Conflicting Perceptions

A study of prevailing interpretations
of the conflict in Macedonia among
Albanian and Macedonian
communities

R E P O R T

THE NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

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Front page:

A Macedonian police officer reads a newspaper with black front page with the headline "Bloody Grupcin" Thursday Aug 9 2001 in Skopje. Grupcin is a village some 30 km west of Skopje, on the strategic Skopje-Tetovo road, where ten Macedonian army soldiers were killed in an ambush by ethnic Albanian insurgents.

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Preface

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights was founded in 1977. It is a member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) whose aim is to monitor state compliance with the standards for the Helsinki Act, subsequent Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, previously CSCE) human rights related documents and central international human rights standards. The IHF has a consultative status with the UN.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has been monitoring and reporting on human rights issues in the former Yugoslavia since 1989. It has had a special focus on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since 1994, when it was involved in the establishment of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee.

The main focus of the Committee's involvement in Macedonia has been on the human rights aspect of inter-ethnic relations. There has been an on-going discussion between human rights organizations and the international diplomatic missions in Macedonia concerning the preservation of stability versus the protection of human rights. Human rights organizations have consistently argued that unless there were real improvements in the human rights situation in the country, increased inter-ethnic polarization and tension could result in serious conflict.

Unfortunately, this prediction was confirmed in 2001, when a group calling itself the National Liberation Army (NLA), launched several armed attacks which were met by counter attacks by the Macedonian army and police. The Albanian insurgency caught many by surprise, although several of the factors commonly known to increase changes of armed conflict had been present for a long time.

After strong international pressure, the parties signed a Framework Agreement 13 august 2001. It aimed at immediate implementation of political reforms, thus preventing full-scale civil war. During and after the crisis, relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians on the ground have deteriorated dramatically and represent a major challenge to peace and stability in Macedonia.

The report is published in the Norwegian Helsinki Commitee's series of reports dealing with human rights in the area covered by the OSCE. It is a follow-up to the 2001 report: "Divided Communities: A study of Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minority Rights in Macedonia."

For further information, please contact the secretariat of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General
March 2003

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Executive Summary

The ethnic Albanian uprising in Western Macedonia in 2001 took not only the international community, but also the people and politicians in Macedonia by surprise. Local intellectuals, human rights groups and international observers had, however, for years issued early warning reports. These reports described a society characterised by fierce animosity, distrust, intolerance and an increased ethnic division in political, social, cultural and economic spheres. This long term tense inter-ethnic climate explains how the conflict escalated so rapidly and ultimately, throughout the summer months of 2001, endangered the stability of the country.

To prevent outbreak of a full-scale civil war, the international community engaged in high level diplomacy which led the main Macedonian and Albanian leaders to sign a peace deal in Ohrid 13 August 2001. The agreement ended the armed conflict and presented a framework for strengthening Albanian rights and modernization of Macedonian state structures. The peace deal did not, however, put an end to animosity and ethnic violence, nor did it allow the government to regain control in the crises areas. On the contrary, the situation in the western part of the country has continued to worsen ever since, with growing chaos and insecurity.

Despite increased ethnic segregation and tensions, there were little inter-ethnic violence in Macedonia prior to February 2001. Reports from the late 1990s showed that large segments of the ethnic Albanian community generally rejected the idea of violence as a mean of improving Albanian rights. Although some inter-ethnic clashes did occur during the 1990s, it never became a regular feature.

The uprising in 2001 caused by a relatively small number of Albanian paramilitants quickly developed into a major battle of interests between the two major groups in the country. Whereas Albanian and Macedonian informants — interviewed for this report — expressed anxiety and distress over the armed rebellion in February-March 2001, the same persons accepted a full-scale civil war as a possibility just few months later, in May-June the same year. An increasing number persons on both sides

claimed that the situation should be solved militarily, rather than politically. This also included the political elites, of which many supported a military solution.

A major factor explaining the rapid shift of attitudes is that many people became directly or indirectly harmed by the armed conflict. Additionally, the preconditions of conflict were clearly present in Macedonia and did not need much encouragement to spiral out of control. Among these preconditions one should not underestimate the long term economic decline since the early 1990s, which caused high unemployment as well as general abridgments of public social services. This development contributed to put further strain on inter-ethnic relations in the country.

Thus, in almost every aspect, the conflict escalation in Macedonia conforms to general patterns of conflict development described by researches and academics.

As a consequence of the events in 2001, the climate for conflict has continued to grow with increased inter-ethnic hostility, economic decline and a growing feeling of pessimism and hopelessness among particularly the young generation.

In order to establish long term stability and prosperity, the situation needs to be addressed in an adequate manner by political leaders and the international community, which is strongly involved in the implementation of the Orhid Agreement. Their success, in terms of establishing long term peace and economic growth, will largely depend upon their ability to shift the focus from ethnic interests towards a reform policy comprising all regions and citizens of the country.

I. Introduction

Despite facing overwhelming political, social and economic challenges, Macedonia was the only new independent republic to avoid war after the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991. During the following years, however, Macedonia faced severe challenges not only internally, but also due to external pressures. Firstly, the still ongoing transition to a modern democracy and market economy has been particularly difficult for Macedonia, and the country remains among the poorest in the region. Secondly, Macedonia has experienced strong pressure from neighbouring countries such as Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia; Greece by blocking international recognition of Macedonia and twice imposing economic blockades, and Bulgaria by questioning the legitimacy of Macedonian nationhood, language and history. The Serbian regime was during the 1990s perceived as a potential threat to Macedonia, and the UN embargo against Serbia denied the young republic access to its most important trading partner as well as to an overland corridor to Western Europe.

The Balkan wars throughout the 1990s, particularly the war in Kosovo in 1999, caused further damage to the fragile stability of the small and vulnerable state. Macedonia was long regarded as the exception in the region, and was until 2001 regarded among the most successful countries in terms of integration and co-operation with the EU and NATO. However, the international community had become increasingly aware of the inter-ethnic tensions in Macedonia, and numerous reports warned the Macedonian government as well as the international community of the potential emergence of ethnic violence.

Nevertheless, the advent of ethnic Albanian insurgency in Macedonia in early 2001 caught not only the international community but also most Macedonians at unawares. Indeed, the preceding couple of years had demonstrated improved relations between Albanians and Macedonians at top political levels. Yet improved political collaboration had not altered the general feeling of distrust nor had it promoted increased integration at

ground level, and inter-ethnic relations were widely held to be a major threat to stability in Macedonian society at large.

Strong international pressure persuaded ethnic Macedonian and Albanian political leaders to sign a Framework Agreement on 13 August 2001 aimed at immediate implementation of political reforms, thus preventing full-scale civil war. Nonetheless, after two years the general situation in the country is still strongly marked by the events taken place in 2001. The results have been further ethnic division between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, with an increasing number of people moving from multi-ethnic villages and neighbourhoods to ethnic clean ones. The security situation in the former crises area is alarming with large parts of the ethnic Albanian dominated areas in the Western region beyond control of law enforcement, causing chaos and insecurity for ordinary people as well as for the police forces. Relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians on the ground have deteriorated dramatically during and after the crisis, and has caused several killings and serious incidents over the last months, exposing lingering danger of spiralling ethnic violence in the Macedonian society.

Increased level of crime and inter-ethnic tensions thus remains among the main challenges to the establishment of sustainable stability in Macedonia in both the short and the long term.

Different perceptions

It is striking how differently the two communities view the origin of the crisis, the potential outcome of the rebellion and the current developments. One of the aims of this report is thus to analyse how the general populace as well as their political representatives have experienced the developments of the crises and its aftermaths. How did the respective communities explain and expound the armed conflict in Macedonia in 2001? And in what way have Albanian insurgency and the resultant armed confrontation changed inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia? Has the conflict created renewed potential for harsh nationalism and confrontational hard-liners in the political life of the state? The report also discusses how the two parties perceive the Framework Agreement. What are the demands of the ethnic Albanian community? What is the Macedonian majority willing to yield in order to meet these demands? And how do the parties view the roles played by

NATO, the EU, and the international community in general? Moreover, the report also outlines tendencies of political radicalisation and inter-ethnic tensions in Macedonia in the past as well as at present. Eventually the report will briefly discuss possible causes to the outbreak of armed conflict as well as its potential consequences.

Methodology

The report is based on several field trips carried out from March 2001 until fall 2002, as well as continuous telephon and e-mail communication with key informants during the entire period. The fieldtrips included interviews with representatives of all the major political parties as well as with ethnic Albanian and Macedonian journalists, academics and NGO-representatives. In addition, the author have conducted in-depth interviews with ordinary citizens and student groups representing both communities in towns like Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Struga, and Bitola. These are people who have been repeatedly interviewed, both individually as well as in group-interviews, throughout the whole period.

The aim of the qualitative interviews is to survey attitudes and perceptions of the informants in a social context. In fieldwork aiming to understand inter-ethnic relations and the evolution of attitudes towards the "others" during times of armed conflict, the qualitative methodology represents a significant tool. It is nevertheless important to underline that the selection of informants itself is not representative in regard to the general public in Macedonia. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that the informants do not represent general attitudes and values.

In addition to in-debt interviews, observation of the daily lives in towns and villages over a certain timeframe, numerous conversations with people in various places and situations also provided important information. Additionally, presence and observations in several inter-ethnic seminars in Macedonia, with the possibility to observe thorough and intense discussions between the groups on vital and sensitive issues have contributed towards better understanding on the different ethnicities's perceptions of the inter-ethnic dispute in Macedonia. Such data collection has been particularly useful in establishing deeper insight in how different groups are viewing main political and cultural issues, and not the least, how these

young people interpreted themselves in relation to the "others". In addition, the report is based upon a variety of relevant international reports and studies, available statistics, as well as local newspaper articles and TV and radio broadcasting.

Acknowledgements

The author of the report is greatly indebted to the informants interviewed throughout 2001 and 2002. This includes first and foremost all of those who are living in Macedonia, representing different regions, nationalities, cultures, religions and understandings of the situation in their country. This includes also politicians from a range of different political parties who have all contributed with interesting views and analyses throughout the whole period.

Gratefulness is also directed towards a number of representatives of international organisations in Macedonia as well as representatives of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for productive discussions and constructive feedback.

Special thanks to Radmila Sekerinska, Teuta Arifi, Jovan Manasievski, Shpetim Pollozani, Denis Boskowski, Vladimir Gorcev, Albert Hani, and Miat Sadiku for their specific contribution, to Jan Braathu (head of the Western Balkan section in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) for constructive comments and assistance, to Vibeke Lillio (former head of the Norwegian Embassy in Skopje) for generous support and explicit help during the fieldwork and to the Norwegian couple Brita Helleland (UNHCR) and Dagfinn Aadnanes (EU's monitory Mission) for numerous fruitful discussions and knowledgeable input.

II. Armed Rebellion

Ominous signs of impending violence appeared in Macedonia through attacks on the police station at Tearce on January 22, 2001, and aboard the Skopje-Kercova passenger train on January 26. A group calling itself the National Liberation Army (NLA), at the time an almost unknown organisation to ordinary citizens and the international community, claimed responsibility for the incidents.

One month later, more serious incidents occurred in villages along the Kosovo border, and in mid March, the NLA spread the fighting to Tetovo, the major ethnic Albanian centre in Macedonia. NLA claimed to be defending the Albanian population against Macedonian security forces and to be fighting for the national rights of the ethnic Albanian community. Six days of clashes in Tetovo eventually led the government to give the Albanian guerrilla an ultimatum to either disarm and leave the country, or face a full-scale military response.

Late March 2001, the Macedonian army started shelling villages above Tetovo, and four days afterwards, the government declared the operation a success. Only one month later, eight Macedonian soldiers were killed on 28 April in an ambush between Tetovo and the Kosovo border. The incident energized the conflict and sparked ethnic riots in Bitola, Veles and Skopje. The NLA then moved the frontline east of the Sar Mountain and north of Kumanovo, increasing the territory which it controlled. Within weeks, it exercised control over numerous villages in the predominantly Albanian region of the country, in the Kumanovo valley in the Northeast, and further west in the regions surrounding the Albanian centres of Tetovo and Gostivar.

The government appealed to civilians to evacuate the areas where it intended to launch its military response, but still thousands of people were caught in the battle between the governmental forces and the NLA in the vicinity of Kumanovo. The Macedonian forces blamed the NLA of using civilians as "human shields" in order to prevent the army to launch a full-

scale offensive; an accusation which the NLA denied, claiming the civilians distrusted the Macedonian authorities.

On June 9 2001, the NLA occupied Aracinovo, a village on the very outskirts of the capital. This marked a new serious escalation of the conflict. The NLA threatened to attack the Parliament and government buildings as well as the international airport situated some kilometres from Aracinovo. This created panic among ethnic Albanians in Skopje and surroundings areas, and international television showed thousands of refugees crossing the border into Kosovo. Ethnic Macedonians in Skopje were equally distressed at the course of events, and people expressed concern that a full-scale civil war was breaking out, threatening to destroy the recently established republic.

In July the crisis continued to deepen. Violations of a 11 June cease-fire agreement and other serious incidents made people increasingly disillusioned and pessimistic.

International response

The difficult situation put the international community on alert. An unstable Macedonia was widely regarded as a potential threat to regional stability, and could potentially involve neighbouring countries if the conflict escalated. Intense diplomacy and international pressure ensued in order to seek an end to the conflict. Strong and co-ordinated international engagement was demonstrated by energetic shuttle diplomacy of the High Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, EU Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten and NATO Secretary General, George Robertson during spring and summer 2001.

The crises led politicians in Macedonia as well as the international community to realise that it may prove difficult to achieve political agreement on a peace agenda that included political reforms. Under strong international pressure, ethnic Albanian and Macedonian political leaders formed a national unity government on 13 May 2001. The new administration included eight parties with various political and ethnic orientations. The main parties were the "Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic party for Macedonian National Unity" (VMRO-DPMNE), the Macedonian "Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia"

(SDSM), the "Democratic Party of Albanians" (DPA), and the Albanian "Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP). The broad based government was established to handle the crisis, and to make all political parties responsible for a peace agreement that entailed constitutional changes and increased minority rights. This was regarded as vital in order to limit space for political manoeuvres on the part of hard-line nationalists on both sides.

Soon, the general impression was that the new government was unable to make a common cause. Both the Macedonian and the Albanian public realised that the different parties were continuing the political cat-and-dog fighting as if they were not participating in a governing coalition. In fact, political rows and sharp differences were publicly exposed, not only between the Albanian and the Macedonian fractions, but equally so within the respective ethnic fractions.

Despite the 11 June 2001 cease-fire agreement between the Macedonian government and the NLA and the proposal of a peace plan by President Boris Trajkovski providing amnesty for NLA-soldiers and strengthening ethnic Albanian rights, the downward spiral continued. The Ministry of Interior distributed weapons to army and police reservists in the capital as well as in Gostivar, Tetovo, Kumanovo and surrounding villages. On the other side, NLA continued to recruit young Albanian men throughout the summer. In late July, reports were published about skirmishes between Macedonian civilians and NLA-rebels in Tetovo, Lesok and Neprosento.[1] Unmistakably, Macedonia was heading to the brink of civil war.

Continued international pressure eventually made headway in the peace negotiations in July and August 2001. But on the ground the conflict intensified as the negotiations started. 35 of approximately 100 deaths resulting from the conflict occurred immediately before the signing of the Ohrid Agreement. Radical politicians and paramilitaries used violence to strengthen their position in the negotiations, threatening a full-scale war if their demand were not met. International mediators, mainly represented by the American representative James Pardew and the EU envoy Francois Leotard

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[1] International Crises Group, "Macedonia still sliding", July 2001.

played key roles during the peace talks.

The four major political parties signed the Framework Agreement on 13 August 2001 in Ohrid.

The Ohrid agreement

The aim of the agreement was on the one hand to institutionalise ethnic equality between Macedonians and Albanians, including constitutional amendments. The deal aims at general modernization of Macedonian state structures, focusing on decentralization and local government reforms. The Ohrid Agreement also included international engagement in terms of co-ordination, facilitation and monitoring of the peace process and structural reforms as well as financial aid. The major provisions provide for:

- Immediate termination of hostilities between Albanian guerrillas and government forces.
- Amnesty for NLA members on condition that NLA is disarmed and disbanded.
- Operation Essential Harvest, i.e. a 30 days operation by a British led NATO-force and NLA- surrender of its arms and ammunition to this force.[2]
- constitutional amendments to institutionalise equality between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians to be approved by the Parliament.
- Changes in the structure of the police, with higher representation of ethnic Albanians in the police forces.
- Redeployment of national police and security forces in the crises areas.
- Bi-national police patrols in areas controlled by the NLA.
- Use of Albanian language in communications with government offices and in plenary sessions of the Parliament.
- Qualified majority voting in parliament for decisions concerning minorities, e.g. laws on culture, language, education, personal documents and the use of symbols.
- Amendments to end the special status given to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, putting it on level with Islam and Roman Catholicism.
- A new law on local self-government.

The ethnic Macedonian community

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[2] New troops under German leadership took charge in October 2001. The mandate of this force is to secure the international civilian presence in Macedonia.

expressed strong criticism of the peace agreement. This was also mirrored in the political process in which the National Assembly was to approve the constitutional amendments outlined in the Framework Agreement. Macedonian politicians held – and are still holding – emotional speeches and expressions of intense dissatisfaction with regard to the amendments.

Still a large number of Macedonians assessed the Framework Agreement as a unavoidable compromise in order to maintain the peace. An ethnic Macedonian man told the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in September 2001:

> *My guess is that the Macedonians are divided in two in regard to this matter, one part is supporting the Framework Agreement, and the other part is totally against it. Among my friends, basically a group of well-educated intellectuals, working in international organisations or public institutions, we would generally support the Framework Agreement, not because we approve its content anymore than the others, but because we believe that this is the only solution to avoid a civil war in Macedonia.* [3]

The ethnic Albanian community was, and still is, more in favour of the Ohrid Agreement than their ethnic Macedonian co-citizens. Yet radical Albanians have continued to throw doubt as to whether it will provide equality to the Albanian population in Macedonia. Persons adhering to the vision of a Greater Albania/Greater Kosovo interpret the Ohrid Agreement as dysfunctional and invalid. The Albanian National Army (ANA), a militant Albanian group, represents such views. Less extreme, but still radical political formations such as the Albanian "National Democratic Party" (NDP) have claimed that the Ohrid Agreement does not provide a satisfactory solution to the Albanian community in Macedonia. The NDP have also rejected the parliamentary adjustments of the Ohrid Agreements. According to NDP these changes has resulted in an even less acceptable solution.[4]

Despite harsh statements from both sides, the Macedonian National Assembly 16 November 2001 approved the constitutional Amendments in line with the Ohrid-Agreement. In early May 2002, ethnic Albanian and Macedonian leaders agreed on proposals for a final set of reforms in talks chaired by American and

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3 Expressed by an ethnic Macedonian informant from Skopje in a telephone interview in September 2001.

4 NDP was established by former PDP- and DPA-members during spring 2001. NDP-represenatives, including party leader K. Haxhirexha, party members M. Rusi, Leki and F. Bajrami, were interviewed in Skopje, October 2001.

European Union officials. According to the proposals, ethnic Albanians and other minorities will have the right to use their own languages in state institutions, and their number will increase in the civil services.

People on the run

The armed confrontation between ethnic Albanian rebels and Macedonian forces caused more than 150 000 citizens to flee their homes. A large number left the country while other became internally displaced. Immediatly after the signing of the Framework Agreement, the Macedonian Red Cross registered over 75 000 internally displaced persons.

Incidents involving forced displacement of civilians have been reported from affected areas in both predominantly Macedonian and predominantly Albanian villages. One example is the anti-Albanian riots in Bitola which caused approximately 10 000 ethnic Albanians to flee the town and its surroundings. Another example is the July 2001 exodus of ethnic Macedonians from villages in the Tetovo-region.

The number of ethnic Albanian refugees from Macedonia living in Kosovo started to decrease immediately after the cease-fire agreement in July 2001. Within a couple of months approximately 45 000 ethnic Albanians had returned from Kosovo. In October 2002, approximately 4 000 ethnic Albanian refugees remained in Kosovo. In January 2002, a total of 21 172 persons were recognised as displaced in some manner. In January 2003, the total number of internally displaced persons was still almost 8 500.[5]

A major impediment to return of internally displaced persons and refugees is a difficult security situation in parts of the crises areas. Other challenges to ensure sustainable returns comprise repairing of private homes, public structures, and agricultural livelihoods. In addition, health, education, water and electricity services in the areas affected by the conflict have to be re-established.

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5 According to Macedonian Red Cross and The International Red Cross Federation. The information was obtained from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugges (UNHCR), Skopje.

III. Different interpretations of the Insurgency

Ethnic Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia view the crises totally differently. The two ethnic groups are also to a large extent internally united in their interpretation of the insurgency and its aftermath. The incompatible perceptions of the conflict and its causes are among the most important factors explaining the rapid escalation of the conflict during spring and summer 2001 as well as continued inter-ethnic tensions since the signing of the Ohrid-agreement. This chapter will describe reactions to the events, as described by informants from respectively the Albanian and Macedonian community.

Ethnic Albanian reaction

Prior to February 2000, a large segment of the ethnic Albanian population generally rejected the idea of violence as a means of achieving constitutional rights. In fact, ethnic Albanians had more faith in governmental structures than their Macedonian co-citizens, according to several surveys.[6] But a general feeling of hopelessness, particularly among young people, had been expressed for years. When the revolt started it was thus soon explained as a necessary response to decades of discrimination after all legal efforts had failed.[7]

The insurgency in February 2001 came nevertheless as a surprise to the majority of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. In fact, Albanian informants were concerned about the consequences of the rebellion, particularly among ethnic Albanians living in multi-ethnic towns like Skopje and Kumanovo. How would the Macedonian security forces and the predominantly Macedonian police react towards ethnic Albanian civilians? Yet hardly any Albanian interlocutors were prepared totally to reject the NLA as an organisation, nor condemn their actions in fomenting military uprising in

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[6]According to the UNDP Early Warning Report fall 2001, almost 70 percent of ethnic Macedonians expressed distrust of the ruling structures. 55 percent of Albanians shared this opinion.
[7]According to the majority of the ethnic Albanian interlocutors during interviews in February and March 2001.

Macedonia. The most outspoken support of the insurgency during the early days of the crises came from young people in predominantly Albanian areas, such as Tetovo and Gostivar. Some weeks later into the crises, attitudes towards the NLA and its actions were rapidly changing. Despite the general concern, informants became more confident in expressing their support for the NLA and the insurgency as such, in order for the Albanians to achieve vital political goals: "People have lost faith in politics. I don't think the government has neither the will nor the ability to bring about substantial changes on behalf of the Albanians in this country", said a 21 years old ethnic Albanian student.[8]

In addition to the growing support among ethnic Albanians for the NLA armed actions during spring 2001, there was, and still is, near unanimity on the causes of the conflict. "The accumulation of injustices committed against the Albanian population in FYROM led to the founding of the National Liberation Army", Ali Ahmeti, the political director of the NLA, stated in an article in the Albanian news-

paper, "Flaka", mirroring what appeared to be the general Albanian sentiments.[9]

Ethnic Macedonian reaction

The insurgency shocked the ethnic Macedonian population. From their point of view, the last couple of years had been marked by successive concessions to Albanian demands. While Albanian youngsters expressed impatience and frustration, young ethnic Macedonians were equally annoyed with "the never ending story of Albanian demands". "It does not matter what we give them," an ethnic Macedonian male told in a group interview with students in Skopje, "they will never stop asking for more".[10]

The typical Macedonian opinion during the early phase of the crisis was that the NLA represented an external enemy, to which all citizens of Macedonia, regardless of ethnic belonging, should be opposed. They strongly rejected the Albanian argument that the rebellion was a reaction to systematic discrimination of the Albanian population and thus represented a legitimate fight for more rights.

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[8] Telephone interview, February 2001.

[9] Quoted from the Macedonian Information Agency' news digest. July 2001.

[10] Interview with ethnic Macedonian and Turkish students in Skopje, March 2001.

According to their view, the insurgency represented a serious external threat to national security and internal ethnic relations were irrelevant. "I am very disappointed because most Albanians support the terrorists. They are betraying their country", a young Macedonian woman said.[11]

Only weeks later, however, most Macedonians saw the insurgency as a battle of interests between ethnic Albanians and the Macedonian majority. One of the incidents contributing towards this shift was probably the ambush outside Tetovo on 28 April 2001, during which 8 Macedonian soldiers were killed. The next evening, Boris Stoiminov, leader of the radical Macedonian party, "Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Real Macedonian Reformist Option" (VMRO-VMRO), made a vengeful speech on television based on rumours of mutilation of the victims. He declared that for each dead Macedonian soldier, hundreds of Albanians should be killed. Only two days earlier, Stoiminov had told the Norwegian Helsinki Committee that he would lend his support to a broad political coalition consisting of all the main political parties in the country, and that he would support a political solution to the crisis.[12]

From the Macedonian perspective, the insurgency had to be viewed in a regional context. It was clearly a direct result of the events in Kosovo in 1999. Since NATO intervention in 1999, ethnic Macedonians have claimed that the precarious situation in Kosovo could threaten the stability of Macedonia. According to this interpretation, ethnic Albanian extremists from Kosovo were trying to stimulate Albanian national sentiments as well as Greater Kosovo/Albania aspirations among their kinsmen in Macedonia. It was also widely held that the NLA was a Kosovo based organisation with Kosovo Albanian leaders and fighters. And those from the Albanian community in Macedonia that participated, at least at the beginning of the crisis, were held to originate from influxes of Albanians from Kosovo since the 1980s. These are persons who, according to the general Macedonian public, harbour less loyalty towards the Macedonian community. In fact, many Macedonian informants tended to distinguish between "good" Alba-

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[11] Interviewed in Skopje, March 2001.

[12] Interviewed in Skopje, April 2001.

nians with long traditions in Macedonia, and "bad" Albanians mainly originating from Kosovo. A male ethnic Macedonian from Skopje stated a typical view on this issue:

> I have nothing against Albanians or the Albanian language. We have always lived together, and I bow to one of my neighbours every day, an Albanian family who has been living here for two generations. But I don't like Albanians from Kosovo. They are different. I don't trust them, I never did. And look what they are now doing to our country.[13]

Albanian political leaders response

The Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) as a part of the Macedonian governing coalition, took a firm stance against the ethnic Albanian rebellion during the early weeks of the crisis, and appealed to the Albanian community to support legal political institutions. The leadership of the DPA condemned both on national and international television the ethnic Albanian guerrillas. The main oppositional Albanian party, Party for Democratic Prosperities (PDP) and its leader Imer Imeri, appeared to be more indecisive and did not distance itself from the NLA as energetically as DPA. As an oppositional party in decline with regard to electoral support and political influence, PDP's performance was largely interpreted as an attempt to regain credibility as the genuine Albanian party at the expense of the DPA.

The general impression during the first weeks was that Albanian political representatives were trying to delicately balance their statements to avoid provoking the increasingly NLA supportive Albanian electorate, and still perform as responsible politicians in the eyes of the international community – and as for the DPA, towards their Macedonian governmental partners.[14]

The Prizren deal

In May 2001 it became publicly known that DPA and PDP had

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[13] Interviewed in Skopje, June 2001.

[14] Vice President and currently Deputy Prime Minister Ms. Radmila Sekerinska provided the following analysis of the two main Albanian parties during the first weeks of the crises: "The influence on, and credibility of the DPA and Arben Xhaferi among, the ethnic Albanian community makes it quite clear that they are, at least at a certain level, communicating with the NLA. The PDP and its members, on the other hand, totally lost their influence and power among the Albanians after 1998. Not only have all the PDP party members in public structures been removed and replaced by the DPA people, but this has equally hit the PDP supporters in the informal and private business sectors. Hence, whereas the governing DPA are struggling to distance themselves from the NLA, the PDP acts as if it has knowledge of, and contact with, NLA structures, although they probably don't have a clue as to what is going on." (Interviewed in Skopje, March 2001)

secretly signed a deal with Ali Ahmeti, the political director of the NLA in a meeting in Prizren (Kosovo). The news seriously threatened to jeopardise relations between the DPA and its Macedonian partners in the governing coalition. The deal further caused distrust between the Macedonian side and the international community because of the role played by the American veteran diplomat, Robert Frowick who had been appointed Special Envoy by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in April 2001. His official objective was to support the Macedonian government in its task of reaching a peaceful solution and thereby bringing an end to the armed conflict. Ambassador Frowick held that to reach an enduring political agreement, direct contact with the NLA was necessary. This view was in conflict with the general principle of the international community to avoid direct contact with the NLA. Frowick proposed an immediate cease-fire with the NLA in exchange for the pledge of amnesty. The next step was to introduce several confidencebuilding measures, addressing ethnic Albanian demands of constitutional amendments and equal representation in state structures. The plan also included measures or mechanisms to integrate some of the NLA leaders into public life.

Frowick's mission ended abruptly when a photograph of Arben Xhaferi and Imer Imeri together with Ali Ahmeti was displayed in the Macedonian media in late May, and the Macedonian public learned about the secret deal between the Albanian leaders. This led Macedonian leaders to accuse PDP and DPA of supporting NLA extremists by inviting the guerrillas into secret negotiations. In addition they claimed to have been deluded by the international community (represented by the OSCE) as well as by their Albanian counterparts. The Albanian government parties were accused of going behind the back of the Macedonian government. The President and the Prime Minister denied any knowledge of the negotiations in Prizren. Frowick on his side claimed that the agreement was mediated with the knowledge and assent of the Macedonian government as well as President Trajkovski. Frowick left Macedonia only days later after severe criticism from national authorities as well as from international representatives in Skopje.

Without neglecting some of the interesting elements in the Frowick Proposal, the outcome was sadly counterproductive and sowed further distrust between the Albanian and Macedonian political

parties. It also sparked frustration within the general Macedonian public as to the role of the international community. The general view presented by Macedonian political representatives was that Frowick's role and the Prizren agreement damaged relations and the political dialogue between Albanian and Macedonian politicians.

Macedonian political leaders response

The Macedonian politicians generally blamed the insurgency on external factors, and refused to ascribe it to Macedonian minority policy. For instance, Filip Petrovski, at that time a member of Parliament for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), told the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: "This rebellion is a result of the situation in Kosovo. It is a fact that the NLA are extremist Albanians from Kosovo for whom instability in Macedonia is indispensable to continued criminal activities." Petrovski, endorsing the line of his Party, stressed that the ethnic Albanian rebellion in Macedonia was not a result of discrimination or a deficiency of minority rights. He claimed that, on the contrary, ethnic Albanians in Macedonia have already gained sufficient rights. Petrovski called upon all citizen of Macedonia, regardless of ethnic belonging, to end the crises:

> Last week many people approached the Ministry of Interior in order to volunteer support for Macedonia against the armed rebels. Why didn't we see any ethnic Albanians among them? Why wouldn't ethnic Albanians also fight for their country?[15]

The Vice-President of the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), Radmila Sekerinska, the main oppositional party at that time, gave a different analysis of the situation. She also put the chief blame for the Albanian uprising on difficult developments in Kosovo, as well as on ethnic Albanian criminal elements that needed to ensure further instability in the region in order to continue their activities. But, according to Sekerinska, the situation quickly developed into a more complex scenario in terms of finding sustainable solutions to the crisis. She expressed concern as to the recruitment potential within the Albanian community in Macedonia, pointing to general dissatisfaction

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[15] Interviewed in Skopje, April 2001.

among the Albanians in the country.[16]

Mirroring Sekerinska's above analysis, SDSM played a more moderate role during the time of the crisis, compared with the VMRO-DPMNE. Although SDSM was accused of hard-line nationalism during the presidential election in 1999, the impression since February 2001 was somehow different. During the peace negotiations, the President of the social democrats, Branko Crvenkovski (currently the Prime Minister) gave expression to a more moderate Macedonian position compared with former Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski, who did increasingly appear as a Macedonian hard-liner.

Interviews with representatives of the two main Macedonian parties expressed similar views as to the role and attitudes of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM respectively. Filip Petrovski (VMRO-DPMNE) told the Norwegian Helsinki Committee that his party would accede to the international demand for minority reforms despite his party's dissenting views on the matter. According to him, the political process was not dictated by the genuine will and interests of the Macedonians, but was directed by international interests and interpretations. The statement was in line with numerous speeches made by the former Prime Minister Georgievski during the time of the crisis. In this way VMRO-DPMNE was displaying double standards, bowing to international pressures while simultaneously appealing to nationalistic sentiments among the general Macedonian public. This stratagem has contributed towards undermining the legitimacy of the peace agreement and, for that matter, new reform policy in general.

During several interviews, SDSM representative Radmila Sekerinska expressed a more open attitude with regard to constitutional amendments and possible steps towards the integration of the Albanian community with Macedonian society.[17] It was unlikely, however, that the majority of the members and supporters of SDSM represented a more liberal orientation than the general Macedonian public on this issue during the time of the crises. SDSM leader, Branko Crvenkovski, did in fact lose popularity due to his moderate stance

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[16] Interviewed in Skopje, April 2001.

[17] Interviews conducted in October 2000, and March and June 2001.

during the negotiations. According to the International Crisis Group, he faced challenges "from the right wing of his own party, led by former SDSM ministers and wealthy members of the hard-line Diaspora".[18]

Only few of the Macedonian informants expressed sympathy for the role of SDSM in the negotiation process during the summer of 2001, claiming that SDSM was "bowing to international pressure". Nevertheless, SDSM continued to play a positive role in the National Government until they resigned and returned to opposition after the approval of the constitutional Amendments in November 2001. When returning to office in November 2002[19], SDSM, together with their coalition partners, declared an ambitious political plan with full implementation of the Ohrid Agreement within 2004.

The role of the former prime minister Georgievski

The actions and statements of former Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski during the time of the crisis caused speculation as to his true political agenda. While Presi-dent Boris Trajkovski (VMRO-DPMNE) stated his determination to solve the crisis by political means, the Prime Minister was frequently urging a hard line toward the Albanian rebels and has on several occasions stated his wish to declare "a state of war" so as to intensify the military offensive. His attitudes and role were questioned, not only by the Albanian community, but also by ethnic Macedonian voters, particularly in relation with the so-called MANU plan.

In late May 2001, Macedonian state-controlled newspapers published an article explaining the details of a proposal allegedly emerging from the Macedonian Academy of Science and Art (MANU). It suggested a territorial and population exchange with Albania in order to solve the armed conflict in Macedonia. According to the plan, major Albanian settlements in Western Macedonia would be annexed to Albania, whereas Macedonia's concession would be a strip of Albanian land and access to the Adriatic Sea. In an interview broadcasted on national television on 3 June 2001, the Prime Minister stated that although he didn't approve of the idea, he believed that "in less than

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[18] ICG Balkan Briefing Paper, 27 July 2001: Macedonia: Still Sliding:4
[19] See chapter VIII on recent political developments.

two months, 90 percent of Macedonians will be thinking it wasn't such a bad idea after all".[20]

The MANU plan and the response by the Prime Minister created a storm among the general public as well as in political circles. Ethnic Albanians claimed that the MANU proposal once and for all demonstrated which of the two sides was advocating partitioning the country. Macedonians were also enraged by the proposal and the Prime Ministers comments, claiming that he was willing to sell Macedonian territory. Rumours spread of a purportedly secret deal between Arben Xhaferi and the Prime Minister in which the two leaders had divided the country between them. The SDSM leader, Branko Crvenkovski, fiercely attacked the proposal and stated that such ideas were "an incitement to civil war, and suicide for Macedonia".[21]

Only days later, the Prime Minister once again appeared on national television declaring that the government of unity was not functioning, and he would call for early elections in September 2001. He offered the mandate for proposing constitutional changes to SDSM, which he had earlier criticised for rejecting the use of force in dealing with Albanian terrorists. The Prime Minster stated that his party "has made it clear that either we create the Constitution made to measure for the Albanians, or we'll have war. This should be made clear to everyone. The position of VMRO-DPMNE is that we categorically refuse to participate in any dialogue in such an environment."[22]

The Prime Minister's numerous statements and speeches within the timeframe of the crisis led the general public in Macedonia to question whether he was contributing to the political dialogue in a constructive way. According to most people interviewed during spring and summer 2001, his role was interpreted as quite the contrary, despite the general (Macedonian) distrust in the part of the peace talks. The Prime Minister was also held responsible for several disruptions and delays in the political dialogue during the summer 2001. Time and again he brought up fresh issues at the last hour, thus preventing a break-through in the struggle to achieve a solution. Several times,

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[20] A1 Television, 3 June 2001.

[21] Quoted from the official Macedonian web-site: www.ok.macedonia, 31 May 2001.

[22] Quoted from International Crisis Group: The Last Chance for Peace, 20 June 2001:13

the Prime Minster issued calls for military responses, and even during the final days of the negotiations in Ohrid in August 2001, he stated that "signing an agreement while there is still occupied territory would be a disgrace for Macedonia". The deal would not be signed as long as there were "Albanian terrorists in the hills".

Also after the signing of the Framework Agreement he continued to issue negative statements, advocating a hard line towards ethnic Albanian rebels during the fragile cease-fire. In a speech on the same day that the parliamentary sessions were initiated, the Prime Minister explicitly denied the assertion by the international community that a vote against the Framework Agreement was equivalent to a vote for war.[23] According to him, discussing constitutional changes while Macedonia was still exposed to external aggression and occupation would be disastrous.[24] According to many commentators, the underlying aim of the Prime Minister was to convince the Macedonian electorate that the concessions on constitutional changes were the result of international arm-twisting.

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[23] This was firmly restated by NATO's Secretary General, Lord Robertson, during his visit to Macedonia on 29 August 2001.
[24] Interview in "Vecer", 31 August 2001.

IV. Rapidly Changing Attitudes

Throughout the spring and summer of 2001, an increasing number of civilians on both sides became directly or indirectly harmed by the dramatic and tragic events in Macedonia. Tens of thousands individuals were on the run, villages were shelled and civilians and soldiers were hurt or killed. The events itself were reinforcing hostile feelings and radical approaches among ordinary people on both sides in the conflict. This chapter will focus on how informants on both sides experienced the situation, and how events rapidly influenced the general opinion in both groups towards stronger radicalism and division. Additionally, it will describe the respective communities' interpretation of the international community and its role during the crises.

The Albanian side

In line with developments in March and April 2001, a sense of increased approval among ethnic Albanians for the NLA and Albanian paramilitary measures as such could be detected throughout the summer months.[25] Four months into the crisis, all the Albanians interviewed in Tetovo expressed clear-cut support for the NLA, and almost all the young male interlocutors claimed that they were willing to be recruited if necessary. Whereas the same individuals were reluctant to reveal explicit support for the NLA to a foreign researcher in April, this was clearly no longer the case. The majority of the ethnic Albanian community apparently had changed their mind with regard to the use of violence in order to gain political rights.

Additionally, all Albanians interviewed referred to family members, close friends and acquaintances who had already departed "to the mountains" to fight for a brighter future for ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. It was said that recruitment was on the increase from May onward, mainly due to the harsh military response from the Macedonian authorities, but also because of the self-confidence shown by the NLA,

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[25] Impression gained during interviews conducted in June 2001

their successes and territorial advances.[26]

This impression was strenghtened during visits to Gostivar. There was equally strong support for the NLA in the second-largest ethnic Albanian centre in the western region, and during interviews with a group of men aged 24 to 50, it was argued that the issue had acquired a moral rather than a merely political or military character. According to them it would be unethical to abandon the civilians in the affected areas and expect them to fight on by themselves. It was in fact viewed upon a matter of solidarity and they expressed a strong desire to support suffering Albanians with humanitarian aid as well as through economic and military support.

Not unexpectedly, the youngest males interviewed were clearly more excited than their older Albanian companions at the prospect of joining the NLA. It appeared that the current fighting in Macedonia was an opportunity to win renown as heroes of the Albanian cause, a chance some missed during the crisis in Kosovo owing to youthfulness. In June

2001, such expressions, in addition to the martial music broadcast by Albanian radio, illustrated romantic notions about war.

The understanding of the NLA

In various statements during the time of the crises, the NLA strongly claimed that by avoiding attacking civilians, it demonstrated once and for all that the NLA was an army with a regular command structure as well as political representation: "The NLA functions as a military organisation with its own uniforms and insignia, and recognises the Geneva Conventions and the Court of International Justice in The Hague as the legitimate authority for war crimes," Ali Ahmeti stated in a Flaka article.[27]

Most Albanian informants agreed with Ahmeti on this issue, and the general conclusion was that the NLA was not a terrorist or criminal organisation claimed by Macedonian politicians, but a legitimate organisation fighting for the rights of an oppressed people in Macedonia. Some months into the crises, this was also the general view of the ethnic Albanian leadership in Macedonia. In March 2001, the

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[26] Interviews with ethnic Albanians, conducted in Tetovo, April/May and June 2001.

[27] Quoted from Macedonian Information Agency' (MIA) News digestive. June 2001.

President of the PDP, Imer Imeri, as well as the leader of the governing party DPA, Arben Xhaferi, expressed parallel notions in clearing the NLA of the accusation of terrorism. Mr Xhaferi told the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: "By avoiding attacks on ethnic Macedonian civilians, the NLA acts like a professional and serious army rather than as terrorists".[28]

Since the inception of insurgency in February 2001 and the following international awareness of the National Liberation Army, the NLA continued to insist that their political goal is equality for the Albanian population within the present state of Macedonia. In the ethnic Albanian paper, "FLAKA", Ali Ahmeti stated:

> I want to inform about our modest demands and the deep clarity and necessary assessment that we have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate regarding the continuity and stability of Macedonia. What we demand is neither secession nor an ethnic war (...). What we demand is to: change the Constitution of FYROM and ensure proportional representation in State institutions; introduce a consensual democracy on issues related to national rights (...); participate in talks between conflicting sides under international mediation; have recognition of the citizenship of all Albanians living in FYROM; have repatriation of all Albanians who have been forcefully expelled from FYROM; have arrangements for a census with the assistance of an impartial international institution; have full rehabilitation and re-socialisation of all NLA-members; have demolished villages and family economies rebuilt.[29]

During remarkably short time, the general perception of the situation had changed from outspoken uncertainty to a perception that the ethnic Albanians were victims of the brutality of the Macedonian armed forces, and the NLA was in fact protecting ethnic Albanian civilians from ethnic Macedonian violence. Moreover, ethnic Albanians still claimed that the Macedonian government should have initiated negotiations with the National Liberation Army at the very beginning of the crisis in order to avoid unnecessary exodus and suffering on the part of Albanians in the affected areas.[30]

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[28] Interview conducted in April 2001.

[29] Quoted from MIAs news digestive May 2001

[30] Despite the general view on the NLAs credibility as a non-terrorist organisation within the Albanian public and the international community, several instances of potential war crimes conducted by NLA rebels have nevertheless come to light since the NLA commenced its offensive in February 2001. This includes the kidnapping of civilians, killings, physical and psychological maltreatment of civilian hostages, expulsion of Macedonians in the Tetovo region, and attempts at forced recruitment of ethnic Albanian youngsters.

Regional differences

One could, all through 2001, sense that in multi-ethnic towns such as Skopje and Kumanovo, the ethnic Albanians were attempting the delicate task of balancing their statements, and people expressed a fear for revenge on the part of ethnic Macedonians. Thus, attitudes among ethnic Albanian informants in Skopje, Struga and Kumanovo, were expressed in a somewhat different way, even though sympathy for the NLA appeared to be equally strong as in Tetovo and Gostivar.

The balancing of expressions was very clear during the dramatic days of the NLA's occupation of Aracinovo in June 2001. According to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Skopje, most of the refugees crossing the border into Kosovo during those days were in fact ethnic Albanians from Skopje. People were intimidated by the violent measures taken by the police and military forces as well as by Macedonian paramilitary organisations and armed reservists, and many Albanians claimed they had been threatened and received warnings from their Macedonian neighbours in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods in Skopje. Reports of maltreatment and threats by police against ethnic Albanians spread throughout the city. An Albanian woman told the following story:

> I was approaching my parents' neighbourhood when my husband and I were stopped at a police checkpoint. I guess it was my husband's beard that provoked them, and they started to shout, asking him if he was NLA. They then began to threaten us, pointing their guns at my husband and telling him they would kill him.[31]

According to UNHCR in Skopje, more than 5000 ethnic Albanians left for Kosovo in four days during the dramatic June days.

Why increased NLA support?

During interviews conducted in in 2000, ethnic Albanians and their leaders were clearly denying any potential armed threat emanating from the Albanian population. Although it was well known that more radical groups were emerging, particularly in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo, the general impression was that the Albanian majority was not in favour of political violence in Macedonia. As noted above, when the insurgency broke out in Macedonia in January/

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[31] Told the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in June 2001.

February 2001 it did not represent a rebellion planned and launched by a broad-based Albanian grassroots movement in Macedonia. Accordingly, the broad based support for the NLA are probably symptoms of the emergence of more radical attitudes among the ethnic Albanian population as a result of the conflict.

In order to understand the Albanian reaction, one must keep in mind the general scepticism towards the Macedonian police and, not least, the Macedonian security forces among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. Albanian civilians have on several occasions experienced the brutality of the Macedonian security forces, and international and local human rights organisations have for many years criticised discriminatory patterns in the treatment of ethnic Albanian individuals on the part of Macedonian police forces. This probably explains the general fear among Albanians of violent Macedonian reprisals, and thus the outspoken wish within the Albanian community to retain and intensify the international presence well into the future.

The robust military responses launched by the Macedonian side against villages occupied by the

NLA most likely strengthened the Albanian population's support of the NLA. Not only were the governmental forces' measures regarded as criminal acts against the Albanian civilian population in the areas of crisis, it was also viewed as inadequate and inefficient. In fact, after weeks of shelling, the Macedonian army was not able to point to significant results, except for destroyed villages and a large number of people on the run. The general picture drawn up by ethnic Albanians thus appeared to be that it was the responsibility of the Macedonian forces to stop attacking the Albanian civil population in northern and Western Macedonia. The Albanian community asserted that the Macedonian forces, without any legitimacy, kept on threatening the security and lives of the Albanian population in the affected areas during the crisis. Consequently, since February 2001, the language used to describe the actions taken by the Macedonian forces and police became increasingly more harsh, and Albanians frequently compared the situation in Macedonia with the Serb repression of the Kosovo Albanian population during the 1990s.

Many people within the Albanian community expressed awareness of to the negative consequences of

the violence in terms of inter-ethnic relations and general development of the Macedonian society. In conversations with a group of ethnic Albanian employees in non-governmental organisations, people stated that despite possible political reforms in response to the rebellion, the resulting increase of distrust and hatred would create serious obstacles to the implementation of those reforms. Similar views were expressed by two Albanian businessmen who strongly emphasised the need for establishing a climate conducive to economic growth as prerequisites for improved inter-ethic relations.

Although there has been, and probably still is, a general support for the NLA, it is highly unlikely that the majority of ordinary Albanians wanted civil war. The pronouncement of an Albanian coffee-shop owner is representative of many Albanians in Macedonia:

I don't want war. I want peace. I was born here, and so were my father and my grandfather. I have my business and my life in Skopje, and my family belongs to this country. The Macedonians claim that the Albanians want a Greater Albania or a partition of the country. But what will then happen to my family? We will have to abandon our homes and the businesses I have spent years in building up. And then the Macedonians tell us that we have our own country, so if we are not satisfied why don't we go and live there? But Albania is not my country any more than it is the country of the Macedonians.[32]

The Macedonian side

Despite years of hostility and the cultivation of negative stereotypes, many Macedonians were still able to point to ethnic Albanian individuals whom they regarded as decent, honest and good citizens. These could be neighbours in the increasingly few mixed neighbourhoods in the towns, college friends, co-students, the owner of the local grocery shop, etc, towards whom, ethnic Macedonians expressed positive attitudes.[33] However, with the emergence of violent conflict, such attitudes were clearly undergoing change, also in the capital. Until the occupation of Aracinovo, the war zone had been confined to predominantly ethnic Albanian areas in the northern and western

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[32] In a conversation in Skopje, June 2001.

[33] According to Greek anthropologist Vasiliki Neofotistos who has conducted studies on Albanian-Macedonian co-existence, there are two ways in which Albanians can be accepted by Macedonians. One is through shared experience, such as growing up with ethnic Macedonian neighbours, the other is through being "modern", that is "dressing stylishly, driving a modern car, using deodorants and the like". Jolyon Neagele: Macedonia: How they perceive one another (Part Two).

parts of the country, remote of everyday lives of the inhabitants in Skopje. However, when the public realised that the NLA was present in Aracinovo, the seeming "normality" evaporated, and tensions rose in the capital. The Ministry of Interior distributed arms to police and army reservists, and rumours rapidly spread on infiltration of NLA rebels into Albanian neighbourhoods in the heart of the capital. Macedonians avoided the Albanian quarters in the city even during daytime, and people said they were scared of going to the Bit Bazaar[34].

In mixed areas people suddenly became hostile towards individuals belonging to the "other group", and in some urban neighbourhoods those belonging to minority groups decided to leave their homes. A tendency towards "ethnic segregation" in mixed areas occurred also within the capital. The sounds of the massive attack launched by the Macedonian forces to recapture Aracinovo were clearly heard and observed from the capital. Thus within a day or two, Skopje residents grasped that the country was on the brink of civil war.

The events occurring in the village of Aracinovo during the dramatic days in June 2001 clearly illustrates how confidence between neighbours may dissolve completely within a relatively short period of time. Until June 2001, Aracinovo had comprised approximately 1300 ethnic Albanian and around 200 ethnic Macedonian households. The Macedonian minority was unaware that Albanian paramilitaries were entering the village until they realised on 7 June that all ethnic Albanian children and women had left. Thus the Macedonians did not start evacuating the town until the situation had escalated dramatically. They later expressed bitterness towards the Albanian villagers with whom they had shared the neighbourhood for decades, and who had not warned their Macedonian neighbours in time.

Since the Macedonian inhabitants had no possibility to prepare themselves to leave the village, they had to abandon most of their personal belongings. Those who did not get out in time or had to go back, were threatened, kidnapped and even tortured by NLA fighters.

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[34] The bazaars in the centre of the old town on the ethnic Albanian side of the capital, a traditional neighbourhood with small shops, coffee bars, restaurants, and one of the main marketplaces in the centre.

The Aracinovo scenario is well-known from other Balkan wars, and the question remains whether Aracinovo again will become a village of multi-ethnic co-existence.

"Take up arms and fight"

Events during the crisis, in particular the NLA's occupation of Aracinovo on 9 June 2001, can probably explain why the Macedonian informants started to express lack of confidence in the political dialogue, and increasingly focused on the possible outbreak of war. A typical view was, and remains, that the government should have been less reluctant at the very outset to use military force with which to compel ethnic Albanian rebels to halt their actions. By doing so, the Macedonian forces could have stopped the uprising before the situation had escalated and the NLA had grown into a strong military threat. In fact, Macedonians are blaming the international community for this strategic failure, a view also reflected among several Macedonian politicians.

During the crisis, the military solution continued to gain support. The majority of male informants said that they were willing to fight for the existing Constitution and to defeat Albanian terrorism in Mace-

donia. "What have we to lose? Either we lose our country or we fight for it, there is no alternative", a young male Macedonian from Skopje said. However, despite the general will to fight for the Macedonian cause, none of the male informants had volunteered to join the Macedonian armed forces. In fact, most of them expressed concern about the prospect of full mobilisation of the Army, as they believed there had been insufficient commitment of economic resources to ensure the security of the Macedonian soldiers.

Western diplomats and the international community in general expressed concern about Macedonian paramilitary groups carrying out violent attacks against ethnic Albanian civilians. Such groups are well known from previous Balkan wars and were responsible for some of the most brutal attacks on the civilian population in the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo during the 1990s. This concern increased when the Minister of the Interior, Ljube Boskovski, came to office in May 2001. He instantly started to reinforce Macedonian paramilitary structures by distributing weapons to police and military, as well as by establishing special security forces such as the

"Lions". In order to promote recruitment to this group, video films were shown on Macedonian national television showing masked soldiers doing sophisticated combat training and performing military exercises.

The frustration level among ethnic Macedonians was clearly detectable during interviews in the summer of 2001. Having in mind the last decade of general social and economic decline, it was very likely that paramilitary groups had considerable recruitment potential among frustrated unemployed Macedonian youngsters. These were young people who expressed serious doubts about their future, and among whom the general frustration were often projected onto ethnic Albanians.

Still, the main impression was that the general Macedonian public, at least in multi-ethnic towns such as Skopje, felt uneasy about such paramilitary structures, an impression confirmed by many ethnic Macedonian informants. Confirming this impression, Macedonian paramilitary activities during the early months of the armed conflict were relatively limited. This surprised many internationals in Skopje. "Obviously, the potential for paramilitary recruitment on the Macedonian side was less probable than most of us believed at first", a western monitor commented. Although Macedonian paramilitary activities increased during the crisis, it was less energetically than on could fear.

The killing of several ethnic Albanians in the village of Ljoboten on 12 August by ethnic Macedonian paramilitaries represented the most ominous sign of such paramilitary activities. According to Human Rights Watch, there was no evidence that any of those who were slain were in uniform or wore the insignia of the NLA. The Macedonian Helsinki Committee was told by villagers that reservists had shot six people, and Western reporters visiting the scene a few days later, confirmed that at least five had been killed.[35] Human Rights Watch accused the Minister of Interior of being directly and intimately linked with the incidents: "It was carried out by troops under his authority during an action in which he was intimately

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[35] Greek Helsinki Monitor and Human Rights Watch: "Alleged Macedonian War Crime against Albanians in Ljoboten", 31 August 2001, and Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), The Crimes of Ljuboten, by Vladimir Javanovski, 31 August 2001.

involved", according to Peter Bouckaert, a Human Rights Watch researcher.[36]

The Albanians' view of the international community

How did the general ethnic Albanian regard the role of the international community in the context of the inter-ethnic conflict in Macedonia? During and after the crises it was widely held that NATO/KFOR, the EU, and the USA sympathised with the Albanian people, not only in Kosovo, as demonstrated in 1999, but also in Macedonia in 2001. Despite the unison and loud condemnation expressed by the international community towards the NLA and its rebellion in Macedonia, ethnic Albanians believed that the outside world was supporting not only the political dialogue and new reforms, but also the Albanian uprising as such. Albanian informants claimed KFOR allowed the NLA to move more or less freely between Kosovo and Macedonia, and by doing so, NATO was seen as an explicit supporter of the NLA.

The majority of Albanian informants interpreted the verbal condemna-tion of the NLA by a unison international community as a mainly diplomatic stratagem to mollify ethnic Macedonian politicians within the government. "Of course they support us!", a male ethnic Albanian from Gostivar exclaimed, "Otherwise how would you explain that the NLA is able to cross the border from Kosovo with people and supplies?" In an interview with "Voice of America", Ali Ahmeti expressed similar views, although using a different example: "It is true that they[37] came out openly against the use of force (...). On the other hand, NATO is openly directing the Slavo-Macedonian state towards resolving the status of the Albanians in Macedonia, and to begin by amending the Constitution."

The international press was also looked upon as Albanian allies. Many Albanians claimed for instance that BBC World news broadcasts (and by implication the British government) favoured the ethnic Albanian insurgency, particularly at the commencement of the crisis. This was repeated by most Albanians interviewed, despite the fact that the BBC, as a majority of international media, was critical towards the NLA and its actions.

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[36] Quoted in Herald Tribune, 6 September 2001.

[37] The international community.

The ethnic Albanians' interpretation of the international community and its active involvement and diplomacy, is probably coloured by the events in Kosovo in 1999 and further on. The commonly held view was that the international community would intervene if necessary, thus avoiding a situation similar to the one prevailing in Kosovo in 1999, i.e. before the commencement of the war.

The large number of ethnic Albanians returning from Kosovo after August 2001 can probably be ascribed to the presence in Macedonia of NATO forces. The typical Albanian view was that NATO, or an equally powerful presence, will remain in Macedonia for a considerable length of time and protect the civilian population against further military conflict.

Who is to blame? Macedonian reactions on the international community

Despite focus in international media on Macedonian hostility towards the international community, frustration and anger were first and foremost directed at the Macedonian government and its political representa-

tives. This is confirmed in the July 2001 UNDP report, which documents that almost 73 percent of the population lacked confidence in the Parliament, while almost 80 percent had no confidence in the government.[38]

A male ethnic Macedonian expressed a representative sentiment:

> The government has not acted responsibly during the crisis, in fact I don't know if one can call this institution a real government. The politicians are not talking to each other, and the Prime Minister approaches the President in a public letter. I found that rather bizarre, and above all, not very reassuring.[39]

Not only did people criticise the government for lack of internal communication, they seriously doubted the genuine will and professional ability of the various ministers. The general opinion regardless of ethnic affiliation tended to be that the politicians were not acting in the interests of their people or the country, and that they were accused of being basically motivated by the prospects of personal economic enrichment. The crisis in Macedonia in 2001, most Macedonians claim, did once and for all reveal

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[38] UNDP Early Warning Report: Skopje, July 2001.

[39] Interview in Skopje, August 2001.

the incompetence of the government as well as its totally irresponsible character.

A particular event, however, provoked the Macedonian public into fierce criticism and hostility towards the international community. In order to get negotiations on track in June, NATO came to terms with the NLA on an evacuation of NLA rebels from Aracinovo under NATO supervision. Approximately 350 rebels were allowed to leave the village with their weapons, assisted by US troops originally serving with KFOR, the NATO-led force in Kosovo. According to the Macedonian media and even several governmental representatives, the Macedonian army had been forced to withdraw under Western pressure.

The large majority of Macedonians viewed the evacuation as a humiliation and people reacted strongly to the fact that the rebels had not been disarmed, and were deported to another NLA-occupied area in Macedonia with their weapons. Furthermore, the offence felt by Macedonians was reinforced by a rejection of an appeal from the Macedonian government by European Union foreign ministers who held a meeting on the same day. The Macedonian Foreign Minister

was candidly told that Macedonia would receive no further financial assistance as long as state funds were "being spent to purchase weapons".

That evening several thousands of ethnic Macedonians gathered outside Parliament. They demanded the dismissal of the President and the Prime Minister, demonstrators invaded the Parliament buildings, and the protest developed into massive rioting, destruction of vehicles belonging to international organisations, and total demolition i.e. of the OSCE entrance as well as the British Airways office. At that moment, the international community was explicitly seen as being in conflict with Macedonian interests — also by Macedonian politicians. The Prime Minister, among several representatives from VMRO-DPMNE, made statements in which NATO was defined as a friend of the "enemy".

Disappointment with the international community is still very much present, as well as the general anger and dissatisfaction with the former VMRP-DMPNE led government and Macedonian politicians in general. In conformity with Albanian opinion, the Macedonians interpret the international community as supportive towards the

Albanians and the former NLA, not only during 2001, but even now. Several issues are pin-pointed when ethnic Macedonian informants and politicians explain their frustration and anger towards the international community's "pro-Albanian" attitude.

Firstly, Macedonians point to the events of 1999 when NATO went to war on behalf of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Secondly (and in agreement with the Albanians), the Macedonians strongly believe that NATO has supported the NLA, not only indirectly by turning a blind eye to the NLAs movements, but also directly by providing, for instance, communications equipment. Thirdly, it was held that there was a clear under-reporting of the large numbers of ethnic Macedonians who fled their homes in the Tetovo region (as many as 15 000 within less than two weeks in July), a view that was also supported by internationals in Skopje at that time. From the Macedonian perspective this was unfair, bearing in mind the international focus on ethnic Albanian refugees earlier in the crisis. This is particularly bitter, the

Macedonians claim, considering that during the refugee crisis in 1999 when Macedonia, as a result of pressure exerted by the international community, accepted (albeit reluctantly) several hund-reds of thousands of Kosovo Albanian refugees on Macedonian territory.

Macedonians have continued to claim that their politicians as well as the general public have been widely criticised for chauvinist attitudes and policies, whereas the ethnic Albanians "who started war in Macedonia" have not being subjected to similar criticism. And the NATOs "Essential Harvest" mission that initiated the implementation of the Ohrid program in the fall of 2001, was largely held to be a symbolic program with very limited impact on the security situation in the crises areas.[40] Macedonians also feel that the international community has ignored the fact that the general decline during the past ten years has hit the Macedonians particularly hard, and that the large group of poverty-stricken, under-privileged ethnic Macedonians has been ignored, before as well as after the crises in 2001.

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[40] Most Macedonians have seriously disputed NATO's official estimate as to the number of weapons involved. According to Macedonian politicians, the press and the general public, the low number NATO had set for the weapons to be collected from NLA (3300), were not compatible with the international community's claim that unless the Parliament adopted the Peace Deal, the country would be pushed into a bloody civil war with the potential of destroying the state. See also chapter VIII.

V. The "Albanian Question"

The so-called "Albanian Question" is frequently referred to in discussions regarding ethnic Albanian uprisings in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia. Several questions are related to the issue, e.g. the extent of joint political and military co-operation between ethnic Albanian groups, as well as the emergence of radical nationalistic visions — such as a Greater Albania/Greater Kosovo.[41] The question includes assessments of ethnic Albanian culture and religious approaches in terms of Islamic orientation, clan structure, but also questions concerning law and order and organised crime. This chapter will briefly outline the focus of the development of Albanian radical policy in Macedonia, and how the Albanian political leaders have expressed and campaigned their political engagement. It starts with a brief discussion on the possible support for a unified Albanian territory among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and an overview of the main Albanians demands.

Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo

In a March 2001speech, Dr. Daniel Serwer described the "Albanian question" as open to three different interpretations:

> To some, it is simply this: when will Albanians all be able to live in one country? Or to others, when will Albanians be able to exercise their right of self-determination through a referendum? To yet others, when will Albanians, if they live in a country where they do not constitute the majority, be able to govern themselves?[42]

In Macedonia all these solutions to, or interpretations of the "Albanian question" have a supporting faction. The emergence of radical militant groups like the "Albanian National Army" (ANA) clearly repre-

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[41] The political vision of a unitary country in which all Albanians are united, is referred to as "Greater Albania". "Greater Kosovo" are by many regarded as a more natural political entity and includes Albanian areas in Former Yugoslavia, such as in Southern Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo.

[42] Dr. Serwer, Director of Balkan Initiative, United States Institute of Peace. Speech held in the "Albanian Forum" organised by the Albanian Institute for Internationals Studies, Tirana, on March 28, 2001.

sents an extreme approach. The ANA claimed that they were fighting for a unified Greater Albania — which would "include territory in Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and Greece".[43] During the crises, international observes as well as Macedonian political representatives questioned whether radical Albanian break-away groups such as the ANA really represented a more radical approach than the former NLA, or whether ANA was being used as a convenient scapegoat, in order to generate an image of a responsible NLA-army, and to distance the NLA from terrorism.

Without speculating on the possible links between the radical parts of the NLA structures and the ANA, the fact remains that the ANA have continued to take responsibilities for violent attacks conducted both in Macedonia and Southern Serbia from 2001 until today. The group have also continued to issue statements contesting the validity of the Framework Agreement.

Moreover, rumours of a new Albanian military offensive in 2003 are intimately linked to the existence and actions of the ANA.[44]

According to reports by the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR) in 2001, the ANA did not gain much support, neither among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia nor in the region as a whole.[45] This has also been the impression gained during interviews with ethnic Albanians during 2001 and 2002 in which the majority of informants rejected organisations like the ANA. There are those, however, who might condemn the ANAs for their violent methods, but still support their political goals.

Ideas of a unified ethnic Albanian territory still have a certain resonance within the Albanian community in Macedonia. Yet, prior to February 2001 people did not seem to view this as realistic political goals; such notions had rather the character of a political myth or a remote vision from the past.[46] The

[43] According to IWP reports, ANA was founded in December 1999 by a KLA faction. The group emerged from the political split into the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the National Liberation Army (NLA), as well as fighters in Macedonia who are dissatisfied with the Framework Agreement signed in Ohrid in August. IWPR Balkan Crisis Report No. 274, 2001.

[44] Information based on interviews with international observers and local political representatives.

[45] IWPR Balkan Crisis Report No. 274, 2001.

[46] Impression gained in interviews with ethnic Albanians in 2000, 2001 and 2002. See also The 2001 Norwegian Helsinki Committee report, "Divided Communities. A study of inter-ethnic Relations and Minority Rights in Macedonia."

idea of a Greater Kosovo,[47] has probably a greater potential for support among Macedonian Albanians than the Greater Albania scenario, mainly because Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians have maintained closer contacts during the Yugoslav era (see below on regional contact).[48] Greater Kosovo aspirations are particularly vital among the many ethnic Albanian villages along the Kosovo border. This could be due to the close-knit nature of the communities on both sides of the border, with substantial numbers of cross-border marriages and migration.

Tanusenvci, the geographical starting point of the insurgency in 2001, is an example, with nearby centres for trade, shopping and other businesses in Kosovo, rather than in Macedonia.[49] Furthermore, these villages are among the poorest and least developed in the country, with no infrastructure and receiving almost no support from central structures in terms of basic social services. Hence the traditionally strong ties with Kosovo as well as the minimal support from the Macedonian government, probably explains the support for the Greater Kosovo in these areas.[50]

Among the Albanian informants living in multiethnic towns like Skopje, Gostivar, Struga etc, people are generally rejecting notions such as Greater Albania/Kosovo. But during numerous discussions and conversations, Albanians often told that if the Macedonians prove unwilling to implement reforms ensuring improved rights for the ethnic Albanian population, the latter would feel compelled to seek stronger collaboration with Kosovo and Albania.

Since the crises, Albanians have increasingly been expressing doubts as to the majority's genuine will to

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[47] This is not a new political vision. During political demonstrations in the late 60s, ethnic Albanians in Tetovo (following political protest marches in Kosovo for the granting of republican status to Kosovo) demanded that Albanian regions of Macedonia should join Kosovo in a seventh republic in Yugoslavia.

[48] During Enver Hoxa's regime, Albanians in Albania were de facto separated from the rest of the Albanian population, and are still both culturally and politically in the periphery of Prishtina.

[49] When the Serbian and Macedonian governments reached an agreement in terms of which the border issue was settled, this was strongly opposed by Albanian villagers on both sides of the border. For years these people had crossed the border, and most of the people in this area lack proper travel documents. Consequently, this was regarded as a threat to their freedom of movement between Kosovo and Macedonia. In fact, it has been said that the border settlement triggered the first insurgency on the Kosovo/Macedonian border in February 2001.

[50] Impressions gained from visiting to border villages in the Western Macedonia in 2000 and 2001.

share power with the Albanian community in Macedonia. Such sentiments have been expressed, not only among interlocutors in Tetovo and Gostivar, but also among Albanians in the capital. Accordingly, the idea of a federal solution, in which Macedonia will be divided into two equal parts, have continued to receive stronger and more candid support since 2001. An ethnic Albanian man from Gostivar explained:

> "*After the signing of the Ohrid Agreement in August 2002 we became very optimistic. However, with the constantly delay of the reform process, Albanians are starting to realise that we will never have for instance an Albanian President or Prime Minister in Macedonia. People are becoming disappointed and impatient. This is why the federal solution is preferred among Albanians.*"[51]

Currently there is only one Albanian party with the federal solution explicitly on the agenda, namely the National Democratic Party, established in Skopje in 2001.[52] Yet

similar ideas have been expressed in different manners by several Albanian leaders in Macedonia.[53]

Still a large part of the Albanian community, most probably see their future within the existing state of Macedonia, although with increased Albanian political power and local autonomy. During interviews, ethnic Albanian informants focus on their lives in the country as well as the long tradition of Albanians living together with ethnic Macedonians.

The Albanian struggle

Ethnic Albanians have without doubt been the most articulate ethnic group in the country in terms of human rights demands. Despite their efforts to address the consequences of anti-Albanian attitudes and activities, the Albanian community claims that these have been inadequate.

Ethnic Macedonians, on the other

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[51] Interviewed in Gostivar in March 2002.

[52] During 2001 and in the beginning of 2002, opinion polls indicated growing support for the NDP. The party lost its popularity when Ali Ahmeti's party (DUI) was established during spring 2002 and rapidly developed into the major Albanian oppositional party in Macedonia. In the general election in September 2002, NDP barely managed to be gain one seat in the Parliament, whereas DUI won the large majority of the Albanian voters.

[53] E.g., the Vice President of the DPA stated: "The only way for Macedonians and Albanians to reach an agreement is to accept their differences. Instead of dreaming of a multi-ethnic society one must accept that the two nations are living, and will continue to live, separately — and peacefully. (Divided Communities. A study of Inter-Ethnic relations and Minority Rights in Macedonia. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee 2001).

hand, maintain that Albanians are looking for discrimination where it does not exist and believe Albanians are overemphasising issues of minor importance. Nevertheless, discrimination and lack of cultural rights have been documented by international organisations. The OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities have addressed the issue in numerous articles and reports.

The issues

Several issues have been focused within the frames of the so-called "Albanian demands". A vital one is linked to the lack of proportional representation in administrative structures, which indicates systematic discrimination on the part of the ethnic Macedonian majority.[54] Equal representation is thus among the key principals outlined in the Ohrid Agreement, which includes reforms directed towards the public sphere in general and the police, and security forces in particular.

Other Albanian demands have been accepting Albanians as a constituent nation, higher education in the Albanian language, the recognition of Albanian as an official language, and the use of the Albanian flag. Among these, the place and the status of the Albanian language has been a key issue for the Albanian political leaders for decades, and caused some of the most serious inter-ethnic clashes during the 1990s.

In line with the Ohrid Agreement, the Parliament recognised the use of Albanian in Public spheres in November 2001. Another significant aspect of the language dispute is linked to the question of higher education given in Albanian. This has been very important and led to the opening of an illegal Albanian University in Tetovo in 1994. The University was immediately declared unconstitutional, followed by clashes between students and teachers and the Macedonian security forces. Despite the government's attempts to close it, the university has been functioning

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[54] An important achievement of the DPA in the governmental coalition dating from 1998 was in fact to increase the proportional representation of ethnic Albanians at higher administrative levels. This was, according to the Deputy Ombudsman in Macedonia, Suzanna Saliu, not reflected at lower administrative levels. Consequently ethnic Albanians will hardly come across any ethnic Albanians in public office even in predominantly Albanian towns. "This is important as it affects confidence in public institutions among ethnic Albanians. I know that this causes a lot of frustration among ordinary people", Saliu told. Interviewed in April 2001.

since with an increasing number of students.[55]

In 2000, OSCEs High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max Van der Stoel, devised a compromise solution recommending the creation of a multi-lingual educational institution to be financed by the international community. As a result of international pressure, the Parliament passed the long disputed legislation on Higher Education in the summer of 2000, and in September 2001 the South East European University (SEE University) was opened in Tetovo with the support of international donors. However, a large part of the Albanian community have continued to support the illegal university, claiming that the Albanians should be provided with state financed higher education in the same way as the ethnic Macedonians.

With regard to the demand of the Albanian community's status as a constitutional nation, the Ohrid Agreement suggested a new formulation in the Preamble of the Constitution, in which the Republic of Macedonia were redefined as a *state for the citizens* of Macedonia, rather than *a national state of the Macedonian people* ("...in which full equality and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanies and other nationalities.)".[56]

Fierce debates over a number of constitutional amendments during the fall of 2001 led the Albanian political leaders to renounce the issue of national status in a compromise with other vital topics. This caused storm in the Albanian public, with political opponents and the Albanian press expressing their discontent and distrust on the part of the further political process. Among ordinary people one could hear that the Ohrid Agreement was loosing its value, pulverised by the Macedonian dominated parliament.

Ethnic Albanian policy

The ethnic Albanian political parties have focused their energy on

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[55] The need of an Albanian higher educational institution became more urgent when Serbian leaders closed the Albanian University in Prishtina in 1992, and the Albanians in the region lost their main educational option. Macedonian reluctance and hesitation to commence Albanian language instruction at University Institutions in Macedonian, additionally contributed to the opening of the Tetovo University (The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2001).

[56] The Preamble of the Constitution before August 2001.

national issues, and their leadeers have to a large extend neglected the construction of broader political platforms, including economic programs, programs for democratisation, and general development — political visions that would benefit the whole population. Consequently, by almost exclusively continuing to emphasise Albanian issues and demands, one could argue that Albanian politicians have contributed to the consolidation of an Albanian social identity as "second class citizens" into which most ethnic Albanians are effectively socialised. The question remains, however, as to whether this "identity" has benefited Albanians in Macedonia in their struggle to take their rightful place in the Macedonian society.

The self-identification as victims could also serve as a lens through which all negative events are viewed, interpreted and explained. By viewing these issues as purely a matter of ethnicity, Albanian politicians often lose sight of, or disregard the fact that many of the difficulties faced by Albanians are general problems also affecting other minorities and marginalized ethnic Macedonians. There are several examples of discrimination without national implications in instances where Albanians could

point to Macedonian suppression of ethnic Albanians. These are linked to the disruptive culture of nepotism and corruption that mark public as well as private institutions in Macedonia. For example, it is widely known that university students have to pay inducement "fees" to their professors in order to pass their exams, and such "bribes" strike ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian students indiscriminately.

Macedonian society is marked by discrimination not only of the country's minorities. Discriminative patterns and tensions exist on many levels and in various contexts, e.g in relations between central and local administrations, towards women, between urban centres and rural areas, and not least towards the Roma people, which is the group most seriously subjected to human rights violations. Such discriminatory patterns and practices have probably been more widely experienced since the country gained its independence, not least due to the difficult transitional process resulting in economic decline and a high level of unemployment, a development which has struck ethnic Macedonians particularly hard.

The majority of ethnic Albanians

still believe that most ethnic Macedonians enjoy substantial privileges at the expense of the Albanian community. But despite the ethnically divided economy and inadequate representation in formal structures on the part of the Albanian community, the distribution of wealth is ethnically relatively even, according to the OSCE.[57] Hence, the causal relationship between socio-economic conditions and inter-ethnic friction is not apparent, despite claims of ethnic Albanian political leaders.[58]

However, "discrimination" may also point to experiences and not only to statistic patterns, which can be documented. A strong sense of being discriminated is felt among members of the ethnic Albanian community who claim that they are not included in the Macedonian society and that they are treated like second-class citizens. This impression is shared by many foreigners who tend to react to what is interpreted as a condescending attitude among many Macedonians towards Albanians in regard to their traditional culture, religious practice and way of living. The result has been that the Albanians, as well as other minority groups in Macedonia, feel that Macedonians dominate public life without taking minority needs and demands into consideration. One can thus argue that due to this discriminative attitude, minorities in Macedonia have given priority to ethnic affiliation before attempting to define themselves as Macedonian citizens.

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[57] Information gained from Petra Anderson, Officer for economy and environment in the OSCE spillover Mission in Macedonia, based on the OSCEs report on socio-economic tendencies in Macedonia in August 2001, for the OSCE. The report is based on existing official data material and statistics in Macedonia. Interviewed in Skopje, September 2001. See also European Stability Initiative's (ESI) report "Ahmeti's village. The Political Economy Of Interethnic Relations In Macedonia".

[58] An impression supported by the UN's "Early Warning Report" from August 2001.

VI. The Macedonian Answer

While the ethnic Albanian community struggled for political changes, and eventually took up arms to fight for structural changes, the ethnic Macedonians have continued to defend present structures, both in terms of minority rights, the Constitution of 1991 and the Macedonian dominance as something naturally given. The ethnic Macedonian community experience the crises and the general inter-ethnic situation as one-sidedly as ethnic Albanians, although the general impression has been that the Macedonians are less articulated in expressing their perceptions and needs. Typical Macedonian perspectives on the the principal Albanian demands and the reforms outlined in the Peace Agreement, will be explained and commented upon here. Furthermore, events contributing towards a radicalisation of Macedonian perceptions and a hardening of its attitudes and stance will be further elucidated.

Discriminated or not?

The typical view expressed by ethnic Macedonians, is that ethnic Albanians are not suffering from discrimination in Macedonia today. In fact, many would claim that ethnic Albanians are in a favourable situation in terms of minority rights; indeed, many Macedonians would assert that the Albanian population enjoys more rights than the Macedonians. For instance, ethnic Macedonian students argue that the quota system, according to which minorities constitute a certain percentage of the total student body, represents a de facto discrimination of ethnic Macedonian students. Clearly, the system of allocating university places according to nationality is causing frustration among Macedonians, and people claim that the "quota-students" are less competent than the student body in general. Such tools, in which the goal is to bring about long term structural changes, is rarely understood as anything other than a sell-out of Macedonian interests within the academic system. More moderate tongues would argue that the system undermines the reputation of Albanian graduates since the quota system causes doubt as to the qualifications and skills possessed by ethnic Albanian students.

Also prior to the ethnic Albanian uprising, Macedonians generally rejected all Albanian demands, and there is a strong feeling among the majority that the country belongs to Macedonians and that the minority should adapt to Macedonian culture and language. Furthermore, it was widely held that the Constitution, in terms of which minorities are granted equal rights, conformed to high international standards. During the time of the crises, the general opinion was that any recognition of Albanian demands would serve as an encouragement to further rebellion on the part of the Albanians. Such reforms would furthermore contribute to the disintegration of the fundamental principles upon which the state of Macedonia rests, and create cultural chaos and misery. Additionally, many Macedonian informants expressed the view that this becomes a matter of pride and self-respect. A young male student made the following typical statement:

> How would you react if people took up arms illegally in your country? You would certainly not reward them with improved rights! For us it is incomprehensible that the very same people who threaten to destroy our country should also be seen as the "victims". In no way can we accept any of the Albanians' demands, not after this.[59]

The language issue

The question of language was among the most delicate issues as it represents a major national symbol for ethnic Macedonians. However, in order to understand Macedonian fears related to the language issue, it is necessary to view the subject in a historical context. Firstly, it has to be remembered that the label "Macedonian" itself is relatively new, and the idea of a Macedonian identity had not found official expression or acceptance anywhere until the creation of the second Yugoslavia. Hence, until Tito's incorporation in Yugoslavia of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, the concept of an official Macedonian language did not exist, nor was there an official Macedonian history, or any national institutions.[60] Macedonian nationhood was, however, strongly opposed by their Greek and Bulgarian neighbours, who claimed that Macedonian nationhood was a purely communist construct invented by Tito and lacking any historical or cultural legitimacy. The Bulgarians bitterly claimed that Macedonian was in fact a Bulgarian

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59 Interviewed in Skopje, August 2001.
60 Perry, 1997.

dialect, and language disputes prevented the two countries from signing a number of bilateral treaties and conventions for many years. Outside pressure, as well as a process of nation building within a young and fragile state, laid the foundation for granting the Macedonian language near sacrosanct status. Ethnic Macedonians explicitly express pride in their language, and Macedonian national identity is intimately linked with language; most Macedonians would say one must be able to speak Macedonian in order to be regarded as an ethnic Macedonian. The issue evokes powerful emotions among Macedonians, also among the young people, who view the Macedonian language in the context hundred of years of national struggle for independence. A female ethnic Macedonian student said:

> It is difficult for me to explain why the language means so much to us. But you must remember that we have fought so hard for our independence, and despite the long struggle for our country, we have managed to preserve our Macedonian language.[61]

The general feeling during 2001 was therefor that should the Albanian language be granted official status, it would be at the expense of Mace-

donian. Others argued that the administrative costs of having a second official language would be unbearable, keeping in mind the difficult economic situation of the country. Additionally, the Macedonian majority is well aware of the fact that the Albanian population is growing more rapidly than the Macedonian, causing concern about the ethnic balance of the country as well as about the future status of the Macedonian language.

Clearly, lack of adequate information created confusion as to the consequences of a revision of the status of the Albanian language. Macedonian informants seriously believed that a change of the status of the Albanian language, would make the government force all Macedonian children to learn Albanian in school, and they worried that increased recognition of the Albanian language would result in ethnic Albanians refusing to speak Macedonian. Furthermore, they claimed that this would lead to a de facto partitioning of the country, in which all ethnic Macedonians would be "cleansed" out of Western Macedonia. An ethnic Macedonian father from Tetovo stated:

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[61] Interviewed in Kumanovo, June 2001.

If there are language reforms, my children will no longer receive proper education in Macedonian. I cannot accept that, and besides, how do you think it feels to be in your own country without being able to speak your own national language? The only way out would be to give up our family house and move to a Macedonian area.[62]

Several Macedonian informants claimed that should the Albanian language be used in Parliament, so should also other minority languages. This, they maintained, would lead to total chaos. Professor Gorge Marjanovic at the Skopje Law Faculty argued that the use of the Albanian language in Parliament would only widen the gap between the Macedonian and Albanian Members of Parliament. According to him, Macedonian MPs would refuse even to listen to Albanian MPs if they spoke in Albanian.[63] Similar views were also expressed by many ethnic Macedonian respondents. Accordingly, there was expressed little flexibility on this issue among ethnic Macedonians. Hence, renewed recognition of the Albanian langue in public life, calls for more public information on the practical consequences of the use of languages in order to defuse the issue. Balanced information has hardly been acces-

sible, neither from politicians, who are afraid to express support for such controversial matters, nor from the media, which have not contributed towards getting the issue into proper perspective. It is also interesting to note the majority of the ethnic Albanian informants insisted that they would continue to use the Macedonian language also in the future, and that they would not oppose a Macedonian curriculum in the Albanian schools. A 34-old Albanian father said:

My daughter will definitely have to learn Macedonian. This is necessary in order have any opportunities outside the Albanian community. I have no problem with that; I myself speak fluent Macedonian as a result of spending most of my life in a country surrounded by the Macedonian language.

According to the Framework Agreement of 13 August, the Albanian language may be used at local levels in municipalities where the Albanian population constitutes at least 20 percent of the population. Additionally, Albanian may be used in communications between representatives of central government branch offices. Regarding the disputed parliamentary practice, the Agreement opens for the use of

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[62] Male ethnic Macedonian from Tetovo, interviewed in Skopje, April 2001.

[63] The Governmental newspaper "Vecer", 12 July 2001.

the Albanian language in the National Assembly with simultaneous translation provided in Macedonian, and additionally in parliamentary committees. However, the Agreement states: "The Macedonian language, using the Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language throughout the Republic of Macedonia and in the international relations of the Republic of Macedonia".[64]

The "sacred" preamble

One of the most persistent Albanian demands was as mentioned above to remove the disputed constitutional Preamble, and grant the Albanians status as a constituent nation.[65] There is general agreement among Albanians that an amendment to the Preamble was essential to a more inclusive attitude towards Albanians in Macedonian society also in practical terms. On the other hand, there was equally strong consensus among Macedonians that the Preamble should not be amended. The symbolic value of the Preamble

is inestimable, and many Macedonians claimed that an amendment or excision would represent no less than a cultural catastrophe to the country and the Macedonian people. A plenary discussion at a seminar for Albanian and Macedonian students in April 2001 showed the degree of conflicting views, which possibly reflects more common attitudes and views. When Albanian participants were asked what they considered to be the most important Albanian demand, they unanimously stated that this was substantial amendment to the Preamble. An equally undivided Macedonian group stated that of all Albanian demands, the issue of the Preamble was the most insuperable, and the one they would never give up. However, it was interesting to note that only two out of more than 20 participants were acquainted with the contents of the Preamble, even though a large number of the group were law students from the University of Skopje.[66] During the crises, the matter further developed into an emotional issue of symbolic signifi-

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[64] Framework Agreement of 13 August: Annex A, constitutional Amendments, Article 7,1.

[65] Minorities interpret the wording of the preamble as defining the constitutional status of Macedonians as superior; hence simultaneously defining minorities as "second class citizens". The Preamble states: "Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanies and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia."

[66] Seminar in Struga, in April 2001, in the regi of the Nansen Dialog Centre in Skopje.

cance, where both groups predicted sweeping practical implications of an amendment to the Preamble. The Albanians interpreted such reforms as essential to self-respect and the feeling of being included in Macedonian society, as well as the end of Macedonian cultural and political dominance. The Macedonians, on the other hand, viewed reform in general and amendments to the Preamble in particular, as a total capitulation to the Albanian rebels. According to most Macedonian informants, several hundred years of struggle for the soul of Macedonia would have been in vain; the loss of the Preamble would sound the death-knell of Macedonian culture. Yet a large majority among the general public had neither read the Preamble nor possess essential knowledge of its contents.[67] The lack of substantial information on key issues clears the ground for misinterpretation and exaggeration of the potential consequences of an amendment. The example of the Preamble shows that there is a clear need for "stripping away" symbolic connotations and values if the Framework Agreement is to gain any legitimacy among the Macedonian public. This is important because it was unlikely that an amendment of the Preamble would threaten the foundations of Macedonian culture and lead to cultural and political chaos, any more than it would have caused an immediate change in the perception of the Albanian community of themselves as "second class citizens".

Other amendments

As mentioned above, proportional representation of ethnic Albanians has been regarded as a key issue. The Framework Agreement opened for considerable improvement in the current situation, and states:

> Laws regulating employment in public administration will include measures to ensure equitable representation of communities in all central and local public bodies and at all levels of employment within such bodies, while respecting the rules concerning competencies and integrity governing public administration. The authorities will take action to correct present imbalances in the composition of the public administration, in particular through the recruitment of members of underrepresented communities.[68]

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[67] Surveys show that although the majority in both the Albanian and Macedonian communities view the Preamble as the most vital issue to either amend or retain, only a small proportion of those interviewed having specific knowledge of the content of the Preamble of 1991. Information provided by Radmila Sekerinska, March 2001.

[68] Framework Agreement of 13 August: Pages 3 and 4, Article 4.2.

According to most ethnic Macedonians, the reason for the ethnic imbalance in public administration was not discrimination, but a consequence of a generally low level of education among all minority groups, and particularly among ethnic Albanians. Hence most of the Macedonian informants strongly opposed the legislative amendment, which they asserted would jeopardise the professional level of public institutions and squeeze out better-qualified Macedonian employees.

It is interesting to note that ethnic Macedonians on the one hand argue that professional levels will drop as a result of increased employment of ethnic Albanians in administrative structures, while on the other hand generally holding that the present system already favours party affiliations at the cost of professionalism. The general opinion is that systematised nepotism also excludes Macedonians who lack political connections and is probably an important reason that the majority of people, regardless of ethnic affiliation, distrust state institutions. It will undoubtedly be difficult to implement the process by which minority representatives will eventually replace ethnic Macedonian staff. Bearing in mind the widespread

nepotism within official structures, the implementation of a genuine process of democratisation in public administration, including adequate national representation, is a complex matter. Proportional representation is only one among several crucial criteria for more professional and democratic institutions.

The issue of Parliamentary voting procedures has been amended in the Framework Agreement. During the former Parliament, ethnic Albanians held only 24 seats in the 120-seat Parliament, and legislation could thus be approved without the assistance of a single Albanian vote. Initially, Albanian political leaders wanted a new "consensual democracy" and an ethnic Albanian Vice-President with the right to veto any law deemed inimical to Albanian interests. However, in line with a proposal by the French constitutional judge, Robert Badinter, the Framework Agreement states that the approval of all legislation of cultural or linguistic significance requires a two-thirds majority, including at least half the affected minority Members of Parliament. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), there is however no agreement as to the definition or scope of the term "cultural or linguistic significance",

and ICG stated that serious parliamentary disputes can therefore be anticipated between Macedonian members arguing for a restrictive interpretation while ethnic Albanian members argue for a wider interpretation.[69]

To sum up – the impression was that from an ethnic Macedonian perspective, amendments favouring the Albanian community represented a loss for the Macedonians. constitutional amendments affecting the use of languages, protection of cultural identity, and the use of flags and symbols, have been important issues for the Macedonians who regard Macedonian culture and language as the more original and authentic for all of Macedonia. With reduced influence in matters of important symbolic significance, such reform represents the "beginning of the decline of Macedonian culture", according to an ethnic Macedonian professor at the University of Skopje.[70] However, despite the Macedonian reactions in 2001, the Parliament's approval of the basic principle of the Ohrid Agreement has caused only limited protest and public reactions.

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[69] ICG Balkans Briefing Paper: Macedonia: "War on Hold", 15 August 2001.

[70] Informal conversation, March 2001.

VII. Inter-ethnic Relations in Perspective

It is clearly not a question of either/or, bur rather of a complexity of causes and preconditions, which must be dealt with if a sustainable stability in Macedonia is to be established. The conflict in Macedonia reflects more general patterns of inter-ethnic division with years of increasing segregation and growing intolerance. Furthermore, ethnic division has been strengthened by general dissatisfaction after more than ten years of economic decline with severe consequences for the standard of living of the majority of the population. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that policy affecting inter-ethnic relations and the rights of minorities in Macedonia, are insufficient *by themselves* to explain why the violence started at the specific moment it did. Still, tense inter-ethnic relations and a history of discriminative patterns and dissatisfaction among ethnic Albanians may explain why the conflict accelerated and reached crisis proportions during the spring and summer of 2001. Therefore *internal* and *external*, as well as socio-economic reasons will be discussed.

Inter-ethnic relations before 1991

Armed conflict in Macedonia is the last of a series of inter-ethnic clashes in the republics of Former Yugoslavia and has led historians and social scientists to analyse why and how ethnicity came to play such an important role in the latest Balkan conflicts. During the 1990s internationals and media tended to explain the ethnic conflicts in Former Yugoslavia as a revival of old hatred between people in the Balkans. Such an approach is strongly criticised by a number of academicians as being deeply incoherent. As noted by Susan Woodward in "Balkan Tragedy": "to explain the Yugoslav crises as a result of ethnic hatred is to turn the story upside down and begin at its end".[71] Historians and social scientists have nevertheless underlined how the Yugoslav state was structured in a way that contributed to and reinforced national perceptions. Tito's

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[71] Woodward 1995

strategy was to weld together the different nations into a unitary state in which civil rights and equal opportunities would be safeguarded while *simultaneously preserving ethnic identity*. E.g. in the old system, resources in terms of economic, political and cultural power was structured along ethnic or national lines and proportionately divided among the different ethnic groups.

In the Socialistic Republic of Macedonia Tito's communist slogan of "brotherhood and unity" thus tended to be more an abstract ideal than an implemented reality. In fact, Tito was particularly eager to foster Macedonian national consciousness and identity.[72] This led the Yugoslav authorities to contribute to the establishment of main Macedonian cultural institutions such as the National Library, the Science of Academy, the National Theatre, and, paradoxically, also the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Eventually in July 1967, the small republic was also granted autonomy status. As a cultural project, this clearly benefited the ethnic Macedonian majority, but was obviously excluding the many minorities. A result of the Macedonian project is said to be that Yugoslav authorities were more tolerant towards Macedonian nationalism. The Skopje authorities when echoing the increased Serbian repression towards ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in the early 1980s "instigated a far more intensive campaign against ethnic Albanian national culture than in Kosovo".[73] Relations between the various nations constituting the small republic were thus marked by distrust and increasing alienation, particularly between ethnic Albanians and the Macedonian majority.[74]

Inter-ethnic relations in the new republic

After independence, inter-ethnic relations were further sharpened. In 1991, during the formation of the independent republic, Albanian resistance surfaced when the Albanian population largely boycotted the referendum on Macedonian independence due to what they perceived as abolition of their basic rights. On January 1992 the Albanian political parties in Macedonia organised an unofficial refer-

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[72] The reason, as noted by many historians, was to create a counterbalance towards Serbian dominance in the federation. E.g. Perry 1997 and Poulton 2000.

[73] Miranda Vickers 1999

[74] Poulton 2000.

endum on territorial autonomy after their claim for constitutional nationhood had been rejected by the Macedonian authorities. Albanian leaders claimed that more than 90 percent of ethnic Albanians participated in the referendum, the large majority of whom voted in favour of autonomy.[75] According to Vickers and Petifer, the Albanians in Macedonia strongly believed that autonomy for Albanian Western Macedonia would later translate into a larger unified Albanian territory.[76] Such sentiments in the first year of independence were probably a result of a general concern that Macedonian dominance during the Yugoslav era also would be the reality in the new republic.[77] The ethnic Macedonian community on the other hand interpreted Albanian resistance in the early 1990s as disloyalty toward the new republic. To the Macedonians, independence represented the realisation of their nationhood and a result of several hundred years of continuous struggle. Thus ethnic Macedonians viewed Albanian reluctance as treacherous, and the Macedonian media bitterly accused the Albanian population of lack of support for the move toward independence and the formation of a new republic. Yet, despite the atmosphere of distrust during the formation of the independent state, the situation of minorities improved to some extent. For instance, restrictions on specifically Albanian cultural expression in the 1980s were relaxed, and the new constitution safeguarded the general right to form political parties, regardless of ethnic affiliation.[78]

Yet, during the 1990s, inter-ethnic relations were gradually more marked by the general process of segregation and ethnic division. Linguistic and cultural differences, such as religious practices and disparate national traditions, became important symbols in the further cementing of "us-and-them" sentiments. Furthermore, lack of a common social meeting ground had long contributed to a climate marked by little inter-ethnic contact, which has probably led to the creation of misleading stereotypes and the entrenchment of inappro-

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Vickers and Pettifer, 1997.

[77] K.S. Brown in J.K Kowan 2000. He notes that in the former Yugoslavia, the Albanians were perceived as having a "kin"-state outside the federation, thus being defined as a nationality (narodnost) rather than a people (narod). Accordingly, in Macedonia, the ethnic Macedonian were " more 'at home' in the Republic of Macedonia than the Albanians".

[78] Poulton, 2000.

priately adversarial images. For instance, the typical Macedonian assessment of the Albanian community have been that Albanians are entrapped in unsophisticated traditional modes of behaviour, and Albanian culture is described as unsophisticated and violent, with weapon fetishism as an alarming ingredient. Furthermore, the Albanian community is impressionable and easily swayed owing to their traditional hierarchical structure. The Albanian view of the Macedonian community is that its lacks a specific cultural identity and that this render them suspicious, indeed paranoid when confronted by other cultural expressions. Albanians also blame Macedonians for not being willing to integrate the large Albanian community thereby preserving Macedonian political, economic and cultural dominance.[79] The tendency of increased ethnic tensions was, as we have seen, founded on decades of relatively cool relations with little social mixing, few inter-ethnic marriages and a growing feeling of alienation in relation to the "others". The impression was that almost every ethnic Macedonian or Albanian, regardless of age and social status, were raised to believe that Macedonian and Albanian cultures represent two different parts of the world.

Internal events in the context of regional developments

Albanian political struggle in Macedonia has for decades been intimately linked with events and political developments in Kosovo. This was demonstrated during the late 60s, when in 1968 ethnic Albanian demonstrators in Tetovo, following demonstrations in Kosovo for the granting of republican status to Kosovo, demanded that the Albanian regions of Macedonia should join Kosovo in a seventh republic within the Former Yugoslavia. The situation was repeated in the 80s, when, as Miranda Vickers notes: "Events in Kosovo again directly influenced on other Albanian-inhabited areas, especially Western Macedonia, where in July 1981 police and territorial defence units were put on alert after leaflets were distributed calling on Albanians to rebel".[80] As a result, during the 80s the Macedonian authorities adopted an increasingly repressive attitude towards Albanian nationalism and Albanian national symbols; the use

[79] Impression gained from interviews and conversations in Macedonia from 2000-2003.
[80] Vickers 1999: 205

of the Albanian language was curbed, and the Albanian flag as well as the use of Albanian names were forbidden. Still the situation in Macedonia was never comparable with the violent situation in Kosovo during the late 1980s and 1990s, a fact demonstrated by the sizeable number of Kosovo Albanians who fled to Macedonia during that time.

It is widely held that the crises in Kosovo in the late 1990s also consolidated ethnic divisions in Macedonia. The dramatic deterioration of the situation in Kosovo, eventually leading to the NATO air strikes and the refugee influx in 1999, threatened the fragile ethnic balance in the young republic. The war in Kosovo clearly exposed differences in the perception of the two major groups of these events and not the least the role of the international community. From the ethnic Albanian standpoint, the Albanian uprising was crucial to putting an end to Serbian repression and violence. Macedonians on the other hand feared that demands of Kosovo Albanians for independence in Kosovo might come to be mirrored by ethnic Albanians making corresponding demands in Macedonia. And whereas Albanians saw the international community as their rescuers and allies, ethnic Macedonians claimed that NATO supported extreme forms of Albanian nationalism and terrorism.[81]

Albanian politics in a regional context

During the crises in Macedonia, the international community became increasingly aware of the link between Albanian paramilitary groups in Kosovo/Southern Serbia and the Albanian rebellion in Macedonia. Several observers associated the withdrawal of ethnic Albanian guerrillas in southern Serbia with the uprising in Macedonia, in which Albanian paramilitary forces and weaponry were forced out from one area only to turn up in another, hence underlining the regional dimension of Albanian armed resistance in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia.

The political conflict in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia, must be viewed in the context of the close geographical, cultural and familiar links between ethnic Alba-

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[81] The 1999 rhetoric and the projection of stereotypes were resurgent during the crisis in Macedonia, and still poses an important challenge to the international community in their role as facilitators of the reform process and confidence building in Macedonia.

nians in these areas. Before the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the drawing of new borders, people had for generations moved freely across the borders, with the result that family members are often situated on both sides of the Macedonian/Kosovo border. During the last decades a large number of Kosovo Albanians have, as noted above, migrated from Kosovo to Macedonia.[82] This trend was further increased with the stepping up of Serbian suppression during the 80s and the 90s. Moreover, ideological bonds were established among Albanians during the Yugoslav era, when a substantial number of Albanians attended the Albanian University in Prishtina, where a politically radical environment was constituted by Albanians from the whole region, including parts of the current Albanian political leadership in Macedonia. Several leading ethnic Albanian politicians and intellectuals from Macedonia completed their higher education in Prishtina, thus living in Kosovo for several years, and most of them have continued to maintain close contact with Kosovo Albanian politicians. The political

contact was maintained also after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. As Vickers and Pettifer notes on the political developments in the mid 90s:

> In the winter of 1994-5 a number of political initiatives were taken that strongly linked the Kosova cause with that of the Tetovo based PDP (…). There is little doubt that the Kosova president Dr Ibrahim Rugova has worked more and more closely with the radicals a in the Albanian leadership, while the Tetovo leaders have seen the extent of cultural repression engineered in FYROM."[83]

The opening of the illegal university in Tetovo (see chapter V) should be seen in this context, having in mind the close relations between Albanian leaders in Macedonian and the underground university for Albanians in Prishtina. The closing of the Albanian University in Prishtina (1992) caused the loss of the main Albanian educational option in the region, and a new Albanian university in Macedonia represented a temporary alternative. Present at the celebration of the opening of the Tetovo University in February 1995 were representatives from Kosovo and

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[82] The numbers of Kosovo Albanians immigrants in Macedonia is not certain. According to Vickers and Pettifers (1997) there are "perhaps as many as 40 000 (Kosovars) living in FYROM". The question is highly politicised and intimately linked with the dispute concerning the number of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia.
[83] Vickers and Pettifer, 1997:180
[84] Ibid.

the Albanian Diaspora as well as local politicians and intellectuals.[84] The Kosovo support has continued also after the reopening of the Albanian University in Prishtina in 1999, e.g. in terms of exchanging teacher resources and co-operation on student seminars.[85]

The war in Kosovo further demonstrated the political, financial and military ties between the Albanians in the region, and not the least between the region and the large Albanian Diaspora living mainly in Western Europe and USA. Ethnic Albanians were recruited to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) from Macedonia and Southern Serbia as well as from abroad, and money poured in to Kosovo Albanian paramilitary structures from the entire Albanian community. In Western Macedonia, former KLA-soldiers were welcomed as heroes after the war and celebrated with a monument to slain Kosovo soldiers, which was erected in a village outside Tetovo in Macedonia during the spring 2000. It is consequently impossible and indeed irrelevant to define a fixed "boundary" between Kosovo and Macedonia and to describe events in Macedonia as strictly "internal". Ethnic Albanians

in Kosovo and Macedonia are intimately interrelated politically, socially and family wise, financially and as we have seen, with regard to paramilitary activities.

The issue is indeed relevant and interesting to dwell upon. One should note that the international community holds relatively little knowledge on informal political power structures in or between the various Albanian communities. Informal political power structures are certainly not an exclusive Albanian feature, this is to a larger or lesser extend the reality in all existing societies. Experiences from the last years in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia have nevertheless proved that the Albanian political organisations are particularly difficult to comprehend for outsiders. Enhanced insight could help us to better comprehend the political dynamics in the Albanian communities in the Western Balkans. This includes a number of questions concerning e.g. the impact of Albanian cultural traditions on Albanian modern life, the status of the clan and the extended family in the Albanian societies, and relations between powerful families, political parties, militant and eco-

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[85] According to F.Sulejmani (the former rector of the Tetovo University). Interviewed several times from 2000 until September 2002.

nomic structures in the region. For instance, do we fully know in what way the family ties between the PDK-leader in Kosovo, Hashim Thaci and the DPA Vice President Mendu Thaci impact political and financial relations between the two parties?[86] And more generally, in what way are former KLA- and NLA-structures logistically, financially and politically interlinked? And presuming that there is a strong connection; with the presence of former NLA-structures, represented by the DUI in Macedonian official political life, in what way will political events in Kosovo influence the political development in Macedonia? Generally one can add that deep insights on cultural, political and social phenomena are always imperative for international co-operation partners- i.e. countries, multilateral organisations, or international NGOs - to secure adequate and distinct response to the specific challenges in the recipient country.

Socio-economic factors

The transition to a functioning democracy and a market economy has proved to be difficult in the Former Yugoslav republics, including Macedonia. Economic reforms involving privatisation, the shutting down of unprofitable factories and state owned companies, have resulted in an alarming unemployment rate as well as general abridgements of public social services. In the last ten years, people have experienced a substantial drop in living standard and are losing hope of a better future in Macedonia. According to various UNDP Early Warning Reports from 2000 to 2001, a majority of those asked expressed distrust in public institutions, pessimism regarding the social and financial prosperity of Macedonia and so on.[87] And after more than ten years of independence, economic processes have not benefited ordinary people and the country is still marked by strong centralisation tendencies and a weak private sector. Corruption and large grey and black economies have flourished during the 1990s, and represent, in addition to increased instability, a significant obstacle to a possible increase in foreign investments in Macedonia.[88]

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[86] Close family relationship was confirmed in a meeting with Hashim Tachi in Prishtina November 2001.

[87] UNDP Early Warning Report October 2000, February/March 2001, August and October 2001.

[88] A feature which is described in numerous reports, including a report on Socio-economic patterns and security by the OSCE (August 2001) and European Stability Initiative's (ESI) report: "Ali Ahmeti's village. The Political Economy Of Interethnic Relations In Macedonia".

Dim prospects and increased poverty have imposed strain on inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. It is understandable and predictable that economic hardship creates a climate in which inter-ethnic relations are tested. The strong tendency towards segregation has also contributed to the development of parallel economic spheres, and has reinforced the construction of ethnically divided economies in Macedonia – which in turn has contributed in exacerbating ethnic tensions. The abandonment of communism was economically disruptive for the Macedonian majority population. Not only did they loose their jobs and get their salaries greatly reduced, they were left with a legacy of decades of financial subsidies from the more prosperous republics of the former Yugoslavia that seem to have affected the general ability to make a living in the private sector. On the other hand, some segments of the ethnic Albanian community have in fact experienced economic growth in the recent years. This is due to several factors. Firstly, the absence of economic integration during the communist era forced Albanians to develop small private businesses and their own informal economy. Thus private initiative and trade have been widely cultivated within the Albanian community. Secondly, due to the fact that Albanians were shut out from public jobs, a large proportion of the male population emigrated as guest workers to Western Europe. Albanian guest workers provided their families back home with financial remittances from abroad, and this continues to represent a considerable income for many Albanian families. Furthermore, large-scale reconstruction activities in Kosovo since the war in 1999 also contributed to increased economic activities in the Albanian centres in Macedonia. This is clearly apparent in the Tetovo-region, where e.g. construction activities and new shopping centres are visible signs of the increased investment and business activity. Parts of the Albanian communities in Kosovo and Macedonia are additionally believed to be closely involved in lucrative criminal activities such as smuggling and drug dealing. It should be noted however, that economic crime in the Albanian community must be seen as a result of years of inadequate economic integration. The large numbers of individuals excluded from public structures and institutions are less inclined to identify with the state, a fact that poses a challenge to efforts to control the black and grey markets. The high unemploy-

ment rate has led to an increasing number of ethnic Macedonians being pulled out of formal economic structures, and may be part of the explanation of why economic crime and criminal activities increasingly represent a feature of Macedonian society, regardless of ethnicity.

Although the general Macedonian public has experienced considerable loss of privileges during the past ten years, they are well aware of their dominant role historically, politically and culturally. Many Macedonians have thus expressed outspoken distrust in, and dissatisfaction with, Macedonian authorities, due to what is perceived as the authorities' pro-Albanian policy at the expense of the Macedonian community. Seen from the Macedonian point of view, decline must be understood as a result not only of structural reforms and transition, but also as a consequence of increased Albanian influence, which is interpreted as a direct threat to Macedonian interests.[89]

A general pattern of conflict in Macedonia?

Despite ominous predictions and negative trends described in numerous reports, the young state had defused and survived several potential crises, and ethnic violence was definitely not widespread in Macedonia before 2001. However, as has been demonstrated above, an atmosphere characterised by fierce animosity, distrust, intolerance and the tendency towards the establishment of ethnically divided political, social, cultural and economic spheres, did not need extremist encouragement to spiral out of control. Since then, events on the ground as well as attitudes on the part of political leaders on both sides, have contributed to exacerbate ethnic tensions and radicalise ethnic identities.

Thus, at nearly every turn, the conflict between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians conform to the general patterns of inter-ethnic conflicts described and explained by academics. The preconditions of conflict were clearly present through the massive production of stereotypical antagonistic images on both sides.

However, deeply rooted negative or hostile stereotypical images do

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[89] In this regard, it is interesting to note that when ethnic Macedonians were demonstrating against the killing of several police officers in Bitola in May 2001, they targeted mainly ethnic Albanian business establishments and not individuals.

not necessarily lead to violent conflict. The vital issue is how perceived identity and violent conflict are related. Why do relationships between some groups suddenly turn violent and others not? According to several studies, ethnic or national identity is intensified primarily "during periods of social, economic or political crisis, when it is brokered by leaders who create or reinterpret histories and traditions".[90] Moreover, the potential for conflict arises when one group believes that recognition of the "other" can compromise its own interests – as when Macedonians "grant" rights to the Albanians, it is experienced as a negation of its own identity and role in society. The latter represents a precise and significant description of the general Macedonian attitude and is often expressed by Macedonian political leaders. Moreover, conflict may trigger violence among groups under conditions of scarcity. When the gap between material expectation and available assets grows, aggression towards those considered to be the cause for this "relative deprivation" can grow and intensify. This may explain the growth of hostile images and stereotyping in a society facing economic decline.[91] Indeed, both Albanians and Macedonians would generally accuse the "others" in order to explain their experience of "scarcity", Albanians by pointing to Macedonian historical economic domination, and Macedonians by pointing to the dramatic reduction of income during the past ten years, and their relative deprivation compared with Albanians.

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[90] Janice Gross Stein in Crocker, Hampson, etc, 1996:95
[91] T.R.Gurr, 1970. J.G Stein and L. Pauly, 1989

VIII. Further Developments and Challenges

Future stability and positive developments in Macedonia depends, as we have seen, on a variety of factors, including the still on-going process of transition towards democracy and modern economy. Progress depends, however, first and foremost on the way local political leaders respond to the current challenges, and on their ability and determination to develop a unified political agenda in which the interests of all groups are addressed. Additionally, the situation in Macedonia is, as we have seen, tightly connected to broader regional developments, which also comprise the international community's response and policy. This chapter will briefly discuss current political developments in Macedonia in the context of some of these issues. First however a short report on the present political situation in the context of the conflict in 2001.

Post-crises political developments

The fall 2001 was marked by fierce public debates on the part of the Ohrid Agreement. The high temperatures of the discussions were mirrored in the parliamentary sessions on constitutional amendments, but despite the rows, the National Assembly approved the revision in line with the Ohrid Agreement in November 2001. Immediately after, SDSM returned to opposition, and the VMRO-DPMNE/DPA constellation was again the main political driving force in the government.

In June 2002 early parliamentary election was announced to be held on 15 September 2002. The summer months were hence marked by the pre-election campaign, and further implementation of the Ohrid agreement was put off, pending the results of the upcoming election. Several disturbing incidents during the pre-election campaign and widely anticipated fraud and intra/inter-ethnic violence put the international community on alert. Thus a sizeable international observation force were deployed all over the country to monitor the election. The gloomy predictions did not materialise, however, with 73 percent of the electorate casting their ballots in an election marked

by the relative lack of violence. The election clearly revealed the general electorates disapproval with the VMRO-DPMNE/DPA regime and a distinct demand for a new government. The election winner was the SDSM-lead "Together for Macedonia"-coalition[92] on the Macedonian side, which gained a vast victory with almost a clear majority in the Parliament, and on the Albanian side the political newcomer "Democratic Unity for Integration (DUI), led by the former NLA-leader Ali Ahmeti. In early October controversial talks were initiated between the Albanian winning party DUI and SDSM. Late October 2002 the negotiations concluded with a power-sharing government between the Macedonian coalition and DUI, and the new government was announced with a platform pledging consensus on issues of essential national interests and full implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.

Continued instability and insecurity

Despite the relatively smooth transition of power, the new Macedonian government is facing a number of difficult challenges and serious concerns. The political situation is still marked by the crises in 2001, when the country was on the edge of civil war. The results have been further ethnic division between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, with an increasing number of people moving from multi-ethnic villages and town neighbourhoods to ethnically clean ones, and major parts of the former crises areas are still largely marked by instability and inter-ethnic hostility. Distrust and animosity between major ethnic groups have caused several killings and serious incidents over the last months, exposing the lingering danger of ethnic violence. The security situation is alarming with large parts of the ethnically Albanian dominated areas in the west beyond control of law enforcement, causing chaos and insecurity for ordinary people as well as for the police- and security forces. This is despite the international led operation to redeploy the police- and security forces in the crises areas in 2001-2, which unfortunately was mostly "a cosmetic exercise".[93] Hence, continuing implementation of the Ohrid Agreement

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[92] Together for Macedonia: A mainly Macedonian coalition formed by a number of Macedonian parties such as SDSM and LDP, as well as a number of smaller minority parties.
[93] ICG Balkan report. No. 135. November 2002:p.5. This assessment is confirmed, not only by international monitors and analysts in the field, but even more by the current developments in the former crises areas.

depends to a large extend on the Governments ability to exert control in the security vacuum that exists in the former crises areas. The President of DUI, Ali Ahmeti, has yet to prove that he can restrain the various armed elements in the crisis areas, and reports are indicating that his authority is limited and reduced.[94] The situation calls for serious concerns, bearing in mind the similar patterns in other parts of the region, where long-term instability have cemented destructive patterns of violence and organised crime. Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski acknowledged the appalling situation with the following statement:

> *Who would invest, build and hire new persons in a country with constant shootings, where it is not recommended to travel after dark in one third of the territory. In a country where the children are killed while playing basketball and where other children instead of being at school, go out on the streets and beat old men. Does anyone have an illusion that economic progress and prosperity is possible in the country where the peace is fragile, where instability and insecurity rule.[95]*

Peace agreement called in question

The fact that the majority of voters recently elected a government that has embraced the Ohrid Agreement, has induced optimism among international representatives and monitors in Macedonia.[96] However, as noted by several observers, the result reflected more a vote against VMRO-DPMNE/DPA, than a vote *for* SDSM and DUI. An important challenge for the government is the wide-ranging scepticism towards the Ohrid Agreement, not only among ethnic Macedonians and smaller minorities, but increasingly among the Albanian community. Albanian informants express suspicions and impatience toward Macedonian political parties due to what is perceived as a policy of redefining and slowing down the reform programs. Several reports indicate that the Albanian electorate severely doubts SDSM's ability and will to lead the reform process in a more effective manner than their predecessor VRMO-DPMNE. Moreover, only moths after the election, DUI experiences severe loss in its popularity among

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94 Information gained from ethnic Albanian informants as well as international monitors in Macedonia.

95 Quoted from International Crises Groups report 135, 2002:4

96 In the context of the general opinions on SDSMs moderate stance during the parliamentary process in 2001 and 2002, the fact they were able to gain, jointly with their coalition partners in "Together for Macedonia",97 an overwhelming victory, justifies a certain optimism.

the ethnic Albanian electorate, mirroring DPAs experience in the late 90s.[97] Even more disturbingly are the responses given by the Albanians informants, where a large majority claim that Albanians will never attain real equality in the present state of Macedonia, despite full implementation of the Peace Agreement. This is probably one of the reasons why the federalisation solution is more frequently heard among ethnic Albanians than before 2001.[98]

Further implementation of the Ohrid Agreement will also depend upon the behaviour of VMRO-DPMNE and DPA in opposition. Since the establishment of the new government, the former Prime Minister Georgievski has continued to condemn the Ohrid-agreement, and VMRO-DPMNE has focused their energy at maximising the political cost to SDSM for forming a government with the "former terrorists'" party. For a while VMRO decided to boycott the national assembly and distance itself from the further political process. However, in January 2003, VMRO-DPMNE returned to parliament, and has recently taken several steps to improve its reputation in the Macedonian and the international society.[99] On the Albanian side, it remains to be seen whether DPA's influence on the ground is badly shattered by the election loss, and whether the party's political course will have a more radical nationalistic orientation.

Distrust in political parties and democratic institutions

A more general concern is linked to the dramatic lack of confidence in political leaders and political parties. Such opinions are widely expressed, particularly among the younger generations. The general picture provided by young informants, regardless of ethnic belonging, is that most politicians are clinging to their positions, not driven by the will to create substantial changes for the benefit of the general Macedonian society,

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97 When the DPA joined the government in 1998 the Albanian community expressed high expectations about the fulfilment of the Albanian demands. Only a year later, Albanians claimed that no substantial improvements had taken place, and some were asserting that DPA was more concerned about staying in power than about Albanian rights.

98 Impression gained from several conversations and interviews with Albanian informants in November 2002.

99 This includes above all the exclusion of the former Ministry of Interiors, Ljube Boskovski, from the party's executive committee. Although Mr. Boskovski probably is among the most popular VMRO-DPMNE politicians, it is nevertheless a significant step in reforming the image of the VMRO-DPMNE.

but by their own private (financial) interest. Youngsters on both sides thus reject the political parties as an arena for social and political engagement and commitment.

A young Albanian man gave a typical statement:

> I will never go into party politics because I think it is almost impossible to remain clean and uncorrupted within existing political structures. In fact, I believe that I can do more for my society by working in a humanitarian NGO.[100]

This attitude does not mirror indifference and lack of political awareness among the young intellectuals, but rather a widespread feeling of hopelessness and distrust with the present political establishment. The situation is grave, however, and insufficient recruitment of gifted youngsters into existing political parties represent a significant obstacle to the creation of the future democracy in Macedonia.

Equally seriously is the lack of confidence in public administration and democratic institutions. Several reports indicate that a large majority of citizens' distrust state institutions and political ruling structures. The general impression is that political connections are vital to obtain jobs in public administration. A striking example is the fact that to be employed as a doctor at the State Hospital, the Minister of Health must approve the appointment personally. Moreover political reshuffles in Macedonia tend to lead to extensive replacement in state and municipal structures, and the current administration has so far been no exception in this regard. A serious implication of such system is, however, that party affiliation seems to be a more important job criteria in public administration than relevant professional background. All in all, the consequence of such policy has been a sluggish and rigid bureaucracy, causing frustration and distrust among the general public.

Substantial public reforms sector is addressed in the Framework Agreement. In this context, the issue of local self-government is noteworthy, and is specifically targeted in the Ohrid document. The issue is highly politicised, however, not least with regard to the reduction in the number of municipalities. Macedonians claim that the decentralisation reforms will disfavour Macedonian citizens, particularly

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[100] Ethnic Albanian participants in a seminar in Struga, arranged by the Nansen Dialouge Centre in March 2001.

in the Macedonian municipalities in the western part of the country. The Albanian community, on the other hand, welcomes the reform, which is recognised as a necessary mechanism for increased Albanian influence in the Albanian dominated areas. The international community has for years encouraged the Macedonian government to speed up the process of decentralisation. However, according to R. Sekerinska (SDSM), the lack of capability in local government administrations, as well as undeveloped systems to transfer funds, still represent a major challenge for carrying out the process in a responsible manner.[101] the wisdom of speedier implementation of the reforms were questioned by parts of the international community before the crises. E.g. the analyse of the IMF and the World Bank in 2000, appeared to be that this was premature, due to lack of human resources and the highly complex economic situation involving grey/black economy. The OSCE on the other hand argued that it was impossible to transfer competencies without at the same time transferring the necessary funds to implement local policy.[102]

With less than two percent of public resources in the control of local administration, the need for decentralisation reforms are unquestionable. On the other hand, one should not underestimate the challenges and realities that are present on the ground. Institutions building and strengthening of human resources in local administration are long term processes, as experienced by most countries dealing with public sector reforms. In an environment marked by instability, corruption and crime, as well as substantial lack of professional human resources — the process will need even more support and long term engagement.

Call for a new policy

"*People are basically tired of talking about inter-ethnic relations. Maybe we should focus on something else*" a long-term international observer commented, in a discussion on the role of the international community in Macedonia. The remark points to some of the main dilemmas in international peacemaking/keeping: How should the international community act in order to support long term stability

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[101] Interviewed in Skopje, fall 2001.
[102] The Norwegian Helsinki Committee 2001

in a country marked by high level of inter-ethnic tensions? Moreover, it contains concerns as to whether the Western understanding of and response to the Macedonian situation have in fact facilitated further production and legitimation of ethnic and national policies. Experiences with peace accords facilitated by western countries in other parts in region, e.g. the Dayton Agreement, with similar objective, although in a different context, have shown that international and local agendas and aims are not always coherent. Experiences from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) have also shown that lack of similar perspectives can have serious impact on the implementation of the peace accord. One of the main objectives with the Dayton Accord was to establish a multi-ethnic based society in BiH, but has ironically contributed to increased ethnic segregation both on grassroots and political level. Today we can see similar patterns in Macedonia, which have led a number of political analysts and politicians in Macedonia to "call the international community for a more careful and sophisticated approach", as formulated by the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) representative Jovan Maniesevski. According to him, the vital issue in Macedonia is the poor condition of the state, which is marked by inefficiency, corruption and nepotism. Hence, he argues, the process must first and foremost be focused on state building and strengthening of its capacity to perform in an adequate efficient manner. The issue has been accentuated by the destructive patterns that have continued to evolve in the Western region, and the government's incapacity to enforce control and influence in the affected areas — in spite of the international community's efforts.[103]

One cannot, however, blame the international community for their good intentions and worthy principles, but one can question the processes leading to the signings of the various Peace Agreements, and hence the reality check of the overall and particular objectives during the process. The main lesson learned seem to be that such agreements must be better anchored in the local context, and more flexible to renegotiate when the contexts are changing, in order to secure substantial local ownership.

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[103] Jovan Manasievski is the currently the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare. Interviewed in Skopje in September 2002.

Having said that, the main responsibility for the recent developments in Macedonia must and should be placed on local Macedonian and Albanian political leaders. On the part of the Macedonians, their policy over the last decade has been based on a perception that minority groups are entitle to certain rights, but not at the expense of diluting the country's Macedonian character. The Albanians, on the other hand, have based their political programs exclusively on ethnic issues and increased Albanian rights, without including general issues or other ethnic nationalities. The result has been a total and dysfunctional division of Macedonian and Albanian politics, where national interests have become more important than broader social and economic chal-lenges. This has led the Macedonian society into a vicious circle in which all main political and social topics tend to be reduced into a matter of ethnicity. In a country (or a region) "where ethnicity has been simultaneously fundamentalised and pathologised"[104], the ethnic division of policy remains one of the main obstacle for general developments - for the benefit of all citizens in the country. In this context, the international monitor's deep sigh is indeed relevant; in order to achieve economic development and a prosperous future in Macedonia, inter-ethnic relations must be dealt with in a way that shift the focus from national interests towards the interests of the country as such.

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[104] J.K. Cowan and K.S.Brown in Cowans 2000: 2 (introduction chapter).

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Main Focus

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is a non-governmental (NGO), non-profit organisation which monitors compliance with the human rights provisions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) within all OSCE signatory states and supports initiatives to strengthen democracy and civil society. In the last few years the Norwegian Helsinki Committee's international activities have focused on the emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Main Activities
· Monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in the OSCE-area
· Election monitoring
· Supporting NGOs and independent media in Central and Eastern Europe
· Human rights education
· Advocacy at the OSCE, UN and other international governmental organisations

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