



United States Mission to the OSCE
Response to the Report by
Ambassador Ralf Breth, Head of the OSCE
Mission to Skopje

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 24, 2014

The United States welcomes Ambassador Breth to the Permanent Council, and we thank him for his comprehensive and valuable report. The United States strongly supports the OSCE Mission to Skopje, and believes it continues to play a critical role in supporting Macedonia's development.

Ambassador Breth, your report emphasizes that relations between the two largest ethnic communities in Macedonia "are becoming increasingly strained." We share your concern that a trend of separation between the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities "has created *de facto* parallel societies along ethnic lines." We have watched with concern the violent protests and developments that have followed the verdict in the 2012 Smiljkovci Lake murder case. In the wake of these violent protests, we were pleased that the Mission raised its voice, together with other embassies and missions to Macedonia, to call for all to remain calm and refrain from violence, and for citizens and leaders "to come together in a spirit of constructive dialogue to address issues that undermine mutual understanding and cooperative interethnic relations."

We also noted that a very similar sentiment was clearly expressed by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Astrid Thors, in her visit to Macedonia on the eve of the verdict in the case. High Commissioner Thors urged "the political leadership to make a joint call for restraint and calm to avoid any disturbances."

The violent protests related to the verdict followed closely on the heels of other violent inter-ethnic protests in the Gjorce Petrov district of Skopje following a murder in May of this year. Ambassador Breth, we welcome your speaking out against the violence then as well. Similarly, we welcome the statement by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović, condemning coercive actions by law enforcement officials towards journalists covering the demonstrations.

These developments remind us all of the important work the Mission does in areas including conflict prevention and resolution, rule of law, the human rights of members of minorities, and tolerance and nondiscrimination. We also take this opportunity to again highlight the important work of the Mission's field office in Tetovo, and its monitoring role there. As

today's report indicates, ethnic tensions and a general separation of communities continue to be primary concerns for the Mission.

The development that prompted the most recent incidents of inter-ethnic tensions in Macedonia – the verdict in Smiljkovci Lake murders case – also causes us to return to a point we raised following your last presentation to the Permanent Council: the Mission's work on rule of law issues remains crucial. Developing and maintaining law enforcement and judicial systems that are fair and transparent is vital to building trust in government institutions among all of Macedonia's citizens. We continue to encourage both the Mission and Macedonia to give high priority to the rule of law, and to coordinate with other international actors to this end.

As we look beyond the immediate tensions to the longer-term tools to address the divide between the two main communities, we draw attention to another key focus of the High Commissioner on National Minorities' visit to Macedonia—the implementation of an integrated education strategy. We, like High Commissioner Thors, welcome the Government of Macedonia's plans to prioritize education, and we emphasize that the growing separation between the two main communities must be comprehensively addressed in the educational system. We appreciate the Mission's continued focus and efforts in this area. At the same time, we also echo your report's concern that the Government's required assessment on the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement continues to languish.

In these challenging times, we are heartened by reports of the Mission's concerted efforts and the positive impact of its operations. We again commend Ambassador Breth and his staff at the Mission for the tremendous work they are doing to assist Macedonia in achieving its full potential. That potential cannot be realized without strong leadership from all of Macedonia's leaders, regardless of their political, ethnic or religious affiliations. We continue to encourage them to step up to the challenges facing their country, to bring their communities together in common pursuit of their shared goal of full European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and to ensure reform and progress that will benefit all the people of Macedonia for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.