



EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES

SKOPJE • MACEDONIA



Ambassador Philip Reeker interview with A1
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Macedonia Must Think About Its Future

A1: Ambassador, welcome home. There were some problems with your appointment. Some senators did not agree with your policy. They were saying you have pro-Macedonian stances. What was actually going on?

Ambassador Reeker: One of the important parts of our democracy is the concept of checks and balances and so when the President of the United States appoints an Ambassador to be his personal representative to another sovereign country, that person goes before the United States Senate and testifies publicly and answers questions of the senators, which I did, with another group of colleagues. I was then passed out of the senate Foreign Relations Committee and in that process some senators exercised their right to ask some additional questions and wrote a letter to Secretary Rice asking for more information about United States policies. This is a very typical process. The Department of State answered those questions and in due course my nomination was confirmed with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. So, I am very happy to be here. I am pro-American and that is what I always will be. Nevertheless, I am very happy to be back in Macedonia and very proud to be the fifth U.S. Ambassador to your country.

A1: How do we solve the name issue; do you have any advice? Your last statement was that leaders from both sides should be flexible and responsible. What does that actually mean? What type of flexibility do you expect?

Ambassador Reeker: Let me say first of all that I think it is a very positive sign that the PM and the leaders of the four major political parties, both in power and in opposition here in Macedonia, have agreed to sit down with the President of the country and with Mr. Dimitrov, the negotiator, to discuss and have a dialogue on Monday. Again, I think this is a very positive sign because Macedonia needs to have a unified position with which to approach the talks in New York next week. And it is important that the leaders advance a unified position and be committed to a sustained process and serious negotiation to find a resolution to this question.

A1: Do you suggest that there should be a change of the name?

Ambassador Reeker: I think what you have to do is think about the future of the country. You all worked so hard to reach this point. You are on the verge of being at a place where Macedonia has never been before, with a level of acceptance and security in the 21st century that you have never had before. I think leadership is required; leadership brings with it the responsibility of making difficult decisions, but at the end of the day, there will be a next day and achieving Euro-Atlantic integration is something that all citizens of Macedonia can be proud of.

A1: What do you think about the Greek policy? In Macedonia it is considered nationalistic.

Ambassador Reeker: Greece has positions that have been described by their leaders, have been described in their media and this is a difficult position for both countries. What's important is that the leaders of both countries exercise their responsibilities, come to the process with Ambassador Nimetz with a degree of flexibility and commitment and have a real negotiation to find a solution. That's what I believe the citizens of Macedonia want. They want to be part of something bigger. They want to be at the place they belong and that's with their leaders at the table, side by side with the leaders of the United States and the other countries of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance.

A1: One of the main points of criticism has been the lack of cohabitation and the need for political culture in Macedonia.

Ambassador Reeker: I think this kind of dialogue, the kind of dialogue that the leaders have agreed to have on Monday is very important, not just for the question of the name and for this important process and negotiation, but for all of the issues that face Macedonia. We deal with these questions in my country as well. I think everybody that watches international news sees the difficult debates that go on within the Government of the United States, within the people of the United States. There are different views, different expectations, but at the end of the day, again, this sort of dialogue and the use of the institutions of our democracy, just as you have institutions of democracy in Parliament, the ability to have a dialogue, is always very important.

A1: But DPA, for example, is boycotting and you called on them to stop the boycott?

Ambassador Reeker: Again, I think using the institutions is the way to go in a democracy and that is why I and my predecessors and the U.S. policy in general is not to boycott institutions of

democracy but to use them. There is a responsibility that comes with being elected officials to represent the interests of the people and to fulfill those responsibilities; it is important to participate, to let your voice be heard and the voice of your constituents be heard as well.

A1: Let's go back to DPA, regarding Kosovo. Their response was: yes we will go back to Parliament, we are currently boycotting because we think the independence should be recognized. You also said it would be wise if the Macedonian leaders do that, but isn't it better if the border demarcation is done first?

Ambassador Reeker: We have recognized Kosovo and we believe that it is in the interest of everyone in the region to do the same thing. We have made those views clear.

A1: Regarding NATO and the future with NATO. Scheffer and President Crvenkovski recently in Brussels expressed concern that even if the name issue is solved, the elections and violence in elections could have an impact later, during the ratification.

Ambassador Reeker: I think we all saw in June with some disappointment the elections that took place. The OSCE has issued a report and I believe that, again, the leaders of Macedonia will look at that report and the recommended reforms that that report lays forth, and work to improve that. We will see again next year of course elections at the local level and for the president and that will be an opportunity again to show that Macedonia has democratic institutions that can deal with the challenges that we all face in the modern world.

A1: Regarding economy. America and in general the international community is concerned about the weak economy and high unemployment.

Ambassador Reeker: The Government of Macedonia has made very clear this is a priority and in the framework of our joint declaration for strategic cooperation we have pledged to continue helping in this field. Investment will be important for the continued economic growth. It is also important to create a climate for domestic investment where Macedonians feel comfortable investing in their own country. When foreign companies see that that is happening they too will be more inclined to look at Macedonia because it has a lot to offer. When I have spoken with representatives from major American companies, they have all made clear that they are interested in seeing what they may be able to do in Macedonia, but they also want to make sure that there is a level playing field and they are very interested in seeing that there is a secure political future and that NATO and EU integration is on track. That is why we are focusing so heavily on that and working to make sure that Macedonia enters those structures that we have all been hoping for over a long period of time.

A1: Obviously a solution to the name would have an impact not only on EU and NATO membership but also in general on the economy.

Ambassador Reeker: Well, I think, again, this is a very important and complex question but there is a solution to this question, and it is up to the leaders of the two countries to find a solution. I believe that can happen and the citizens of Macedonia that I have talked to also express that this is their goal, they want to have better lives, better standards of living for themselves, for their children and their children's children, and that is what NATO and EU

integration will mean. So seriousness of purpose, leadership is required, a certain flexibility to reach that goal.

A1: Regarding the U.S. and the forthcoming elections, there is concern in Macedonia that Obama for example has pro-Greek stances. Can the recognition of the constitutional name be changed if Obama wins?

Ambassador Reeker: I think both Senator Obama and Senator McCain are pro-American no matter where you stand in our upcoming elections and indeed the whole world is watching. Their first focus is going to be on America's interest. And I have said many times since I returned to Macedonia, I believe that Macedonia has had no better friend than the United States. I think that will continue whether we have an Obama administration or a McCain administration. What I do know is that our current President, President George W. Bush, knows a lot about this issue. He has followed this closely. As you know he spoke about this at the Bucharest Summit, he expressed our support; he fully supported Secretary Rice when she signed the agreement with Foreign Minister Miloshoski in Washington in May. So, we have a time now where the President of the United States is personally aware of the issue and following it closely, and he believes, as do I, that there is a solution possible, that we need to find a solution and move on, so that Macedonia can find its place in the North-Atlantic structures, side by side with our own President, whether that is President Obama or President McCain. And I think that will be a great day. I look forward to seeing that, when your leadership sits next to my leadership at the table of the North-Atlantic Council; when your leadership goes to Brussels as not just candidates but almost members of the European Union. And, one day we will all look back on this and realize how important this time was for Macedonia and what important decisions lay ahead, and I think we will all realize that there is a very strong and powerful future for Macedonia and for all of us in an integrated 21st century.

A1: One of your friends was late President Boris Trajkovski. One of the first things you did when you arrived in Macedonia was visit his grave.

Ambassador Reeker: He was a great leader, I think he was a visionary, he was a fair man, and I personally miss him very much. I think he did his best, he showed leadership and he showed vision for Macedonia and he would be so proud to see Macedonia enter NATO and the EU because I know that was his goal as well.

A1: You were also here perhaps in the most difficult times for Macedonia, during the crisis and the attacks on the U.S. Embassy. We were together then.

Ambassador Reeker: Da. That was the last century and now we are in a new century and so I am very much focused on the challenges we face in this century and working with our Macedonian partners to deal with those challenges and to help Macedonia be in a better place so that all of its citizens can lead better, more secure and more prosperous lives.

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