



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brian Aggeler

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 30, 2023

Ambassador Aggeler, dear Brian, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the Permanent Council to present your first annual report.

In the five months since you assumed your role as Head of Mission, you have been remarkably active. I thank you for providing clear and strategic leadership for the Mission and its staff and for your visible presence across the country at the Mission's field offices. As detailed in your report, the Mission is working to advance its mandate by facilitating dialogue and promoting social cohesion; combating corruption; and advancing programs in the fields of elections. We also commend your work to promote democratic governance, fundamental freedoms, safety of journalists, and the rule of law. The Mission's work at the cantonal and municipal levels has been particularly effective and has successfully promoted cross-dimensional, inter-entity, and interethnic cooperation via creative projects on the ground. This is evident from projects such as the cooperation among five municipalities on demining, environmental protection, and tourism that you are supporting across the inter-entity boundary line in Majeвица. The opportunity to hear from two of the mayors involved in the project yesterday, one from the RS and one from BiH, was quite insightful and we applaud you and them for these efforts.

I recognize this work is taking place despite the uncertainty and erosion of the Mission's real purchasing power stemming from not having an approved budget. Please be assured the United States is advocating every day in Vienna for your Mission, indeed all Field Missions, to have the Unified Budget resources that you need to succeed. We all know monthly allotments based on a budget from two years ago is woefully insufficient for you to meet the current challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States continues to support democratic reform and the work of the Mission, but we must also promote accountability for the actions of those who would undermine democratic institutions and stability in the Western Balkans. Ethnonationalist political parties continue to undermine democratic institutions and government in Bosnia and Herzegovina and engage in corrupt behavior. The Republika Srpska entity leadership is engaged in a naked power grab to seize authorities from the state and give them to entity governments and institutions. Moreover, Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik's inflammatory rhetoric has fueled actual violence, most recently with the March 18 physical assaults on LGBTQI+ activists and journalists in Banja Luka. Some Federation--based political parties have also weaponized key institutions to misuse resources in support of political goals and to protect criminal organizations. We cannot turn a blind eye to these

practices and must not allow the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be splintered by those who would seek to advance their narrow political interests.

We share the concerns you outlined in your report on divisive rhetoric, hate speech, institutional paralysis, and the failure of elected leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to work together for the good of their constituents. The United States remains committed to combating endemic corruption, and all other threats to the success of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its desired Euro-Atlantic trajectory. On March 15, for example, we imposed sanctions on three individuals who pose a threat to the rule of law, regional stability, and the aspirations of those seeking functional democratic governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We remain steadfast in our support for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – who by the way are often the losers in this process - and the country’s democratic institutions and we will continue to pursue all avenues possible to ensure accountability for those who perpetuate crime and corruption and attempt to undermine its institutions.

Ambassador Aggeler – Brian – thank you again for your service as Head of Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina at this challenging time. We agree the Mission has continued to demonstrate its added value across all three Dimensions and appreciate your dedication and diligence in the face of challenging conditions for the benefit of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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