



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission in Skopje Ambassador Clemens Koja

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 7, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Koja back to the Permanent Council. Thank you, Ambassador, for your thorough report. We value your Mission's continuing work to assist North Macedonia in achieving key reforms based on its needs, including in the terms of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, and note the challenges your team has faced especially this year due to the pandemic.

We congratulate North Macedonia on conducting the October local elections for the councils and mayors of 80 municipalities, including the City of Skopje, and applaud ODIHR's conclusions that the elections "were competitive and fundamental freedoms were widely respected." We also commend the government for its improved ratings in international assessments on levels of corruption and democratic governance.

We recognize that comprehensive electoral reform remains a priority for North Macedonia and stand ready to help the government and mission in achieving that goal. There are several ODIHR recommendations that would address remaining gaps and inconsistencies in the electoral legal framework, address the systemic advantages enjoyed by the leading political parties, and relieve the strain imposed by limited personnel and operational capacity on election administration. While this work is underway, such as with Parliament's recent endorsement of amendments to the Electoral Code, it is essential that the process takes place in an open and transparent manner with meaningful public engagement.

We are therefore interested in hearing further from you today on the prospects for electoral reforms this year given the pace of legislative activity and the political context, as well as which specific ODIHR recommendations you assess are the most significant.

Ambassador Koja,

We applaud the Mission's cooperation with the government to create a 2022-2024 programmatic strategy and agree that one of the Mission's comparative advantages is its unrivaled ability to monitor developments countrywide—thereby facilitating early action and timely interventions. As in other parts of the region, this capacity remains essential to the value added of the OSCE in promoting social cohesion, democratic governance, and regional stability.

Your team's work on the full range of issues presented in your report continues to assist North Macedonia in making meaningful progress in key areas, from promoting an inclusive

multi-ethnic society and democratic governance to countering transnational threats and illicit trafficking in small arms. The Mission's assistance is particularly notable in supporting key institutional reforms in the judiciary and law enforcement and for gender equity. Yet other vital activities such as trial monitoring and the promotion of the safety of journalists further illustrate the breadth of the Mission's impact.

Ambassador Koja, we thank you again for your leadership and your Mission's continued outstanding work. You continue to have our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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