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INTERVIEW WITH SVETLANA GELEVA

“Exemplary” Skopje-OSCE partnership reaches 15-year milestone

Perhaps no other official in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is more familiar with the work of the OSCE than Svetlana Geleva. As Director for Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she is the prime official contact for the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, the Organization’s oldest field presence. On the occasion of the Mission’s fifteenth year of operations, Ms. Geleva traces its achievements, alongside those of the country’s leaders and citizens, especially after the crisis of 2001. In an interview with Sarah Broughton for the *OSCE Magazine*, she says that “the most evident demonstration of the Mission’s success will be when its assistance is no longer needed”.

Sarah Broughton: What are your earliest memories of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission?

Svetlana Geleva: They go back to the second half of 1992, when I started working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At that time, the OSCE Mission was being established as the first international presence in Macedonia. There was a lot of excitement about it, as we had been campaigning for international recognition and membership in the OSCE and other organizations.

At the end of June 1996, I was transferred to the Ministry’s OSCE Department as a desk officer and my contacts with the Mission intensified. In addition to its monitoring mandate — which was difficult to carry out properly because of the Mission’s small size at that time — it focused on political reporting and made its good offices available in a number of delicate situa-

tions involving minority issues. Ever since then, I have been involved in OSCE matters generally, and in co-operation with the Mission specifically.

How would you characterize relations between the Foreign Ministry and the OSCE Mission over the past 15 years?

Since the start of the Mission, the Foreign Ministry has acted as its focal point and channel for liaison with other ministries and institutions. At times, for various reasons, we had difficulties managing the process of co-ordination. Sometimes it was because of a lack of experience or will on the part of some Mission members, and sometimes it was a lack of understanding of the Mission’s role on the part of some Macedonian institutions.

However, we have always managed to resolve our differences by working to improve co-ordination and by trying to understand one another better. Our co-operation during the crisis in 2001 was exemplary. The Mission’s successive enlargements in 2001 were all undertaken in close co-ordination with the Ministry, acting on behalf of the Government.

The Mission and the Foreign Ministry would meet to assess the situation on the ground on the basis of information provided by representatives of relevant ministries.

Lake Ohrid, 13 August 2001. Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski (who died in a plane crash in February 2004) delivers remarks on the occasion of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian signatories to the agreement, as well as senior OSCE, EU and NATO representatives, took part in the ceremony.

We would also discuss what personnel were needed to carry out the Mission's mandate and its additional assigned tasks. Naturally, we had some differences of opinion, but we all worked hard under the pressure and fear of possible negative developments in the country and managed to find common ground on which to tackle the challenges ahead.

I believe this is the way missions should work. If they are to capitalize on the strengths of the Organization, they should act in good faith in the best interests both of the host country and of OSCE field operations.

On a more personal note, through this close communication and co-operation, I made lifelong friendships with a lot of people who fell in love with Macedonia and its people, and who were genuinely committed to making a contribution.

What have been the Mission's most important achievements so far?

There are many, but I believe they cannot be seen separately from the achievements of our own citizens and leaders. After all, the main task of the OSCE's international presence is to assist a participating State's national authorities in confronting a broad range of serious challenges.

You will recall that the Mission was not directly involved in the negotiations of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001. However, the OSCE was represented by Max van der Stoep, special envoy of the Chairman-in-Office, and the Mission was given important assignments under the Agreement's Annex C, relating to confidence-building measures, police development and other matters.

I remember well a meeting at the Foreign Ministry to discuss the return of regular police patrols to the regions where fighting had taken place during the conflict. Along with OSCE Head of Mission Craig Jenness and his police experts, Interior Ministry officials were trying to determine the personnel required to accompany police patrols through the villages, and their redeployment timetable.

Ambassador Jenness said that the police would return to Shipkovicha — the former site of the headquarters of the [ethnic Albanian] National Liberation Army — and would be able to cover the entire territory in two months. Although I had always been an optimist even at the peak of the crisis, I challenged this estimate and we made a bet. The estimate turned out to be correct — a formidable achievement on the part of the Mission, our police and our citizens. I was happy I lost the bet.



Svetlana Geleva

Originally from Podgorica, Montenegro, Svetlana Geleva moved to Skopje after finishing a philology degree at the University of Belgrade. She is a member of several national commissions dealing with human rights and security issues and publishes occasional analytical pieces on international relations issues affecting her adopted home.

How do you see the difference between the role of the OSCE Mission and that of other international organizations?

One of the main strengths of the OSCE is its flexibility. This is reflected in its prompt decision-making, especially in times of crisis — as seen, for example, in the quick reaction of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to the events of 2001. The Organization's comparative advantage lies in its ability to focus on new priorities quickly. Its added value is that it operates effectively but with a low profile in various fields of expertise.

At the same time, I fully agree with the view that OSCE field operations are particularly well suited to crisis management and conflict prevention, and to a lesser degree to long-term institution-building, especially in south-eastern Europe, where the EU and NATO accession processes are the strongest tools driving reforms.

What do you expect from the Mission in the future?

I believe that the Mission should continue scaling down as discussed with the Government. The down-sizing projections are based on a full assessment of ongoing projects and of the assistance needed by Macedonian authorities.

I don't think, for example, that there is any need for two field stations. Kumanovo should complete its operations at the end of the year, and Tetovo some time in 2008. The Mission's support for the decentralization of authority from national to local government is also expected to end once the second phase of the process is over.

The focus should remain on the rule of law, especially judicial reforms. At an appropriate time, we should also start discussing an exit strategy, because in the long run the most evident demonstration of the Mission's success will be the fact that its assistance is no longer needed.

What is your vision for the OSCE in general and what role do you see your country playing?

Macedonia greatly values the OSCE's unique role as a forum for political dialogue. Its geographical coverage, diverse membership, wide-ranging approach, flexibility and ability to change and respond to new challenges are all elements that make the OSCE a unique and constantly relevant organization.

We have benefited from our participation in the OSCE on various levels. In addition to the Mission's activities, the deep involvement of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities led to several initiatives. One of these was the creation of South East Europe University with the aim of expanding higher education opportunities in minority languages. We have used the expertise of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in drafting the electoral law and various other pieces of legislation. The recommendations of ODIHR observation missions have helped improve our electoral process.

Now the time has come for our country to make a larger contribution. For one thing, Ambassador Arsim Zekolli, who heads our delegation to the OSCE, chairs the Permanent Council's Economic and Environmental Committee. The issues it is addressing are, we believe, crucial to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

We are also working with the Mission to enable successful models and best practices from Macedonia to be transferred to other participating States. Just to give you one example, I remember that when the idea of developing a community policing model was first presented to high-level representatives of the Interior and Foreign Ministries, they were slightly sceptical but did agree to

its implementation. As a result, the Mission and the two ministries started developing the concept in late 2002.

After just a few years, various groups started coming to Macedonia to see how the concept was working in practice so that they could apply it in other situations. Most recently, Norwegian police visited, and one of our experts from the Interior Ministry went to Georgia to conduct training in community policing.

The Mission's original mandate was to monitor a possible spillover of tensions from your neighbouring countries into your border areas. Now, once again, the eyes of the international community are on any potential conflict related to Kosovo's final status. What are your thoughts on this?

It's true that the Kosovo issue continues to be the focus of attention in the region and beyond. No matter how difficult the recent past has been, our region and its individual countries have advanced substantially in all spheres, so we are, of course, keen that the final settlement should contribute to regional stability and should not undermine our own achievements.

Our country supported United Nations envoy Martti Ahtisaari's proposal as a good basis for a final settlement. Among other things, it deals appropriately with border demarcation, which is of great significance to Macedonia. We hope that the parties will approach renewed talks in good faith and in line with the basic principles of the Contact Group. This will take courage and wisdom, but these qualities are what make the difference.

I believe that the region's European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives are a strong motivation for further progress and lasting stability, and that we should all devote 100 per cent of our energy to these inter-related processes. There simply is no alternative.

Sarah Broughton is Head of Media Development as well as being Spokesperson of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission in Skopje.



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Ambassador Giorgio Radicati, Head of Mission (centre), and some of his staff pose for an anniversary picture on the rooftop of the mission's headquarters.

"You are the driving force and public face of the Organization. It's an honour to work with you," said OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, paying tribute to the mission's 188 national and 68 international staff members.

Skopje and the OSCE: The lessons of partnership

We witnessed an exemplary co-operation between the OSCE, the EU, NATO and the Council of Europe during the security crisis of 2001. Their concerted efforts helped us to surmount the difficulties we were confronted with and to accomplish a remarkable amount of progress within a short period of time. This, of course, would not have been possible if the political will and determination to embark on a phase of intensive democratic development in Macedonian society had been lacking.

The results, taking the form of broad administrative, legislative and judicial reforms, were achieved thanks to the effective co-operation between these international

entities and the Macedonian authorities.

This has proved to be a workable recipe for a successful democratic transition. The present engagement of these organizations in the fulfillment of our priority foreign policy goal, namely, full integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, is a testimony to their ability to adapt to the country's needs. Strengthening of complementarity, avoidance of duplication, strategic planning and good co-ordination among them are not just slogans pronounced at international conferences — they are actually being realized in practice. The Macedonian example shows that this is happening on the ground. **Antonio Milošoski, Macedonian Minister for Foreign Affairs**



OSCE/MARIA DOTSENKO

In the early 1990s, we, the leaders, were quite frustrated in dealing with our country's internal problems. We were concerned that if our oil supply were cut off, our economy would collapse within a matter of days. We had an influx of 65,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Domestic unrest was escalating.

While seeking to meet the essential needs of the population and maintain stability, we kept an uneasy eye on Kosovo, as we were convinced that an outbreak of conflict there would quickly spill over into our Republic and lead inexorably to another Balkan war. To help us to preserve our "oasis of peace", we requested assistance from the United Nations, the European Commission and the OSCE. **Kiro Gligorov, first president of the State, serving two terms (January 1991 to November 1999)**



OSCE/SAMIR LJUJKA

Anniversaries afford opportunities to cast our thoughts forward and look to the future. No doubt, many challenges still lie ahead.

Having worked closely with the authorities for 15 years, the OSCE is deeply committed to continuing its support to the country for implementing key laws and for building the productive political climate that is so essential to enable it to move closer to OSCE standards.

As we consider the future, let us recall the vital lesson learned from 15 years of experience. This is the lesson of partnership — partnership between the OSCE and the host Government, between the OSCE and the wider society, and between all the major actors involved in the complex process of transformation.

Partnership lies at the heart of everything this country has achieved, and everything that the OSCE has had the honour of supporting. Careful co-ordination and joint efforts are vital to ensuring an effective use of resources and the achievement of maximum results.

The OSCE has been woven into this country's history for the last 15 years, as has the country's history into that of the Organization. This is not just because of the presence of the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje. It is also because the country itself grew from having observer status to become a full and very active participating State of the Organization.



OSCE/MARIA DOTSENKO

Skopje, 1 October, at a special event to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (centre) with OSCE Ambassador Giorgio Radicati, Head of the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, and the OSCE Secretary General.

Your commitment to the OSCE ideals and to the comprehensive approach to security is evident in your continued constructive role and positive engagement with your political counterparts in the region. **OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, in Skopje**