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United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Mr. Soren Jessen-Petersen, SRSB and Head of the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council,
February 10, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a happy occasion, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, to be able to warmly welcome you here to your first appearance in front of the Permanent Council since your appointment last June as the Secretary General's Special Representative and Head of the United Nations' Mission in Kosovo.

But it is also a sad occasion, as I understand, Ambassador Fieschi, that this might be your last visit here in your capacity as deputy for institution building. I would say to you Ambassador Fieschi, the United States deeply appreciates your service as Head of the OSCE's Mission in Kosovo and commends your leadership over the past three years, which allowed OMIK's institution and democracy building expertise to give Kosovo the tools to conduct several generally free and fair elections. These contributions were indispensable to the creation of functioning democratic institutions that are helping Kosovo today meet the Standards.

The implementation of the Standards is, of course, and has to remain the main priority of Kosovo's new provisional government as it prepares for the Comprehensive Review of mid-2005.

We welcome the new government's commitment and energy to making these Standards a reality in Kosovo, but at the same time note that a positive Standards Review in mid-2005 is not assured and that much remains to be done.

We urge the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to sustain its current reform efforts, indeed to accelerate them, in the coming months, particularly in reforming local government, ensuring security for all communities and in providing an environment conducive for the return of those who have been displaced. The very future of Kosovo will depend on Kosovo becoming a place where people of all communities can live, work and travel without fear, and without hostility or danger.

At the heart of any democracy is the representation of all communities in political institutions. We are disappointed that many Kosovo Serb leaders – at Belgrade's insistence – have decided not to take their positions within the PISG, thus absenting themselves from the political life of Kosovo altogether.

We encourage the Kosovo Serb representatives to join the political process as soon as possible in order to ensure that their voice is heard and that their interests are taken into account.

Democratic reform in Kosovo, including reform of local government, cannot wait, and we will support the PISG and UNMIK as they move forward in addressing key areas. We welcome the recent progress in decentralization and urge the PISG to finalize preparations for pilot projects under the guidance of the Working Group on Local Government Reform and look forward to their early establishment.

We support UNMIK and the PISG in elaborating Kosovo's decentralization concept, taking into account issues such as the protection of minority community rights and security, and the need to ensure better living conditions for all inhabitants of Kosovo.

We note that the modalities for the Comprehensive Review of the Standards are still being discussed at the UN and within the Contact Group and believe that this is the proper forum for this discussion, in our view. There is no need at present, from our perspective, for the OSCE to insert itself into this process.

Instead, OMIK should continue to focus on its key function of democratic institution-building, and helping the PISG meet the Standards, while being prepared to perform whatever other role UNMIK and the international community might call on it to play in the future.

Finally, the United States would also like to highlight the obligation of all individuals and institutions in Kosovo, and indeed throughout the region, to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

We thank you, Mr. Chairman.