

**Ambassador Gillian A. Milovanovic Interview with  
"Macedonia in Europe" Magazine and Makfax News Agency**  
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*Your Excellency, as a diplomat of a world superpower, a country with an ambition of promoting democratic and market values in the world, how do you assess relations with Macedonia? What is your assessment of the situation in Macedonia, following a seven-month stay in the country? Is it pink, as the Government claims; or black, as the opposition claims?*

Relations between the United States and the Republic of Macedonia are excellent. Our governments share the same vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, and we are working together to help Macedonia complete that vision through its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Our joint effort aims to strengthen democratic institutions and promote market reforms that will foster economic growth and development.

Prime Minister Buckovski's meeting with President Bush in Washington last October underscored our close and productive ties as we celebrated 10 years of bilateral relations. President Bush was especially appreciative of Macedonia's support for international efforts to win the war on terror, including Macedonia's contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan, where your troops have served and continue to serve with valor and distinction.

My overall assessment is that Macedonians should be proud of the fact that their country has overcome great challenges in its recent past to emerge as a politically stable, multi-ethnic democracy. That is a solid achievement, and one you can continue to build on. There certainly is a need to make significant additional progress on rule of law, including the fight against corruption and trafficking in persons, and all aspects of the judicial system.

The government also needs to continue implementation of the Framework Agreement that is deep, broad, and sustained over time, especially with respect to the key elements of decentralization and equitable representation. Further efforts to ensure a more positive investment climate that will stimulate job-creating growth are also needed - and of course progress on corruption and on reform of how the judicial system functions will make an important contribution to the business climate as well.

There is much to be done, but what is equally important is that the general trend is positive, and the commitment to continue moving forward is present. I am confident that Macedonia's leaders and its citizens will rise to the challenges ahead.

*What are the U.S. recommendations for carrying out parliamentary elections, which is the most current political topic?*

The US, like other members of the International Community, continues to highlight to the government, legislature and judiciary, to political party leaders, election administration officials, NGOs, the media, and to Macedonia's citizens that the upcoming elections amount to a pass/fail test for Macedonia's immediate aspirations to become a member of NATO and the European Union.

From my secondary school math classes, I still remember the reference to certain conditions that are "necessary but not sufficient" for solving a math problem. Well, to put it simply, free and fair elections that meet international standards are a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for the fulfillment of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic goals.

We stress that there is no magic formula or perfect electoral code for guaranteeing flawless elections. Likewise, good elections are everyone's responsibility. Voters have the responsibility to make sure they are properly registered to vote, to exercise their right to vote on voting day, and to let government and party officials as well as candidates know they expect their votes to be properly and fairly counted.

Elections that meet international standards will happen only if citizens and all political leaders are willing to do their civic duty and to demand and uphold the highest standards of electoral conduct, both during the campaign and on Election Day. I believe that the upcoming elections can and, with everyone's dedication and determination, will demonstrate the strength and maturity of Macedonia's democratic institutions.

*What would be a mistake in the elections, relating to Macedonia's ambitions for NATO membership?*

The elections must be judged by domestic and international observers as free and fair -- and of course Macedonia must meet all other NATO requirements-- if Macedonia hopes to receive an invitation for NATO membership for the next round of enlargement. I would add that an electoral campaign in which candidates focus on the issues and on presenting their party programs would be seen as an indication of democratic maturity. Negative campaigns are costly to the society because they discourage the electorate instead of encouraging and empowering voters.

*Elections are only part of the prerequisites. Has Macedonia matured enough for membership in NATO? What are the other conditions?*

Aspirant countries must meet a comprehensive set of criteria in the context of their NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) to be invited to join the Alliance. Those criteria include defense, political and economic elements, as well as some legal requirements.

In Macedonia's case, the most pressing priority is to consolidate the country's progress in establishing a mature, multi-ethnic democracy. For this reason, we continually have emphasized the importance of free and fair elections, judicial and police reforms, and fighting corruption and organized crime. We also continue to underscore the importance of creating conditions for increased domestic and foreign investment that will create sustained, job-creating economic growth.

We are pleased with the excellent progress Macedonia has made in pursuing defense reforms, and in working individually and with its Adriatic Charter partners to support NATO operations in Afghanistan.

*Are Macedonia's hopes to acquire NATO membership in 2008 realistic? Some international elements assured us that our membership in 2006 was a reality, but eventually it turned out there would be no summit on enlargement this year.*

The United States' policy is to work toward the goal of a NATO summit in 2008 at which NATO would review the progress of aspirant countries. The outcome of that review is not guaranteed. As you know, NATO is an alliance with many members, each of which must agree to enlargement and must agree about which countries should be extended an invitation to join the Alliance.

Whether Macedonia will be invited to join the Alliance in 2008 will depend on the progress the country makes on crucial reforms. We are committed to working with the government to help Macedonia meet NATO's criteria for membership and demonstrate to NATO allies that the country is ready to join the Alliance.

*Ambassador Milovanovic, recently there was information that on behalf of NATO, Great Britain requested an additional 180 soldiers from Macedonia for the NATO mission in southern Afghanistan. Macedonia currently has 40 soldiers in Iraq, and as many in Afghanistan. With that, as well as with the participation of about 150 soldiers in SEEBRIG, Macedonia is contributing about 10% of its active military force to NATO missions and allied operations. Despite this, there is still no clear perspective regarding Macedonia's membership in NATO. Is there a lack of logic in this issue, or does it just seem that way?*

The United States is deeply appreciative of Macedonia's contributions to the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan, to the Multinational Forces in Iraq, and to the South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG). Those contributions demonstrate Macedonia's commitment to strengthening cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Macedonia's engagement also improves the Macedonian army's interoperability with other NATO allies, and reaffirms Macedonia's role as reliable ally of the United States and its coalition partners.

Military deployments, however, are only one criterion, albeit an important one, that NATO members use to assess aspirant countries. For that reason, we will continue to work with the Macedonian government as it pursues the reforms necessary to strengthen the country's candidacy in all areas covered by the Membership Action Plan, including judicial reforms, combating corruption and trafficking in persons, and measures to promote economic growth and development.

*What is your comment on the Macedonian public's concerns that the possible independence of Kosovo might raise serious questions about the stability of Macedonia? We would like to hear the U.S. position on the demarcation of the northern border with Kosovo.*

The U.S. and its Contact Group partners support the ongoing final status negotiations and are pursuing a solution that enhances stability in the entire region by ensuring that Kosovo, whatever its future status, is governed by multiethnic democratic institutions and the rule of law, with full respect for the rights of all of Kosovo's minorities.

We share with the Government of Macedonia an interest in ensuring that, whatever its final status, Kosovo contributes to peace and prosperity in the region as it moves toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

Macedonia is doing its part to contribute to a constructive outcome in Kosovo by sharing its experiences in creating successful multiethnic democratic institutions through implementation of the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement.

We believe that, whatever Kosovo's final status, an internationally recognized and demarcated border will be required. We support resolution of this issue as part of a final status agreement, with the concurrence of the Contact Group and the UN's Ahtisaari.

*What are the aims of U.S. policy in the Balkans? In the domestic, as well as the world media, there are speculations and claims that the Americans are lobbyists for the Albanians -- above all in Kosovo, but also in Macedonia. These accusations seem to have calmed down with the Republicans coming to power. Is there a connection of one with the other? Finally, is it sometimes difficult to calm down situations in the Balkans due to certain -- although invisible to us - differences in policy towards the region by the major powers?*

U.S. policy in the Balkans aims at completing our vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace. We seek to achieve that goal through strengthening democracy, rule of law, and economic development in the region, and by integrating the countries in region into Euro-Atlantic structures.

We believe that U.S. interests in Kosovo are shared interests: peace, stability, an end to inter-ethnic conflict, protection of human rights, and economic development. Achieving those goals will benefit all ethnic communities in the region.

*The U.S. pleasantly surprised Macedonia by considering its arguments and recognizing its name. Why, despite this fact, does Washington still consider it necessary [for Macedonia] to continue the negotiation process with Greece under UN auspices?*

The U.S. decision to recognize the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name was not meant to prejudice the outcome of the UN talks and was done to bolster stability in Macedonia at a critical time. In the 1995 Interim Accord, both sides agreed to pursue a negotiated solution to the dispute, working under the auspices of the UN Secretary General.

The U.S. continues to remain neutral on the substance of any proposals that emerge from the UN process, while supporting the negotiations to reach a final, mutually acceptable resolution to the dispute between Macedonia and Greece.

*The U.S. Embassy is working on promoting business relations between the U.S. and Macedonia. What are the most important directions and projects? Are there conditions in order for us to see an investment by a large U.S. company in Macedonia soon?*

People in Macedonia view increased employment and economic growth as top concerns. We have placed a high priority on programs and activities to improve economic conditions and the business environment in Macedonia.

Through USAID and other U.S. Government agencies, we have worked with the Government of Macedonia and the private sector for several years to improve the business climate for both Macedonian and foreign investors. We have partnered directly with the private sector to improve the competitiveness of businesses in Macedonia, and we have supported funds that provide financing to small and medium-sized enterprises.

With our support and the support of others in the international community, the Macedonian government has put into place many laws and institutions that are essential to the creation of a better business environment.

We are also strongly supporting ongoing judicial reforms. An impartial, effective judicial system is essential, in fact a *sine qua non*, for establishing and maintaining a healthy business environment, and for attracting foreign and domestic investment.

There are large U.S. companies, such as Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard, already directly present in Macedonia. We hope to see continued improvement in the business climate, additional U.S.

companies entering Macedonia to do business, and an expanded presence by those firms that are already doing business here.

*One of the main comments regarding the work of all Macedonian governments is the inadequate fight against organized crime and corruption. It is known that the U.S. has police officers in Sofia, and soon will in Tirana, which has brought about close cooperation with the governments of Bulgaria and Albania in combating crime. Why is there no such cooperation in Skopje, and what is the U.S.-Macedonian cooperation in this aspect?*

The U.S. Embassy does indeed have American police officers in Macedonia as part of our International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), including a very experienced advisor assigned to the Department for Organized Crime in the Ministry of Interior. Our U.S. police officers work directly with counterparts in Sofia and Tirana. They report that the cooperation between Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania in the fight against organized crime is improving. Our ICITAP program is a sign of the importance we attach to the fight against organized crime and corruption, and contributions to our overall effort to improve police performance and support the rule of law in Macedonia. Additionally, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) maintains one of its many regional offices in Sofia. Agents from that office work regularly with colleagues in Macedonia on issues of mutual concern.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues with "Macedonia in Europe," as part of my regular and ongoing contacts with the media in Macedonia. Thank you for your interest.