

Speech of Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic  
at the Closing Session of the  
OSCE Forum of the Political Parties  
and Democratic Development  
November 30, 2005

Ambassador Pais, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today.

I understand that in the past day and a half you have had some lively exchanges and intense debate. Critical thinking and constructive criticism are cornerstones of democracy. They help our nations, our political economic and social systems, grow, develop and improve.

Your topic --political parties and democratic development-- is more than timely. It lies at the core of the democratic electoral process. Government, civil society, the average voter, and most especially political parties, share responsibility for the integrity of that process. And as we all know, speedy passage --and implementation-- of laws to reform the electoral system, followed by properly conducted legislative elections in 2006, will be crucial for Macedonia.

Why crucial? Well, as the US Ambassador to Macedonia and a member of the International Community, I can give you one obvious answer: because electoral reform and its implementation, together with legislative elections free of irregularities, are necessary for Macedonia's successful progress toward membership in NATO, the EU and other Euro-Atlantic institutions.

All this is true. But more importantly, this is a crucial issue because Macedonia's citizens deserve a more universally fair and transparent electoral process than the one that took place in the Spring of 2005. They deserve, and they expect, what citizens of democracies everywhere expect: that their votes will be cast freely, that they will be counted fairly, and that if there are irregularities those responsible will swiftly be identified and prosecuted.

We in the International Community are not telling you what is required. We are joining with Macedonia's own citizens, with you as political party members, with you as members of civil society, with you as members of government at various

levels, with you as members of the media, in support of your goal of perfecting Macedonia's democracy.

Of course, it will not be enough to have to have good laws on the books. Free and fair elections will require the political parties here, both in the government and in the opposition, to show leadership and assume responsibility. In a mature democracy, parties are responsible for the integrity of the process. They use their institutional role and the following they have among their voters to strengthen accountability, rather than avoid it. Political parties, and especially their leaders, must require and must demonstrate clear respect for the integrity of the electoral process.

One of the most important questions facing this country is whether next year's parliamentary elections will again be plagued by irregularities that bring discredit to the system, and to the country. I believe two factors will be key.

The first factor is the reform of the electoral system, including the legal framework for elections and the strengthening of institutions responsible for administering and monitoring elections. If passed, and properly implemented, these reforms will redress important weaknesses and bring Macedonia yet another step closer to its Euro-Atlantic integration goals. Yet these reforms alone cannot guarantee free and fair elections. The second, equally important, factor is the role of political parties.

This factor is often overlooked, in part because so much party activity takes place behind the scenes, out of public view. But this does not diminish the need for parties to ensure they play their role as positive forces for responsibility and accountability on election day. There should be, there can be, no tolerance for anything less than the highest democratic standards and performance.

These are exciting times for Macedonia, and for those who are or wish to be active in public life. You are building your country, working together to shape your future. As US Ambassador, it is my privilege, with the members of my Mission, to accompany and support you and all citizens of Macedonia, whatever their role, as together you build the democratic, prosperous future you seek and deserve. Thank you.