



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Spillover Mission to Skopje, Carlos Pais

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
16 September 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States very warmly welcomes Ambassador Carlos Pais to the Permanent Council. We highly value his efforts leading the OSCE Mission in Skopje. We also greatly appreciate the work of the Mission's staff and their tireless efforts to build confidence among Macedonia's communities.

Macedonia is at a critical juncture. We share Ambassador Pais' concern about the consequences of a "Yes" vote in the anti-decentralization referendum scheduled for November 7. We believe it would have a negative impact on the country and would run contrary to the interests of all the citizens of Macedonia.

A "Yes" vote would be a vote against greater local control of services of government, against stronger, more transparent and more responsive democratic institutions. Decentralization is a step all countries that aspire to integration with Euro-Atlantic structures have taken to deepen their democracies.

A "Yes" vote would run counter to the word and spirit of the Framework Agreement, which calls for fair opportunities for minority communities as the basis for an integrated, multi-ethnic, democratic Macedonia. It would undermine the Parties who signed and committed themselves to full implementation of the Framework Agreement as part of Macedonia's progress toward integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Already, the Government of Macedonia has made significant strides toward finalizing implementation of the Framework Agreement. We fully expect the Government of Macedonia to proceed with implementation of the remaining provisions. This requires the redrawing of municipal boundaries to make them ethnically diverse, fiscally stronger, and politically sounder. We believe decentralization, as envisioned in the Framework

Agreement and embodied in the decentralization laws passed in August, will benefit all of Macedonia's communities, while ensuring that the rights of all its ethnic groups are fully respected. The Framework Agreement explicitly states that municipal boundaries will be revised within one year of the completion of a new census. We share Ambassador Pais' concern about any delays in this process.

We support the Government of Macedonia's efforts to educate the public on the reasons for and the benefits of decentralization as a key element of the Framework Agreement. We and our international community partners will continue to support the Government of Macedonia

in the full implementation of the Framework Agreement as we committed to under the Agreement.

We fully concur with Ambassador Pais' view that Macedonia will continue down the right path and surmount any difficulties in its way. We will continue to closely monitor the situation during this period. In our efforts to work constructively with the Government of Macedonia and the OSCE, the United States urges that ODIHR send a robust monitoring mission to observe the referendum.

We believe, Mr. Chairman, that through the efforts of Ambassador Pais and his Mission, the OSCE can facilitate the Government of Macedonia's efforts to complete decentralization. We also highly value the Mission's confidence-building and capacity-building activities, and greatly appreciate the Mission's hard work to neutralize any attempts to create a negative atmosphere in connection with the impending referendum. We support his view that for the time being the field stations in Tetovo and Kumanovo play an important role in assisting the Mission.

In closing, let me again thank Ambassador Pais, and through him, the staff of the Mission for their dedication and their professional and personal commitment to the many programs that improve the lives of people in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.