



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 27, 2013

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 believe it continues to play a critical role in supporting Macedonia's development. Ambassador Breth's report is a constructive and honest assessment of where Macedonia stands on its path towards greater European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Regrettably, as Ambassador Breth points out in this report, many of the challenges highlighted in his previous report to the Permanent Council remain just as pressing today. We again express our concern about continuing tensions between ethnic communities, the politicization of the media and of society, and a lack of political will to respect the rule of law.

In such an environment, the Mission's work on rule of law issues remains critical. Developing and maintaining law enforcement and judicial systems that are fair and transparent is vital to building trust in government institutions and among all of Macedonia's citizens. We continue to encourage both the Mission and Macedonia itself to make this effort the highest priority, and to coordinate with other international actors to this end.

We also 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 erode progress toward the European and Euro-Atlantic integration that Macedonia's citizens seek. The valuable reporting and work done by the office in Tetovo is essential to the Mission's work.

We note Macedonia held local and municipal elections in March and April, and point out ODIHR's assessment that those elections were carried out in an efficient and orderly manner. We recognize, however, the concerns raised in ODIHR's report about the blurring of state and party activities during the campaign period, partisan media coverage in favor of the ruling party, and persistent rumors of voter intimidation, most often of public sector employees.

We congratulate Macedonia for decriminalizing defamation and insult during this reporting period, an important step towards establishing a free and independent press. The general lack, however, of a critical media environment that would foster greater accountability and

transparency of government is of deep concern to us. We share the worry expressed by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, over the 30-day pre-trial detention of a journalist for an article written five years previously.

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 Macedonia's political leaders on all sides. We encourage those political leaders to step up to the challenges before them, to bring their communities together in pursuit of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and to ensure reform and progress that will benefit the people of Macedonia for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.