

Statement of Philip Reeker
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Macedonia
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am privileged to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee to be our country's next Ambassador to the Republic of Macedonia. I am deeply honored by the confidence expressed by the President and Secretary Rice in selecting me for this important assignment. It has been my privilege to meet Committee members and staff during my years in the Foreign Service, and I pledge continued commitment and candor as you consider confirming me for this new position. Should the Members of this Committee and the full Senate confirm my nomination, I will do my utmost as Ambassador to validate the trust placed in me, to advance our nation's goals in Macedonia and in Southeast Europe, and to represent our country to the best of my abilities. That would include maintaining a close working relationship with this Committee, its staff, and your Congressional colleagues in furthering the security and interests of the American people.

Mr. Chairman, I am delighted to be accompanied today by my wife and best friend, Solveig Johnson Reeker, herself a career member of the Foreign Service. I would also like to recognize my father, Larry Reeker, and two of my four siblings, my brothers Greg and Seth. Seth in fact spent the summer of 1998 with me in Macedonia, when he was eight years old, while I was serving at our Embassy in Skopje as the Public Affairs Officer, under Ambassador Christopher Hill. If confirmed, I will return to a Macedonia very different than the one I left in 1999. I am struck by how far Macedonia as a country has come since I last served in Skopje. Indeed, no period since its independence in 1991 has been an easy one for Macedonia, and the last nine years have been no exception. The country has suffered setbacks and challenges to its stability, but has overcome each to regain its bearings and press forward again in pursuit of a better future. In 1999, Macedonia rose to the challenge of the influx of Kosovar refugees from Milosevic's ethnic cleansing campaign. It was profoundly tested again by an insurgency in 2001. With the help of the international community, Macedonia's leaders lifted their country out of the clutches of interethnic conflict with a model political accord: the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

With the Ohrid Agreement, Macedonia took a bold step, breaking the previous mold for the Balkans by ending conflict through a political agreement that addressed ethnic grievances through principles of equal rights for all citizens irrespective of ethnicity. The Ohrid Agreement, concluded with U.S. and EU help, remains the foundation and roadmap for Macedonian peace and development. Successive multiethnic governments have reaffirmed the Agreement by committing themselves to its implementation, a process the United States monitors

closely. All of the constitutional and legal provisions mandated by the Agreement have been adopted. Their implementation has progressed, including the key pillars of equitable representation of minorities across state structures and of decentralization to make local governance more responsive to the people. In the spirit of Ohrid, inter-party and interethnic dialogue continues to be critical. While not immune from political gamesmanship, this dialogue over the years has resulted in compromises and reforms that have strengthened Macedonia's multiethnic democratic institutions and remain integral to securing for all Macedonia's citizens a future in Europe, whole, free and at peace.

Today, seven years on from Ohrid and after 17 years of independence, Macedonia is a stable, unitary, multi-ethnic democracy – still in transition, but with much stronger democratic and entrepreneurial institutions. Today, a still evolving Macedonia is a model of multiethnic democracy in the Balkans, working to address its internal social and ethnic challenges within a vibrant, inclusive political process and steadily maturing institutions of government and civil society.

Steps like ethnic rebalancing of the police, put in place by Macedonia in the wake of the 2001 insurgency, and the adoption of a police law in line with international standards and other key legal reforms have reinforced the independence of the judiciary and strengthened rule of law. Making strides economically, Macedonia is making up for its relative lack of development in the former Yugoslavia, for the economic downturns that accompanied Yugoslavia's breakup, and for the investment-chilling effects of the 2001 insurgency. Unemployment, a strain on social stability, remains high, but real wages have gradually increased, inflation and deficits are manageable, and GDP has risen. The government has taken bold steps to improve the investment and business climate, leading the World Bank to cite Macedonia as a top ten global reformer in its 2008 report on "Doing Business." Macedonia also stepped up the fight against corruption, reflected by a significant jump in Transparency International's 2007 ratings. And strong governmental efforts have brought Macedonia back into full compliance with the minimum standards to combat trafficking in persons.

Macedonia has more work to do, but its progress is driven by values that we Americans recognize and share. These include recognition that the livelihoods of its communities and the success of the whole country and region depends on cooperation eclipsing confrontation, understanding supplanting mistrust, and healthy political competition and compromise becoming the tools to resolve differences. Macedonia also identifies with the Euro-Atlantic family of nations, with responsibilities -- indeed a calling -- to contribute to peace and stability for peoples beyond its borders.

Mr. Chairman, this affinity of values explains, I believe, the depth of our partnership with Macedonia today. Our relations with Macedonia have never been

closer; pro-U.S. sentiment among Macedonians of all ethnicities is strong. Today, we are partners in the major endeavors and challenges of our time. Just last month, in my previous capacity as Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, I had the opportunity and honor to meet with the Macedonian special forces and infantry platoons deployed with American forces at Taji. They are brave and professional, serving with high morale alongside U.S. troops. Several Macedonian soldiers who served in Iraq were awarded medals of bravery by the United States. In Afghanistan, Macedonian forces are guarding NATO Headquarters and displaying such proficiency that the UK placed a platoon of British troops under Macedonian command.

Macedonia's capable troop commitments reflect the substantial efforts of recent years to meet NATO defense standards. Macedonia also has proven itself as a strong contributor to regional stability. It has troops in the European Union Force in Bosnia and provides needed helicopter lift – in fact it lost 11 soldiers in a crash this year, but that tragedy did not deter its continued participation. For years Macedonia has provided critical logistical support for the NATO mission in Kosovo. And in an issue of utmost importance for Balkan stability – the fate of Kosovo – Macedonia “paid forward” by fully backing U.S. efforts to resolve Kosovo status peacefully via UN Secretary General Special Envoy Ahtisaari's plan for supervised independence. As a close neighbor, Macedonia recognized that ending Kosovo's limbo was important to the stability of the region.

The unwavering support of Macedonia's political leaders and parliament for Macedonia's contributions to regional and global stability, and the overwhelming backing of Macedonia's citizenry for NATO and EU membership – over 90 percent in each case – are reflections of the country's self-identification with Euro-Atlantic values and a mandate for Macedonia's continued reform. Its hard work of building a multiethnic society based on equal rights and opportunities is not complete. As in our country, the process has not been perfect and the way forward has not been easy. At times, Macedonia has asked for the support of the United States, and we have given it, standing by the citizens of Macedonia, helping as we could with counsel and assistance, and working with their political leaders to move beyond a zero-sum mentality. Macedonia's track record in avoiding the terrible pitfalls witnessed in other parts of the region has shown the world that multiethnic democracy in the Balkans can, must and will succeed.

Macedonia's progress has been slow at times, but its way forward has never been in doubt. It is still a poor country, but rich with tradition and culture, with a capable and entrepreneurial citizenry, with multitalented and multilingual youth, and with a growing economy full of potential. It is a small country, but punching above its weight in U.S.-led coalitions. Once a net security consumer, today Macedonia is a net security producer, keen on bringing its unique capabilities into

NATO as a full-fledged member. It is also an official candidate for the EU, working to fulfill benchmarks and receive an invitation for membership talks.

Macedonia's success is critical to the region. Its achievement of NATO and EU membership will be an important affirmation that political and economic reform is worth the hard work and that NATO and EU doors remain open for countries that share Western standards and values. The fact that Allies at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April did not issue a membership invitation for Macedonia was a disappointment for Macedonia and also for the United States. The United States through several Administrations has strongly supported Macedonia's NATO aspirations. We do not consider that the dispute between Athens and Skopje over Macedonia's name should have prevented Macedonia from receiving an invitation. We made a great push in the lead-up to Bucharest to work with governments in Greece and Macedonia and with UN negotiator Amb. Matthew Nimetz to help the parties find a mutually acceptable solution. This did not prove possible. At Bucharest, Allies determined that Macedonia meets NATO's performance-based standards and will receive an invitation as soon as the dispute with Greece over the name is resolved. As President Bush noted, "America's position is clear: Macedonia should take its place in NATO as soon as possible." We will continue to support the UN process to help Macedonia and Greece find a mutually acceptable solution to the name dispute as quickly as possible.

Mr. Chairman, in May Secretary Rice and Macedonian Foreign Minister Milososki signed a joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation as a sign of friendship and shared values between our two countries. This was an important signal to the people of Macedonia after the disappointment of the NATO Summit. As Secretary Rice said upon signing the Declaration, the United States is proud to have been a part of the significant reforms that Macedonia has made. We believe a strong, stable, unitary, multiethnic Macedonia within its existing borders will enhance NATO's strength, security and prosperity and democracy. We have encouraged and will continue encouraging Macedonia to work hard to strengthen what it will bring to the Alliance.

Macedonia's parliamentary elections on June 1 underscored the challenges that remain for Macedonia in consolidating its progress. Frankly, they were a disappointment, with numerous instances of violence, intimidation, fraud and irregularities predominantly in ethnic Albanian areas. We were encouraged by the authorities' steps taken to address the problems, including the decision by the State Electoral Commission to hold broad re-runs in affected areas and actions by law enforcement authorities to arrest and bring to trial the suspected perpetrators of those incidents. The June 15 re-runs showed significant improvements, including effective and professional police conduct which created a much better security environment. Nevertheless, despite these improvements and good administration overall, the problems on June 1 and continuing irregularities in some polling

stations led the OSCE international observation mission to conclude that the elections overall failed to meet some key commitments. The United States will continue to urge follow-through from the government, including holding accountable those responsible for the problems, to ensure in the future a fair electoral process that protects the rights of all citizens and fully repairs Macedonia's credibility. This is a top priority, and the United States looks forward to working with the next Macedonian government and all Macedonians to support them on this path.

Mr. Chairman, if I am confirmed, my foremost priority as Ambassador will be promoting U.S. interests in Macedonia while maintaining a solid partnership with the host country. The security of all U.S. citizens living and working in Macedonia is of course paramount. I would be committed to helping Macedonia achieve the multiethnic democracy and free market economy its citizens desire, advancing its integration into NATO and the EU. As Ambassador, I would continue to help Macedonia's leaders and people build on their successes and achieve these goals. If confirmed to this position, I would encourage the Macedonian government and people to continue contributing wherever possible to peace and stability in the region and globally. And I would if confirmed promote further maturation of Macedonia's own democratic institutions. I would also hope, if given the opportunity by the Senate, to facilitate greater U.S. business engagement in Macedonia, taking advantage of the Macedonian government's steps to improve the business climate, and enlisting U.S. companies to bring their talents to bear in support of Macedonia's transformative efforts. No less importantly, I promise to manage our Mission and its resources responsibly and to provide our embassy's talented workforce and their families the safe and secure working conditions that allow them to contribute to our mission. Consistent with that goal, we would hope to take occupancy of a new embassy compound next year.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, should my appointment be confirmed, I would strive to uphold and build on the distinguished record of the men and women who have held this position before me and who have contributed to the excellent relations between the United States and Macedonia and who thus have made such vital contributions to peace, stability and prosperity in this important region of the world. I know that I cannot succeed in these endeavors without your support. If you confirm me, you can expect my close cooperation with you, your Committee, its staff and the entire Legislative Branch as we work together for the advancement of U.S. interests. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

