



MACEDONIA REPORT

The Politics of Ethnicity and Conflict

A. INTRODUCTION

Images that usually first come to mind in relation to the Balkans are of 'ancient inter-ethnic hatreds', irrational bloodletting among neighbours, and unpredictable eruptions of senseless violence. US and European mainstream press coverage, films such as *Before the Rain* and popular books such as *Balkan Ghosts* all reinforce this perception, rather than the manipulation of ethnic animosities by politicians. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (henceforth Macedonia, or the Republic of Macedonia), however, stands out in the constellation of Yugoslav successor states as one country to have made the transition to independence free of violence. Despite this, the country's Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Roma, Vlach, and Serb communities are struggling to determine how to live with each other; how to create political, social, cultural, and economic structures that can accommodate their similarities and their differences; how to reconcile their past with their visions of the future.

Macedonia's position in the southern Balkans, especially in light of the Bosnian war and its aftermath, has attracted considerable international attention. Governmental, non-governmental, and supra-national organisations of all sorts are engaged in preventive action intended to keep Macedonia from collapsing and to bolster the country's ability to develop an integrated and pluralistic civil society. Although such efforts have contributed to the maintenance of relative stability, Macedonia has not overcome many of its political, social and economic difficulties. Macedonia's fundamental problems and the increasing occurrence of incendiary events, have given rise to growing international concern about the country's future.

This report stems from such international concern. It is intended first as an introduction to the Republic of Macedonia, and second as a baseline for updates. The primary objective of the author is to examine current conditions in the republic and to offer some recommendations that address the country's most pressing problems.

B. BACKGROUND

The Republic of Macedonia was the only Yugoslav successor state to reach independence in 1991 without conflict. This absence of violence promised the country relatively stable basis for independence, especially when compared to Bosnia. During its six years of statehood, however, Macedonia has been confronted with domestic and international conflicts that have brought the country to the brink of several crises which have threatened its survival, culminating in the nearly successful assassination of President Kiro Gligorov in September 1995. Some of these conflicts stem from the republic's Yugoslav political and social legacy, (for example, disputes over minority-language education). Others have arisen from current regional conditions, (for instance, bi-lateral relations with Greece, which has still to recognise the Republic of Macedonia as a legitimate nation and state).

With parliamentary elections due either in the fall of 1997 or spring 1998, Macedonia has been in a state of political paralysis since summer 1997. This political condition has prevented the country's leadership, especially on the ethnic Macedonian side, from taking responsible or judicious steps to deal with the country's problems. Political paralysis has contributed directly to the escalation of Macedonia's inter-ethnic tensions. On the one hand, it has encouraged some Albanian politicians to take ever more extreme positions on issues they know cannot be addressed in the present political climate. On the other, it has prevented Macedonian politicians from offering even modest solutions to reasonable Albanian demands, thereby contributing to the growing marginalisation of moderate Albanians.

Regional Relations

Macedonia's story is a long and tangled one. The land has been claimed by Macedonia's neighbours Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and to a lesser extent Albania as part of their national legacy. The country's political history, however, is simpler: From the mid-14th to the early 20th centuries Macedonia was part of the Ottoman Empire; part of old Serbia (including the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and pre-war Yugoslavia) from the Balkan Wars until World War II; and then part of the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) from 1945 until 1991. Following the secession of Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia, Macedonia also held a referendum in 1991 when the population voted for independence. The reaction of Macedonia's neighbours was mixed, if predictable.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria, which has historically rejected the notion of a Macedonian 'nation' distinct from Bulgarian, was the first country to recognize Macedonia's independence as a state, but with the proviso that the

country is populated by people whose 'nationality' is Bulgarian. Because of its own dire economic and political crises, Bulgaria refrained from its Macedonian polemics during most of 1996-97. As of June 1997, however, Sofia revived its claim to Macedonia's identity by announcing yet again that the Macedonian language is only a dialect of Bulgarian, and that international efforts should be undertaken to solve 'the language issue.' Bulgaria has also claimed that Slavs living in Albania along the Macedonian border are Bulgarians rather than Macedonians and has offered 'brotherly' humanitarian assistance.

Albania

Only Albania recognised Macedonia's independence without qualification in 1991. Disputes between the two countries revolving around the demands for rights made by Macedonia's large Albanian population have caused Macedonian officials to question the sincerity of Albania's commitment to Macedonia's political sovereignty and territorial integrity. The collapse of Albania's political and social infrastructure in the spring of 1997 has altered relations between Skopje and Tirana. On the one hand, the Albanian government is too overwhelmed by its domestic crises to focus more than rhetorical attention to issues raised by Macedonia's Albanians. On the other, the porousness of the Albanian-Macedonian border has led to increasing confrontations between Tirana and Skopje as refugees, undocumented day labourers and especially gun runners cross into Macedonia.

Greece

Greece has categorically rejected the existence of a "Macedonian" Slav ethnos, maintaining that the Slavs who refer to themselves as Macedonians are either Bulgarians or Slavophone Greeks. Athens further claims the exclusive historical right to the name Macedonia, thereby rejecting the validity of the Republic of Macedonia as a state. Throughout the Yugoslav period and into the present, Athens has referred to the Republic of Macedonia as the Republic of Skopje, Serbia, or Yugoslavia. Use of the name Macedonia was one of several volatile bilateral issues that impelled Greece to impose a two-year trade embargo (1993-95) against Skopje. Macedonia had by then already been admitted into the United Nations under the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), which was intended to be a temporary arrangement and whose usage was to be limited to the UN. Greek diplomatic efforts, however, have convinced the international community to continue referring to the republic exclusively as FYROM.

In late 1995, however, through mediation conducted by the UN and the United States, Greece and Macedonia arrived at an interim accord of mutual understanding that re-established minimal diplomatic and economic links between them. Certain sensitive issues were resolved—foremost changing Macedonia's national flag—but the name

was left for future negotiation. The Skopje government proposed a compromise solution in June, 1997: to have Athens refer to the Republic of Macedonia by any name it finds suitable in their bi-lateral affairs, whereas Athens would rescind its insistence on the use of FYROM in Macedonia's multi-lateral relations. Athens rejected this proposal.

Opposition parties in Macedonia, especially the VMRO, have vehemently denounced the Government for caving in Greek demands and for betraying the country by agreeing to altering the flag. Changing the name of the republic would be anathema to Macedonians of all political persuasions. The nationalist credentials of all parties will put to the test in 1998 when Macedonia holds parliamentary elections. In Greece as well, as of September 1997, opposition parties have been criticising the Athens government for its willingness to engage Skopje in any dialogue over the name, and have promised to make this an issue in their forthcoming elections.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)

The rump Yugoslavia (the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consisting of Serbia and Montenegro), until the fall of 1995, regarded the border between itself and Macedonia as an administrative rather than an international one. Accordingly FRY neither explicitly rejected nor accepted Macedonia's independent status. Although it is not an openly discussed option in Skopje, the question has lingered whether Macedonia would consider rejoining the Yugoslav federation if it were unable to survive as an independent entity. The pull of Belgrade for the older generation of Macedonian politicians is undeniable, though this attraction—part of what is pejoratively known as Yugo-nostalgia—is rarely articulated. It is also difficult for any Macedonian politician to advocate alliance with FRY as long as that country suffers from its current level of political and economic turmoil. Skopje's hesitation is also based on the awareness that affiliation with FRY could eventuate Belgrade's denial of Macedonia's sovereignty and renewal of its historic claim that the republic is actually South Serbia. Furthermore, Macedonia's Albanians are particularly wary of the Macedonians and Serbs recreating a larger Slav bloc in which they and Kosovo Albanians would constitute a disenfranchised minority.

Preliminary negotiations for mutual Yugoslav-Macedonian recognition were announced in Skopje in September 1995, just days before the attempted assassination of Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov. No documents have yet been signed, however, officially delineating the border between the two countries. In January 1996, Skopje and Belgrade announced that relations were soon to be normalised. This normalisation, however, has been contingent on Greece and Yugoslavia coming to their own mutual understanding over the future of Macedonia. Athens and Belgrade have entered into a joint

agreement regarding the “Macedonian Question”, including the legitimacy of the country’s name—an issue that unto itself has no bearing on Macedonian-Yugoslav relations.

Kosovo

Although Macedonia’s regional political and economic relations are dominated by Yugoslavia and Greece, the grip of Kosovo on Macedonia’s consciousness cannot be underestimated. With its population of approximately two million Albanians, this territory and its status have been iconic of Slav-Albanian relations, whether in former or present Yugoslavia or Macedonia. And with Albanians constituting between a quarter and a third of Macedonia’s total population of 2.2 million, Macedonians feel like a vulnerable island in an Albanian sea.

In SFRY Albanians were never officially considered a constituent “nation”, and thus did not enjoy privileges such as recognition of Albanian as a “national language”. Nevertheless, with over two million people spread through three republics (Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro, not to mention significant numbers of migrant workers in elsewhere) Yugoslavia had little alternative but to consider the needs of the Albanian community. Although the Belgrade government refused repeated demands that Kosovo be granted the status of a republic, Kosovo and Vojvodina (the northern Serbian region on the Hungarian border) were eventually recognised as autonomous provinces. The Autonomous Province of Kosovo was effectively controlled by local Albanians who ran the political, economic, and educational institutions—including the University of Prishtina. With instruction both in Albanian and Serbian, the existence of the University of Prishtina, was of particular significance for Macedonia’s Albanians as the only their native-language institution of higher education in Yugoslavia.

Despite being the poorest region of Yugoslavia, Kosovo offered educational and employment opportunities for more ambitious Macedonian Albanians who graduated from the university in Prishtina. Furthermore, Yugoslavia’s unrestricted internal mobility enabled Albanians to migrate and settle in freely throughout the country, resulting in numerous marriages between Macedonian and Kosovo Albanians and kinship ties that still intimately bind many families across these neighbouring territories. For the Macedonian government in former Yugoslavia, the University of Prishtina—and the existence of Albanian institutions in Kosovo altogether—obviated the need for Skopje to address many of the needs of the republic’s indigenous Albanian community. Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia make an unfavourable comparison between their current situation and supposedly superior conditions they enjoyed under former Yugoslavia, refusing to accept any diminution of their previous educational, political, or economic levels.

Although Macedonians make frequent reference to alleged irredentist

aspirations of Macedonia's Albanians vis-a-vis Albania, a far more actual concern is the residual effect of Kosovo's problems on the country. The interplay of Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians is most frequently one of shared symbols and rhetorical support, but not in every instance. The gradual erosion of Kosovo's institutions under SFR Yugoslavia starting in the early 1980s, and the eventual revocation of Kosovo's status as an autonomous province and the closure of Albanian institutions under Milosevic since 1989, have aggravated Albanian relations with both Serbs and Macedonians. For example, the movement for an Albanian-language university in Macedonia was precipitated by the closure of the University of Prishtina. That would not have been sufficient motivation, however, had it not been reinforced by the return of Prishtina-educated Macedonian Albanians eager to assert leadership in their community.

As the situation in Kosovo stagnates or worsens under the current Belgrade regime, Macedonians remain concerned that any cataclysmic event to the north could have far-reaching repercussions to the south. During the Bosnian war, the primary concern was that Serbia might open a new front in Kosovo to distract attention—whether domestic or international—away from Bosnia. That possibility threatened a potential flood of Kosovo Albanian refugees into Macedonia, destabilising the delicate balance that had kept Macedonia afloat. It was this potential spill-over of the Bosnian conflict into Macedonia that prompted the initial establishment of an OSCE (then CSCE) mission in Skopje. Although this immediate threat has receded, Macedonian Albanians are still highly responsive to currents in Kosovo, and speak openly about their readiness to fight alongside their co-nationals and relatives in Kosovo should they resolve to rebel against Serbia's policy of apartheid. Whereas Kosovo Albanians also pay lip-service to supporting their brothers in Macedonia, they are unable to act on their rhetoric. Neither do they take Macedonian Albanian politics very seriously, because they consider the political culture of Albanians in Macedonia to be underdeveloped, too meek, and unsophisticated. Macedonian Albanians therefore look northward to learn the lessons of escalation rather than Kosovo Albanians looking south to learn accommodation.

Macedonia's Government and Macedonian politicians in generally take great pains to differentiate the solution of their country's Albanian issues from the solution of Kosovo's conflict. The willingness of Macedonia's Albanians to make this distinction has been fading as the Macedonian Government has failed to satisfy basic Albanian demands. Both moderate and radical Albanian politicians have stated publicly since July that the Macedonian policies have coalesced Albanians throughout the Balkans around a single "Albanian Question". It remains to be seen how true this is, and what impact any peninsula-wide Albanian movement would have on each country's domestic and regional relations.

Economic Conditions

Macedonia's internal and international difficulties have been exacerbated by the country's floundering economy. To the north, UN sanctions levied against Serbia during the Bosnian war denied Macedonia access to its primary ex-Yugoslav direct trade partner as well as to its overland corridor to Western Europe. To the south, Greece's trade embargo from 1991-1995 denied Macedonia access to importing raw materials and exporting finished goods. Macedonia has legitimately claimed considerable economic damage as a result of the UN sanctions and the Greek embargo. Sea-borne essentials such as petroleum were imported via Bulgaria, but at an inflated price. Land-borne materials such as newsprint, which had been trucked in through Yugoslavia, had to be re-routed through Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, causing the price of a daily paper to rise beyond the reach of the average Macedonian.

Nevertheless, during this period Macedonia's grey and black economies flourished, bringing in massive amounts of cash and creating a conspicuous class of *nouveau riche*. The lifting of the embargo and sanctions in 1995 closed a lucrative if illegal avenue of income generation for un- and under-employed Macedonians (whose number, according to unofficial estimates, ranges as high as 50% of the workforce).

Domestically, Macedonia has been suffering an overall economic downturn, especially in the industrial sector. 'Socially owned enterprises' (former Yugoslavia's term for workers' self-management) have been undergoing privatisation under a regimen prescribed by the World Bank and other international financial institutions. As a result, substantial numbers of blue-collar workers have been laid off and have been unable to find alternate employment. The majority of these redundant employees are ethnic Macedonians. Many of Macedonia's Albanians, besides dominating in family-based agriculture, have also been engaged in small business since private enterprise (of up to five employees) was made legal in Yugoslavia's 1974 Constitution. Ethnic Macedonians have thus borne the brunt of the transition to privatised industry and regard Albanians as 'having all the money.'

All these factors have heightened Macedonia's political and social instability by damaging the country's ability to provide sufficient unemployment compensation or retirement pensions, or to guarantee social welfare. For instance, in September, 1997, a Government proposal to reduce maternity leave from nine to three months was finally retracted after much public opposition. Such financial and social distress, coming in the midst of Macedonia's transition from its Yugoslav planned economy to a nascent, privatised market economy, has aggravated both ethnic and class tensions.

International involvement since 1991

Since independence, Macedonia has slowly been gaining international diplomatic recognition. There are presently approximately twenty embassies, consulates, and interest sections in Skopje, including a embassies of the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Albania, Italy, and the other former Yugoslav republics. A number of western European countries (including Switzerland and Belgium) have embassies in Bulgaria that are responsible for Macedonia as well. Macedonia has been accepted into the Council of Europe and is a signatory to most of the conventions that apply to European Union member states. The country is also now a member of the Partnership for Peace, and harbours aspirations for admittance into NATO; though the NATO Madrid summit in June 1997 indicated that this is at best a long-term prospect.

Generally speaking, the international community has supported the efforts of the Macedonian government to effect an incremental transition from a centralised political system to a participatory democracy and from a command economy to a free-market system. But whereas the Macedonian population applauds the support it has received from Europe and the US, many also feel that they have been treated as an instrument of Western interests rather than in response to Macedonia's real domestic needs. This complaint has been voiced most frequently by Macedonia's nationalist political parties, which maintain that they lost parliamentary and presidential elections because of fraud that the West ignored in order to assure its influence with the current Government.

Beyond diplomatic attention, Macedonia has been the focus of international 'preventive' actions intended to forestall the outbreak of war as in Bosnia or to prevent the 'spill-over' of violence from Serbia (Kosovo) into Macedonia. Both the OSCE and the United Nations are concerned with trying to avert or contain hostile events on Macedonia's international borders.

UNPREDEP (United Nations Preventive Deployment Force) patrols the Macedonian/Yugoslav and Macedonian/Albanian borders, with a specific mandate to 'observe, monitor, and report' any potentially inflammatory incidents. UNPREDEP has not been an entirely passive presence, however, and has been credited on a number of occasions with preventing the escalation of small-scale but potentially provocative confrontations between the Macedonian and Yugoslav military. The Security Council has recently recommended a reduction in UNPREDEP troops from 1000 to 700, which has been supported by the UN Secretary General. In his August 1997 report Kofi Anan maintains that Macedonia's neighbours no longer pose a threat warranting the current level of UN military presence. Although the Macedonian Government has requested that troops remain at their current strength, downsizing is expected to commence in October 1997.

Likewise, the OSCE was originally considered a 'spill-over' mission to prevent the spread of war from former Yugoslavia southward to Macedonia through Kosovo. Post-Dayton, the OSCE's mission has focused more intensely on inter-ethnic and human rights issues. OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, Max Van der Stoep, has visited Macedonia on regular occasions, particularly in the wake of incidents that threaten to escalate the already tense level of Albanian-Macedonian relations.

C. INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Demography

According to the official census figures of 1994, Macedonia's population consists of a majority of ethnic Macedonians [66%, predominately Orthodox, with a small Muslim minority], followed by ethnic Albanians [23%, Muslims, with a smattering of Catholics and Orthodox], ethnic Turks [4%, Muslim], Rom (Gypsies) [under 2%, nominally Muslim, but with some nominally Orthodox], ethnic Serbs [under 2%, Orthodox], and Vlachs [under 2%, Orthodox]. Most of Macedonia's ethnic Albanians are concentrated in the western part of the country, and in certain municipalities (principally around Tetovo and Gostivar) Albanians represent the majority population. The compactness of the Albanian population and its location along the borders with Albania and Kosovo (the Albanian majority region of FR Yugoslavia) has been a key factor in both Inter- and intra-ethnic relations.

Like former Yugoslavia, Macedonia tends to equate its pluralism with tolerance. But also as in Yugoslavia, Macedonia's pluralism has been bought at the price of segregation rather than integration. Macedonian children go to school with their Macedonian peers, Albanians with Albanians, Turks with Turks. Macedonians read the Macedonian-language press, Albanians the Albanian press, Turks the Turkish press, and so forth. In former Yugoslavia this system of 'separate but equal' tracks was meant to satisfy the social and cultural needs and even political ambitions of the country's divergent nationalities. In Macedonia, however, it has left a system of parallel, non-intersecting communities. The citizens of this new state are now expected to integrate into a common civil society.

Since Macedonia's independence in 1991, the virtually complete politicisation of life - in terms of ethnic identity, loyalty to the new state, real or perceived irredentist aspirations and national security - has brought the country to a number of political crises culminating in the yet-unsolved attempted assassination of President Kiro Gligorov in September 1995. The segregation typifying Macedonia's educational system and the media is also mirrored among political parties, which all define themselves ethnically rather than by interests. Albanians thus belong to one of three Albanian political parties, Macedonians to one

of the Macedonian parties, Turks to the Turkish party, and so on. Each party represents the 'national interests' of its constituent ethnic community.

Macedonian-Albanian Relations

Macedonia's Albanians are keenly dissatisfied with conditions in the republic and consider themselves disadvantaged in most every domain: employment, education, political representation. As the second-largest community in the country, and as a nationality instrumental with the Macedonians in forming the Socialist Republic of Macedonia after World War II, Albanians demand equal status with Macedonians: these demands include free use of Albanian national symbols; recognition and use of Albanian as an official language; recognition of Albanians as a constitutive (state-forming) nation in the Constitution; proportional representation in government; and greater participation in organs of local government, public institutions, and the armed forces (police and military).

Perhaps the most serious consequence of the high level of mistrust that has developed has been the almost complete separation of both ethnic groups. Most of the ethnic Albanians enclose themselves with their ethnic group, taking into consideration only the interests of their own group. The same has happened to the ethnic Macedonians: Most have retreated into their ethnic group to unite in defending themselves against the Albanians. As a result, communication between the two ethnic groups has broken down in many areas of everyday life.

What began as a conflict between the national political parties has been turned into a conflict between the two major ethnic groups. The battle for political power could very easily be replaced by a battle for territorial redistribution. What has developed is a potentially volatile situation of intolerance between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, characterised by a very high level of tensions. The fear of conflict escalation is becoming a part of everyday life' (Petroska-Be'ka, 1996:137-138).

Recent Crises

Macedonia has been subjected to a cycle of crises in the last year or so triggered by Albanian demands for rights that the community's political leaders claim are constitutionally theirs. At the heart of these confrontations, rather than any discrete action, is the overall paradigm governing interactions between the Macedonia's Albanian community and the Government. That pattern is a complex matrix of relations between Albanians and the Government, between the Government and the Macedonian political opposition, and between the centrist and nationalist Albanian political wings. In the second and third quarters of

1997, crises have arisen in four areas: minority-language education; the rights of minorities to use ethnic symbols; deterioration in the rule of law, particularly abuse of police power; and a general paralysis in the functioning of the national government.

Minority-Language Education

After Macedonia's independence in 1991, Albanians made two demands: reinstating Albanian-language instruction at the 2-year Pedagogical Academy, and upgrading the academy to a 4-year Pedagogical Faculty. The academy had prepared teachers for 1st- to 4th-grade classrooms only, whereas the faculty would train teachers for 5th- to 8th-grade subjects. Albanian leaders considered educational reform key to achieving parity with the country's Macedonians, whom the Albanians consider to be privileged in all aspects, including the quality of their education. Despite numerous government promises, the neither the academy nor the faculty has been opened.

Whereas on its surface the university issue was posed as an educational dispute, Albanian and Macedonian nationalist politicians painted it as a political question: Albanians claim that the Macedonian leadership is interested in maintaining a level of educational and professional apartheid by restricting access to higher education in their native language. Macedonians counter that sanctioning an Albanian-language university in Tetovo is tantamount to accepting Albanian aspirations for regional autonomy and ultimately (re-) unification with Albania.

Since early 1996, as Albanian leaders and the Government dug in their heels on either side of the constitutionality issue, the university dispute mutated from an Albanian-Macedonian clash to one between the governing party, SDSM, and its political rivals. Nationalist Macedonian politicians (and the Macedonian opposition in general) attacked the Government for caving in to Albanian demands and failing to uphold the Constitution. Verbal recrimination escalated until early 1997, when Parliament passed a law reinstating Albanian-language instruction at the Pedagogical Academy. Macedonians reject this law on two grounds: Emotionally, they feel it to be a breach of 'Macedonia's sovereignty'; and legally, they consider the law in violation of the constitutional principle that Macedonian is the only official state language.

In February and March 1997 opposition to the Government's higher-education policy turned ugly: Ethnic Macedonians of university and high-school age demonstrated on the streets of Skopje daily, and these protests quickly became the venue for expressing general anti-Albanian and anti-Government sentiments. Marchers carried posters with slogans ranging from 'Macedonia for the Macedonians,' to 'Albanians to the Gas Chambers,' to 'Sofia Todorova [the Minister of

Education] brown-noses Albanian Politicians.' When asked personally why he supported these protests, the president of the leading ethnic Macedonian party (VMRO), Ljupco Georgievski, denied being anti-Albanian and stated that he was trying to prod the Government into obeying the Constitution.

The heightened tensions led to sporadic, random acts of violence against Albanians on the streets of Skopje, as well as to one violent confrontation between opposing Macedonian political groups after a soccer match. Fortunately, the Albanian political leadership was astute enough to restrain the Albanian community from responding with counter-demonstrations or other actions that would have further aggravated the situation. Rhetorically, however, the issue of the Tetovo university, and of Albanian-language higher education in general, has escalated beyond the domestic confines of constitutionality and has entered the international arena of alleged human rights violations which promises an even greater and more acrimonious protraction of the dispute.

Minority Flags

The education issue has been superseded since the summer of 1997 by a new dispute concerning the constitutional right of Macedonia's minority communities to fly flags 'belonging to foreign countries.' Local elections in 1997 brought to office a number of Albanian mayors belonging to the Albanian Democratic Prosperity Party (PDPA, now DPA), which advocates a more hard-line stance toward the Macedonian Government and is thought to harbour aspirations for some form of autonomy for western Macedonia with its Albanian demographic majority. Ethnic Macedonians have long been concerned by the growing constituency of the PDPA/DPA . If the current trend continues, the DPA's constituency will eventually overtake that of the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP), the only Albanian party remaining in the governing coalition with the governing party, the ethnic Macedonian SDSM.

Tetovo and Gostivar, the two main towns of western Macedonia, both elected DPA mayors Alajdin Demiri and Rufe Osmani. With the 1996 redistricting of Macedonia, 20 of 130 municipalities have an ethnic Albanian majority. Redistricting was one element in the constitutional process to restructure local self-government. For example, previous municipal assemblies mirroring the national Parliament have been replaced by city councils and a mayor's office. Unfortunately, the

realistic limits of municipal authority are insufficiently defined in the Law of Local Self-Government. As a consequence, city councils have been passing statutes that the national government considers exceed their constitutional limits.

Following the election of Rumi Osmani as mayor of Gostivar, the Gostivar City Council decided that, next to the Macedonian state flag, it would fly two other flags indicating the municipality's demographic composition; namely, the Turkish and Albanian flags. Macedonia's Constitution, continuing the legacy of former Yugoslavia, guarantees the country's minorities the right to self-expression, including the use of national symbols such as flags. In former Yugoslavia Macedonia's minorities' flags were distinguished from those of their titular countries by the presence of the red five-pointed star, which was removed after Macedonia's independence in 1991. Consequently, the flags of Macedonia's Turkish and Albanian communities are now identical to their titular state flags.

When the Gostivar City Council passed a local statute sanctioning the raising of the Albanian and Turkish flags over City Hall, Macedonian opposition political parties brought the Council before the Constitutional Court on the grounds that the Constitution prohibits the flying the flags of foreign states. The Government's initial reaction was to form an ad hoc parliamentary committee to design new flags for Macedonia's minority communities all of which dismissed this option out of hand. This was quickly followed by a draft Flag Law that was intended as a compromise solution: It recognizes the existing flag as the traditional symbol of Macedonia's Albanian community, but restricts the occasions and locations when it may be flown.

A number of MPs from the SDSM refused bring the draft law to a vote, citing the possibility of worsening interethnic tension as well as legal and political difficulties with the draft. The Macedonian LDP (Liberal Democratic Party, successor to the Liberal party) demanded the adoption of an amendment, certain to provoke Albanian resistance, that required Macedonia's minority flags to be distinguishable from those of sovereign states. The LDP threatened to bring the matter before the Constitutional Court if this amendment were rejected, thereby completing the circle. Albanian politicians have been referring to the flag issue as a 'human rights violation,' which is widely understood in Macedonia as shorthand for bringing the greatest possible international pressure to bear on the national government.

As the flag controversy dragged on without resolution, Macedonia's Albanians became increasingly radicalised, raising the rhetorical temperature above the record previously set by the Tetovo university confrontation: mayor Rumi Osmani called on Gostivar's Albanians to "protect their flag with their blood". Even for the hyperbolic political language of the Balkans, such expressions were ominous.

Osmani's prediction was realised during the night of July 8 when Albanian and Turkish flags were forcibly removed from the City Hall in Gostivar by special police forces. Clashes with demonstrators left three civilians dead and up to 400 wounded, including a number of police. City Hall facilities were ransacked, and DPA members arrested including Mayor Osmani. Events in Gostivar were described in the press as 'war in the streets.' Albanian and Macedonian eye-witnesses refute many claims made by police to justify the use of force: namely, that the police were fired upon by demonstrators and had to return fire; that the police met with resistance and had to use force to enter and secure city hall. Television crews captured on tape the use of unwarranted force against unarmed civilians who were offering no resistance, including men in their 70's. There have also been substantiated reports of police entering private homes and beating inhabitants.

Gostivar was effectively under undeclared martial law for a week following this incident. OSCE requests for permission to enter Gostivar on July 9 were flatly refused by the police. A few UNPREDEP civilian police were able to enter hospitals where some of the wounded were being treated, but were unwilling to make public comments on what they observed. Albania's newly elected government lodged a formal protest with the Macedonian ambassador in Tirana regarding the use of unnecessary force. Western diplomats who visited the Macedonian Foreign Ministry reiterated that stability in Macedonia depends on the Government's ability to exercise its constitutional authority. No Western diplomat publicly questioned the excessive use of force. In an emergency visit to Skopje, July 11-13, OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, Max Van der Stoep, met intensively with the Government and issued a statement calling for calm, future restraint, and appealing for dialogue rather than confrontation.

Ethnic Macedonians by and large support the government's action and claim that Albanians brought these events upon themselves through their extremism and their refusal to recognize their place as a minority within the Macedonian state. Many Albanians, both average citizens and politicians, feel that Gostivar is a watershed in worsening Macedonian-Albanian relations. Even moderate Albanians who feel that the DPA used the flag issue to provoke Macedonians feel betrayed by the Government for allowing the police to wreak this 'revenge' on Gostivar.

Many Macedonian citizens, particularly opposition Macedonian parties, are convinced that this action was planned well in advance for reasons totally unrelated to the flags controversy. The purpose, they argue, was to distract popular attention while unpopular economic reforms were introduced. Indeed, on the day prior to the flag removal the Government finally acceded to IMF demands for a devaluation of Macedonia's currency by 15% and a freeze in wages (but not prices). Thus, overnight, the average Macedonian awoke to the possibility of

his/her standard of living plummeting as the value of the country's currency dropped by 15% and inflation started to rise concomitantly.

In early September, Gostivar Mayor Osmani was tried for actions leading to the police intervention of July 9, 1997. Criminal charges against him included inciting racial, ethnic, and religious hatred; organising armed resistance (to the police); and contempt of court. According to Osmani's defence team, his trial was marked by procedural irregularities: Witnesses called by the defence were barred from testifying; motions before the court by defence lawyers were struck down. Finally, in protest of the Court's alleged bias against the defendant, Osmani's lawyers resigned as his counsel on September 17. The Court promptly assigned a public defence lawyer, who was given an hour to prepare his client's case. These developments led DPA president Arben Xhaferi to announce that Osmani would be defended through street protests, since the judicial system was obviously incapable of providing him with a fair trial. Despite this warning, no street demonstrations ensued.

The country was shocked, however, when on September 18, 1997, the court in Gostivar sentenced Osmani to thirteen years and eight months in prison. Osmani's lawyers have promised to appeal against the conviction on grounds of procedural irregularities. Although they have 20 days within which to file such an appeal, their motion has been delayed because of Osmani's refusal to accept his conviction in Macedonian and his demand that it be presented to him in Albanian. The Court has agreed to translate the conviction but has not yet done so, thereby postponing the appeal as well. In the interim, Osmani has been replaced by an acting mayor.

Political reaction to the Court's verdict has been swift and negative. While still referring to Osmani as guilty of defying the Constitutional Court and disregarding the Flag Law, VMRO and LDP leaders characterise the trial and sentence as political theatre intended to earn the SDSM nationalists political credits in the run-up to elections. Macedonian opposition politicians as well as the Macedonia Helsinki Committee have condemned the entire procedure as a human rights violation, a violation of due process, and a setback for the development of civil society in Macedonia. Politicians outside of government are further concerned that these developments will damaged Macedonia's international standing at a time when the country is vying to occupy the last empty seat on the UN Security Council. The independent Macedonian press has also editorialised against the outcome of the trial, describing it as a violation of civil rights that should be of concern to Macedonian citizens of every ethnicity.

Albanian intellectuals and politicians consider the trial and its outcome as a conscious and premeditated warning by the Government to Macedonia's Albanians. Even those Albanians who have disagreed with the DPA's tactics consider the trial and sentence to be a nadir in

Macedonian-Albanian relations. Moderate Albanians in the governing coalition find themselves in a no-win situation: They have threatened to leave the coalition but have not acted on their threat. If they do quit the Government, they will have forfeited any immediate hold on power and also face the distinct possibility that the DPA will succeed in winning their seats in the next election. If they do not leave the coalition, they will be portrayed as Uncle Toms by the DPA, and again face the possibility of losing their parliamentary seats.

D. GOVERNMENTAL PARALYSIS

There is a growing fear among citizens of all nationalities that events in and after Gostivar have revealed the Macedonian Government's weakness and not its strength. Many are questioning the present Government's sincerity or ability to uphold the rule of law. These doubts have been reinforced by the Government's stonewalling of calls to investigate the decision-making process that led to the police action on July 9, as well as to examine whether the police used unnecessary and unwarranted force.

Macedonian opposition parties have been criticising the SDSM for its handling of the flag issue, and point to the July 9 events as the culminating proof of the SDSM's inability to govern. With increasing revelations of high-level involvement in corrupt banking institutions, the SDSM has been accused of using the flag issue to cover up its economic blunders and other incidents. Opposition party leaders also claim that the SDSM orchestrated the flag issue as a way of bolstering the party's image as the defender of Macedonian national (ethnic) interests, especially in anticipation of local elections in the fall of 1997 or spring 1998.

E. ARMS CROSSING THE ALBANIAN-MACEDONIAN BORDER

On September 7, two police inspectors - one Macedonian and one Albanian - were shot to death in the village of Dolno Palciste near Tetovo as they were investigating the shooting death of a village resident. A third Albanian inspector was wounded. The person initially under police investigation has also been charged, together with two accomplices, in the murder of the two inspectors.

Whereas the accused in these killings are Albanians and the victims both Macedonian and Albanian, this incident has not been generally interpreted as a case of deliberate inter-ethnic violence. It has, however, highlighted the problem of an increasing and unregulated flow of arms into Macedonia from Albania. This case has also been cited by ethnic Macedonians as justification of their fear that ethnic Albanians will arm themselves whenever they have an opportunity, and that western Macedonia with its Albanian majority is becoming ripe for eventual armed conflict.

Although the Macedonian-Albanian border is patrolled by both UNPREDEP troops and civilian OSCE monitors, it is clear to all concerned that it is impossible to prevent illegal crossings over this mountainous and heavily forested terrain. The penetrability of the border became of critical concern following the meltdown of Albania's political and military infrastructure in the spring of 1997. Vast quantities of armaments ranging from rifles and handguns to larger-scale materiel were plundered from armories and spread throughout the Albanian countryside. The Macedonian Army (ARM) went on red alert to protect the country's border, though fortunately there have been relatively few casualties from confrontations between the ARM and armed civilians from Albania. Nevertheless, Macedonian citizens of all ethnicities concur that the availability of inexpensive weapons, together with the rising prevalence of heroin, is a serious matter and promises to remain one.

It should be noted that, in general, there has been an increase in the number of gun-related homicides. The daily press often reports a murder, usually within a family or among persons known to one another, committed with a gun. Although not related directly to the issue of illegal weapons coming across the Macedonian-Albanian border, the increase in homicides is probably indicative of how ordinary Macedonian citizens are reacting to the increasing economic and other pressures in their lives.

F. A WAY FORWARD

Some observations

Just as Macedonia's problems stem from both immediate and distant causes, solutions to the country's difficulties must deal with both the short and long term. The recommendations offered below represent a selected number of possible approaches. Other recommendations will accompany future reports as circumstances warrant.

There is a tendency to look for immediate, tangible and preferably quantifiable results. Short-term solutions are appropriate for certain problems, either because of the nature of the problem itself or because the need for action is particularly urgent. Nonetheless, pushing for quick results is not only often unrealistic but can be ultimately damaging. For one, it does not give any program or process the time it needs to sink roots in the Macedonian soil. For another, when over-accelerated programs fail, these failures only further convince Macedonian citizens that their problems are beyond solution.

Government is clearly the institution most able to effect change, especially short-term change. Experience has illustrated that real change requires investment in both infrastructure and grassroots, citizen-based institutions. Macedonia's cultural and political legacy, from Yugoslavia and before, has created an attitude toward authority

combining passivity and suspicion. People are unused to taking personal responsibility and expect government to solve all problems. At the same time people are sceptical and suspicious of governmental initiatives. It is thus most effective to apply solutions to Macedonia's problems on both the infrastructural and citizen levels simultaneously.

Using threats rather than incentives: It is in the nature of diplomatic relations to couch arguments in terms of 'if/then,' with implicit or explicit threats accompanying the 'then.' Macedonia has signed various international conventions which prescribe social and political policies. Macedonia's membership in the Council of Europe and the Council's position on minority-language education is a case in point. Non-compliance with Council prescriptions on education should be followed by certain sanctions, but none have been applied. Macedonians, like other Balkan peoples, are adept at circumventing sanctions, and react to implied threats with resentment and retrenched resistance. It is therefore far more useful and effective to design solutions to problems in terms of incentives. The solution offered would better appeal to the obvious self-interest of Macedonian society rather than to the fear of repercussions if the recommendation is not implemented.

One last general point: In Macedonia's highly charged atmosphere, differences inherently lacking an inter-ethnic dimension quickly assume such a character. Therefore, a primary objective of any intervention must be to prevent their escalation from a narrowly defined conflict over a specific matter to a broad inter-ethnic dispute over the Constitution or human rights. Both the Macedonian Government and the Albanian community are anxious to argue the legitimacy of their positions before the international community, especially to the OSCE (Max Van der Stoep) and to the UN (Elizabeth Rehn). Such high-visibility attention to the conflicts in Macedonia usually aggravates the situation, resulting almost invariably in a hardening of positions rather than in a constructive search for mutually acceptable solutions. Sometimes it is important that the international community lower the public-relations quotient of its efforts in Macedonia.

Policy recommendations

1. **Education:** Over the next few years, the U.S. and other Western states need quietly and in a sustained fashion to prod the Macedonian government at politically more opportune times to satisfy some of the Albanian demands on education. There are a variety of ways this can be done, but that must be a decision of the government and needs to be carefully worked out with attention also to quality. Such prodding would be most usefully accompanied by material help in specific fields.
2. **Border Security:** To address problems created by the flow of illegal arms across the Albanian-Macedonian border, the international community should assist the Macedonian

Government in bolstering its border-patrolling capacities. Aid could take the form of additional training for current border patrols; contributing funds and training personnel to the border patrols; purchasing equipment and training of personnel to use it; and bringing together representatives from both the Albanian and Macedonian governments to develop joint approaches to the problem.

3. **Arms:** To reduce the circulation of guns already in Macedonia, the international community could contribute funds for a governmental arms buy-back program, such as the one launched by the Albanian Government in the summer of 1997.
4. **Police:** The typical Macedonian citizen's interface with the 'rule of law' comes through contact with the police. In Macedonia, the police are still viewed as serving the interests of the state rather than of its citizens. This is particularly true for Albanians, who are greatly under-represented in the public sector altogether and who are resentful of being policed almost exclusively by ethnic Macedonians. The international community can address this in two ways:
 - a) Assist the Macedonian Government in launching a serious community outreach program to improve relations between citizens and the police. Various training programs exist in the United States and elsewhere that specifically address issues of police/community relations, and which focus on elevating the human rights awareness of a country's armed forces.
 - b) Assist the Macedonian Government in developing a strategy and budget to recruit higher numbers of non-Macedonians into the police, and the army. The Government claims to have implemented affirmative action to attract Albanians to the police academy, but states that this effort failed for lack of Albanian interest.

Albanians claim that the government manipulated entrance requirements into the police academy and that even qualified Albanians were barred. It is therefore crucial to the potential success of a recruitment effort that it be supervised by a body (domestic or international) whose integrity is accepted by all.

POLITICAL PARTIES in MACEDONIA

SDSM	Union of Social Democrats of Macedonia (the governing Macedonian party most closely associated with former Communists)
VMRO-DPME	Known popularly only as VMRO, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, with roots in early-century anti-Ottoman and nationalist movements. Most vehement anti-communist and anti-SDSM party.
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (merger of the previous Liberal and Democratic Parties)
LP	Liberal Party. Partner of SDSM in first Macedonian government in 1991 and member of the Alliance for Macedonia that swept the 1994 parliamentary elections. Removed from the alliance in 1996.
DM	Democratic Party. With VMRO, opposed SDSM in 1994 and boycotted second round of elections due to alleged voter fraud.

Additional Macedonian parties include the Socialists, MAAK, MAAK-KP, and other smaller organisations, none of which has a visible impact on politics in the country.

Albanian parties

PDP	Party for Democratic Prosperity. First Albanian party, and still coalition partner with SDSM in current government.
NDP	National Democratic Party. First splinter from PDP. Considered more radical than its parent.
PDPA	Party for Democratic Prosperity for the Albanians. Party that spearheaded the radical Albanian political movement, and which has challenged the primacy of the PDP in national and local affairs.
DPA	Democratic Party of the Albanians. Merger of the NDP and PDPA.

For further information on political parties and the election process in general, see the *1994 Report on Macedonia* by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Washington DC.

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