

The Ohrid Framework Agreement: Ten Years Later

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In many ways, this conference has addressed issues about the past – in regards to the last ten years of the Ohrid Framework Agreement – but it is also about the future. I am now a private citizen – not a U.S. official. Yet my life is forever linked to Macedonia by the events of the summer of 2001. I am professionally and personally interested in the future of this wonderful place. Therefore, I will speak frankly about the future of Macedonia as I see it.

I do not know the future – no one can – but I do have hope for the future of Macedonia. I have many hopes – but let me mention just three.

My first hope is that Macedonia will move beyond the current obsession with the past.

Macedonia has a glorious past. It is a part of the development of Western Civilization. Be proud of it. But this history is a regional history that many can and rightfully do share with you.

Today, Macedonia should not allow history to limit the future of the country – and its people. Extreme chauvinism is a characteristic of weakness and insecurity, not a strength or source of confidence.

History can never be the legitimate basis for discrimination against individuals.

Further, the current diplomatic stalemate over the name issue is in no one's interest. It is not in the interest of Greece and it is certainly not in the interest of Macedonia. Surely, Macedonia will not allow this problem to limit its future. The government should find a solution without delay.

My second hope is related to the first. I hope for Macedonia to become a member of NATO and the EU.

These institutions provide the protections, benefits and standards Macedonia desperately needs for development. The advantages are obvious.

- NATO gives you the national security which you and your neighbors require.
- EU membership vastly increases the economic and investment potential of the country if Macedonia meets EU standards.
- Finally, EU membership brings a commitment to democratic values, rule of law, human rights and international transparency that will help insure an open, fair and meaningful democracy for all citizens in the future.

Macedonia is one of the first nations established from the breakup of Yugoslavia. Macedonia completed the Ohrid Agreement as a model for ethnic relations in the region.

I do not believe that you want to be the last Balkan nation in the EU and NATO. Join Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Slovenia in these institutions as fast as possible.

My third hope is for each person in Macedonia to be judged on their individual character and merit without regard to ethnic background.

Certainly there are differences and difficulties, but I have great confidence in the character and strength of the people of Macedonia – all of them. I saw it firsthand in the summer of 2001, and I saw it as Macedonia fulfilled the commitment made at Ohrid. Each group has values and skills to make things better for everyone. Recognize them. Use them for the benefit of all.

Go further in implementing the two great principles of Ohrid:

- Respect and recognition of the cultural values of individuals and groups within society.
- Equal rights for every citizen of Macedonia.

I will conclude with two comments on leadership.

Real leaders do not just follow. They lead at critical points in history. Right now is another point in time which requires leadership with vision and courage.

The past has been glorious. Will the future be glorious as well? What is to be the legacy of this generation of Macedonia's leaders to be – full democracy and integration into Western institutions? Or is that legacy to be symbols of the past and an unfortunate resistance to change?

I was asked yesterday by a student in Tetovo – “When can we expect to become members of NATO and the EU?”

The answer to that question rests with the people of Macedonia – when the people of Macedonia demand admission into NATO and the EU, political leaders will take the actions necessary to make that happen.

The sooner that happens, the better.

Thank you.