



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 13, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Suomalainen back to the Permanent Council. Thank you, Ambassador, for your excellent report on the activities of the OSCE Mission to Skopje.

The formation of a new government in Macedonia reflects adherence to Macedonia's laws and respect for the will of the people, freely expressed through lawful democratic processes, including on the basis of the December 2016 elections, which were accepted by all parties. We recognize that important steps were taken by President Ivanov and the leaders of the majority coalition parties, who worked collaboratively in a constructive way to grant the mandate for a new government and enable the new Speaker of Parliament Talat Xhaferi to assume office. In doing so, the actions of Macedonia's political leaders effectively ended the country's long-running political crisis. We also recognize the positive contributions made by the OSCE Mission to Skopje as part of the international effort to resolve the political crisis, in particular its work to maintain an open and productive dialogue with all political parties, civil society, and institutions.

As Vice President Pence told Prime Minister Zaev in a phone call on July 10, the United States continues to strongly support Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. As a friend and partner of Macedonia, we look forward to working with the new government as it implements urgent reforms that strengthen the rule of law and judicial independence, media freedom, and government accountability. The United States welcomes the priorities of the new government, which include strengthening Macedonia's institutions, particularly the judiciary, and integration into the EU and NATO.

Ambassador Suomalainen, the OSCE Mission to Skopje's support for implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, including strengthening institutions, improving social cohesion, and advancing inter-ethnic relations, remains vital. We are pleased that your Mission is fully engaged in helping the host country to adopt and implement the substantial reforms as outlined in the Agreement, and continue to believe this should be among your highest priorities. As noted in your report, the OSCE Mission's Rule of Law Unit continues to make progress in strengthening the judicial system and rule of law, including through training of judges and prosecutors, development of practical tools and materials for continuing legal education, and conducting activities to help law students understand the new Criminal

Procedure. This is important work and complements your Mission's ongoing trial monitoring, and reporting on the Special Prosecutor's current trial cases.

In its Final Report on the early parliamentary elections on December 11, 2016, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) reiterated its preliminary findings that Election Day was generally well administered and proceeded without major incidents, and that the elections were an essential step in resolving two years of deep political crisis. ODIHR also noted that Macedonia made significant improvements to its electoral legislation, in accordance with the Przino Agreement, and addressed most of the previous ODIHR and Council of Europe Venice Commission recommendations. It is difficult to overstate the importance of these changes. Having said that, we urge the government of Macedonia to take seriously ODIHR's latest recommendations to address long-standing issues, such as voter registration, media, and administrative preparations for elections.

In closing, let me emphasize that the United States will continue working together with the people and government of Macedonia toward a secure and prosperous future as a multi-ethnic democracy fully integrated in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Our engagement, as demonstrated by the over \$750 million in U.S. assistance provided to Macedonia since 1991, reflects the United States' deep commitment to the rule of law and to helping Macedonia develop strong democratic institutions and move forward toward membership in the EU and NATO. Our commitment remains firm.

Ambassador Suomalainen, thanks again to you and your team for your tremendous work and leadership. You and the Mission have our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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