



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 27, 2020

I am proud to welcome you, Ambassador Kavalec, to your first appearance as the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ambassador Kavalec, congratulations. The United States views the success of Bosnia and Herzegovina as crucial to the lasting peace and progress of the region, and we will continue to do our utmost to support your Mission’s excellent work.

At the outset Ambassador, I wish to express my appreciation for your timely and informative report. Your report, together with your extensive consultations with delegations, and informative informal briefing yesterday are very much appreciated, and they reflect the strong commitment that you and your mission have to engaging delegations and keeping those of us in Vienna apprised of the critical work that you and your mission are undertaking. Thank you very much for that.

The United States was pleased that in December Bosnia and Herzegovina finally concluded negotiations for state-level government formation. However, recent events in the Republika Srpska threaten to divert attention away from pursuit of much-needed reforms. Bosnia and Herzegovina desperately needs to strengthen the rule of law, fight corruption, and address segregation in education and other interethnic divides. We must press state and entity-level governments to get reforms back on track, in part by incorporating guidance offered by the international community. You and your Mission are at the forefront of that cooperation.

One glaring example of why our collective efforts are so critical is in the need to implement the final and binding decisions of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights. As you point out in your report, there have been far too many instances where this has not been the case, including in the 2016 “Ljubić case” and the case of Mostar resident Irma Baralija. The OSCE’s hard work in supporting electoral reform is also critical, and it is an area in which the OSCE excels. We encourage you to

redouble your efforts in this area now, in preparation for the municipal elections in October of this year.

More broadly, the OSCE's efforts to advance democratization, good governance, and the rule of law will help move the country forward and advance Bosnia and Herzegovina's Euro-Atlantic integration. Your mission's exemplary work over the years in observing war crimes and corruption cases has been instrumental in supporting the rule of law, reconciling communities, and helping the country advance.

Finally, we appreciate that the Republika Srpska responded last year to concerns from the public, journalists, and the international community regarding draft legislation that would have stifled freedom of assembly and expression. We hope the Republika Srpska government will work constructively with the international community on other issues as well, rather than resort to undermining State-level institutions or blocking their decision-making. We call upon the OSCE Mission to keep this engagement moving in a positive direction and help ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the important role of independent civil society and media, are protected in the process.

Marking 25 years since the Dayton Peace Accords ended the brutal fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020 is an important time for political leaders to reaffirm their commitment to the rule of law and interethnic reconciliation. We urge the country's leaders at all levels to refrain from rewriting history or promoting divisive rhetoric that undermines progress for the sake of short-term political expediency.

Thank you, once again, for your report today. The United States is a friend and partner of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will continue to work with the government at all levels – as well as with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its civil society and media – to foster democratic reform, reconciliation, and regional peace and prosperity.

The United States shares your view that the OSCE field mission plays a critical role supporting these goals. Your mission has a long-standing positive track record in working constructively and collaboratively with OSCE executive structures, and we encourage you and these instructors to continue to do so over your tenure. Such coordination will be particularly critical this year. Ambassador, thank you again. The OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina has our full support in this joint effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.