive normalization agreement.

While we're well aware the CoViD-19 pandemic has posed many challenges, the United States continues to be impressed by the Mission's innovative approach to accomplishing its work both online and in-person. We appreciate the Mission's monitoring of language compliance regarding access to information for all communities since the outbreak of CoViD-19 and assistance with translation of key CoViD-related documents. Additionally, the Mission provided assistance and guidance with publication of reports of CoViD-related information and data, as well as provision of medical goods to help ensure the safety of the police and Anti-Trafficking authority during their operations. We note that among other planned activities, your team designed a series of trainings for the Victims' Advocacy and Assistance Office to help operators provide legal, psycho-social, and gender-sensitive support to victims of domestic violence. This is in direct response to the 12.9 per cent increase in domestic violence cases in Kosovo from January to August of this year in comparison to the same time frame in 2019.

Beyond the Mission's work related to the CoViD-19 pandemic, the United States also welcomes its contributions in the areas of human rights monitoring and promotion, support to democratic

institutions and good governance, and public safety and security. We rely on the OSCE to provide local stakeholders and democratic institutions the necessary tools to strengthen democracy in Kosovo.

Mr. Ambassador, the United States was pleased to hear directly from a host country beneficiary about the excellent work of the OSCE Mission, as we do in informal briefings with other Heads of Mission. Hearing about the work and the impact of that work is especially impressive when relayed directly by the host country and its nationals who are benefitting. This shows the OSCE is working effectively. We appreciate the Albanian Chairmanship's willingness to engage on this issue and ensure beneficiaries are invited to all Heads of Mission informal briefings.

Finally, Ambassador Braathu, I would like to take a moment to thank you for your years of leadership and solid management of the OSCE's largest field mission in the Western Balkans, and outside the SMM, as you mentioned.

Under your direction, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo contributed to Kosovo's democratic growth, and through its work and relationships in the area, ensured the peace and stability of the entire Western Balkans region. This success would not have been possible without your strong leadership. The United States appreciates all you have done.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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