



United States Mission to the OSCE

Developments in Macedonia

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 22, 2015

The United States is following carefully ongoing efforts in Macedonia to implement the political agreement between the major parties, known as the Przino Agreement. Adherence to the agreement represents Macedonia's best path forward out of its current political crisis. Disclosures made in recordings obtained from illegal wiretaps raised concerns about possible electoral fraud, media manipulation, and corruption, suggesting a failure to uphold Macedonia's OSCE commitments.

Unfortunately, the parties missed a key deadline on October 20 to decide upon issues related to government formation, whistleblower protection, and privacy protections. The parties did take an important step, however, in establishing a Special Prosecutor for crimes arising from the illegally intercepted communications. The Special Prosecutor must be given the resources and staff needed to fulfil this role. Political parties should not seek to influence or constrain the Special Prosecutor's pursuit of her mandate. By fully implementing the Special Prosecutor law, Macedonia's leaders will demonstrate to their citizens that they understand the need for a full investigation into the allegations of widespread wrongdoing that were raised after the wiretaps were publicly released.

Parallel to the criminal investigation, a parliamentary committee should conduct a full and transparent inquiry to determine the circumstances surrounding this alleged misconduct and provide concrete reform recommendations to prevent a similar situation from arising. While protections for privacy are important, we urge Macedonia's political leadership to refrain from introducing restrictions on freedom of expression that are inconsistent with its OSCE commitments.

The parties to the Przino Agreement have made some progress in agreeing to a set of electoral reforms, but implementation of these reforms requires immediately building up the capacity of the State Election Commission to take on its enhanced role. There is no time for delay, especially in the hiring of much-needed staff. The parties also need to address previous recommendations made by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to establish a level playing field for elections. Failure to do so will lead to serious questions as to whether conditions will be conducive to elections in April 2016. We are encouraged that ODIHR will send a pre-election assessment team to Macedonia in November. We urge Macedonia's leaders to take action now to put the country on a path to credible elections in 2016 and to take full advantage of the array of OSCE tools available in that effort.

With multiple external challenges – such as refugee flows and migration, violent extremism, and the unresolved name issue – now is not the time for increased disagreement within Macedonia. Rather, now is the time for the country’s leaders to work together to move their country forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.