



United States Mission to the OSCE

On Developments in Macedonia

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 14, 2015

We have followed with concern the developments in Macedonia in recent months, including both the political crisis that has emerged from the disclosure of wiretap recordings of alleged government wrongdoing and separately the incidents of violence between police and armed suspects in Goshince and Kumanovo.

As was detailed in a spot report from the OSCE Mission in Skopje, over the weekend, there was a large-scale police operation against a group of armed fighters in Kumanovo, Macedonia on May 9-10, which followed the attack on the Goshince border police station on April 21. Our thoughts are with the families of the police officers who were killed in the operation and with the people who were caught up in the violence. We urge citizens to remain calm and allow the facts of the incident to be established.

We thank the OSCE Mission in Skopje for its constructive role in facilitating a ceasefire, and for the Mission's close attention to and timely reporting on the situation. We also appreciate the statement of the OSCE's Chairperson-in-Office, Serbian Foreign Minister Dacic, on developments in Kumanovo.

Mr. Chair, let me underscore what was said on Monday in Skopje in a joint statement on behalf of the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the EU—that we join with citizens and political leaders throughout Macedonia in denouncing violence. We welcome President Ivanov's initiative to meet with all political parties. We appeal to citizens to continue exercising restraint in response to the weekend's tragedy, as well as in any group assembly in the coming weeks.

Turning to the separate matter of the wiretap disclosures, in our May 11 joint statement in Skopje mentioned already, the United States and its partners expressed concern that Prime Minister Gruevski and his government had not made progress toward accounting for the many allegations of wrongdoing contained in the released recordings. We take note of the resignations on May 12 of three government of Macedonia officials—the Director of Counterintelligence, and the Ministers of Interior and of Transport and Communications—who featured prominently in those allegations. We also welcome the May 13 statement by parliamentary leaders of their intent to establish an Inquiry Committee to investigate the wrongdoing implied by the wiretap disclosures, and to offer the chairmanship of that committee to an opposition member, as soon as the opposition party returns to parliament.

We see these as constructive steps by the ruling coalition to begin to show accountability and address the substance of these allegations and to investigate further. Should additional

evidence reveal clearly unacceptable behavior, we expect that appropriate political and legal measures will be taken against those responsible.

We also call on the government to undertake specific reforms, including measures to ensure the integrity of the electoral system, media freedom, independence of the judiciary, freedom of expression, and whistle-blower protection in order to address institutional weaknesses highlighted by the disclosures.

The United States urges the political opposition to return to parliament in order to participate in the Inquiry Committee and in helping the parliament to fulfill its oversight and legislative duties more generally.

The United States welcomes the visit to Macedonia by the Chairmanship's Special Representative on the Balkans, Ambassador Stoudmann, and the Head of the CiO Taskforce, Ambassador Šahović. We look forward to Ambassador Stoudmann's report to the Permanent Council.

Finally, the United States continues to support fully the right of citizens to peacefully assemble and protest, and appeals to all sides to refrain from violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.