



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 5, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the visit of Foreign Minister Mitreva to the Permanent Council and we very much value the active engagement of her country in OSCE matters, including through the OSCE Mission in Skopje.

We remain grateful to Macedonia for its hosting of the Ohrid Border Security Management Conference in 2003, and pledge United States support for ongoing NATO and OSCE regional follow-up to this very important initiative.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Macedonia on its progress in implementing the Framework Agreement. Implementing decentralization and advancing equitable representation are the next major steps. We are encouraged to see that parliament is currently addressing the draft decentralization legislation, and that the governing partners are moving ahead with their mutually agreed plan to ensure adequate minority representation in the state.

The legalization of Tetovo University represents a major advance in fulfilling the Framework Agreement requirement for enhanced minority access to higher education in the minority language. Ensuring that the university delivers quality education, and that criminals don't take control of it, are remaining challenges.

Congratulations also Madame Minister, on Macedonia's dramatically improved security environment, and on the December 15, 2003 departure of the EU Military Mission "Concordia." We welcome the deployment of "Proxima," the EU police advisory mission, as well as your government's receptivity to continuing police reform in partnership with the EU as well as with the OSCE.

We would look forward to OSCE taking the international community's lead on monitoring the fall 2004 elections, if invited. Key to successful administration of the elections is a State Electoral Commission, which unfortunately has had neither chairman nor offices for several months. We urge that these appointments be made so that proper planning for the elections can begin.

Mr. Chairman, I also would like to address two timely developments with respect to events in and near Macedonia.

USKFOR's recent captures of Xhemail Hyseni, a.k.a. "Jamie Shea," and Avdyl Jakupi, a.k.a. "Chakalla," are excellent news. We look forward to their being brought to justice through fair and transparent proceedings.

The United States welcomes the release of Zoran Vraniskovski (a.k.a. Bishop Jovan) on bail last week. We understand that Vraniskovski's denial of the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as his allegiance to the Serbian Orthodox Church, is deeply troubling to many Macedonians. However, it does not appear that his actions rose to the level of inciting religious or inter-ethnic hatred.

Article Nine of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 19 of the Macedonian Constitution as well as Macedonia's OSCE commitments, and international norms, all guarantee his right to freedom of religion.

The United States is concerned that Vraniskovski's January detention and his ongoing trial may be disproportionate to his alleged offenses and violate his freedom of religion. We believe that governments should avoid involvement in religious disputes.

We understand that there are several charges pending against Vraniskovski and his supporters for illegal weapons possession, theft, and misuse of Church property. We encourage the authorities to apply Macedonian law fairly and appropriately where such charges are concerned.

In conclusion, Madame Minister, it is an honor to have you return to the PC today. Your country has set a high standard for cooperation with this organization, for the talent that you have sent to represent you here in Vienna in the person of Ambassador Tavciovski, and in the close cooperative relationship you maintain with OSCE's representative in Skopje, Ambassador Carlos Pais. We encourage you not to be shy and trust you will not be, about sharing these and other achievements with the OSCE community.

The United States is firmly committed to partnership between our countries, including under the Adriatic Charter. We wish your country well in its aspirations for further integration into Euro-Atlantic community.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.