



**Skopje, 14 July 2004**

**Joint statement by the EU Special Representative Søren Jessen-Petersen, the United States Ambassador Lawrence Butler, Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje Ambassador Carlos Pais and NATO Commander Brigadier Dennis Blease**

“We warmly welcome the agreement reached by the government regarding the laws on Territorial Organisation and the City of Skopje.

The agreement was reached after long and intensive discussions between the coalition partners. The multi-ethnic governing coalition has shown its ability to put the interest of the state and its citizens first in making an agreement that will benefit the whole country.

We strongly believe that the agreement represents a rational balance fully respecting the spirit and the letter of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, will strengthen local democracy at the municipal level and is in the strong interest of all communities.

The agreement reaffirms the government commitment to move closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures through the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the international community stands ready to assist the government with all appropriate means to speed up this process. By agreeing, the partners have also once again confirmed their dedication to the territorial integrity, unitary and multi-ethnic character of the country, which must be preserved and reflected in public life.

Adoption of the decentralisation laws before the end of summer will furthermore allow local elections to take place as scheduled in October. It will allow for the unabated preparation of the implementation of decentralisation. The timescales are already tight and progress should continue to move swiftly. We look forward to constructive engagement by the opposition parties in the forthcoming dialogue. We also expect the parliament to move with the necessary sense of urgency. This is vital, as further delay will only hinder progress towards European integration and the future prosperity of this country.

The decentralisation process is of major importance to the delivery of public services to all citizens, to real and substantial local democracy, as well as to the reform of the public administration towards modern European standards. We commend the government on having taken a bold and courageous step that fully embodies the letter and the spirit of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.”

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