

## MACEDONIA : BETWEEN OHRID AND BRUSSELS

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*An (much) abridged version of this text has been published in the Chaillot Papers, 107, January 2008, at: <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp107.pdf>*

In the July 2006 parliamentary elections, a majority of ethnic Macedonians voted for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO-DPMNE, right-wing) in the hope that Macedonia would end a difficult chapter of its history - the post-conflict period. Since an Albanian armed insurgency erupted in February 2001, the political agenda had indeed been virtually dominated by interethnic issues. In 2001, early international involvement had prevented the armed confrontation from turning into a full scale civil war<sup>2</sup>. But the Ohrid Framework agreement (FA) that successfully put an end to violence on August 13, 2001, entailed major constitutional and institutional changes designed to redress what was perceived as imbalances between the ethnic Macedonian majority and the Albanian community. For five years, under close international supervision (the EU Office for the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, the United States, NATO, the OSCE...), Macedonia's ruling elites were thus compelled to devote most of their energy to minority rights and interethnic relations. In 2006 VMRO-DPMNE leader, Nikola Gruevski, built his political success on a discourse that aptly combined promises to make Macedonia a prosperous country and to boost ethnic Macedonian self-confidence. After years when members of the ethnic majority felt they were the major losers in the FA process, the VMRO-DPMNE's emphasis on national pride was perceived as most welcome.

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<sup>2</sup> The conflict reportedly made few casualties - less than 200 -, mostly among combattants. In December 2001, Macedonian security forces claimed to have lost 63 men and the former leadership of the NLA, 64. Quoted in Iso Rusi, "What do the casualties of war amount to?", AIM Skopje, December 2001, at: <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/trae/archive/data/200112/11230-003-trae-sko.htm>. On material destructions, see UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Update OCHA Skopje, September-November 2001, December 2001, at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/93bca7e97095281cc1256b1a00358aa9?OpenDocument>

In this context, the new ruling elites were certainly ill-prepared to face the renewed interethnic tensions that emerged at the political level. In the legislative elections, despite accusations of corruption and arrogance, the Democratic Union for integration (DUI), an offspring from the former National Liberation Army (NLA), had obtained a majority of the Albanian votes, as its name was associated with increased rights for the Albanians in the field of language, education, equitable representation in public bodies and local self-rule. The VMRO-DPMNE's decision to choose the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) as a coalition partner met with strong resistance from DUI, whose leaders oscillated between threatening renewed ethnic conflict, boycotting parliamentary sessions and putting up a new list of minority demands. Under significant international pressure, the VMRO-DPMNE finally accepted to sit at the table in the Spring of 2007 and to negotiate an agreement with DUI on a few issues the Albanian party's leadership claimed to pertain to the implementation of the Ohrid agreement. Meanwhile Macedonia had once again lost several precious months in implementing much needed reforms in the judiciary, state administration, education and the economy.

These recent developments are illustrative of both the dramatic changes that have taken place in Macedonia since the 2001 conflict and the persistent misunderstandings between the two major ethnic communities. They also pinpoint the complex local perceptions of the international community's role. Six years after the signing of the Ohrid agreement, members of the majority and of the Albanian minority continue to hold different readings of the past conflict and of the FA. While segments of the ethnic Macedonian population now consider that at least some of the Albanian demands were legitimate, a majority of the people mostly accepted ethnic compromises because they were seen as the only option to prevent war. In their perception, once the Ohrid reforms were adopted, other issues such as unemployment, poverty and corruption should be have been allowed to return to the forefront. Macedonia could also reassert its sovereignty after years of intense (and at times much resented) international scrutiny. The DUI's offensive political strategy in 2006-2007 simply confirmed widely-held views that ethnic Albanians are not really interested in the common state, and only get mobilized when it comes to pushing ethnic demands. Among the Albanians, support for the Ohrid agenda has understandably been extremely high since 2001. While most members of the community originally feared the Macedonian majority would never accept to share power with the Albanians, recent developments have contributed to a slight improvement in perceptions of the ethnic majority. Yet cultural prejudices and stereotypes remain high. Albanians often show little understanding of the Macedonians' unsecure identity

and believe that, unless pressured from outside, ethnic Macedonians are unlikely to promote any policy aimed at improving the fate of the Albanians. In their view, majority/minority relations are not questions that can be resolved once for all, but issues that require constant fine-tuning.

True, aside from interparty bickering, interethnic relations on the ground have gradually improved over the past years. But local situations vary greatly. The tense Struga and Kumanovo configurations stand in stark contrast to rather good interethnic relations in Debar and in Gostivar. Moreover, on average social distance between communities has increased since 2001. Intercommunity interactions often do not go beyond the sphere of professional relations, and there is little likelihood that tendencies towards community self-enclosure and physical separation (in education, for instance) may soon be reverted. The Ohrid deal rested on a combination of measures designed to favor multiethnicity (like equitable representation in state administration and public enterprises) and reforms bound to reinforce ethnic distance (decentralization and higher education in Albanian language, among others).

Under these circumstances, EU integration and NATO membership appear all the more important as they stand among the few projects on which members of the majority and the other communities agree. To various degrees (NATO was long perceived as “pro-Albanian”), ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians are convinced that only the Atlantic Alliance can shield Macedonia from external as well as domestic threats, thereby guaranteeing sustainable peace in the country. Membership in the European Union (EU) is even more consensual. Most citizens of Macedonia feel it holds the key to a significant improvement in socio-economic standards and to a better future. Should we then conclude that Macedonia is “out of the woods” to paraphrase the title of a 2005 ICG report<sup>3</sup>? Two major issues are likely to weigh upon future chances for consolidation. Regionally, the prolonged uncertainty over Kosovo’s final status reflects negatively on the political process in Macedonia and perhaps even more so on local anticipations with regard to the future of the Macedonian state. A rapid decision on Kosovo that would enjoy overwhelming support from the international community, would allow Macedonian elites and people to concentrate on the domestic political and socio-economic reforms required for EU membership. Domestically, the greatest source of weakness does not necessarily lie in what is often described as the outbidding logic of ethnic politics, but rather in the interaction between ethnic and economic cleavages, on the one hand, community-based politics and political clientelism, on the other.

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<sup>3</sup> See International Crisis Group (ICG), “Macedonia: Not out of the Woods Yet”, *Europe Briefing* n°37, February 2005, at: [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/balkans/b037\\_macedonia\\_not\\_out\\_of\\_the\\_woods\\_yet.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/balkans/b037_macedonia_not_out_of_the_woods_yet.pdf)

## **I - The 2001 conflict between Albanian rebels and Macedonian security forces**

### A - The roots of the crisis

The 2001 eruption of violence caught most domestic and international observers unaware. Since the dismantling of the Yugoslav Federation in 1991, the newborn Macedonian state had managed to stay away from the post-Yugoslav wars and had successfully preserved the peaceful (although uneasy) coexistence between a Macedonian majority and a seizable Albanian minority mostly concentrated in the North-Western part of the country. At the time of the NATO intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in the Spring of 1999, Macedonian authorities had sheltered 245 000 refugees from Kosovo despite fears of potential repercussions on majority/minority relations in the country<sup>4</sup>. The Macedonian social fabric, economy and political system seemed to have withstood the test.

Among the Macedonian elite, the 2001 violent events were mostly attributed to external factors - i.e. the redeployment to Macedonia of former Albanian insurgents from Kosovo and from the Preševo valley (Southern Serbia)<sup>5</sup>. Following an agreement between Serbia and NATO, the Serbian police had indeed been permitted to return to the Ground Safety Zone (from which it was excluded in June 1999), including areas previously controlled by Albanian rebels. Some of the South Serbia insurgents, now deprived of a “cause”, were said to have decided to retreat to Macedonia to export violence there. Another event was also deemed to have precipitated the mobilization of Albanian armed groups, the signature in February 2001 of an agreement between the FRY and the Macedonian government, which delimited the border between Macedonia and the province of Kosovo, putting an end to several years of uncertain demarcation. Regular border police patrols in what used to be a grey zone could be anticipated to harm the interests of local cross-border traffickers. All in all, the Albanian insurgency was interpreted - in particular in VMRO-DPMNE circles - as reflecting an evil combination between radical irrenditism (a “Great Albania” hidden agenda) and organized criminal networks.

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<sup>4</sup>96 000 refugees transited through Macedonia before being air-lifted to other destinations. See Guido Ambroso, “The Balkans at a crossroads: Progress and challenges in finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons from the wars in the former Yugoslavia”, UNHCR Research paper, n°.133, p.12, at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2006/unhcr-gen-28nov.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Prime minister Georgievski (VMRO-DPMNE) denounced, on March 18, 2001, what he saw as “an aggression from the northern province, from Kosovo (...) prepared, planned and implemented with maximum logistical support from the political structures in Kosovo”. See “Prime Minister Georgievski’s Address to the Nation”, at: <http://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0103c&L=makedon&T=0&P=7538>

There is little doubt that a regional environment in which resorting to violence had become widespread currency, the availability of large stock of weapons (some of which had been hidden in Macedonia at the time of the Kosovo war), and the military skills acquired by some Albanians (both from Kosovo and from Macedonia) in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) did facilitate the eruption of an armed confrontation in Macedonia. Yet, while reactions to the first incidents among the Albanian political elite and average Albanians were rather negative, as weeks went by the National Liberation Army (NLA) did manage to garner support among the local Albanian population and to recruit locally - a fact that spoke both for the intense frustration accumulated by Albanians in Macedonia, especially since the creation of an independent Macedonian state in 1991, and for the poor management of the crisis by Macedonian elites<sup>6</sup>.

In effect, misunderstandings between Macedonians and Albanians had accumulated in the 1990s despite continued cooperation across elites at the central level<sup>7</sup>. Following the break-up of Yugoslavia, a rather weak and unsecure Macedonian majority had engaged in an ambitious nation state-building enterprise. The emphasis placed on the Macedonianness of the new state was all the more intense as the Macedonians felt externally and internally threatened in their identity. Externally, the Serbian Orthodox Church refused to recognize the autocephalous Macedonian Church; Greece opposed the name and the flag Macedonia had chosen; although Bulgaria recognized the new state as early as January 1992, Macedonia's eastern neighbor was still suspected of denying the existence of a distinct Macedonian nation. Internally, the Albanian boycott of the September 8 referendum on independence, the abstention of ethnic Albanian members of Parliament at the time of the vote on the 1991 Constitution, coupled with the (short-lived) announcement of a autonomous "Province of Ilyrida" in January 1992, further fuelled Macedonian suspicions regarding the loyalty of Albanian citizens to the new state. From the outset, the latter felt excluded from the ethnic Macedonian state project and resented what was perceived as a deterioration of their status when compared to the socialist period. The Constitution adopted in November 1991

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<sup>6</sup> For a balanced assessment of the interaction between external and domestic factors, see Kristina Balalovska, Alessandro Silj and Mario Zucconi, *Minority Politics in South East Europe. Crisis in Macedonia*, The Ethnobarometer Working paper Series, 6, 2002. See also International Crisis Group (ICG), "Macedonia: The Last Chance for Peace", *ICG Balkan Report*, n° 113, Skopje/Bruxelles, 20 juin 2001. On ethnic Macedonian and Albanian (divided) accounts of the roots of the conflict, see Ingrid Vik, "Conflicting Perceptions. A study of prevailing interpretations of the conflict in Macedonia among Albanian and Macedonian communities", The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 1, 2003, at: <http://www.southeasteurope.org/documents/Mak03.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> One might even argue that increasing cleavages between the two major ethnic communities dated back to the 1980s. Heightened tensions in Kosovo reverberated upon interethnic relations in Macedonia. See International Crisis Group (ICG), "Macedonia's Ethnic Albanians: Bridging the Gulf", *Balkans Report*, n°98, Skopje/Washington/Brussels, 2 August 2000; Nadège Ragaru, *L'environnement régional de la Macédoine*, Paris, Study conducted for the *Délégation des affaires stratégiques* (DAS), Defense Ministry, 2002, 86p.

described Macedonia as the state of the “Macedonian people (*narod*)”, whereas the Albanians - who hoped to be treated on equal footing with the Macedonians as one of the constitutive peoples of Macedonia - were mere “nationalities” (*narodnosti*)<sup>8</sup>. The clause of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution which allowed minorities in units of government where they were in a majority to use their own language in the public space, was similarly suppressed, as was the right to fly their flag on specific public occasions<sup>9</sup>. One attempt to raise the Albanian flag at the Town Hall of Tetovo and Gostivar ended up with three Albanians being killed and several others injured in local clashes with the police in July 1997, while the mayors of the two cities were sentenced to several years of imprisonment<sup>10</sup>. Last but not least, the 1991 Macedonian Constitution did away with the former Yugoslav principle that minorities should be proportionally represented in public bodies.

Sources of dissatisfaction did not relate to legal status and national symbols only. Some other reforms, albeit not always exclusively targeted at the Albanians, negatively impacted their situation and their perceptions of the Macedonian state. Namely, the very decentralized Yugoslav mode of governance was replaced with a much more centralized rule. In Yugoslavia, municipalities enjoyed extensive prerogatives in the field of the economy, infrastructures, health, social services, education and territorial defense. The 1991 Constitution severely reduced their competencies and financial independence, a tendency mostly confirmed in the Law on self-government adopted in November 1995. In parallel, the 1996 redistricting increased the number of municipalities from 34 to 123. Presented by its initiators as a move prompted by considerations of efficiency, this policy was widely interpreted among the Albanian community as aiming at breaking-up local Albanian majorities with a view to opposing possible demands for autonomy.

Efforts at achieving greater control from the center took place in a particularly ill-boded context. Whereas freedom of movement between Kosovo and Macedonia had been the rule in Tito’s Yugoslavia, the creation of a Macedonian state transformed an inter-Republic boundary (Republic of Serbia/Republic of Macedonia) into a more tangible state boundary which, added to the extremely tense political situation in the Kosovo province, limited geographic mobility and social interactions. The Albanians, some of whom had received higher education and found a professional realization in Kosovo, returned to Macedonia,

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<sup>8</sup> Let us note that in 1989 the Republic Constitution of Macedonia had been amended and the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was declared to be a nation state of the Macedonians, while references to the contribution of Albanian and Turkish minorities were removed.

<sup>9</sup> See James Pettifer, « The Albanians in Western Macedonia », in James Pettifer (ed.), *The New Macedonian Question*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 143.

<sup>10</sup> See Human Rights Watch, « Police Violence in Macedonia », *Human Rights Watch Report*, 10(1), April 1998, at : <http://www.hrw.org/reports98/macedonia/>

where they found themselves locked up in an uneasy face-to-face with the Macedonians. Frustrations grew all the faster as diplomas from Pristina university were not recognized by Macedonian authorities, no more than the degrees later obtained in Tirana (Albania). Local Albanians thus tended to be shut up from Macedonian state administration and public enterprises. An Albanian effort at solving the higher education issue through the launch of a private Albanian-language university in Mala Recica (near Tetovo) in 1994, was harshly opposed by the Macedonian government who feared the new university might turn into a foyer of national radicalism (as the university of Pristina was perceived to have).

Finally, the tentative transition to a market economy and the external economic shocks Macedonia faced in the 1990s (primarily the loss of financial transfers and markets from other Republics following the collapse of Yugoslavia, the 1992 UN embargo, the 1994-1995 Greek embargo) accentuated the ethnicization of economic and social differences that already existed in Tito's Yugoslavia<sup>11</sup>. On both sides of the ethnic divide, the economic transformations resulted in wider social inequalities with few winners and a large number of losers experiencing unemployment and poverty. Still, in both communities these evolutions were widely blamed on the "Other", reinforcing mutual stereotypes and distrust. The Macedonians resented the Albanians' involvement in a profitable new private business which they perceived as tightly linked to criminal activities, and accused them of evading state taxes - thereby forgetting that most Albanians were engaged in rudimentary agricultural activity and did not have access to the narrow circles of prosperity. Meanwhile the Albanians complained that the Macedonians monopolized secure jobs in the public sector and were responsible for the high unemployment rate among ethnic Albanians - discarding the fact that employment in state administration was neither perennial (as a result of the prevailing "spoil system") nor well paid. Moreover, ethnic Macedonians were severely hit by the closure of loss-making socialist enterprises in which they had represented the bulk of the labor force. Having been less involved in the informal economy before 1991 (because of their privileged contribution to socialist industrialization), they were particularly ill-equipped to face the challenges of the market. By the end of the 1990s, with an ailing economy and poverty on the rise, intercommunity relations were deteriorating. The time was ripe for an enunciation of social evils in ethnic terms.

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<sup>11</sup> On the political economy of the conflict, see European Stability Initiative (ESI). *The Other Macedonian Conflict*, Berlin & Skopje, January 2002. The long-term territorial and social anchoring of ethnic differences has been comprehensively analyzed in Michel Roux, *Les Albanais de Yougoslavie, minorité, territoire, développement*. Paris: Edition de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1992.

Yet among the Albanian public support for the NLA was not automatic. It grew as the leaders of the movement started to claim more comprehensive minority rights and as governmental repression against Albanian villages and civilians intensified despite its obvious lack of efficiency on the ground. More importantly, the denunciation of majority/minority asymmetries was not the only reason why the armed movement earned legitimacy among the Albanians. Of nearly equal importance were their denunciation of corrupt Albanian political elites and of rent-seeking practices, the promise to fight solely for the “Albanian cause” (and not for personal gains), as well as the call for the termination of illegal economic networks (notably, to close brothels in Western Macedonia). In other words, the Albanian insurgents managed to present themselves as a credible alternative to a political elite that was widely perceived - independent of party affiliation - as more preoccupied with its own well-being than with the welfare of its constituency. Taking into account this second cleavage (Albanian political elites vs. average voters) beside the majority vs. minority divide is extremely important if one wishes to understand post-Ohrid political and social dynamics.

#### B - A timely international response: The Ohrid peace agreement

The international community (mostly the European Union, the United States and NATO) has often been praised for having shown in Macedonia more acumen than in previous Balkan conflicts. Learning from experience, international actors got involved earlier and coordinated their action to prevent the country from getting embroiled into an actual civil war. At the beginning of March 2001, while emphasizing their commitment to the territorial integrity of the Macedonian state and denouncing the actions of “Albanian terrorists”, international actors were calling for a nuanced and well-targeted Macedonian response to the insurgency. On April 9, 2001, the signature of the Association and Stabilisation Agreement (ASA) in Brussels offered one more opportunity to call for restraint as well as to suggest the need for a government reshuffle. By May, a “national unity” government was formed in Skopje, while Brussels and Washington conducted an active shuttle diplomacy. Despite public refusal of any talk with the “terrorists”, both Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Lord Roberston, his successor at the head of the Atlantic Alliance, knew that no enduring solution could be found unless the rebels participated in the peace effort. A turning point in the crisis was the (supposedly secret but leaked to the media) meeting organized at the end of May in Prizren between NLA leaders, representatives of Macedonia’s Albanian parties and some former KLA fighters, thanks to the mediation of US ambassador to the OSCE, Robert Frowick. A few weeks later, James



Pardew, the US Special Envoy, and François Leotard, the EU representative, were mandated to bring about a peace settlement. And so they did.

The Framework Agreement (FA) signed in Ohrid on August 13, 2001 was predicated upon the assumption that the roots of the violence lay in Albanian frustrations at their lack of equal rights in Macedonia. As a consequence, the deal proposed a series of constitutional and institutional reforms designed to reduce power asymmetries between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority in the field of language, representation in the public sector and the political process, decentralization and education. In exchange for these concessions, the FA reasserted territorial integrity, state unity and the sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia (federalization was explicitly excluded from the Accord which stated that "There are no territorial solutions for the ethnic conflicts"). In addition, NLA fighters committed themselves to giving up their weapons and returning to civilian life.

The implementation of the Ohrid Agreement was guaranteed through a twin military and civilian international presence. At the end of August 2001, a NATO mission, *Essential Harvest* (3 500 troops, August 27-September 26), was deployed to Macedonia to oversee the disarmament of former Albanian rebels and to destroy their weapons. It was followed by two other NATO operations - *Amber Fox* (700 men, September 27, 2001-December 15, 2002) which was officially in charge of protecting EU and OSCE international monitors, but mostly focused on preventing clashes in the former crisis areas, and the smaller *Allied Harmony* (December 16, 2002-March 31, 2003) that provided military advice to security sector reform activities. As the security environment improved, the EU took over from NATO and deployed its first ever military mission, *Concordia* (400 troops, March 31-December 15, 2003). The civilian/political side of the post-Ohrid crisis management mechanism was placed in the hands of the Office of the EU High Representative in Skopje with a strong involvement on the part of the OSCE<sup>12</sup>.

Pushing the reform agenda proved to be a very demanding process. From the inception, it was indeed clear that the Georgievski government (VMRO-DPMNE) understood the FA as a "reward to terrorism" forcibly imposed by the international community. They were ready to do their best to delay or even to block adoption of the reforms included in the Ohrid package. Every legal and institutional change had to be obtained through a mixture of international

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<sup>12</sup> Alain le Roy (October 29, 2001-October 30, 2002), Alexis Brouhns (November 1, 2002-January 31, 2004), Soren Jessen-Petersen (February 1, 2004-August 31, 2004), Michael Sahlin (September 1, 2004-October 30, 2005) and Erwan Fouéré (November 1, 2005-...) acted in turn as EU representatives. E. Fouéré was appointed both head of the Delegation of the European Commission and EUSR, following the fusion of the former Office for the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement with the EC Delegation.

pressures and (mostly financial) “carrots”. In the Fall of 2001, the then EU representative, Alain Le Roy, threatened to cancel a donor conference originally scheduled for October as the Macedonian authorities refused to pass the required constitutional amendments (finally adopted on November 16, 2001). The Conference was postponed till March 2002. Meanwhile a much delayed Law on local self-government was adopted in January 2002, paving the way for decentralization. Amnesty for the former insurgents<sup>13</sup> and refugee returns<sup>14</sup> were amongst the issues that provoked heated controversies in the months following the end of the infighting<sup>15</sup>. Despite President Boris Trajkovski’s (VMRO-DPMNE) firm commitment to the Ohrid process, political tensions remained high until the September 2002 parliamentary elections that saw the victory of the (more moderate) Social-Democratic Alliance (SDSM) and the formation of a coalition in which the Albanians were represented by the Union for Democratic Integration (DUI), an Albanian party initiated in June 2002 by former NLA chief, Ali Ahmeti. With some of Macedonia’s most flamboyant nationalists out of office - former Interior minister, Ljube Boškovski, former Prime Minister, Ljubčo Georgievski -, the implementation of the Ohrid Accords went smoother.....at least until decentralization and redistricting were put on the agenda in 2003-2004.

### C - The Ohrid reforms six years later

Six years after signing the FA, where do we stand in terms of minority rights? When it comes to the legal status and symbolic recognition of the role of the Albanian community in Macedonia’s society and institutions, changes with the pre-conflict situation strike as impressive. The Albanians wished to be considered a “people” (*narod*). The Ohrid Agreement had envisioned a civic rewording of the Preamble of the 1991 Constitution that would have eliminated references to any specific people and only referred to the “citizens of Macedonia”, but this perspective was opposed by large segments of the Albanian and

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<sup>13</sup> Amnesty took place in three steps. In December 2001, President Trajkovski personally amnestied 64 former NLA combatants. On March 7, 2002 the Parliament adopted an Amnesty Law which did not cover crimes that might fall under ICTY jurisdiction. It concerned the actions committed between February 2001 and September 30, 2001. By mid-September 2003, about 900 persons had benefitted from the Law with about 60 cases still pending. Finally, in June 2003 the government announced an amnesty for all those who had evaded military service during the previous ten years. The amnesty law reportedly applied to 12 369 draft evaders, 7 730 of whom were Albanians and 3 260 Macedonians. See “EU: Amnesty does not apply to commandant Breza”, Macedonian Information Agency (MIA), September 19, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> About 170 000 people were displaced as a result of the 2001 conflict, 74 000 internally (UNHCR data quoted in Norwegian Refugee Council, “Macedonia: Country Profile on Internal Displacement”, February 2004, at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2004/nrc-mkd-26feb.pdf>). Over 95% of them had been able to return home by the end of 2002. In a few former crisis areas, though, especially in villages where refugees were returning to a minority environment, some IDPs came back only to sell their properties and resettle in regions where their community is in a majority. See International Crisis Group, “Macedonia. No Time for Complacency”, *Europe Report n° 149*, October 23, 2003 and Norwegian Refugee Council, “Macedonia...”, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> For further details, see Nadège Ragaru and Assen Slim, “Macédoine 2001-2002. Une stabilisation fragile”, *Le courrier des pays de l’Est*, 1026, June-July 2002, esp. p.124-129.

Macedonian political elites. As a result, an “ethnic” approach was retained in the new Preamble, which nonetheless removed notions of “nationality”/“minority”<sup>16</sup>. The definition of citizenship stood at the core of another much expected reform. Namely, in december 2003 the Macedonian Parliament amended the 1992 Law on citizenship, cutting down from a previous 15 to 8 the number of years a person must have resided in the country in order to be eligible for naturalized citizenship. The new criterion was expected to ease the naturalization of Albanians from Kosovo who had emigrated to Macedonia following Milošević’s suppression of the Province’s autonomy in 1989; coupled with the 2002 Amnesty Law, it also made it easier for some Albanians from the remote mountainous villages of Tanuševci, Brest, Malino - whose birth had never been actually registered - to regularize their situation without fearing that they might be arrested by the police.

Language was a second sensitive issue on the Albanians’ agenda. They claimed their language should become a second official language in Macedonia. In an interesting grammatical twist, the Ohrid compromise managed to confirm the fact that “the Macedonian language, written using its Cyrillic alphabet, is *the* [author’s emphasis] official language throughout the Republic of Macedonia and in the international relations of the Republic of Macedonia” (Amendment V, 1), while stating that “any other language spoken by at least 20 percent of the population is also *an* [author’s emphasis] official language using its alphabet” (Amendment V, 1). Albanian was not explicitly mentioned, but the 20% threshold at the national level is only crossed by the Albanian community. At the local level, it was decided that in municipalities where over 20% of the inhabitants speak a given language, they may use it in communication with representatives of the local and central institutions (a decision that affects Turks, Serbs and Roma in certain municipalities). The question of the use of minority languages in Parliament provoked much interparty discussion until a compromise was found in July 2002: Albanian deputies were allowed to use Albanian in oral (not in written) communication, a measure which did not extend to Albanian ministers, nor to non-Albanian parliamentaries. By the end of July 2007, though, the adoption of a new Law on minority languages remained pending.

Higher education in Albanian had been one of the major bones of contention between Macedonians and Albanians throughout the 1990s<sup>17</sup>. Two options were on the table. The first one had been promoted since 2000 by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,

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<sup>16</sup> The new formulation reads as follows : “the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian people, as well as citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Romany people, the Bosniak people and others” (Amendment IV). See Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, at: <http://www.sobranie.mk/en/default.asp?vidi=ustav#20>

<sup>17</sup>For background information on conflicts in secondary and university education, see the excellent Rony Mirhvoid, “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Education as a Political Phenomenon”, *NORDEM Report*, 4/2005, at: [www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/nr/2005/0405.pdf](http://www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/nr/2005/0405.pdf)

Max van der Stoel - i.e. the creation of a private South East European University (SEEU), where courses would be taught in Albanian, Macedonian and English. At least in the first four years, the University was to be financially supported by the international community, the EU in the first place. The second option consisted in legalizing the Tetovo (Mali Recica) university and in including it on the list of public higher education institutions funded by the Macedonian state. Without taking a definite stance on the fate of the controversial Tetovo university, the Ohrid Agreement pinpointed the need for the state to subsidize higher education in Albanian. Ultimately, Tetovo obtained both. On November 20, 2001, the SEEU was inaugurated, shortly before being officially registered with the ministry of Education (April 2002). The University offers Bachelors' and Post-graduate studies in Law, Business Administration, Management, Communication Sciences and Pedagogy, and claimed 5 400 students in 2004-2005 (up from 850 in 2001-2002)<sup>18</sup>. To this day, the van der Stoel University has primarily attracted Albanian students from wealthier families. Representatives of the lower social strata rather attend the University of Tetovo, which was accredited as Macedonia' third state university in February 2004 with four faculties (Law, Economy, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences). As a result, although ethnic Albanians remain under-represented at the university level, the percentage of Albanian students in higher education has risen from a mere 4,9% in 2001 to 14,9% in 2004<sup>19</sup>.

These achievements, however, do not mean that problems regarding staff recruitment, course curricula and (de)politicization of the educational sector have disappeared. The new Albanian language universities constitute a locus of Albanian party competition, leading to frequent personal changes. Despite these limitations, the opening of higher education institutions has given Tetovo a higher profile in Macedonia and, to a less extent, in Kosovo and in Albania. For many decades, Macedonia's Albanians were indeed perceived by other Albanian communities in Kosovo and in Albania as poorly educated, conservative peasant communities. Following the opening of the van der Stoel University, a few students came from as far as Pristina and Tirana. For the first time ever, Tetovo could compare to the other Albanian "capitals". Meanwhile, the city has witnessed a boom in its housing market as new students seek rooms for rent, whereas local cafes and restaurants have prosperated. Yet it is too early to determine whether the SEEU will manage to strengthen its reputation as a high-level institution - as the American University in Bulgaria for instance has - or whether it will fall prey to local/political interest groups. Similarly, one shall need more time to assess the impact on the local labour market of a new generation of Albanian bachelors. Will they

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<sup>18</sup> For further details, see the (self-serving) "History - SEEU, the first four years", at: <http://www.seeu.edu.mk/english/general/history.asp>

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in "History - SEEU, the first four years", op. cit.

remain in Macedonia or take part in a future brain drain? If ever they decide to remain in the country, will they be recruited in the state administration and public enterprises?

Undoubtedly, in this respect, implementation of the Ohrid agreement has opened up new professional opportunities for Albanian graduates. Before 2001, of particular concern was the limited presence of Albanian representatives in the police (about 3%), the army and the judiciary. In Ohrid, Albanian negotiators had argued in favor of the creation of autonomous police forces in the regions where they were in a majority. The solution finally reached maintained the police force under the control of the Interior ministry, but local municipal councils were permitted to select local police chiefs from a list provided by the ministry. The latter retained the ability to dismiss police chiefs "in accordance with the Law"<sup>20</sup>. In addition, a significant increase in the share of minority representatives in the police forces was agreed upon. By the end of July 2003, 1065 new recruits from non-majority communities had been trained by the OSCE in a (hasty and not always extremely efficient) program<sup>21</sup>. In 2006, according to the data provided by the Ombudsman's office, the Albanians accounted for 14,9% of the 12 076 employees of the Home Affairs Office (80,6% were ethnic Macedonians) (see **Table 1**)<sup>22</sup>. Improvements have been slower in the judiciary, in part for lack of a sufficient pool of Albanian lawyers and jurists, in part because the judiciary is engaged in a very slow and painful reform process.

Considering **Table 1**, two more observations come to mind. The first one concerns the "smaller" minorities, i.e. the Turks, the Serbs, the Roma, the Vlachs. While members of the Albanian community seem to have successfully voiced demands for a fairer participation in the public sector, representatives of the other non-majority communities did not fare as well. Here we touch upon an important feature of post-Ohrid Macedonian society where numerically weak communities seem to have been mostly left out of the readjustment between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian "majority-minority". The second remark concerns the high share of Albanian representatives in such institutions as the ministry for Local Self-Government and the ministry of Education, two ministries whose incumbents are currently Albanians. Such situation can be best understood if one keeps in mind the fact that access to power in Macedonia is understood - among the majority as in the minorities - as an

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<sup>20</sup> In case the municipal Council fails to agree on a name, the ministry has the ability to decide in last resort after consulting with the Council of Ministers.

<sup>21</sup> See OSCE Press Release, "OSCE Achieves Goal of Training Multiethnic Police force in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", July 28, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> At that date, minority representation within the special police forces and intelligence units remained low. Reform of the police is one of the areas in which much energy has been invested by international actors, primarily the OSCE and the UE. The presence of international monitors (and NATO forces) was essential when the Macedonian police started reinvesting areas formerly held by the rebels - a process which took place between October 2001 and July 2002.

opportunity to reward political clienteles. In a deeply ethnicized political system where resources are scarce and unemployment is high, applying an “ethnic key” thus results in massive “local” recruitment. This, in fact, has not prevented some ethnic Albanians who applied for new job openings in the public sector to face disillusionment when they realized that party membership and local connections were often more important in seeking state employment than experience and diplomas.

Among ethnic Macedonians, the promotion of Albanians in public bodies - although at times supported in principle - created intense frustrations. The timing of the process was indeed particularly ill-chosen. Minority recruitments in state agencies started right at the moment when public administration was under high pressure to downsize and when loss-making public enterprises were scheduled for restructuring, privatization and often closure. In April 2003, Macedonia signed a US\$ 28 million stand-by arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which conditioned aid on structural reforms in the public sector and on tight budgetary policies<sup>23</sup>. Given the fact that Macedonia’s private sector was not (and is not up to this day) dynamic enough to create sufficient employment opportunities, the Ohrid Agreement unwillingly introduced an element of zero-sum game. It might be important to recall here that the number of unemployed stood at 391 072 in December 2004 and 371 816 in March 2007 and that the share of people who declared they had no income whatsoever increased from 37% in 2003-2004 to 41% in 2006-2007<sup>24</sup>. Under these conditions, a job in the public administration is still considered as one of the few “secure” sources of income. Plenty a Macedonian also resented what they described as recruitments of unexperienced young Albanians whose performance was said to be lower than that of their older Macedonian colleagues. Ethnic Macedonians often recounted stories of charming young ladies (who spent most of their time speaking on the phone in Albanian) taking up positions for which they were not fit, or of arrogant DUI appointees intent on making them feel they enjoyed good, high-level political connections.

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<sup>23</sup> Between 2003 and 2007, the share of people who declare they earn a salary in the public sector has decreased from about 14,5% to a now rather stable 10%. Data quoted in UNDP, *Macedonia June 2007, Early Warning Report*, Skopje: UNDP, 2007, p.32.

<sup>24</sup> See UNDP, *Macedonia*, op. cit., p.30.

Body	Total empl l.	Macedonian s (%)	Albanian s (%)	Turks (%)	Roma (%)	Serbs (%)	Vlachs (%)	Bošnjaks (%)	Other (%)
Cabinet of the President- expert service	25	88,0	8,0	0,0	0,0	4,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Parliament- expert service	186	80,1	14,0	1,6	0,5	2,2	0,0	1,1	0,5
Constitutional Court	25	86,2	13,8	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Ombudsman	70	55,7	34,3	1,4	2,9	2,9	2,9	0,0	0,0
Court Council	14	92,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	7,1	0,0	0,0	0,0
Attorney general	91	93,4	5,5	1,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Government - expert service	583	82,3	11,1	1,7	0,7	1,4	1,5	0,0	1,2
M. Finance	574	85,9	9,9	0,5	0,7	1,4	0,7	0,3	0,5
M. Foreign Affairs	343	76,7	20,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,6	0,0	1,7
M. Justice	613	76,5	18,3	2,6	0,5	1,1	0,7	0,3	0,0
M. Agriculture, Forestry, Water	443	80,1	13,8	1,4	0,2	2,5	0,7	0,0	1,4
M. Health	176	75,6	19,9	0,6	0,6	1,7	0,6	0,0	1,1
M. Defense	663	84,8	9,2	1,2	0,3	2,1	1,5	0,3	0,6
M. Transport and Communication	173	75,1	19,7	0,6	0,6	3,5	0,6	0,0	0,0
M. Labour and Social Policy	279	77,1	14,7	0,4	1,1	2,9	2,2	1,4	0,4
M. Economy	405	74,3	21,0	1,0	0,0	1,2	1,5	0,0	1,0
M. Environment and Urban Planning	107	80,4	11,2	0,0	0,0	4,7	1,6	0,0	1,9
M. Local Self Government	19	47,4	47,4	0,0	0,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
M. Education and Science	228	59,6	33,8	1,8	0,0	3,5	0,0	1,3	0,0
M. Home Affairs	120 76	80,6	14,9	0,6	0,6	1,8	0,0	0,2	0,3
M. Culture	80	85,0	8,8	2,5	0,0	1,3	2,5	0,0	0,0
Autonomous state bodies**	997 7	89,37	5,3	0,7	0,6	2,3	0,6	0,4	0,8

### **Table 1 - Equitable representation in public bodies - Ombudsman Annual Report 2006**

Source: from Omdusman. *Annual Report 2006*, Skopje, p.24-25.

This table does not contain data on representation in the fields of education, health and culture.

\*\* No results received from the Foreign Invesments Agency, the Protection and Rescue Agency, the Security Personnel Training centre.

\*\*\* No results from the Fund for Deposits Insurance.

\*\*\*\* No or uncomplete results from Agro-Berza Skopje, Dojransko Ezero, and Ga-Ma, Skopje.

After symbolic recognition, education and equitable representation, the last cornerstone of the Ohrid package concerned the functioning of the Macedonian political system, both in terms of decision-making at the central level and in terms of local self-government. Since 1991, members of the Albanian political elite had complained that, despite being present in Parliament (16 to 24 deputies depending on the legislature) and regularly participating in governmental coalitions, they were unable to promote policies designed to improve the fate of the Albanian constituency. In a 120-member Parliament, they were doomed to be in a minority and ethnic Macedonian deputies, albeit belonging to competing parties, were accused of coalescing to oppose minority initiatives. In the executive branch, discontent was no less intense. Albanians claimed they always received the smaller, understaffed and poorly funded ministries of Agriculture, Education or Culture. Lack of coordination across public institutions and ministries further prevented innovative public policies. In order to redress these grievances, two major reforms were adopted. First, a requirement - known as the Badinter principle - that all pieces of legislation affecting the rights of the minorities be adopted with a double majority (among ethnic Macedonian deputies and deputies representing communities "not in the majority") was adopted. Second, a new proportional electoral system was introduced shortly before the 2002 elections, which increased the number of seats *de facto* allocated to minorities<sup>25</sup>. Abandonment of the previous 5%

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<sup>25</sup> The country is now divided in six electoral districts, three mostly Macedonian districts (district 3,4 and to a lesser extent, district 5) and three districts with a significant Albanian presence (district 6 has a 90% Albanian majority; in district 1, Albanians comprise about one third of the population; district 2 is mixed). For a more



threshold fostered an improvement in the political representation of the smaller minorities (Turks, Serbs, Roma and Vlachs). This, in effect, was one of the very few measures that positively reverberated upon the communities other than the Albanians, as it convinced ethnic Macedonian parties to put minority representatives on the electoral lists in districts where they comprised a significant share of the population. In 2002, three Turks, two Bošniaks, two Serbs, one Roma and one Vlach were thus elected to Parliament (against one Roma and one Turk in the previous legislature). The current Assembly elected in July 2006 includes two Turks, two Roma, one Serb and one Bošniak<sup>26</sup>. Nonetheless, it may be worth underscoring an unintended effect of the electoral reform. Designed to guarantee a better fit between the composition of the legislative branch and the ethnic structure of Macedonian society, the shift to a party-list proportional representation has also reinforced dependence of average deputies on the leadership of their party. Henceforth election has become mostly conditional upon the candidate's ranking on electoral lists. In countries like Macedonia where questions of elite responsiveness and accountability are extremely sensitive, this configuration is likely to reinforce local frustrations at the deputies' lack of commitment to their voters<sup>27</sup>.

In part because of dominant representations of majority/minority relations<sup>28</sup>, in part because they were likely to have the most immediate impact on people's daily lives, decentralization and redistricting were the reforms that provoked the most intense controversies in Macedonia. In fact, announcement of the envisioned plan for the definition of municipal boundaries in July 2004 provoked such an uproar among the public and most of the political elite (including some local SDSM structures) that it nearly derailed the Ohrid process. In December 2003, the government has presented a project, according to which Macedonia would have been made up of 62 municipalities (down from 123) - a number which was perceived as avoiding excessive fragmentation of local authority while allowing local administrations to be close enough to ordinary citizens. Yet the SDSM and its Albanian ally, the DUI, had to talk for six more months before they could agree on an 80-municipalities deal<sup>29</sup>. Disagreements among coalition partners primarily focused on three cities, Skopje, Struga and Kičevo. For symbolic reasons, the Albanians negotiators wanted the borders of the capital to be redrawn so that Skopje would comprise over 20% Albanians, allowing for

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detailed presentation, see Kristina Belalovska, "Macedonia 2006: Towards Stability?", *The Ethnobarometer Working Paper Series*, 2006, note 41, p.63.

<sup>26</sup> Data available on the website of the Macedonian National Assembly at:

[http://www.sobranie.mk/mk/default.asp?vidi=pratenicki\\_sostav&MandatID=6](http://www.sobranie.mk/mk/default.asp?vidi=pratenicki_sostav&MandatID=6)

<sup>27</sup> For a similar stance, see UNDP, *Macedonia June 2007, Early Warning Report*, Skopje: UNDP, 2007, p.13.

<sup>28</sup> On this issue, see part II.

<sup>29</sup> A few minor amendments were later introduced. The Law finally passed on August 11, 2004, brought the total number of municipalities to 84 (plus the city of Skopje, which enjoys a specific status).

Albanian language to become a second official language in the city. For that purpose, some neighborhoods where Albanians were in a majority had to be incorporated. Similarly in Struga, where Albanians accounted for 47,94% of the population (Macedonians, 41,54% and Turks, 5,44% according to the 2002 census), extension of the boundaries to include surrounding Albanian-dominated villages was demanded, in order to give the Albanian community a clear majority in the municipality. An identical configuration could be found in Kičevo, a region from which Ali Ahmeti, DUI's leader, originates. Ultimately DUI got the upper hand in Skopje (with the adjunction of Saraj and Kondovo) and in Struga. In Kičevo, though, Ali Ahmeti's party accepted to leave the territorial delimitation unchanged until 2008.

Although decentralization also entailed redefining the municipalities' prerogatives and funding, most debates centered on the sole issue of boundaries<sup>30</sup>. In Struga, on July 22, a visit by Defense Minister, Vlado Bučkovski, and SDSM secretary-general, Nikola Kjurčiev, aiming at explaining the rationale behind the new territorial division ended up with the SDSM leaders being escorted by the police out of the SDSM building to avoid confronting aggrieved local Macedonians. About 40 people were hurt in clashes between demonstrators and police forces<sup>31</sup>. In Skopje, members of the academic elite, NGO leaders, party activists rallied to denounce what they saw as dubious secret negotiations and, more importantly, a first step towards federalization (or even destruction) of the Macedonian state. A petition managed to collect over 150 000 signatures, compelling Macedonian authorities to organize a referendum on the definition of municipal boundaries. On the evening of November 7, when it turned out that only 26,58% of the voters had participated in the vote (the SDSM and DUI had asked their electorate to boycott the referendum) and that the consultation was invalidated, the ruling parties and the members of the international community were immensely relieved, as quite a number of observers felt that the extreme tensions surrounding discussions over redistricting might have reignited violent interethnic confrontation in Macedonia. On that very day, a majority of the citizens of Macedonia showed that, albeit extremely dissatisfied with the turn of events, they were not ready to jeopardize peace. From that moment onwards, the elite of the Social democratic party, which had taken upon themselves to implement a highly unpopular reform, saw their public rating dwindle and knew (or should have known) that they were bound to lose the next elections.

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<sup>30</sup> For further developments, see Nadège Ragaru, "Maillage communal, frontières et nation. Les imaginaires, enjeux et pratiques de la décentralisation en Macédoine", *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 36 (3), 2005, pp.163-204.

<sup>31</sup> See Ulrich Büchschütz, « Macedonia's Government under Growing Pressure », *RFE/RL Newslines*, July 28, 2004 at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/07/7ec5de2d-2fdc-4a01-83ed-759b825e31cf.html>

In spite of political infighting and public frustrations, reforms have moved ahead. In many legal and institutional respects, “Macedonia 2007” does not resemble “Macedonia 2001” much. Nevertheless, several limits to the Ohrid agreement have appeared in time. First, understandably in view of the context in which negotiations took place, Ohrid addressed the question of the relations between majority and minority from the standpoint of the aggrieved minority. Little compensation was offered to the Macedonian majority beyond a (promised) peace they feared might not be enduring. Compromises were all the more difficult to accept as in dominant Macedonian perception, Albanians had enjoyed extensive rights in the 1990s. Most average citizens did not feel minorities had suffered from discrimination or segregation. Few had ever engaged in an open debate on Macedonian identity and Macedonian nationalism. And how could they have when the most pressing public issues after the collapse of Yugoslavia had been strengthening the newborn nation-state? Under these circumstances, some kind of backlash was to be expected, as was a renewed search for self-confidence and pride. Part of the support enjoyed by the new Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE) amongst the ethnic Macedonians owes precisely to his insistence of “non-ethnic issues”, that is one issues that do not concern ethnic minorities, but every (Macedonian) citizen.

Second, the Ohrid peace deal did succeed in addressing identity-related issues that were of concern to the Albanian community at that time. But it mostly left out of the picture the “small minorities” that had contributed to Macedonia’s ethnic diversity (and peace). The 2001 war had already created a very uneasy situation in which the Turks, the Serbs, the Roma, the Vlachs... had been asked to chose sides. The post-Ohrid 2001 configuration has reinforced this trend. The Ohrid 20% threshold has created a situation in which those groups that account for a small percentage of the national population tend to marginalized. On several occasions, representatives of the Turks and the Roma community have complained that the new territorial division and the ways in which the 20% principle is locally implemented is weakening their voice on public issues. Many Turks and Roma fear being “squeezed” between an unsecure Macedonian majority and an aggressive Albanian minority with a strong demographic potential. Furthermore, the “ethnic key” means that in order to benefit from new employment opportunities, one needs to identify “ethnically”. But this emphasis on ethnicity does not always match previous self-perceptions of identity. The Vlach community, where individual self-definitions often include multiple levels of identification with the Macedonian majority, the Macedonia-based Vlach community and a wider Balkan *aromani* world, is a case in point. Macedonia inherited from Ottoman times a very diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural make-up in which some cleavages were cross-cutting. The

current move towards ethnic-based monodefinitions is likely to weaken the multiple social, urban/rural, local ties that had in the past helped to preserve local equilibria.

Finally, and perhaps even more importantly, when dealing with Albanian issues, the Framework Agreement targeted only the divide between majority and minority. It did not (and perhaps could not) address the question of distrust between political elites and average citizens. In fact, this problem is not exclusively Albanian. Regardless of the community they belong to, most Macedonian citizens rank state capture, diversion of public funds, discretionary allocation of resources and corruption as Macedonia's most painful evils after unemployment. But the ways in which the political system functions have repeatedly aggravated ethnic misunderstandings. Since 1991, Macedonia has experienced a mixture of clientelism and community-based politics. Political legitimacy is based on (ethnic) promises for future allocation of jobs, contracts, permits. Yet given the scarcity of public resources, all local demands cannot be met. Party leaders are thus faced with two major issues. First, the electoral support they enjoy is conditional upon their ability to be and stay in power. Once in opposition, they run the risk of seeing their electoral support erode extremely fast. This situation helps explain why electoral competition at the central level (and increasingly so at the local level as a result of expanded local prerogatives) is so fierce. Second, in order to regain legitimacy, politicians are often tempted to shift political debates from social and economic issues - on which they have only limited leverage - towards symbolic and national issues that can offer easy political gains. Sadly enough, interethnic relations are held hostages to these political strategies, thus fuelling both interethnic mistrust and political frustrations on both sides of the ethnic divide.

## **II - The fragile politics of coexistence**

### A - A growing social distance between communities?

When one moves from the sphere of minority rights to the actual interethnic relations in Macedonian society, the picture becomes cloudier. True, regardless of ethnic backgrounds, citizens in Macedonia first and foremost aspire to lead a normal life, unhindered by memories of previous tensions and fears about the future. In addition, perceptions of intercommunity relations have gradually improved over the past years. According to a Brima Gallup opinion poll conducted in March-April 2007, only 7,6% of the people interviewed assessed interethnic relations as "bad"<sup>32</sup>. Evaluations, though, vary significantly from one community (and one

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<sup>32</sup> See UNDP, Macedonia, op. cit., p.49.

municipality) to another. Ethnic Albanians have a much more positive outlook. After 2001, many Albanians believed ethnic Macedonians would never make the concessions they had committed themselves to. Recent changes have belied these expectations. Hence 19,7% of the ethnic Albanians interviewed declared interethnic relations to be excellent (vs. 2,2% of the ethnic Macedonian respondents) and only 11,9% “bad”. By contrast, over a third of the ethnic Macedonian participants in the survey (35,9%) ranked interethnic relations as “bad” or “very bad”<sup>33</sup>.

Beyond these quantitative data, recent social evolutions require a balanced and cautious assessment. The Ohrid Agreement endeavored to square a circle - i.e. confirm the existence of a unitary state while promoting institutional recognition of ethnic diversity. Several observers have argued that the Framework agreement was in fact rather emphasizing community-based logics. By giving up on chances for a “real” civic state where citizenship would have prevailed over ethnicity, it presented the Macedonian state with the risk of following a process of ethnic bipolarization<sup>34</sup>. Worse still, the FA would have wrongly hoped to engineer peace through separate development.

It might be fairer to say that the Ohrid peacemaking deal aimed at promoting multiethnicity as well as a better integration of minorities in society, while institutionnalizing the social and cultural distance that already existed between the two major communities. Yet the complexity of the Ohrid settlement lies precisely in the fact that it comprises a mixture of reforms geared towards increasing social interactions across communities and reforms that will weaken cross-community ties. Promoting minority employment in public administration and public enterprises pertains to the first group, as it enhances chances that representatives of different ethnic groups will interact daily on the work place, get to know each other better, and possibly develop professional solidarities that may help bridge the ethnic divide. The opening of the South East European University in Tetovo - where both students and professors come from diverse ethnic backgrounds - was predicated upon the same belief in the stabilizing impact of more frequent interethnic contacts.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.97.

<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, see Jenny Engström, “Multi-ethnicity or Bi-nationalism? The Framework Agreement and the Futur of the Macedonian State”, *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* (JEMIE), 1, 2002. Zhidas Daskalovski has adopted a slightly different stance : “Generally speaking, the proposed amendments of the Constitution of Macedonia as outlined in the Framework Agreement can be divided into two categories: alterations that emphasize a liberal conception of the republic, and changes that underline the importance of the worth of ethnic groups”. See Zhidas Daskalovski, “Language and Identity: The Ohrid Framework Agreement and Liberal Notions of Citizenship and Nationality in Macedonia”, *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* (JEMIE), 1, 2002.

By contrast, decentralization and recent developments in the educational system are likely to induce greater ethnic separation, if not segregation. Decentralization entails the devolution of new responsibilities to local government institutions in areas such as culture, primary and secondary education, health care and urban planning. Local communities are thus enabled to manage more matters of concern to their community on their own. As a result, there is a possibility that members of local communities, especially in ethnically homogeneous municipalities, will remain more frequently enclosed within their own municipal borders<sup>35</sup>. To quote but one example, following the transfer of the rights to allocate construction permits from the central level of government to local authorities, Albanian citizens in Tetovo have been saved the need to travel all the way to Skopje to arrange for the necessary permits. Apart from allowing ethnic groups to live, work and socialize more frequently among themselves, the new decentralization agenda is likely to be associated with an increase in disparities between the municipalities that enjoy the highest levels of economic development and the municipalities which face serious economic challenges<sup>36</sup>. The issue is not “ethnic” as such. Questions of unemployment, lack of infrastructure, old school premises, inadequate public services or low public finances are found both in predominantly ethnic Macedonian municipalities (especially in the Eastern part of the country and in urban centers whose economic prosperity was conditional upon the presence of socialist mono-industries that have collapsed in the 1990s) and in Albanian dominated areas (mostly in mountainous rural settlements). Nonetheless, the timing of the transfers of competences, state arbitrage regarding the delimitation and the exercise of new local prerogatives as well as the definition of public budgetary priorities can easily take an ethnic dimension, as local politicians and average citizen are likely to view governmental choices through ethnic lenses.

In the Spring of 2007, for instance, the media spent quite some time pondering about the municipalities that would be allowed to enter the second phase of fiscal decentralization<sup>37</sup> (which entails handling the salaries of employees in schools, kindergartens, nursing homes and local cultural institutions at the municipal level). In August, a government commission was supposed to release a report on the readiness of municipalities. Would DUI-held municipalities be excluded? Were the criteria used to rank “good” and “bad” municipalities ethnically biased? Which measures would be taken to meet the needs of the municipalities that were not deemed ready? On August 1, 2007, a list of 42 municipalities (out of 85, of

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<sup>35</sup> 16 municipalities (out of a total of 84 plus Skopje) have an Albanian majority.

<sup>36</sup> See UNDP, *Socio-economic Disparities among Municipalities in Macedonia*, Skopje: UNDP, November 2004, at: <http://www.undp.org.mk/datacenter/publications/documents/Sosioekonomski%20ANG.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> For background information, see Marjan Nikolov, “Fiscal Decentralization in Macedonia: Recent Developments and Challenges”, *Center for Economic Analyses Working Paper*, Skopje, October 2004, at: [http://www.cea.org.mk/Publications/Fiscal\\_Decentralization.pdf](http://www.cea.org.mk/Publications/Fiscal_Decentralization.pdf)

whom 76 only had applied) allowed to move onto the second phase was finally published<sup>38</sup>. Several Albanian inhabited municipalities (notably Tetovo) were among them. But this fact did not suffice to reassure those segments of the ethnic Albanian community who believe that the government wants to use decentralization as a pretext to stop funding underdeveloped Albanian rural municipalities. More broadly, in a context of polarization along ethnic lines, there is little doubt that debates over financial transfers from the central budget will include references to opposing ethnic claims.

Growing separation and, at times, strained interethnic relations are also noticeable in the educational sector. Some developments were brought about by the 2001 conflict; others predate 2001 and were merely accentuated following the war. With higher education now available in Albanian, we are likely to witness more demands for secondary schooling in Albanian and, consequently, more Albanian students with a rather poor knowledge of Macedonian. Before 2001, a few ethnic Albanians attended Skopje and Bitola universities<sup>39</sup>, although many found the entrance exam in Macedonian challenging. Some also complained that ethnic Macedonian teachers often asked Albanian students (especially if they came from Tetovo, a city perceived as wealthy) for higher bribes than their colleagues belonging to the majority. Nonetheless, by studying with fellow ethnic Macedonians, they were given a chance to familiarize themselves with cultural models and ways of life differing from their own. Now that two higher education institutions are available in Albanian in Tetovo, why go to Skopje or to Bitola? In the past, the vast majority of Albanians had a reasonable command of Macedonian. In this respect, reciprocity (knowledge of Albanian among ethnic Macedonians) was never achieved, and it is unlikely to be so in the near future - although some Macedonian speakers now attend the South East European University (SEEU), where courses in Albanian language are compulsory<sup>40</sup>. As a result, the upcoming generation of young ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians will be less familiar with one another than its predecessors. In the 1980s, there were already worrying signs that Albanian kids were growing reluctant to study Macedonian at school, especially after the Republican authorities tightened requirements for opening classes in Albanian language in high schools, and fired a few teachers who opposed the new curriculum<sup>41</sup>. In primary school, education was mostly in the mother language. In secondary school, though, Albanian language enrolment was more

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<sup>38</sup> See "Vo vtorata faza od decentralizacijata vlegoa 42 opštini" [42 municipalities entered the second decentralization phase], *Nulta korupcija transparentnost*, at: [http://www.transparency.org.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=191&Itemid=57](http://www.transparency.org.mk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=191&Itemid=57)

<sup>39</sup> In 1998, all in all 1 073 students belonging to (all) ethnic minorities attended university in Macedonia, that is about 16 % of all university students. Quoted in US Department of State. *Macedonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2000*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, February 2001, at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/867.htm>

<sup>40</sup> They were about 600 in 2004-2005 (out of a total of 5 400 students). Data provided by SEEU.

<sup>41</sup> See Ronny Mirhvoid, op. cit., p.25.

limited, in part for want of qualified Albanian teachers<sup>42</sup>. Some Albanians also preferred to attend Macedonian language classes in order to enhance their chances for a good professional future in Macedonia. That time is now over.

Secondary education has become more segregated since the conflict. Earlier, schooling of minority pupils took place either in mixed interethnic schools where lessons were being taught in Macedonian, in shared premises but separate shifts for Albanian and Macedonian language classes (in 2001, the shift system was being used for about 40% of the kids, partially because of insufficient space<sup>43</sup>) or in independent premises. Following the 2001 violences, the number of education-related conflicts increased rapidly, especially in Kumanovo, Struga, Bitola and some Skopje districts. On these occasions, parents, pupils and teachers sought to prevent interethnic fist-fighting by seeking separate schooling for ethnic Albanian and Macedonian students. When, in the Fall of 2003, Education Minister, Aziz Pollozhani (DUI), tried to launch pilot attempts at reintroducing ethnic mixity in three schools located in Skopje (Čair), Kumanovo and Bitola, his policy met with intense opposition from parents, students' unions, teachers and local residents alike<sup>44</sup>. Ethnic Macedonians were convinced that the minister, himself an ethnic Albanian, was intent on favoring Albanian pupils; Macedonian parents said they feared for their children's security as well as for the quality of the education they received. Although transfer of four classes of Albanian students from the "8 Septemvri" school in the Avtokomanda suburb to the "Arseni Jovkov" Economics high school in Čair did finally take place in two steps, to this day in many instances local actors still prefer to see pupils from diverse ethnic backgrounds attend classes in separate shifts or even in separate buildings<sup>45</sup>. At moments when local tensions were high, this policy probably helped to avoid local clashes and to reassure local communities. But, in the long run, separation is likely to reinforce mutual stereotypes and prejudices<sup>46</sup>. Besides, some local

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<sup>42</sup> The number of ethnic Albanian teachers, which had severely decreased between 1991 and 1994 as a result of Macedonian state policies, recovered thereafter to reach 836 in 2002 (for 17 135 students enrolled in 23 schools). In the 1990s, ethnic Albanians complained that the Ministry of Education was refusing to open the Skopje Pedagogical Faculty in Albanian to teachers for fifth to eighth grade. Training was limited to pre-school and primary school teachers. Data provided by the Ministry of Education, quoted in Ronny Mirhvoid, *ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*, p.26.

<sup>44</sup> See Ronny Mirhvoid, *ibid.*, pp.30-39.

<sup>45</sup> The four Albanian language classes were officially part of the "Arseni Jovkov" high school, but were stationed in Avtokomanda officially due to lack of place. Albanian students from the Čair district had protested that Avtokomanda was too far away from their home and that commuting was time and energy-consuming. Some did not feel at ease in that area, located in the Gazi Baba municipality (whose population is mostly ethnic Macedonian). See also Aleksandra Ilievska, "Macedonian Students Protest at Desegregation", *Transition Online*, September 22, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> See UNDP, *Macedonia June 2007, Early Warning Report*, Skopje, UNDP, 2007, p.52. On the contribution of the educational system and the school curricula to interethnic misunderstandings, see Violeta Petroska-Beska and Mirjana Najcevska, "Macedonia Understanding History, Preventing Future Conflict", *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, 115, February 2004, at:

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN017851.pdf>



interethnic education-related disputes will most probably reignite with the progressive transfer, as part and parcel of the decentralization process, of greater authority over primary (and to a lesser extent secondary) school management to municipalities. There is indeed a certain likelihood that local decisions will favor majority education over minority rights<sup>47</sup>.

How much of these evolutions may be imparted to the post-Ohrid dynamics? Was the increased ethnicization of life, society and politics written into the Ohrid Framework Agreement? In fact, these two questions are wrongly formulated. Since the introduction of political pluralism at the beginning of the 1990s, party politics in Macedonia have been centered on communities, although after 1992 all post-electoral governmental coalitions have included an ethnic Albanian partner<sup>48</sup>. Albanian political organizations compete over Albanian votes; their Macedonian counterparts try to achieve support in Macedonian-inhabited regions. In these two groups, cases of cross-community voting in the municipal and the legislative elections are exceedingly rare. There are also several smaller minority parties that survive through making more or less enduring alliances with larger ethnic Macedonian organizations. When time comes for presidential elections, the Albanian electorate plays a crucial role in the second round, prompting Macedonian parties to court the (then) dominant Albanian party. Typically, the defeated ethnic Macedonian candidate accuses his opponent of owing his election to Albanian votes. For the rest, some gentleman's agreement of mutual non interference seems to have ruled party coexistence up to now. Macedonian politicians do not interfere with the ways in which Albanians manage the ethnically homogenous municipalities they hold, nor do Albanians endeavor to establish a political presence in regions mostly inhabited with ethnic Macedonians.

Furthermore, the social understandings of territory, demography and power are shared by all communities, as they were in former Yugoslavia. To put it bluntly, the moment one community comprises above 50% of the total population in any given unit of government, that unit becomes "hers". The mayor will come from the majority community and he will be expected (by members of all communities) to defend the interests of his ethnic group in the first place. Minority rights might be respected, yet community preference will be the rule rather than the exception. In this respect, "minorities" (nationally) do not "behave" better than

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Both authors argue that "Macedonia's educational system has long been one of the major contributors to the *de facto* segregation between the ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian communities" (p.3).

<sup>47</sup> This point is notably stressed in the excellent Mirjana Maleska, Lidija Hristova and Jovan Ananiev, *Power Sharing. New Concept of Decision-Making Process in Multicultural Municipalities*, Skopje, n.d., 2006, p.18, at: <http://adi-macedonia.org/Downloads/publications/english.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Since 1991, both party spectrums have been mostly bipolar, political competition taking place between the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE among ethnic Macedonians, while in the Albanian community the (post-1994) predominant PDP/DPA cleavage was superseded with a DPA/DUI divide after 2002.

the “majority” when they are locally dominant<sup>49</sup>. The 2004 redistricting process was thus bound to be marred with “ethnic” considerations and afterthoughts, as were debates over the previous Macedonian territorial organization in 1996<sup>50</sup>. In 2004, both sides knew what they were doing when the SDSM tried to guarantee that the road to the international airport located 7 km east of Struga near the lake shore would remain in an ethnic Macedonian municipality or when they negotiated the delimitation of Skopje districts so as to guarantee that the Cyril and Methodius University, although on the side of the Vardar where Albanians now tend to predominate, would remain in *Centar* municipality, where ethnic Macedonians prevail<sup>51</sup>. Similarly, the Albanian BDI was fully aware of the impact of drawing some Albanian villages and the city of Struga together<sup>52</sup>. By giving ethnic Albanians a relative majority, they guaranteed that the next mayor would be Albanian, and indeed in March 2005 Ramiz Merko (DUI) was elected at the head of the enlarged municipality. Locally, his policies have been understood as primarily targeting his Albanian constituency - including an ill-fated initiative for placing a memorial to the killed municipal councilor, Nura Mazar, a.k.a. Commander Struga, an alleged former NLA member (the decision was adopted without applying the “Badinter rule”, as stipulated by the 2002 Law on Self-Government). Many an ethnic Macedonian feel uneasy with recent changes within the municipality, such as extensive personnel reshuffle in local institutions and renaming of streets, squares, buildings with Albanian names. Some feel Struga is now following the path Tetovo earlier undertook - a path towards ethnic homogeneization.

The recent multiplication of monuments, statues and commemorative plaques throughout Macedonia celebrating (ethnic) national heroes as well as “victims” (respectively “veterans”) of the 2001 crisis uses the very same ideological idioms. The construction of a statue

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<sup>49</sup> On issues related to the protection of minority rights in Gostivar, Debar, Struga (where ethnic Macedonians are in a minority) and Kičevo (Albanians as an ethnic minority, at least until 2008), see Mirjana Maleska, Lidija Hristova and Jovan Ananiev, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> In former Yugoslavia, particularly in Kosovo in the 1980s, gerrymandering was “ethnic”, as it was used to engineer local majorities and local minorities. On the politicized management of territorial divisions in Yugoslavia, see Michel Roux, *Les Albanais en Yougoslavie. Minorité nationale, territoire et développement*, Paris : Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1992, pp. 397-406 ; Eggert Hardten, « Administrative Units and Municipal Reforms in Kosovo (1959-92) », in G. Duijzings *et al.*, *Kosovo/Kosova Confrontation or Coexistence*, Nijmegen : Peace Research Centre, University of Nijmegen & Political Cultural Centre 042, 1996, pp. 158-170 ; Michel Roux, « Controverses sur les frontières du Kosovo », *Balkanologie*, 7 (2), 2003, pp. 183-197.

<sup>51</sup> See the description of the boundaries of *Centar* municipality in the Law on the City of Skopje, at: [http://zels.logincee.org/legisl\\_body.asp?AF\\_ID=3867](http://zels.logincee.org/legisl_body.asp?AF_ID=3867)

<sup>52</sup> Under the 1996 territorial division, the ethnic make-up of Struga municipality (36 892 inhabitants in total) was as follows: 47,94% Macedonians, 41,54% Albanians, 5,44% turks, 0,30% Roma, 1,75% Vlachs, 0,27% Serbs, 0,08% Boshniaks and 2,67% “others”. Following the redefinition of municipal boundaries, its population has increased to 63 376. Ethnic Albanians now account for 47,80% of the inhabitants, ahead of the ethnic Macedonians (32,08%) and the other communities (Turks, 5,72%; Roma, 0,18%; Vlachs, 1,03%; Serbs, 0,17%; Boshniaks, 0,16%; “others”, 3,79%). Data from Republika Makedonija, Državen zavod za statistika, *Popis na naselenieto, domakinstvata i stanovite vo Republika Makedonija, 2002 godina - definitivni podatoci* - [Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002 - Final data -], Skopje: DZS, December 1, 2003, p.22 & 25 (for the 1996 territorial division) and downloaded from the website of Struga municipality (for the current boundaries of the municipality) at: <http://www.struga.gov.mk/index.php?id=173>

dedicated to Skanderbeg in Skopje is a case in point. During the 2001 conflict, Prime Minister Georgievski (VMRO-DPMNE) had decided to have a huge steel Orthodox cross built on Mount Vodno to the South of Skopje. Illuminated at night, the cross overlooks the entire city, including areas with a large Albanian population like Čair and Butel. Local Albanian politicians were not long in “retaliating” (although there is much more to the Skanderbeg project than a mere Macedonian/Albanian show of strength)<sup>53</sup>. The new Skanderbeg initiative was launched shortly after Macedonia redrew municipal boundaries and made Albanian a second official language in Skopje. It stood as a symbol for the Albanians’ higher profile in the capital. Although local Macedonian authorities protested the legality of the monument, Skanderbeg’s statute was inaugurated on November 28, 2006 (the Albanian flag Day) in the presence of members of the international community as well as a mostly Albanian crowd<sup>54</sup>. Located a few dozen meters away from the Vardar river - which has become in the later years a symbolic demarcation between the (mostly) Albanian inhabited Northern Skopje districts and the ethnic Macedonian districts in the South -, the statue marks one of the entrances to the Old Skopje Bazaar. It is a seven meter-high bronze monument due to a Tirana architect; Skanderbeg is represented sitting on his horse, his sword in its holder. His right hand is raised. In Orthodox iconography, this gesture might be interpreted as a form of salute. Among common Albanian people, “stop” is the message read into it: “Your territory ends here”. It is only a meager consolation to think that Macedonia has moved away from armed antagonisms to a situation where interethnic rivalry uses memorials as common weapons...

#### B - Buddressing national pride: The new government’s policies

Under the leadership of the young and dynamic former Finance minister, Nikola Gruevski, the VMRO-DPMNE won over a program that promised sustainable growth and foreign investments, anti-corruption policies, a more efficient bureaucracy as well as the opening of a new, post-Ohrid implementation era. Nikola Gruevski’s government composition and his first

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<sup>53</sup> Skanderbeg (in Albanian: Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu, 1405-1468), an Ottoman soldier who later rebelled against the Empire, is perceived among Albanians as an Albanian national hero. Before Skopje, there were statues of Skanderbeg in Tirana, Pristina and Rome. When launching the initiative, local Albanians from Macedonia were also trying to enhance the symbolic prestige of Albanian lands in Macedonia in relation to neighboring Albania and Kosovo. Politically speaking, the project was taking place against a background of intense DUI/BDI-DPA/PDSH competition. Supported by DUI, the project offered Ali Ahmeti an opportunity to boost his rating in a city where DPA/PDSH enjoys a large audience. Finally, national and war memorials typically provide opportunities to raise funds from Albanians abroad and to strengthen ties with the diaspora.

<sup>54</sup> The Macedonian Department for the protection of cultural heritage considered that the municipality of Čair was violating the law for monuments and cultural heritage, as well as the urban planning legislation when initiating the project. The official authorities in Skopje claimed that they were the ones to make the decision, and that the agenda of the municipality of Skopje (where the possibility to build such a statue had been mentioned in 2005) could not be used as a legal base in support of the project.

political initiatives were in full harmony with Macedonian public expectations. First, Gruevski built a team of young multilingual technocrats, most of whom had a professional experience in the United States. A former World Bank official, Zoran Straveski was appointed deputy Prime Minister. Vele Samak, who had earlier worked for Microsoft in the US and whose father owns Microsam, a large Macedonian firm, was chosen as minister (without portfolio) for foreign investments, as was Gligor Tašković, the son of a former vice-president of the World Macedonian Congress. Nikola Gruevski also recruited from the English-speaking NGO sector. Lazar Elenovski, the new Defense minister was until then president of the Euroatlantic Club, which lobbies for NATO membership. Gabriela Konevska, a former head of Transparency Macedonia, has become deputy Prime minister for EU integration. Soon after being sworn in, the new government announced a package of measures aiming at revitalizing the economy : a unique 12% tax for personal income and profit (10% in 2008), tax relief on reinvested benefits, increased labor market flexibility, as well as new public investments.

In the sphere of symbolic politics, Prime Minister Gruevski has used every single opportunity to stress Macedonianness, Macedonian pride and Macedonian history. Discarding Greece's national sensitivity, Skopje airport was remained Alexander the Great Airport in December 2006. New (antique-style) statues were installed in front of the government's building entrance. In April 2007, 32 new apartments built for the families of former Macedonian members of the security forces killed in the 2001 conflict were inaugurated in the presence of the Prime Minister. Against this background, there is little surprise that the VMRO-DPMNE failed to anticipate the political cost of the tensions with Albanian opposition political forces. Following the July 2006 elections, DUI who led among the Albanian block by 6 deputies (17 vs. 11 for his opponent, the DPA) hoped to be invited to join the future coalition government, but the VMRO-DPMNE was extremely reluctant to ally with a party of former NLA fighters. Despite international attempts at facilitating a compromise, N. Gruevski finally chose Arben Xhaferi's DPA/PDSH as a coalition partner. DUI's response was prompt and dramatic. Albanian party activists took to the streets and blocked roads in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Debar and Struga for several hours a day starting on August 7. On August 25, several thousands Albanians demonstrated in front of the National Assembly to protest parliamentary approval of the new government, while DUI ostensibly boycotted legislative work until September 9. Throughout the Fall, Ali Ahmeti's organization, itself strained between a radical branch (Rafiz Aliti, Fazli Valiu, Gëzim Ostreni) and a more moderate wing (Ali Ahmeti, Agron Buxhaku, Teuta Arifi), pursued an aggressive strategy. Some DUI leaders threatened to ask Albanian DUI-led municipalities (15 out of 85) to refuse to cooperate with central government

authorities. Moreover certain voices raised concerns that if democratic principles were not respected (the winner of a given electoral contest should be in government), some Albanians might be tempted to take up arms again.

In the meantime, DUI put forward a series of demands concerning majority/minority relations, some of which had been discussed at the time when the SDSM was in power. Nikola Gruevski initially refused to start consultations on these issues. In response to the government's stance, DUI ceased again all parliamentary activity in January 2007, thus effectively blocking adoption of some important reforms for which the Badinter majority was requested. Much international pressure - especially from Erwan Fouéré, the EU representative, and Gilian Milovanovic, the US ambassador - was required before Nikola Gruevski and Ali Ahmeti finally reached an agreement in May 2007. Most of DUI's demands were met. A list of 45 laws to be adopted through the so-called Badinter principle was drawn. Both parties agreed that changes would be made in the parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations to ensure that opposition parties held a majority in the Committee. Initially, it was also announced that a law on pensions for the 2001 war "victims" (but not for "veterans") would be adopted - an information later denied by the Prime Minister. No consensus was reached regarding the future law on the use of languages (DUI insisted on the nationwide use of two official languages). Finally, Ali Ahmeti failed to obtain the compulsory formation of government through dual majority vote. By the end of July, though, renewed disagreements had appeared over the exact concessions made by the VMRO-DPMNE, while N. Gruevski had come under heavy criticism from both the SDSM (opposition) and the DPA (member of the coalition) for having bypassed the executive and engaged in interparty negotiations.

Several lessons need to be drawn from this sad episod. First, many local and international observers have been disappointed with DUI's confrontational tone. Having seen the ethnic Albanian party promote policies in the spirit of the Ohrid Agreement between 2002 and 2006, they hoped that DUI would remain "moderate" while out of office. Had Ali Ahmeti not promised to promote a new, more responsible way of doing politics? These expectations, though, missed the point. The dominant question is not whether DUI's leadership is more "moderate" than that of the DPA or the other way round. As suggested earlier, the core issue had to do with the ways in which intra-Albanian party competition has been structured over the past 15 years and power exercised. Albanian political parties (this is valid for Macedonian parties too, although to a lesser extent) can only "deliver" (jobs, contracts, public funds) when they are in power. The moment they fall out of government, they lose most of the resources

that allowed them to control political loyalties. Traditionally, Albanian parties have therefore tried to “survive” while in opposition through adopting radical national discourses and “ethnicizing” day-to-day politics. Such practices are unlikely to change unless, first, average voters start depending less on resources provided by political parties for their economic well-being and, second, politics stops resembling an extensive spoil system in which every single majority change induces thousands of layoffs and hasty party appointments<sup>55</sup>.

Second, whether we like it or not, in Macedonia ethnic issues are not likely to fall out of the agenda anytime soon, all the more so as most upcoming reforms in state administration, local self-rule and social policies are likely to affect interethnic balances. At every step, adjustments will be indispensable, as will be the search for broad consensus between government and opposition. To put it otherwise, if dominant parties endeavor to sideline ethnic issues, there is a risk that the latter will find ways of making themselves heard. This remark is especially true in a context where uncertainty over Kosovo’s final status is likely to reverberate negatively upon chances for further stabilization in Macedonia.

### **III - The Kosovo issue in Macedonian politics and society**

#### A - Macedonia’s cautious policies

Kosovo has been a highly visible and divisive issue in Macedonia in the past two decades. In the 1980s, developments in Kosovo were among the factors that convinced Macedonian authorities to attempt to crack down on what was perceived as an increasingly militant Albanian nationalism. Some of the Serb policies, in the education sector for instance, were replicated in the Macedonian Republic. In the 1990s, influx of Albanians from Kosovo seeking refuge from the harsh Serb policies were further perceived as having disrupted prevailing ethnic equilibria in several Macedonia municipalities, particularly in the northern suburbs of Skopje (the districts of Butel and of Čair). At the time of the 2001 conflict, local ethnic Macedonians often made a distinction between the “good” local (Macedonian) Albanians and the “bad” Kosovo Albanians, who were seen as ill-integrated into Macedonian

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<sup>55</sup> Gruevski’s policies were no exception to the rule. 544 public officials were discharged at the first public session of the new government - including directors and board members of public enterprises, agencies, and funds, and members of the judiciary, among others. Later dismissals targeted customs officials. All in all the reshuffles were expected to affect between 2 000 and 8 000 people. See Osservatorio Balcani, “EU and Macedonia: Do People Make Changes?”, October 11, 2006, at: <http://www.osservatoriolbalcani.org/article/articleview/6258/1/216/>

society and one of the reasons behind the worsening of interethnic relations. In brief, Kosovo was understood as a major source of fragility for the Macedonian state.

Today, Kosovo remains one of the topics on which ethnic divergences are the greatest. Among ethnic Macedonians, the possibility that Kosovo should be given independence continues to cause deep concern. The Brima Gallup March-April 2007 survey suggests that only 3,1% of the ethnic Macedonians favor that option for Kosovo<sup>56</sup>. 30,5% rather support an “independent Republic within Serbia” and a near equal share (33,9%), a return to the previous status. The difference with ethnic Albanian views is striking: 95,3% of the Albanian respondents prefer independence. Reluctance to see the creation of a new Kosovo state derives from the fear that the mostly Albanian-inhabited North-Western municipalities of Macedonia might be encouraged to secede and to seek reunification with their Kosovo Albanian brethrens within a “greater Kosovo” (if not a “greater Albania”). Additionally, a poor and weak state is seen as a future fertile ground for organized criminal networks. At a regional level, some Macedonians also worry about a potential spill over effect with negative repercussions on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ethnic Albanians, on the contrary, believe that Kosovo independence, while putting an end to years of uncertainty, would promote regional and local stability. Following such a decision, the Western Balkans would be allowed to concentrate solely on their EU-NATO agenda. In the long run, membership in the European Union should also allow all Albanian-inhabited lands to belong together in a larger entity, where freedom of movement would be the rule. Finally, diagnoses diverge when it comes to determining who is responsible for delays in solving Kosovo’s issue. Ethnic Macedonians still primarily blame Kosovo authorities (33,7%) and the United States (20%), whereas three quarters of the ethnic Albanians (74,8%) think Serbia has been procrastinating<sup>57</sup>.

In this context it is impressive that until now Macedonian political elites have managed to formulate a very balanced and cautious policy on the issue. When the Vienna talks started in 2006, Macedonian rulers made it clear that they would accept any solution to Kosovo’s final status, provided that it was acceptable to the international community and to the concerned parties. Several political leaders, including President Crvenkovski (SDSM), endeavored to explain their electorate that what would be most dreadful for Macedonia would not be Kosovo’s independence so much as a failure to reach a decision on the issue. The VMRO-DPMNE’s accession to power in July 2006 did not alter Macedonia’s official stance. On February 3, 2007, Prime Minister Gruevski declared that the proposal submitted by UN

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<sup>56</sup> UNDP, *Macedonia*, op. cit., p.75.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

Special Envoy to Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, offered an “acceptable” solution that “may contribute to the stability of the region and help the countries in the region in their preparation for the European Union, NATO membership”<sup>58</sup>. The Ahtisaari plan envisages that Kosovo would obtain an internationally supervised independence. Kosovo would remain under the oversight of an international envoy, and Kosovar Serb municipalities would be granted substantial autonomy, while retaining some financial ties to the Serbian government.

On the same occasion, Nikola Gruevski also expressed satisfaction at the proposed settlement of the Kosovo-Macedonia border demarcation issue. The question had been left pending since 2001. The agreement signed between Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was never recognized by Kosovo authorities. They opposed having been excluded from the negotiations and protested the loss of small portions of Kosovo land to Macedonia. At the beginning of the Vienna negotiations in 2006, Macedonia’s government had expressed the wish to see the Macedonia/Kosovo border issue addressed before Kosovo’s final status was settled. Finally, Skopje had to content itself with the promise that the boundary question will be tackled shortly thereafter. Martti Ahtisaari’s plan foresees the creation of a joint technical commission, comprising one international civilian representative, within 120 days after the entry into force of the Kosovo settlement to oversee the border demarcation process<sup>59</sup>. The commission’s work is to be completed within one year from the date of its establishment.

Later in the Spring, as it became clearer that Russia might be intent on blocking a UN resolution on Kosovo’s final status and that disagreements between Kosovo Albanians and Serbia could not be easily bridged, President Crvenkovski (SDSM) went a step further, stating that “if there is no [UN] resolution, as a candidate to the UE and to NATO, we shall follow the common policy of these two organizations (...). If their position is to establish diplomatic relations and to recognize Kosovo, then this is what we will do »<sup>60</sup>.

Despite showing extreme good will, Macedonia’s politicians dread a stalemate in Kosovo. Several recent developments have caused further concern. On February 10, 2007 former NLA and KLA member, Fazli Veliu, currently a DUI deputy, attended the controversial *Vetvendosja* [Self-determination in Albanian] demonstration in Pristina where two

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<sup>58</sup> See « PM Gruevski : Kosovo Plan of UN Envoy acceptable to Macedonia », at : <http://www.vlada.mk/english/News/February2007/ei3-2-2007a.htm>

<sup>59</sup> See United Nations, Security Council, Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, March 26, 2007, p.50, at : [http://www.unosek.org/docref/Comprehensive\\_proposal-english.pdf](http://www.unosek.org/docref/Comprehensive_proposal-english.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> See the president’s interview to Greek daily, *Katemerini*, in Macedonian at : <http://www.president.gov.mk/info.asp?SectionID=6&InfoID=2662>



demonstrators died in clashes with UN police. The protest movement led by Kosovo Albanian, Albin Kurti, is known for being critical of the international community's inefficiency in managing the Kosovo issue and for advocating a unilateral declaration of independence. In July 2007, after Faik Fazliu, the leader of the KLA veteran association in Kosovo, declared that former Albanian rebels would be ready to take up weapons if Kosovo were denied the right to independence, in an interview to Macedonian daily, *Dnevnik*, Fazli Veliu boasted that he could put together 10 000 men to go and fight in Kosovo. Stating that KLA and NLA veterans were in regular contact, he exposed his strategy in these terms: "We shall wait for them [in Kosovo] to take the initiative and based on that, we shall protest together to internationalize the question. We'll see how the international factor reacts, knowing that they are the ones to guarantee equal rights for all. We're ready to fight for Kosovo independence with weapons if need be"<sup>61</sup>. On August 3, several thousand ethnic Albanians demonstrated in Tetovo in support of Kosovo independence. Three days later, two hand-grenades exploded one hundred meters away from the headquarters of Macedonian government. This was the first incident of this kind in several years, prompting fears that a deadlock in Kosovo might reignite interethnic tensions in Macedonia<sup>62</sup>.

Postponing a settlement would definitely be a wrong option. After members of the UN Security Council failed to agree on a UN resolution in July, a troika that comprises U.S. envoy Frank Wisner, Russia's top Balkans diplomat Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko and Germany's Wolfgang Ischinger, who represents the EU, engaged in a last-ditch round of shuttle diplomacy. The troika is supposed to submit a report to the UN Council on December 10, 2007. Prime Minister, Agim Ceku, has warned that Kosovo might consider proclaiming independence unilaterally on November 28 (the day of the Albanian flag). The international community's efforts will focus on keeping Kosovo Albanians in, while convincing Serbia to get on board. At the end of August, though, there seemed to be little chance for an agreement. Serbian authorities had made it clear they would consider affording Kosovo any form of autonomy short of independence. For Kosovo leaders, the Ahtisaari plan was just not negotiable.

The greatest difficulty for Macedonia lies with potentially (negative) self-fulfilling prophecies. The more things drag on, the weaker Macedonia's social fabric is likely to become. Recent allegations about a potential division of Kosovo with the northern part going to Serbia can

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<sup>61</sup> See "Veliu so 10 000 borci ke vojuva za Kosovo" [Veliu with 10 000 fighters will fight for Kosovo], *Dnevnik*, July 10, 2007 at: <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/?itemID=D9926D2D7D7A9F4B9D09F9756B7D8CD9&arc=1>

<sup>62</sup> See « Grenade Fired as Macedonian Government Buliding », *RFE/RL Newswire, Southeastern Europe*, August 7, 2007.

only be destabilizing. For the time being, in Macedonia an overwhelming majority of the people simply yearn for peace and prosperity, and they believe euroatlantic integration will help them achieve these goals. In this context, a credible EU and NATO commitment remains the best guarantee that Macedonia will look to the future rather than let itself get trapped in the past.

#### **IV - EU “member-state building” and NATO membership : The only path to sustainable peace**

In the Spring of 2005, the International Commission on the Balkans argued the best option with a view to achieving stability, democracy and prosperity in the region resided in a “member-state building” strategy<sup>63</sup>. This scenario remains the most convincing to this day. In Macedonia, EU and NATO membership stand among the few projects around which both majority and minority communities rally. They may thus help build the vision of a common future in a state at peace with itself and with its neighbors. Correspondingly, both NATO and the EU have tried and will most probably continue to use Macedonia’s expectations to foster political and economic reforms as well as comprehensive implementation of the Ohrid agenda. NATO representatives and US officials in particular have convincingly argued that to become a member of the Alliance, Macedonia needed not only to reform its defense sector, but also to strengthen judicial reforms, fight corruption and promote a multiethnic society and a functional democracy<sup>64</sup>.

In March 2007, 92% of the Macedonians supported NATO membership<sup>65</sup>. This result is particularly remarkable if one keeps in mind the intense anti-NATO feelings provoked, in the Spring of 1999, by the Alliance’s bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) at the time of the Kosovo crisis. During the 78-day military campaign, ethnic Macedonians had also strongly protested the United States’ policy and several hundred demonstrators had thrown firebombs at the US embassy and tried to storm the building on March 25<sup>66</sup>. During the 2001 conflict, both the Alliance and the US fostered ambivalent sentiments, as most ethnic Macedonians thought they were supportive of the “Albanian cause”. In fact, although NATO’s

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<sup>63</sup> See The International Commission on the Balkans. *The Balkans in Europe’s Future*, April 12, 2005, at: <http://www.balkan-commission.org/activities/Report.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, ’s statement in Zoran Nikolovski, “US supports Macedonia’s NATO bid”, Southeast European Times, July 16, 2007, at: [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2007/07/16/feature-03](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2007/07/16/feature-03)

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in “PM Gruevski: NATO membership - top priority of Macedonia’s foreign policy”, Macedonian Information Agency (MIA) June 30, 2007, at: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=46508>

<sup>66</sup> See “Anti-Nato protests hit Macedonian capital”, CNN.com, March 25, 1999, at: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9903/25/macedonia.protest.02/>

image has undeniably improved over the past years, in March 2007, 30% of the participants in the Brima Gallup opinion poll still declared they disagreed “entirely” or “somewhat” with the statement that “NATO wants what is best for our country”<sup>67</sup>. Nevertheless, regardless of their cultural background, citizens in Macedonia feel the need to be part and parcel of a larger security organization in order to preserve peace and stability in the country. The Alliance’s efficient management of the post-conflict situation has also convinced members of the Macedonian political elite that NATO was a reliable and efficient partner, whose leaders knew what they wanted to achieve and how to get there.

After its fifth round of enlargement, on March 29, 2004 when seven former East European countries joined the organization, NATO had claimed to stick to an “open door policy”. Nevertheless, the Alliance seemed to ponder about its capacity to accept new members and the rationality of a continuing enlargement policy. To maximize the probability of being accepted into the organization, in November 2004, Macedonia joined the so-called Adriatic Charter alongside Albania and Croatia, two other NATO candidates, with a view to intensifying lobbying efforts. Despite worries that Croatia might try to go it alone, cooperation between the three countries has gone smoothly. In May 2005, the Macedonian authorities also amended the Law on national defence to allow for the creation of a professional army - a process that is due to be completed by the end of 2007. Additionally, Macedonia has engaged in a variety of international peacekeeping missions - in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and Bosnia-Herzegovina - and provided logistic support to KFOR in Kosovo, in order to demonstrate its commitment to the organization. Recent statements from NATO officials suggest that this strategy might bear fruits. At the 2006 Riga Summit, NATO Heads of state and government declared the Alliance intended to extend invitations to countries meeting NATO standards to join the North Atlantic Treaty at its 2008 Summit. Macedonia has already made it clear that it might accept to join NATO under the name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) it was compelled to accept in order to be admitted to the United Nations in April 1993 following Greece’s refusal to recognize its constitutional name<sup>68</sup>.

Perceptions of the European Union were never as sharply (ethnically) divided as those of NATO. In the elite, frustrations with the EU’s internal divisions, and with the poor cooperation between the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR, in charge of administering financial assistance to Macedonia until 2008), the Delegation of the European Commission in Skopje and the Office for the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, receded after the positions of

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<sup>67</sup> See UNDP, *Macedonia*, op. cit., p.76.

<sup>68</sup> This point was notably made by President Crvenkovski in the interview he gave to Greek daily, *Katemerini*. See : <http://www.president.gov.mk/info.asp?SectionID=6&InfoID=2662>

EU Representative and Head of the EC were amalgated in the Fall of 2005. Although they irritate Macedonian authorities at times, rivalries between EU member states are also perceived as giving local actors additional room to maneuver. Besides, amongst average people the European Union remains widely associated with ideas of a better life and higher living standards. For those Macedonians who knew Bulgaria and Romania in the early 1990s and have recently travelled to these countries, drastic economic and social changes, as well as the modernization of infrastructures bear testimony that EU accession does matter.

By confirming that all Western Balkan states would join the European Union once they meet the established criteria, the Thessaloniki European Council (June 2003) gave Macedonian ruling parties a major incentive to maintain the internal reform momentum. The first Western Balkan country to have signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in April 2001<sup>69</sup>, Macedonia submitted its application for EU membership on March 22, 2004. In December 2005, the country was granted candidature status, mostly in recognition of the courageous implementation of the Ohrid reforms. But no date for opening negotiations on EU entry was set<sup>70</sup>. The EU's insistence on a stricter compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria (June 1993), the provisions of the SAA and the requirements of the Stabilization and Association Process was received with mixed feelings by local Macedonian elites, as long as the Union's internal crisis - started after French and Dutch voters separately rejected the EU constitutional Treaty in May-June 2005 - seemed to provide the major rationale behind the more reserved EU policy towards future enlargement. At the EU summit last June, there were positive signals that the European Union might overcome its institutional impasse. Were the Intergovernmental conference (IGC) to agree on a new EU Treaty before the Lisbon informal Council of October 18-19, 2007 and the European Council to approve the document, the Union European might regain impetus, political credibility and attractivity.

Macedonian authorities are fully aware that, following accession of ten new member states in 2004, plus Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the European Union needs to consider "absorption capacity" when planning future expansion. The Commission's Communication on the enlargement strategy and on the main challenges for 2006-2007<sup>71</sup> has made that point

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<sup>69</sup> The SAA was the specific instrument designed by the European Commission in its relations with Western Balkan states. Following the Thessaloniki summit (June 2003), the country of the Western Balkans were given a clear UE perspective and the SAA were enriched to include elements taken from the EU enlargement process. Macedonia's SAA came into force in April 2004.

<sup>70</sup> See Council of the European Union, *Brussels European Council, 15/16 Decembrer 2005, Presidency conclusions*, Brussels, 30 January 2006, p.8, [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/87642.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/87642.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006 – 2007, Including annexed special report on the EU's capacity to integrate new members*, Brussels, 8.11.2006, COM(2006), 649 final at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2006/Nov/com\\_649\\_strategy\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/Nov/com_649_strategy_paper_en.pdf)

clear, as have EU high official statements both in Brussels and in Skopje. Macedonian politicians also understand that issues such as visa-free travel regime are extremely sensitive among EU member states. At the same time, calls for a greater commitment to economic reforms, to rule of law and to equality regardless of ethnicity can only be heard if local actors are provided a strong impetus to move ahead with socially painful and politically delicate changes. Giving a date to start membership talks, moving from visa facilitation - on which an agreement was signed in April 12, 2007<sup>72</sup> - to a full liberalization of the visa regime, would demonstrate that the EU is willing and able to improve people's life in Macedonia and that every Macedonian government should rank EU accession as its top-most priority. In a country where social issues continue to represent a major challenge to stability, allowing Macedonia to benefit from EU pre-accession funds would also do much to increase domestic social and ethnic cohesion.

Recently the European Parliament made a strong case for keeping the EU moving. In its July 12, 2007 resolution on Macedonia's 2006 Progress Report, while encouraging the VMRO-DPMNE government to push reforms and opposition parties to refrain from using such political methods as parliamentary boycott, the European Parliament called for "negotiations to start as soon as possible"<sup>73</sup>. The European Parliament also confirmed that the question of Macedonia's constitutional name should not prevent the country from initiating EU membership talks. The name issue has been plaguing the country's relations with Greece (and, consequently, with the EU) since the early 1990s<sup>74</sup>. In the past twelve years, a UN Special Envoy, Matthew Nimitz, has been trying to facilitate negotiations between the countries, as of now to no avail<sup>75</sup>. Meanwhile, Greece has repeatedly threatened to use its leverage as an EU member state to block Macedonia's road to the Union in case no acceptable solution is found. In December 2004, the United States's decision to recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name spurred much hope that the Greek-Macedonian dispute might come to an end. Alas, if the decision did much to boost the image of the United

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<sup>72</sup>Under the agreement, visa will be facilitated for about twenty categories of citizens, including students, retired persons, children up to 6 years of age, liberal professions, businessmen and tourists. It will be easier for such groups to get multiple entry visas. For students and pensioners, visas will be issued free of charge. Also, the possibility to maintain a bilateral general visa fee exemption vis-a-vis Bulgaria and Romania has been preserved. See "Macedonia - EU negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements concluded", April 13, 2007 at: <http://www.vlada.mk/english/News/April2007/ei13-4-2007a.htm>

<sup>73</sup> See European Parliament resolution of 12 July 2007 on the 2006 Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2006/2289(INI)), p.5, at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?Type=TA&Reference=P6-TA-2007-0352&language=EN>

<sup>74</sup> Greece objects to its neighbor using the name "Republic of Macedonia", saying that it implies claims on a Greek province of the same name. For further details, see John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece. The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation*, London: MacFarland, 1997.

<sup>75</sup> Several propositions were put on the table. In 2005, M. Nimitz proposed the name Republic of Macedonia-Skopje. Macedonian authorities had earlier suggested that Macedonia use its constitutional name in all foreign relations, while continuing to use FYROM in its bilateral relations with Greece.

States in the country, it did not prompt the Greeks to show greater flexibility. It did not suffice either to convince the European Union to follow in US footsteps.

For Macedonia as for the Balkans at large, 2008 will be a crucial year. If Kosovo's final status is resolved peacefully and if adequate decisions regarding Macedonia's future NATO and EU membership perspectives are made, remaining fears of potential interethnic confrontation in the country will rapidly recede into the background. If not, the EU might come to painfully understand that "its time has not come" in the Balkans, nor is it likely to do so any time soon.

*Paris, August 2007*