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US Reaffirms Commitment to Kosovo Special Court

After the American prosecutor at the new Kosovo Specialist Chambers announced his departure at short notice, causing concerns that indictments could be delayed, the US said it remains committed to the Hague-based court.

BIRN Pristina



The Kosovo Specialist Chambers HQ in The Hague. Photo: Europol.

The US embassy in Pristina told BIRN on Friday that it “remains committed to the institution of the Specialist Chambers” after prosecutor David Schwendiman unexpectedly announced last month that [he will step down at the end of March](#).

“We hope that the transition to a new Specialist Prosecutor occurs without significant delay, and are confident that the staff of the Specialist

Prosecutor's Office will continue this important work uninterrupted," the US embassy said in a written response to BIRN.

Schwendiman said he was leaving the job due to the expiry of his fixed-term appointment as a senior foreign service officer with the US State Department.

This caused fears that indictments for crimes committed during and just after the Kosovo war could be delayed. None have been issued so far. *The Guardian* newspaper also speculated that Schwendiman was leaving with no designated successor "largely due to inertia in the US state department", where many diplomatic posts remain unfilled by the Trump administration.

But the US embassy insisted that "appointment to this position is for a fixed period of time and personnel changes like this are routine".

"The United States will work with the EU, as it conducts its normal procedures to identify the next Specialist Prosecutor. We intend to put forward a candidate for consideration," it added.

Schwendiman, who was appointed in 2016 as Specialist Prosecutor, previously led the EU Special Investigative Task Force (SITF), which probed alleged crimes by Kosovo Liberation Army fighters.

The Specialist Chambers will hear cases arising from the 2014 SITF report which said that unnamed Kosovo Liberation Army officials could face indictments for a "campaign of persecution" against Serbs, Roma and Kosovo Albanians. The alleged crimes include killings, abductions, illegal detentions and sexual violence.

The SITF report was commissioned after the Council of Europe published an inquiry by rapporteur Dick Marty in 2011 which alleged that some senior Kosovo officials, including current President Hashim Thaci, were responsible for various human rights abuses. Thaci strongly denied the allegations.

International judges and prosecutors staff the new court, although it operates under Kosovo's laws.

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[Kosovo Special War Court Prosecutor to Step Down](#)
[Kosovo President: Special War Court Can't Be Stopped](#)
[Special Court is Kosovo's International Obligation, Says Prosecutor](#)