

Press Statement: EUR DAS Kathleen Stephens

July 21, 2004

Today I discussed the United States Government's support for the decentralization package agreed to by the coalition partners July 15. I discussed additional bilateral matters with FM Mitreva.

We believe the decentralization package agreed to by the coalition partners is consistent with the FWA and will create financially viable, self-sustaining local government that improves the welfare of all citizens. Our partners in the international community agree. We applaud the coalition leaders for demonstrating statesmanship, seeking compromise, and for putting the interests of all Macedonians first in reaching the agreement.

The agreement does not in our view create ethnic divisions, but rather integrates ethnic communities and creates an incentive for them to work side by side to ensure local governments serve their citizens. We also believe the agreement is exactly the kind of political outcome that helps foster the stability that can attract foreign investors.

We urge expeditious legislative action to pass the decentralization package. We recognize that opposition parties may not agree on the package. However, parliamentary systems give the opposition ample space to debate such proposals. Provocative, non-democratic actions such as blockading parliament or trying to intimidate government political leaders into withholding their votes can lead to unintended, unthinkable consequences.