

MACEDONIA: THE LAST CHANCE FOR PEACE

20 June 2001

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MACEDONIA: THE LAST CHANCE FOR PEACE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the past three months, since mid March 2001, Macedonia has stared into the abyss of inter-ethnic conflict, pulled away from the precipice, squandered opportunities for a political settlement, then returned as if sleepwalking to the brink of civil war. The downward spiral was interrupted on 11 June, when the Macedonian government and the ethnic Albanian rebels agreed to a ceasefire. The following day the government abruptly endorsed a peace plan proposed by President Boris Trajkovski. For their part, the NLA guerrillas expressed a readiness to halt their insurgency but want to see concrete steps towards improving Albanian rights.

The ceasefire has more or less held, while the details of Trajkovski's plan are being worked out in Skopje. In broad terms, it would end the conflict by disarming the rebels, offering them a safe exit from Macedonia or a limited amnesty, and launching a reform process to address the legitimate grievances of the ethnic Albanian minority. Although the plan does not foresee the NLA's direct inclusion in negotiations, the NLA cannot be excluded from the process if it is to have a realistic chance of success. On 14 June, the government officially requested NATO help to disarm the rebels. Although leading Alliance members responded coolly, the prospects of positive NATO engagement in Macedonia look better than at any time before.

If this initiative is to succeed, Macedonian leaders on both sides of the ethnic divide will have to show unprecedented courage in looking beyond personal or partisan interests. It is extremely unlikely that this will happen unless the European Union (EU) and the United States throw new political and military resources behind the negotiations. U.S. participation in a NATO deployment to assist in the implementation of a settlement is crucial. Otherwise the NLA will continue the conflict, in the belief that the U.S. will eventually engage in its favour. A donors' conference for Macedonia should be held as soon as a settlement is firmly in place, to demonstrate international resolve to address the economic decline that fuelled the conflict.

The United States and Europe together must work with the government in Macedonia to ensure that multiethnic Macedonia offers equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens without privileging the ethnic majority. The divide separating Macedonians and Albanians is deepening by the day. The status quo of ethnic communities leading parallel lives is no longer tenable or acceptable, and not only because of NLA demands. The Western alliance must do everything in its power to push through a political solution. If Macedonia slides into civil war, the conflict will be difficult to contain within Macedonia's own borders.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Peace Negotiations

1. The European Union and the United States must take a more active role in the negotiating process, their insistence that the "Macedonians take ownership" of the process having cost valuable time and yielded negligible results.
2. In particular, both the EU and U.S. should proceed quickly with the appointment of high level special envoys to assist the negotiations being conducted among the leaders of the four principal parties in the national unity government.
3. Both Washington and Europe should send a strong, explicit message that Albanian extremists will not be allowed to split the country along ethnic lines.
4. While the NLA need not have a formal place at the negotiating table, it cannot be excluded from the negotiating process. A viable settlement must include an amnesty agreement for the NLA fighters and rehabilitation for those who surrender their weapons.
5. Given that without strong NATO backing, neither the government nor the rebels are likely to accept a political solution, leading Alliance members (including the U.S.) should announce readiness to deploy troops as soon as an acceptable peace agreement has been signed. These troops should be tasked to monitor the disarming of the rebels and, as appropriate, their withdrawal from Macedonia through a safe exit corridor. Such a NATO deployment could in due course be replaced by a multinational UN peacekeeping force.
6. NATO should stand prepared to play an active military role in support of the Macedonian security forces against further rebel activity, if the situation so demands and the Macedonian government so requests.

Follow Through

7. When a peace agreement is firmly in place, an international donors' conference for Macedonia should be held within 30 days.
8. The international community should urge the four principal parties in the unity government to amend Macedonia's constitution by de-ethnicising it. The alternative solution – of promoting the ethnic Albanian community to constitutional parity with the ethnic Macedonians – would entrench rather than alleviate ethnic division, encouraging federalisation or secession.
9. Kosovo's uncertain final status encourages ethnic Albanian extremism throughout the region. With the G8 taking the lead, the international community must develop a 'roadmap' towards final status negotiations.
10. The EU, NATO, UN and U.S. should encourage Greece to accept the international recognition of Macedonia under its constitutional name as The Republic of Macedonia.
11. The proposed United States project to train ethnic Albanian police officers, will need careful monitoring to ensure that recruits are fully integrated into current police structures.

12. The international community should pay closer security attention to the activities of Albanian diaspora groups in the United States and Western Europe, with a view to stemming the flow of funds to illegal armed formations.
13. The international community must press hard for strong anti-corruption measures that will restore some degree of public confidence in Macedonia's elected leaders.

Skopje/Brussels, 20 June 2001



MACEDONIA: THE LAST CHANCE FOR PEACE

I. INTRODUCTION: SPHERES OF INFLUENCE, SOURCES OF DISINTEGRATION

In the past three months, since mid March 2001, Macedonia¹ has stared into the abyss of inter-ethnic conflict, pulled away from the precipice, squandered opportunities for a political settlement, then returned as if sleepwalking to the brink of civil war.

By early June 2001, the country was bracing itself for the worst. Ethnic Albanian insurgents calling themselves the National Liberation Army (NLA) had advanced almost to the eastern outskirts of Skopje, the capital city.² The government spurned rebel offers of a ceasefire, and rumours of an imminent breakthrough offensive by Macedonian forces were rife. The NLA threatened to attack police stations, the parliament, the airport and a nearby petrol refinery unless the army stopped bombarding rebel-held villages. Residents of the capital rushed to stock up on water, candles, cooking oil, flour and other staples.

Ethnic Macedonian unity began to unravel as the country's leaders disputed the efficacy and merits of a hard-line military policy. Meanwhile the NLA steadily gained territory and influence. There have been some 25 military and civilian fatalities, and the number of wounded is in the hundreds.³ More than ten villages have been destroyed by government forces and will be uninhabitable for some time. At least 42,700 ethnic Albanians have fled to Kosovo while about 50,000 Albanians and Macedonians are internally displaced from their homes. The UNHCR estimates that about 150,000 ethnic Albanians might seek refuge in Kosovo if the fighting escalates.⁴

¹ The use of the name Macedonia in this report, as in others published by ICG, is a convenience that does not imply any opinion on the use of "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM) or "Republic of Macedonia" as the currently correct name of the state in question.

² The terms used in Macedonia to describe the ethnic Albanian insurgents vary: from terrorists to guerrillas, extremists and rebels. Unlike European foreign ministries, the U.S. State Department has very specific criteria for applying the designation "terrorist". The U.S. government defines the NLA as "extremists using terrorist methods". The ICG uses the terms insurgents, rebels, guerrillas and extremists interchangeably to describe the members of the NLA.

³ It should be noted that, in the Albanian language, the National Liberation Army is *Ushtria Clirimtare Kombetare* (UCK), and hence shares the same initials as the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves*). In the Macedonian language, the UCK is the *Osloboditelna Narodna Armija*, or ONA.

⁴ Press reports vary tremendously regarding the number of military and civilian casualties. On 29 May 2001, a Macedonian Ministry of Defence spokesman said that 14 soldiers had been wounded and 14 killed. The Albanian language newspapers *Fakti* and *Flaka* reported on 25 May that 10 civilians had been killed and more than 200 wounded.

⁴ United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Spokeswoman Astrid van Genderen in Pristina on 11 June 2001.

The Macedonian government and the NLA agreed to a ceasefire on 11 June 2001. The following day the government abruptly endorsed a peace plan proposed by President Boris Trajkovski. For their part, the NLA guerrillas expressed a readiness to halt their insurgency but want to see concrete steps towards improving Albanian rights.

The details of Trajkovski's plan are being worked out in Skopje. In broad terms, it would end the conflict by disarming the rebels, offering them a safe exit from Macedonia or a limited amnesty, and launching a reform process to address the legitimate grievances of the ethnic Albanian minority. The plan does not foresee the direct inclusion of the NLA in negotiations. On 14 June, the government officially requested NATO help to disarm the rebels. Although leading Alliance members responded coolly, the prospects of positive NATO engagement in Macedonia look better than at any time before.

The current crisis can be traced directly to spring 1998, when a series of unexplained bombings destroyed five police stations and rumours of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) cells flourishing in the country were heard for the first time.⁵ Not much attention was paid to these rumours, and they faded completely after the 18 October 1998 elections that led to a coalition government between the ethnic Macedonian nationalist party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the ethnic Albanian nationalist party, the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA).

The coalition leaders, Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski and DPA leader Arben Xhaferi, reached an informal understanding regarding their spheres of influence. It is common knowledge that VMRO-DPMNE focused on the eastern part of the country while the DPA looked after the western portion, where the population is predominately ethnic Albanian. The arrangement worked well and relations between the country's two largest ethnic groups were relatively relaxed. Belying his nationalist reputation, Georgievski pursued European integration and generally accommodated the DPA's modest agenda of reform, which focused on placing ethnic Albanians in government leadership positions and building an accredited university with instruction in the Albanian language.⁶

Ethnic self-policing was an essential element of this de facto division of the country. In many parts of western Macedonia, no ethnic Macedonian police officers or soldiers have ventured in more than two years. Unfortunately, this provided a benign environment for the growing number of armed ethnic Albanian insurgents, many of them driven by battlefield experience elsewhere. Many VMRO-DPMNE supporters who now advocate a strong military response to the insurgency blame their Prime Minister for having ceded control of the security of the country back in 1998, and also blame Xhaferi for what they see as his betrayal when he proved unable to control the NLA. The ethnic Albanians, in turn, also blame Xhaferi for his rather modest or uninspired reform platform that opened the political space for the NLA to emerge.

⁵ Car bombs exploded outside police stations in Gostivar, Tetovo, Skopje, Kumanovo and Prilep. See ICG Balkans Report, *The Albanian Question in Macedonia: Implications of the Kosovo Conflict for Interethnic Relations in Macedonia*, 11 August 1998, pp. 13-14.

⁶ Agreement to establish the South East European University was reached in April 2000.

Violence erupted in mid February 2001 in Tanusevci, an ethnic Albanian village near the border with Kosovo.⁷ The trigger may have been the negotiations between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to restore the buffer zone (Ground Safety Zone) around Kosovo to Yugoslav control. Ethnic Albanian rebels in the zone needed to transfer into Macedonia, and may have stumbled into trouble in Tanusevci, or started trouble to divert attention from larger movements elsewhere in the border area. An alternative theory sees senior government figures as having organised a little incident at Tanusevci as a show of strength, which then got out of hand.

Whatever the origins may be, on 13 March 2001 the NLA spread the fighting to Tetovo, Macedonia's second largest city. The NLA leaders claimed to be defending the Albanian community against Macedonian security forces, and to be fighting for their national rights in Macedonia. The NLA's political demands were designed to gain popular support among the country's ethnic Albanians.

The government reacted loudly but irresolutely until 21 March 2001, when the rebels were given an ultimatum to disarm and/or leave the country, or face a full-scale military offensive. The shelling of villages above Tetovo began on 25 March, and four days later the government declared the operation a success, although 11,000 refugees had been created. Shortly after the crisis, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1354 expressing unanimous support for Macedonia's democratically elected and multiethnic ruling coalition.

The crisis subsided for a month until eight Macedonian soldiers were killed on 28 April 2001 in an ambush near the village of Vejce, near Tetovo, close to the Kosovo border. Their deaths triggered renewed fighting between the state and ethnic Albanian militants and sparked riots in Bitola on 1 and 2 May and violence in Skopje and Veles. The rebels then moved the frontline eastwards from the Sar mountain range, north of Tetovo, to the Skopska Crna Gorna range between Kumanovo and southern Serbia (the Presevo valley).

On 3 May 2001, the militants entered and took control of the villages of Vaksince and Slupcane, north of Kumanovo. Around 30,000 civilians were caught in the skirmishes after unsuccessful government appeals to evacuate the areas. The government countered by shelling the villages of Lopate, Slupcane, Oprizare, Otlja, Opaje, Vaksince, Matejce and other smaller villages in the vicinity and continues to do so intermittently. The Macedonian forces accused the NLA of using ethnic Albanian villagers as "human shields" that prevented the government troops from launching a full-scale offensive. The NLA flatly denied the accusations. Albanian villagers fleeing from the fighting have not supported the government claims but some have indicated that NLA intimidation may have prevented many villagers from fleeing fierce government shelling.

From late March 2001, European Union High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten and NATO Secretary General George Robertson have taken the lead in trying to broker a political solution. Their engagement has involved some high wire balancing -- advising the government to launch a credible political process while at the same time recognising the need for military containment.

⁷ See ICG Balkans Report No. 109, *The Macedonian Question: Reform or Rebellion*, 5 April 2001.

Bowing to enormous international pressure, the four major parties agreed to form an all-party national unity government. Unseemly squabbling prevailed, however, and nearly seven precious weeks elapsed before the formation of the new coalition on 13 May. Macedonian forces had initially threatened to eliminate the insurgents unless they accepted a 17 May 2001 deadline to give up their armed struggle. A temporary ceasefire was offered as a concession to the ethnic Albanian parties in the unity government. The government resumed shelling of Slupcane and Opaje on 22 May.

A series of tit-for-tat escalations culminated in the NLA's almost nonchalant "liberation" of a town on the outskirts of Skopje, on 9 June 2001. The infiltration of Aracinovo, only some ten kilometres from the capital, demonstrated a new and dangerous escalation. Although defence experts doubt that the NLA is able to make good its threats to bombard civilian and infrastructure targets, the rebels scored an important point by mentally bringing the battle into the streets of Skopje – and to the KFOR supply centre adjacent to the airport.

The seizure of Aracinovo, and other rebel movements in villages along the northern and western sections of the ring road around Skopje, followed Prime Minister Georgievski's threat on 6 June 2001 to seek a parliamentary declaration of a State of War. The prime minister's threat was itself a response to the killing of five Macedonian soldiers on 5 June. Georgievski vowed to crush the Albanian extremists rather than engage in political negotiations. The NLA had initially responded with a call for a ceasefire to begin at midnight on 7 June 2001. When this offer was spurned, the rebels walked into Aracinovo.

The 11 June ceasefire was agreed so that humanitarian assistance could be delivered to the thousands of civilians trapped in the rebel held villages. At time of writing, however, water was still not flowing from the Glazani Dam, which ceased to deliver water to the 100,000 residents of Kumanovo on 6 June, due either to rebel sabotage – as the government claimed – or to a routine engineering fault, as the rebels themselves contended.

In the recent turmoil, two things have remained constant. First, no reasonable ethnic Macedonians or Albanians in the country have expressed any desire to kill each other or to see their country torn apart. The fact that extremists have not succeeded in actively splitting the population – though they have sown distrust, fear and even hatred – is an immense asset that neither Macedonia's elected leaders nor the international community has known how to exploit.

At the same time, the longer the crisis continues, the more frustrated and disillusioned the public grows. At this moment, ethnic Macedonians and Albanians alike appear almost as frustrated with their respective political leaders as with each other. But each day that passes without real movement towards a peaceful solution serves to deepen the divide that separates Macedonians and Albanians, and this enormous stress could easily be channelled into inter-ethnic violence

The three separate incidents of ethnically driven rioting in the southern city of Bitola, in early May and again in early June, that destroyed more than 200 homes, shops and restaurants belonging to ethnic Albanians and Macedonian Muslims, testified to the danger of civil war.

Secondly, the international community is still trying to square the circle: namely, searching for ways to help Macedonia without providing any new economic or security guarantees. It is still underestimating the gravity and scale of the challenge to governance and society in Macedonia that the crisis has activated.

The destabilisation of Macedonia could undo nearly a decade of peace-making efforts throughout the Balkans. If Macedonia slides into war, it is likely to affect peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and in Kosovo. The KFOR logistics centre, located in Macedonia, provides critical support to the Western troops in Kosovo. The rapid flow of refugees into Kosovo would shortly undermine NATO efforts to bring order to the border area.

II. THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (NLA)

The National Liberation Army (NLA) claims to be fighting for equal rights of ethnic Albanians. Its leaders have demanded greater economic opportunities and social benefits, access to university education in the Albanian language and changes to the discriminating language contained in the Macedonian Constitution. The guerrillas later refined their demands to include an internationally conducted census that they alleged would reveal that ethnic Albanians comprise nearly 40 per cent of the population.⁸

The insurgents stole the political agenda of the country's elected Albanian leaders. Although most Macedonians scoff at the idea that the rebels are fighting to improve rights, and some ethnic Albanians doubt this too, the NLA cleverly tapped into the everyday frustrations shared by the country's one-third ethnic Albanian population. Ethnic minorities in Macedonia do have legitimate grievances. Albanians claim they are treated as second-class citizens and lack access to basic government services, but it is not generally perceived to be the type of discrimination that drives people to take up arms.

The reasons for the fighting are interlinked in a web of political self-interests in Kosovo and in Macedonia, criminality, a warped diaspora view of the real situation in the country, and unleashed frustration caused by chronic discrimination against Albanians. There are indeed, connections between the Albanian political leaders in Kosovo and in Macedonia who support the insurgencies in the Presevo valley of southern Serbia and in Macedonia. The reasons for this support are diverse and range from parochial protection of political and economic positions to aspirations of a new Balkan map.

The NLA comprises essentially five types of soldiers: 1) battle-hardened ex-KLA fighters who have been killing Serbs for the past ten years in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo and have now moved the battlefield to Macedonia, 2) opportunists who see themselves ensconced in new, highly profitable political structures, 3) Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians who are pursuing a cloudy, pan-Albanian vision, 4) naïve young ethnic Albanians who believe that armed conflict is justified because the government has failed to deliver any meaningful reform, and 5) foreign mercenaries who are paid to fight.

⁸ The 1994 census indicated that ethnic Albanians comprised 23 per cent of the country's 1,936,000 population. However, the proportion of ethnic Albanian children currently enrolled in primary school stands at just over 34 per cent.

The vision of a "Greater Kosovo" only partly explains the motivation of the NLA. Few ethnic Albanians in Macedonia – as distinct from the diaspora – would want to be part of Kosovo or Albania. Yet, a borderless criminal network already operates freely in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. Keeping Macedonia at risk allows the contraband trade in drugs, weapons, cigarettes, and humans to flourish unchecked. A destabilised Macedonia is profitable both for criminals and for those who dream of a pure Albanian section of western Macedonia. The contest for Albanian leadership in the region remains open as long as Macedonia is under siege.

The unstated goal of the NLA seems to be a division of the country along ethnic lines, not necessarily to be part of a "Greater Albania" or "Greater Kosovo" but rather to become the new Albanian power broker in the region. Despite the lack of clarity in the real aims or objectives of the NLA, one outcome is certain. As long as the Macedonian Army pursues a military strategy with inconclusive results in which the risk to Albanian civilian casualties is high, popular support for the NLA among ethnic Albanians will continue to grow. And, if one segment of the Macedonian government organises or encourages violence against ethnic Albanians, the conflict has the potential to become a civil war.

Albanians in Macedonia overwhelmingly support the stated objectives of the Albanian guerrillas but disagree with their violent methods. It is striking that few intellectuals or elites seem prepared to join them. The insurrection is, however, gaining support in villages not in harm's way. There is a sense that the Macedonian forces are getting what they deserve after years of harassing ethnic Albanians. There may also be some misplaced romantic notion that this is a fight for liberation. The KLA holds a certain allure among young Albanians in Macedonia, many of whom may not be aware of the KLA's very mixed and bloody record in Kosovo.

Ethnic Albanians are running out of patience, owing in part to the weaknesses of the two largest Albanian political parties. These parties, DPA and the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), have failed to set aside their own political ambitions and recriminations in order to present a united front. They blame each other for failing to improve the status of Albanians in the country. Both parties tried to curry favour with the guerrillas in order to enhance their own political standing. According to the two parties' self-imposed deadline, they have very little time to deliver significant reforms before they are irrevocably compromised in the eyes of their supporters. Yet, until 12 June, the leading Macedonian party (VMRO-DMPNE) refused to consider political reforms until the NLA had been destroyed. This gave the NLA little option but to keep fighting.

The National Liberation Army (NLA) remains a shadowy organisation, yet there is no question that it has provided the greatest challenge to Macedonia during the country's eventful first decade as an independent state. Until it threatened targets around Skopje, in the second week of June 2001, the NLA had not put a foot wrong in political terms.

III. THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT

Under enormous international pressure, ethnic Macedonian and Albanian political leaders formed a national unity government on 13 May 2001.⁹ This enlarged government included eight political parties, spanning a range of leftists, rightists, nationalists, former communists and unrepentant socialists. The four principal parties are the coalition of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), which had governed since the 1998 elections, plus the main opposition parties since the 1998 elections, namely the Social Democrats (SDSM) and the DPA's main rival for Albanian support, the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP).

The daunting task facing this government is to narrow the deep divisions between the ethnic majority and the main ethnic minority, by means of legal reforms and constitutional amendments. The ethnic Macedonian leaders knew that the national unity government would afford some protection from popular criticism, as and when significant concessions were made to ethnic Albanians as part of a settlement. Their Albanian counterparts hoped to steal back the political reform agenda from the NLA, which had seized the initiative so successfully in March 2001.

All too familiar bickering and internecine conflicts delayed the formation of the new government, which cost valuable time and further eroded public confidence in political leaders. The PDP insisted for weeks that halting military action against the guerrillas was a condition of joining the unity government. Reluctantly, PDP joined the government, warning that significant reforms must be achieved before 15 June 2001 or it would withdraw support from the government. The government called a temporary ceasefire in the fighting to allow the Albanian insurgents a chance to lay down their arms and to leave the areas or face a wide-scale operation to "eliminate the terrorists". The ceasefire was viewed at the time as an important concession to the ethnic Albanian parties in the new government.

During the formation of the government, the ethnic Macedonian parties promised a legislative whirlwind that would improve the constitutional and legal status of minorities. Few people in the country, however, believe that the government will accomplish much beyond the preparation of new election laws and procedures before staging early elections. Perhaps, with forceful international leadership, the new Albanian-language Southeast European University in Tetovo could be operational by October. Secondary education has become emblematic of the ethnic Albanian struggle so any gains would be viewed as an important victory. Other reforms like official Albanian language usage, decentralisation for local government and strong anti-corruption measures are probably too complex for "fast-track" drafting and have little hope of being pushed through parliament this summer.

⁹ The ICG had argued for this step to be taken in its Balkans Report No. 109, *The Macedonian Question: Reform or Rebellion*, 5 April 2001, in the wake of the Tetovo episode. See Recommendation 3 : "It may prove impossible to achieve consensus among the main political actors on a reform agenda and process without widening the governing coalition. The [VMRO-DPMNE and DPA] government should be ready to bring the principal opposition parties, the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia [SDSM] and the Party for Democratic Prosperity [PDP], into the coalition."

These parties are not natural bedfellows, and their power-sharing arrangement could collapse at any moment. The threat of widespread fighting has not abated but there is a dangerous unwillingness on the part of Western powers to assume responsibility beyond the creation of the unity government. The current political leaders in Macedonia have simply shown themselves unable to manage the immediate crisis on their own. The coalition will need a great deal more political help (including pressure, incentives and rewards) than is currently being offered.

IV. MILITARY RESPONSE TO A POLITICAL PROBLEM

The United States and the European Union have urged restraint but at the same time strongly support the Macedonian's government's attempts to regain military and political control of the country currently held by ethnic Albanian insurgents. The government finds itself in a nearly impossible situation. If the government exercises caution, then it concedes territory to the extremists. On the other hand, if the woefully ill prepared Macedonian army launches an all-out military offensive, the civilian casualties could be disastrously high. Such an offensive may also be the catalyst that unleashes widespread fighting between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians throughout the country.

The government initially heeded Western calls for restraint. The government issued an ultimatum on 17 May 2001 for the Albanian rebels to surrender their weapons and leave the villages. The guerrillas showed no sign of abandoning their posts and fighting resumed. To date the casualties have been limited. About fifteen soldiers have been killed, five seriously injured and one kidnapped. There have been five confirmed civilian deaths. The guerrillas dispute government reports that 30 NLA fighters have been killed; they admit to about a dozen fatalities. More than 50,000 ethnic Albanian refugees have fled the areas of fighting since March 2001, while ethnic Macedonians have moved to Kumanovo, Skopje and other areas in eastern Macedonia. International aid workers estimated that around two thousand villagers were trapped in the cellars of their homes in the villages under siege. The relentless shelling of Albanian villages has helped alienate the country's Albanians and caused great risks to civilians.

As one seasoned Western diplomat in Skopje described the situation, "The government says the villagers are hostages of the NLA. When hostage situations arise in Western countries, the safety of the victims is the first priority. Take for instance a plane hijacking. The first concern is the safety of the passengers. If talks fail and a commando team charges the plane, it attacks the hijackers not the passengers. Here, in Macedonia, the army is attacking the passengers."¹⁰

The government must find a way to safeguard the territorial integrity of the country while guaranteeing minority rights within the institutions and constitutional framework of the country. President Boris Trajkovski has publicly stated his determination to solve the crisis through political means and without resorting to force. Yet, he has failed to invite any ethnic Albanians to attend either the National Security Council sessions or his new ad hoc advisory committee, which supplanted the NSC during May.¹¹ This 'kitchen cabinet' includes the president, prime minister, minister of defence, minister of interior, speaker of parliament, director of

¹⁰ ICG interview in Skopje, 6 June 2001.

¹¹ Iljaz Halimi of the DPA is a designated member of the National Security Council, but he has not been invited to attend any meetings since early May 2001.

intelligence, two generals, and sometimes the minister of foreign affairs, the former prime minister and deputy prime minister.

Public pressure to end the four-month stalemate is growing. Most ethnic Macedonians believe that the only way to defeat the "terrorists" is through strong, unmitigated military force. The ethnic Albanians, however, see a political compromise as the only enduring solution. The deepening gulf of mistrust between the ethnic Macedonians and Albanians is unlikely to be bridged any time soon. The ethnic Albanians' legitimate grievances about endemic discrimination are valid but likely to fall upon deaf ears. The vast majority of the refugees fleeing mountain villages in and near the conflict zone are Albanian. They are fearful that if they leave their homes, they will never be able to return. There are credible reports of male Albanians being singled out from amongst refugees and taken to police stations for interrogation. Some have been beaten and kept separated from their families.¹²

Western officials fear that a heavy military assault by Macedonian security forces will trigger extensive civilian losses and overthrow the unity government that was designed to isolate nationalist guerrillas. The Macedonian public had begun to believe that the situation was under control, and its great fears of civil war had faded somewhat since the fighting moved from the urban setting in Tetovo to the mountainous villages outside Kumanovo. Everyone's worst nightmare is an image of Tetovo or Skopje in flames while Macedonian and Albanian neighbours fight in the streets. The NLA's capture of Aracinovo and threats to the capital brought this nightmare a huge step closer to realisation.

The barrage of domestic and international media has numbed the public into a sort of inertia. Conversations in homes, cafés and bars come to a complete standstill during nightly news broadcasts. The Macedonians want to believe that the military along with strong Serbian logistical and military support will be able to eradicate the guerrillas.¹³ Yet, there is the nagging fear that the guerrillas will disappear into the hillsides or escape to Kosovo and return again. The country is faced with a counter-insurgency that is largely domestic, which means that the fighters know the terrain and are likely to fight on despite temporary losses. At the moment, the NLA has no other options other than to continue fighting.

The military option remains tempting to extremists on both sides, but the only sensible and permanent solution is political. Inter-ethnic violence may gain momentum and spread to other ethnically mixed cities around the country. Some nationalist Macedonians have begun to form paramilitary groups. At least four such groups may have been formed; they claim to have a combined total of 5,000 members.¹⁴ Initially, the Macedonian Army rejected Macedonian volunteers because of reasonable concerns that these volunteers would be too violent or motivated to fight Albanians. Now, in the wake of escalated fighting, the Army is

¹² Human Rights Watch Report: *Macedonian Police Abuses Documented*, 31 May 2001.

¹³ The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Macedonia signed a military agreement on 4 June 2001 to boost security on their joint border and to enable Skopje to buy arms from Belgrade.

¹⁴ Dnevnik, May XX, p.1. The Komiti group is comprised largely of Vardar football fans and claims about 1,500 members; the Macedonian Lions have 500 members and follow the model of Arkan's Tigers; *Siva ptica* or Grey Birds claim 2,600 members and a fourth group under the historic revolutionary name of "Todor Aleksandrov" has not mentioned the size of its membership.

accepting volunteers in order to minimise the appeal of joining paramilitary groups.¹⁵

V. TO NEGOTIATE OR NOT: THE FROWICK PROPOSAL

Robert Frowick, a veteran American diplomat, was appointed Special Envoy of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in April 2001. The 71-year old envoy brought refreshing candour and determination to international efforts to break the stalemate in Skopje. Whether he also conveyed Washington's keenly anticipated political engagement alongside the European Union and NATO was less clear.

Officially, Ambassador Frowick's objective was to bolster the Macedonian government's ability to reach a peaceful settlement. Frowick encountered two immediate obstacles: Macedonian and Albanian intransigence and tepid support from the Western diplomats on the ground.

Frowick understood the issues and players in Macedonia extremely well from his previous stint as OSCE head of mission to Macedonia in 1992.¹⁶ He quickly surmised that to reach an enduring political agreement would require direct contact with the NLA. Frowick proposed an immediate ceasefire with the NLA in exchange for the promise of amnesty. The government duly granted a ceasefire in order to bring the PDP party into the unity government on 13 May 2001. The next step of the plan was to agree a series of confidence-building measures that directly addressed legitimate Albanian concerns, such as constitutional amendments, recognition of Albanian as an official language, access to higher education and greater representation in the state structures. After significant political progress was achieved, various control mechanisms would be set up to integrate some of the NLA leaders into public life.

The proposal was junked when a photograph of DPA leader Arben Xhaferi and PDP leader Imer Imeri with NLA Political Director Ali Ahmeti was plastered across television screens and morning papers from 23 to 25 May 2001. The three leaders had met secretly on 22 May in Prizren in Kosovo, and signed a declaration "concerning the peace and reform process in the Republic of Macedonia".¹⁷ They had followed the basic outline of the Frowick proposal, but rearranged the "confidence-building measures" that were supposed to occur in sequence, and dropped a few of them altogether.¹⁸

When news of the meeting broke, the president and prime minister denied prior knowledge of the negotiations and accused the two ethnic Albanian party leaders of supporting the NLA extremists. They further charged Xhaferi and Imeri with chasing votes by selling out Macedonia's territorial integrity. Xhaferi and Imeri

¹⁵ Government spokesman Antonio Milososki made the plea for restraint during a 12 June 2001 press conference in Skopje, which was covered by all major television and daily papers.

¹⁶ In 1992, the organizational precursor to the OSCE was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

¹⁷ Reportedly, Frowick was also in Prizren at the time of the meeting, which he did not attend.

¹⁸ To ICG's knowledge, no authorised text of the document has been released. The title of one version seen by ICG is "Statement of the Albanian leaders of Macedonia concerning the peace and reform process in the Republic of Macedonia". It is a page in length, almost all concerned with concessions to ethnic Albanian political demands (including "full rehabilitation and reintegration of all members of the NLA").

refused to back down and disown their support for the agreement. They did not fail to notice that while they were in Prizren, Trajkovski convened a meeting of the National Security Council (without inviting the sole ethnic Albanian advisor) to consider whether to escalate the offensive against the NLA, which would endanger even more Albanian civilians. The proposed military escalation also contradicted the agreement reached with the two Albanian parties, which was conditioned on a lasting ceasefire.

Frowick's proposal had great merit as a starting point for negotiations. It was framed in a three-step process; the next phase would have been introduced once sufficient trust had been established among the principal parties. Frowick consulted regularly but perhaps not fully with other Western diplomats. Whatever Trajkovski's and Georgievski's subsequent disclaimers, informed sources in Skopje are convinced that Frowick brokered the agreement both with the knowledge and consent of the Macedonian government and the backing of at least certain elements in the State Department and White House: it remain unclear, however, precisely who in the Bush Administration may have been supporting Frowick, or therefore what resources he commanded.¹⁹ He lacked the political clout of an endorsement by Secretary of State Colin Powell or Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Had there been clearer and more forthright U.S. policy support, Frowick would have had a much better chance of bringing the Macedonians on board. While his strategy was essentially sound, the absence of international consensus on the content and procedure left him hopelessly exposed when the Skopje government cried foul. His main problem was the international community's indecisiveness about whether or not to negotiate directly with the NLA. The European Union was adamantly opposed, while NATO's approach seemed to acknowledge the need for contact, if not necessarily for direct negotiations. The U.S. position was even less clear.

Clearly, Frowick could have done a better job of laying the groundwork for Albanian and Macedonian acceptance of the proposal. He may have also relied too heavily on his personal relationships with the key leaders. He understood that the Macedonian leaders were ready for an agreement but did not fully realise how unprepared they were to see it on paper. Frowick first arrived in Skopje shortly after the country's independence a decade ago. As much as he knew the Macedonians, they remembered him too, but as someone who was a bit too sympathetic to Albanian issues, and they may have been searching for reasons to validate their suspicions.

The ethnic Albanians were baffled by the international community's immediate rejection of the Prizren document. While the motivation might have been principled - intended to bolster the legitimacy of the elected Albanian leaders, above all Arben Xhaferi - the Western reaction against the Frowick proposal was excessive and counterproductive. All the parties in the unity government except VMRO-DPMNE were willing to accept the Frowick proposal as a starting point.²⁰ And it has subsequently been generally acknowledged that the NLA cannot be excluded from the negotiating process, even if they are not seated directly at the main table.

¹⁹ ICG interviews in Skopje, 28 May – 8 June 2001.

²⁰ ICG interviews with leaders of SDSM, LDP, DPA, PDP, and VRMO-DPMNE in Skopje, 28 May – 8 June 2001.

The Frowick plan's close brush with success underpins the importance of high level American involvement. For better or worse, ethnic Albanians believe that only the U.S. can be trusted to negotiate a reasonable and enduring settlement. The U.S. has enormous leverage over the ethnic Albanians and increasingly over the ethnic Macedonians, who are frustrated with what they see as the fuzzy European approach to negotiations. In the words of one senior SDSM parliamentarian: "We feel as if we are accomplices to the Solana plan rather than fully comprehending what is the European objective."²¹

Had the U.S. been engaged overtly, rather than trying to achieve peace indirectly and on the cheap, the Frowick proposal would probably have been accepted by the unity government. Instead, three or four valuable weeks were lost until many of the proposal's key elements resurfaced in President Trajkovski's plan.

VI. THE PRIME MINISTER'S HIDDEN AGENDA?

On 29 May 2001, one of Macedonia's state owned (politically controlled) newspapers, caused a storm by publishing details of a proposal, emerging reportedly from the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU), to solve the crisis by agreeing a territorial and population exchange with neighbouring Albania. The partition plan envisaged that the three largest ethnic Albanian majority cities in western Macedonia could be annexed to Albania. Macedonia's quid pro quo would be a small strip of land in Albania with access to the Adriatic Sea. The plan's authors – reportedly they were three senior members of MANU – delicately suggested that people affected by the plan could reduce the cost of relocation by simply exchanging homes.

The following day, MANU president Georgi Efremov held a press conference to deny that the Academy stood behind this scheme. His denial was unconvincing. The partition plan had official fingerprints all over it. On 31 May, the plan was presented in the other state-controlled Macedonian language newspaper, *Nova Makedonija*, this time with a more ambitious map, implicating Bulgaria in the scheme. Following complaints from Sofia, *Nova Makedonija's* editor-in-chief was replaced.

The reactions of government leaders did nothing to allay suspicions of VMRO-DPMNE complicity in publicising, if not originating, the partition plan. The speaker of parliament, Stojan Andov, commented that the plan was "intriguing but not irritating".²² Prime Minister Georgievski described the partition proposal in precise, dispassionate detail to a nationwide television audience, before concluding that it was "a terrible idea", for the striking reason that "in less than a month, 90 per cent of Macedonians will be thinking that the idea is not quite so bad after all."²³ A week later, on 10 June, Georgi Efremov resigned as president of MANU with these words: "I agree with the opinion of majority that the idea of voluntary exchange of territories and population between Macedonia and Albania is unacceptable, uncivilised and against the principles of modern civil societies."

²¹ Ibid.

²² When asked about the plan by ICG on 6 June, Mr Andov was more cautious: "It's the [ethnic Albanian] terrorists who want partition. The MANU ideas have no political substance, they are not a political fact."

²³ Interview broadcast by A1 television at 19:30 and 23:45 on 3 June 2001.

Fantasies of territorial partition involving the mass deportation of ethnic Albanians have been part of Macedonian nationalist subculture for decades. What was new in this episode was the semi-explicit official imprimatur given to the plan, and also the timing. The timing seemed intended to accomplish three things: to gain leverage for future Macedonian concessions by moving the starting point to the far right nationalist position; to raise the stakes with the NLA; and to shore up the Prime Minister's ratings among VMRO-DPMNE's rank and file supporters, who since 1999 have harboured doubts about Georgievski's nationalist credentials.

Efremov's resignation suggests that the partition plan's sponsors were taken aback by the fierce criticism that greeted it. Ethnic Albanians leaders immediately rejected the proposal. Approximately half the country's ethnic Albanians live in Skopje and the area east of the capital, which includes the Kumanovo valley. No one reasonably expects that the capital's 100,000 to 200,000 Albanian residents will simply abandon their homes.²⁴

Former Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski denounced the partition proposal in the press and said that such ideas "were an incitement to civil war and suicide for Macedonia". Crvenkovski favoured, instead, granting greater minority rights including the recognition of Albanian as an official language.²⁵ His position and that of his party, the SDSM, quickly came under attack from Prime Minister Georgievski. He accused Crvenkovski of rejecting the strong use of force to deal with the "terrorists" and capitulating to all Albanian demands.

In a nationally televised interview on 3 June, the Prime Minister offered the mandate to the Social Democrats for the changes to the constitution because his party, VMRO-DPMNE, "has made it clear that either we create the Constitution made to measure for the Albanians or we'll have war. This should be made clear to everyone. The position of VMRO-DPMNE is that we categorically refuse any dialogue in such an environment."²⁶ The Prime Minister also stated that the government was not functioning, and he would call early elections in September 2001.

The interview shocked many Macedonians because it seemed to confirm that Georgievski had rejected any idea of trying to reach a peaceful resolution through political reforms. Although the prime minister qualified the MANU partition scheme as "terrible", the entire tone of the interview indicated that he in fact supported the basic premise of ethnic partitioning. He suggested publicly for the first time that the Albanian population is more than one third of the total population rather than one quarter, as given in the 1994 census.²⁷ He played directly on the deep-rooted ethnic Macedonian fears that Albanians are out-breeding them and will soon turn the tables on them, making them the new minority.²⁸

²⁴ The exact number of ethnic Albanians living in the capital and surrounding suburbs is a very controversial topic. Macedonians claim that about 100,000 Albanians reside in the capital while Albanians claim to number more than 200,000. Whatever the real figure, the total is on such a scale that demands for the (ethnic) federalization of Macedonia can gain no support among Macedonia's Albanians.

²⁵ The statement appeared on all major television stations: A1, Sitel, Thelma, Kanal 5 and MTV on 31 May 2001.

²⁶ Interview broadcast by A1 television at 19:30 and 23:45 on 3 June 2001.

²⁷ See footnote 8 above.

²⁸ Using a 2.2 birthrate per 1,000 needed for a population to reproduce itself, at current birthrates of 1.5 for Macedonians and 2.5 for Albanians, it will take approximately 60 years for Albanians to overtake Macedonians in the demographic 'race'.

After this performance, there was little doubt remaining that Georgievski would pursue a strategy of blaming his SDSM coalition partners for any concessions made to ethnic Albanians. In effect, he had launched the first salvo in the pre-election campaign, which indicates there is little time remaining to push through any meaningful reforms. His statements also pulled the carpet from under the coalition government. The basic understanding for forming the national unity government was a commitment to pursuing legislative and constitutional reforms in order to defuse and resolve the crisis. If the prime minister and his supporters in government pursue an entirely different agenda, based on military victory without political compromise, there is no reason for the other parties to participate in the unity government.

Even without this internal subversion, the unity government has not functioned. Successive Macedonian administrations since independence have operated on the "winner-take-all" principle. As a rule, government positions are filled according to party criteria. Many key appointments have been blocked since mid May 2001 because no one really knows if the new ministers and deputy ministers have the authority to fill positions in the time honoured way. Added to this bureaucratic inertia is the complicating fact that ethnic Macedonian and Albanian government officials have stopped communicating with each other — not just at the top level but within all ministries except the finance and labour ministries. Government has not collapsed but it could at any moment.

VII. ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN BITOLA

Riots broke out in the southwestern city of Bitola on the nights of 1 and 2 May after the bodies of four Macedonian soldiers from Bitola were returned to their families' homes. The press portrayed the slayings as a massacre of innocent victims. Mobs destroyed about 100 homes, shops and restaurants owned by ethnic Albanians. Many eyewitnesses said that the mob was well coordinated and determined to limit the damage to Albanian property.

The pogrom images were replayed on the evening of 6 June when a new wave of violence swept the city after the deaths of three more soldiers from Bitola at rebel hands in the north of the country. More than 100 houses, shops and the city mosque were burned. Mobs of young men shouted, "Death to Albanians!" and sprayed Orthodox crosses on Muslim tombstones and the mosque. Earlier in the day, Orthodox Bishop Petar delivered a highly inflammatory speech at the funeral services for the soldiers, accusing Xhaferi and Imeri by name as collaborators and terrorists.²⁹

Reporters and others in the town said that leaders of the 1,000-strong mob had clear directions to Albanian homes and shops. Many residents contended that the rioters were from Skopje and that the police did very little to stop the violence, and

²⁹ Bishop Petar's appearance and speech introduced an explicitly religious element in the secular conflict. The autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church is one of the pillars of ethnic Macedonian identity. Its visible involvement in the political crisis would be most unwelcome.

may have even aided in some of the burning and looting.³⁰ Many of the rioters were identified as local football team supporters called "Chkembari" who have a record of violent clashes with other teams' supporters. The brother of one of the soldiers killed on 28 April is a ringleader of the Chkembari. On the second evening of planned rioting, Macedonian police stepped in and used tear gas to subdue some 700 potential rioters who had marched to the army barracks to demand weapons. Three men from Skopje who were coordinating the mob by mobile phones were detained.

There is a larger lesson to be learned from the violence in Bitola. Albanians comprise only 4 per cent of the population and many of them fled after the night of violence on 1 May. Several members of very wealthy ethnic Albanian families did, however, receive plum government jobs through the VMRO-DPMNE and DPA patronage system. Young ethnic Macedonians, on the other hand, with no chance of public employment or other chance of self-betterment, may resent the award of scarce government jobs to ethnic Albanians.

A closer look at Bitola will illustrate a particular danger that is growing across the country: the danger of a large, unemployed urban underclass that is frustrated by the lack of economic opportunities and wants to blame someone for its misfortune. Bitola holds historic significance for Macedonians and other ethnic groups. It could boast twelve consulates in the nineteenth century, when the father of modern Turkey Kemal Ataturk attended its military academy. About 3,000 Jews from Bitola were deported to Treblinka concentration camp in World War Two, and a significant number of Turks left for Turkey between 1953 and 1981, following an agreement between Belgrade and Ankara. The city suffered a population decrease during the 1990s, down from 84,002 in 1991 to 77,464 in 1994. Most of the emigrants were young educated people who went to the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 1999, of the 225 people who moved out of Bitola, 152 were between the ages of 15 and 29. Inward migration is mostly from the surrounding villages into the urban area.³¹

The emigration is mostly due to economic stagnation. Until independence, Bitola's connections with Greece were more active than those with Skopje; the closest Greek city, Florina, is about 20 kilometres from Bitola, whereas Skopje is 180 kilometres away. The city's livelihood dwindled away during the five years of Greek economic blockade (1992—1997), which coincided with the international sanctions regime against Serbia. At the same time that revenue generated from transit tourism was lost, state enterprises were shedding jobs. The REK Bitola Complex, for example, a coal mine and electricity plant that produces about 80 per cent of Macedonia's electricity, has reduced its workforce as coal reserves run out.

Residents have relied on remittances from the diaspora and on savings made from working abroad. The people suffered two waves of major losses. In 1991, after the collapse of federal Yugoslavia, all the hard currency accounts in Stopanska Banka were appropriated by the Central Bank in Belgrade. Then, in 1996, some 30,000 depositors lost more than U.S.\$90 million in personal savings when the private bank TAT collapsed due to a pyramid scheme that implicated local and high-level government officials. Despite pledges during the 1998 election campaign, none of

³⁰ Accounts from *Dnevnik*, *Utrinski vesnik* and *Fakti* newspapers and from *Human Rights Watch Report* dated 7 June 2001.

³¹ Source: *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia for Year 2000*.

the depositors have recovered their savings. For many people in Bitola, this dealt a deathblow to the credibility of state and government institutions.

In sum, Bitola has become a breeding ground for extreme nationalism, for reasons, which apply equally well elsewhere. There is an acute danger that other mixed cities with small but visible Albanian populations, such as Struga, Ohrid, Resen, Kicevo and Prilep, could be the next sites for ethnic violence if the current peace initiative fails to deliver.³²

VIII. ECONOMIC FALLOUT

The economic effects of the conflict are likely to impact on more Albanians than Macedonians because Albanian villages are being destroyed. The current fighting affects mostly ethnic Albanians. Further, Albanian small businesses are losing customers as refugees flee into Kosovo. Ethnic Macedonians, on the other hand, will be affected later by the total decrease in economic activity and halted foreign investment. The official unemployment rate is around 30 per cent but in many Macedonian cities and villages outside the capital, the actual rate is probably closer to 60 or 70 per cent. The real losses of the villages damaged and displaced persons are hard to calculate.

Based on official figures, the government anticipates a drop in economic growth this year from 6 per cent to 2 per cent (although most observers would say zero per cent is a more truthful projection), and a controlled rise in inflation from 2.2 per cent to potentially 6 per cent. Recent IMF negotiations concluded with the government on 11 June 2001 agreed to a cap of 4 per cent inflation for this year, but this target may be hard to keep in sight.

Wild stories of hyperinflation have been circulating throughout the capital since the end of May 2001. According to these scenarios, if the current crisis continues, the government will have to print new money no later than September to pay state salaries. The resulting inflation could be as bad as the worst years for Macedonia (1993-1994) when inflation exceeded 1000 per cent. In simple terms, the real value of the average salary of 350 DM would be 30DM. The persistent rumours of an imminent devaluation of the denar have pushed up demand for German Marks and other hard currency.

Even if the crisis ended immediately, the country could still experience double-digit inflation in January 2002. The Macedonian Central Bank (NBRM) has enough reserves to fight current pressure on the Macedonian denar but the foreign exchange reserves of U.S.\$130 million have been spent in the last three months. Oddly, short-term economic redemption may have been delivered by Yugoslavia, which reportedly transferred U.S.\$25 million to the Central Bank on 13 June 2001 as part of the share-out from the recently concluded agreement on dividing the assets of the former Yugoslav federation.

Macedonia has also fallen a long way down on the list of prospective candidates for eventual European Union integration. On 9 April 2001, Macedonia became the first Southeastern European state to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. The SAA was intended to reward the Macedonian

³² In fact, Naner Hani, a DPA political activist, was gunned down by unknown assailants in downtown Struga on 13 June 2001.

government for its critical role during the Kosovo Crisis. Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder wanted to devise an economic framework that would reward Macedonia and build trust and confidence in the European Union.³³ Only two months after the SAA signing ceremony in Brussels, Macedonia's leaders and the European leaders were nursing a sense of mutual betrayal.

The U.S. has pledged an additional \$5 million to rebuild destroyed houses, to aid Albanian students and to increase recruitment of ethnic minority police trainees. The European Union has pledged support for local government reform, assistance for conducting the census, support of the Southeastern European University and other projects. The economic assistance and military support are vital lifelines to the haemorrhaging economy but they will not be enough to prop it up and offset a decade of political corruption.

IX. REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

The Macedonian and Yugoslav government claim that the violence and terrorism in Macedonia and the Presevo Valley in Serbia this year were exported from Kosovo. They contend that the Albanian guerrillas fighting in southern Serbia and Macedonia want to unite the predominately Albanian populated areas in the two countries in order to force the issue of annexation or federalisation of these areas. The Macedonians and Serbs have strengthened their ties in the common fight against Albanian irredentism. The new alliance, however, may prove to be an unwelcome obstacle to a meaningful "inter-ethnic dialogue" between Slavs and Albanians.

Western defence experts in Skopje believe that the imminent return of Yugoslav troops to the Presevo valley triggered the shooting between Macedonian soldiers and NLA guerrillas in Tanusevci, in February 2001. The NLA had reportedly set up operations and a logistical supply base in the Ground Safety Zone (GSZ), the demilitarised, five-kilometre buffer zone around Kosovo that was established by agreement between the NATO-led Kosovo International Security Force (KFOR) and the Yugoslav Army (VJ) on 9 June 1999. Beginning in mid March 2001, NATO allowed the VJ to slowly reclaim the area and to push out some 600 to 7400 ethnic Albanian rebels from the zone.

The NATO supervised plan allowed for the surrender of the Albanian rebels fighting in southern Serbia and safe passage to Kosovo. The exodus of Albanian fighters from Serbia, however, presented new problems. A sizeable number of rebels are reported to have slipped into Macedonia to reinforce the Albanian fighters currently at battle with the Macedonian Army.

Serbian Deputy Premier Nebojsa Covic said on 10 June 2001 that Serbia would assist Macedonia in any possible way. He said that the crisis should be solved in a peaceful manner. Covic also declared that Serbia should be involved in negotiations and that "a similar model which has brought peace in the Presevo valley may be also used in Macedonia. In a way, Macedonia is a test for the world's policy towards Southeastern Europe." He said the international

³³ ICG interviews in Skopje, 28 May – 8 June 2001.

community should decide whether it supports multiethnic or ethnically clean states in the region.³⁴

The recent suggestion made by Covic for a partition of Kosovo has caused many in the region to take alarmed notice, not least when the inflammatory partition theme was embraced by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as described earlier in this report. Macedonians and Albanians alike believe that any such partition could not be accomplished without war because the new map would need to be decided on the battlefield. Bulgaria and Greece, too, would probably pitch in with maps of their own. Although the Serbian call for partition of the territory adjacent to the troubled areas in Macedonia may be just coincidental, the idea is in play and seems bound to resurface.

Bulgaria stands to lose the most from improved relations between Serbia and Macedonia. Bulgaria has traditionally been the closest ally of the Macedonian nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party, which traces its roots to the anti-Serbian movement following the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. Closer ties to Serbia would reinforce the north-south axis connecting Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. Bulgaria, the eastern partner, would gain little in terms of trade, economic cooperation, or political influence and would be further removed from European markets.

Both Serbia and Greece are worried about the long-term implications of a protracted conflict in northern Macedonia. The main highway or "Corridor 10" connecting the port of Thessaloniki to Belgrade passes through Kumanovo. Greek businessmen have been the largest investors in Macedonia in the past three years and have lost heavily since February. The Greeks have their "own Albanian problem", too, with more than half a million ethnic Albanians living in Greece. Athens worries that an escalation of tensions in Macedonia may spark inter-ethnic violence in Greece as well.

The Greek government has played a responsible role during the crisis. Athens floated a proposal directly to the political parties in mid May. Their idea to jump-start the stalled political negotiations deserves credit for its innovation and salience. The proposal envisaged a concrete schedule of immediate, five-day long, binding negotiations among major political parties represented in the parliament, setting up of a secretariat to supervise these talks, and obtaining a clear commitment by the political parties to pursue a comprehensive reform agenda, including amending the constitution. This initiative bypassed the ad hoc presidential cabinet and introduced thorny issues in bite-size pieces. It did not, however, envisage the participation of the NLA in the political dialogue.

³⁴ *Dnevnik; Makedonija Denes; Vecer; Vest; Nova Makedonija; Utrinski Vesnik; A1 TV; MTV; Sitel TV; Telma TV; Kanal 5* all covered his press conference.

At the same time, Greece was pressing for final resolution of the name dispute that has obstructed normal political and financial ties between the two countries since 1992.³⁵ The Greek foreign ministry announced on 14 May 2001 that talks were near the final stages. The Greeks had proposed that the country adopt as its constitutional name "Gorna Makedonija", meaning "Upper Macedonia". Athens was optimistic that the newly formed all-party government in Macedonia would be able to garner the two-thirds majority in parliament needed for such a constitutional change.

This proposal probably had a fair chance of acceptance during May, but more recently momentum has been building in Skopje for a different proposal. The Macedonians are already under pressure to adopt constitutional changes deemed necessary to fully incorporate Albanian and other minority rights. While Macedonian party leaders accept the inevitability of constitutional change, they believe the international community should persuade Greece to recognise the country's constitutional name. Given the extraordinary courage that, in the Balkan context, will be required of Skopje if it is to forge ahead with constitutional amendments, there is merit in this argument. Greece's fear of potential Macedonian irredentism, not to mention its implicit claim to copyright on the toponym 'Macedonia', should yield to the imperative of addressing the real territorial threats by the NLA inside Macedonia.

X. KOSOVO: "THE MONSTER IS DEVOURING MACEDONIA"

The Macedonian point of view, as passionately expressed by Speaker of Parliament Stojan Andov,³⁶ is that "Macedonians thought they were doing everything right in terms of inter-ethnic relations. They were told that their country was the only multiethnic success story in the region, and were duly rewarded for their good behaviour. Then, after the fighting in Tetovo, Macedonians suddenly became the pariah and were told that they were doing everything wrong and had to give the Albanians everything the terrorists demanded." Mr. Andov continued, "And now, we are being attacked by an international protectorate! Who are we fighting -- the United Nations?"

NATO's bombing campaign against the FRY in spring 1999 still sends political repercussions through Macedonia. Ethnic Macedonians and Albanians were split, the former deploring NATO while the latter keenly approved it. Prime Minister Georgievski's popularity rating may never have recovered after he allowed NATO troops to use Macedonian territory in 1999. The majority of ethnic Macedonians were opposed to NATO troops and supplies traversing their country. The Prime Minister's own VMRO-DPMNE party was adamantly opposed to the assistance and repeatedly warned the president that the "Kosovo monster would return to swallow the country".

³⁵ Greece has refused to recognize the country by its constitutional name, "The Republic of Macedonia", on the ground that the name implies a potential claim on territory in Greece or perhaps an eventual union with Greece's northern province of Macedonia. In 1993, the UN Security Council proposed that Macedonia should "temporarily be referred to as 'former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', until the resolution of the differences on the name of the state..." (UN Security Council Resolution 817 (1993).)

³⁶ ICG interview in Skopje, 6 June 2001.

Even if an agreement were reached with the NLA, Macedonia would still feel threatened by Kosovo. No one can convince the Macedonian public that the great powers and the mightiest military alliance on earth cannot seal the border with Kosovo. Macedonians feel abandoned after they foolishly accepted NATO troops and saw fellow Slav Serbs killed in the conflict. The Macedonian leaders believe that the NLA masterminds are in Kosovo and move about with complete impunity. It will be very hard for the Macedonians to accept any political settlement with the NLA if the international community does not improve its performance in Kosovo.

As ICG has argued elsewhere,³⁷ what is needed is G8-led progress toward a final political settlement: the identification of a clear political focal point for that process and the commencement of consultations on possible elements of a solution, including in particular the idea of “conditional independence”. Such a process would be as important for what it ruled out – in particular any expansion of Kosovo’s boundaries into what is now Macedonia – as for what it ruled in at this stage. It is ICG’s judgement that some clarity on these issues would not stimulate, but rather dampen Albanian radicalism in Macedonia – radicalism which, as in Bosnia and Kosovo before it, expands into a security vacuum. The limits to ‘irredentist’ aspiration must be set by the international community.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

The country faces an insurgency that is largely domestic, which means that the fighters know the terrain, are committed to their cause and, without a political solution, are likely to fight on despite losses. The Macedonian military and much of the public believe a victory was won in Tetovo at the end of March 2001. Yet the guerrillas were undefeated. Without a political solution, the NLA can reprise the Tetovo or Kumanovo scenario elsewhere in the western part of the country.

The international community wants to avoid establishing another protectorate. They want to see reform but are unwilling to accept full responsibility for the problem. The international troika of Patten, Solana and Robertson rightly pushed the Macedonians and Albanians to form a national unity government; but the political momentum has stopped.

The Macedonians could not get to the negotiating table by themselves, and it appears unlikely that they will be able to shape the reform agenda on their own. The shortsighted approach to reform means that the EU and NATO will have expended all their political muscle for an inert national unity government that accomplishes little else than holding early elections. As seen from Macedonia, the United States has been absent from the high level political negotiations. The Bush Administration’s avoidance of new U.S. commitments in the Balkans has left the Europeans in charge of negotiations. Ethnic Macedonians and

³⁷ Balkans Report No. 108, *After Milosevic: A Practical Agenda for Lasting Balkans Peace*, April 2001, Ch 5 ‘Kosovo’, and especially Ch 6 ‘The Future of the FRY’, pp. 120–130.

Albanians both fear that the Europeans are incapable of delivering any sustained political, economic and military assistance.

The European Union and the United States must undertake much stronger action to prevent the destruction of Macedonia. Macedonians and Albanians alike have exercised enormous restraint in ignoring the calls for war. The small and inadequate Macedonian Army cannot defeat well-supported and well-funded guerrilla insurgents who are bent on destroying the country. Indeed, its clumsy operations are more likely to recruit new members to the NLA than the opposite, while also incurring losses among its own ranks that will raise ethnic tensions, as has happened three times already in Bitola.

At time of writing, NATO has ruled out direct military intervention in Macedonia to stabilise the situation, at least in the absence of a political settlement, but pressure is rising - which ICG strongly supports - for NATO assistance at least in monitoring the disarmament of the NLA guerrillas as part of such an agreement. NATO teams have been shuttling in and out of the capital for the past two weeks. Both neighbouring Greece and nearby Turkey have called on allied governments to consider immediately deploying international peacekeeping troops inside Macedonia.

Whatever its present reluctance, only NATO can guarantee Macedonia's security after a political settlement is achieved, as it also does that of Bosnia and Kosovo. NATO should stand prepared to play an active military role in support of the Macedonian security forces against further rebel activity, if the situation so demands and the Macedonian government so requests.

Even before a political settlement is reached, NATO must prevent the NLA and other ethnic Albanian extremists from operating freely in Kosovo, and it must provide better training assistance if the Macedonian army is to be more effective in preventing the NLA from operating freely inside Macedonia. The Macedonian army and police have received training, intelligence information and weapons from Alliance members. This assistance should be systemised as part of a longer-term guarantee.

NATO has set up a new structure (NATO Coordination and Cooperation Centre or NCCO) in the region to better facilitate the exchange of information and coordinate military and bilateral support to Macedonia. KFOR troops have tightened border security between Macedonia and Kosovo but the long porous border with Kosovo has not been sealed airtight.

Many Macedonians and Albanians (and probably a few Europeans) believe that U.S. disengagement from the region has contributed to the crisis. As one Macedonian leader put it, "The United States always has a black and white approach, but it is so much easier to deal with them after they have made a decision. The Europeans are too flexible — this is the Balkans, we know how to play with them and use their national interests to our advantage."

The NLA has put key Albanian grievances front and centre on the agenda. They have stimulated serious engagement by the international community to resolve issues that had been previously rhetorical and passive. The NLA in absolute

political terms may achieve in a few months what the two Albanian parties could not deliver in ten years. Their goal, however, appears to be ethnic separation within Macedonia. The importance of implementing critical reforms is to dissuade the Albanians in Macedonia from joining the NLA and to stop them from dreaming about a new Greater Western Macedonia.

The NLA will not disappear, and the only way to stop them from gaining a permanent foothold in the country is stop them from setting the country's political agenda. This does not require the unity government to make a place for the rebels at the table. But it does mean that the elected Albanian leaders in the government must be able to have contact with the rebels and represent their concerns. It will also mean NATO contact with the NLA.

When the military crisis ends, important changes will have occurred in Macedonia. It is important to remember that all the citizens of Macedonia must be involved in the radical political changes that will be necessary to preserve the unique and multiethnic character of the country. Many of the reforms, such as amending the constitution, decentralising the government and official recognition of the Albanian language can be achieved. The way in which these changes are introduced will determine their acceptance.

Skopje/Brussels, 20 June 2001

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