



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Address by Serbian Deputy P-M Nebojsa Covic

Delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes to the
Permanent Council, Vienna
May 15, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We are pleased to welcome Deputy Prime Minister Covic to the Permanent Council, and also welcome Ambassador Massari from the OSCE Mission in Serbia and Montenegro. We are very pleased to hear of the continued excellent cooperation between the Government of Serbia and Montenegro and the OSCE Mission in Belgrade.

We note that this spirit of cooperation extends to Ambassador Milinkovic and the delegation of Serbia and Montenegro here in Vienna, who are highly esteemed colleagues, and with whom we work very closely and productively. This discussion here comes at a time of both uncertainty and opportunity. With the shocking, tragic assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic, the day I visited your country and had the opportunity to meet with you, still fresh on our minds, we are reminded that elements of organized crime and terror threaten to destabilize the entire region. Other challenges, such as corruption, trafficking in persons, drugs, and weapons, and high unemployment, add to the air of uncertainty and despair.

But that is only half of the story in the Balkans. We must also point to areas of significant, and even remarkable, progress. Regional cooperation is improving, as evidenced by the upcoming conference on border management in Ohrid. Progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration, which seemed distant and elusive just five years ago, is happening and quite quickly.

And, perhaps most notably, courageous leaders in the Balkans are making the tough decisions that are necessary to reform their governments, to address the evils of the past, and to build open, democratic societies. In Serbia and Montenegro, positive steps have been taken recently to facilitate cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, to crack down on organized crime, and to institutionalize civilian control of the military.

The momentum of change is carrying the Balkans in the right direction, and while there are still numerous challenges to address, the outlook is encouraging. It is with this in mind that I would now turn to Kosovo.

As we stated last week when Special Representative Steiner appeared before the Permanent Council, the United States fully supports the work of the United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo, and the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Let me be clear here, the United States stands firmly behind Special Representative Steiner and UNMIK's "standards before status" policy.

We continue to strongly support UNMIK's plans to transfer all remaining, non-reserved competencies to the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government by the end of this year. There is still significant progress that needs to be made on refugee returns and minority rights. This is a priority for the United States and we have contributed substantial resources to make sustainable returns possible.

The Provisional Institutions will need the support and guidance of the international community, particularly the OSCE and the EU, to build capacity and to govern effectively. But the international community cannot do the job alone.

The people of Kosovo - Albanians, Serbs, and other minorities - must also accept responsibility for creating functioning, multiethnic communities. That means participating in the Provisional Institutions, respecting cultural sites, and speaking out against violence and terror.

We urge the leaders in Belgrade to support this process as well, by dismantling parallel institutions and acknowledging the role of the Provisional Institutions as outlined in Security Council Resolution 1244.

To that end, the dialogue and cooperation between UNMIK and Belgrade must continue. We regret the cancellation of the High-Level Working Group meeting that was scheduled to take place in Pristina just a couple of days ago. There should be no further delay in resolving practical issues such as the Protocol on Mutual Recognition of License Plates and privatization. We urge officials in Belgrade and Pristina to resume the consultative process in the context of the Common Document and the High-Level Working Group.

The prospect of building peaceful and democratic multiethnic communities in former crisis areas is not insurmountable. We need only to look to South Serbia to see that it is possible.

The efforts made by the Serbian government, and by Deputy Prime Minister Covic personally, to maintain peace and to begin the process of reconciliation in South Serbia through the South Serbia Coordination Body are commendable.

The OSCE has also played a vital role in maintaining stability in the region, and we are pleased that the OSCE Mission remains engaged and is now assisting in

economic and social reforms. As progress continues, we hope the multiethnic communities in South Serbia can serve as models of democracy and tolerance for local governments around the region.

In conclusion, we extend our thanks to Deputy Prime Minister Covic and to Ambassador Massari for appearing before the Permanent Council today. In this time of uncertainty and opportunity, the OSCE's activities in Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo are more critical than they have ever been. Our Field Missions should do all they can to coordinate efforts and support our common aims in the region.

Thank you.