

**The Implementation of the Ohrid Agreement: Ethnic Macedonian  
Resentments**

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*This article explores the difficult process that attended implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. It explores the various resentments the terms of the agreement provoked amongst ethnic Macedonians, in particular those dealing with 'symbolic' issues, and examines reasons for their rejection. These, the author argues, are related to the peculiarities of Macedonian national identity as well as to the political dynamics in the country. On the one hand, it is argued, many politicians feared for their patriotic credentials if they supported the agreement. On the other hand, large parts of Macedonian society saw the very existence of the Macedonian nation under threat. They regarded the state as the only protector of their contested national identity and therefore opposed the agreement's goal to rewrite the constitution on purely civic terms with wide-ranging rights for the minorities. For many Macedonians, this meant a severe loss of security. Despite this, the author concludes that compromises could be found which allows for some optimism for the future.*

## **I. Introduction**

On 8 August 2001 in Ohrid, the leaders of the Republic of Macedonia's main political parties, that since 13 May 2001 had formed a shaky 'National Unity Government', struck a deal which aimed at ending the violent conflict between Macedonian security forces and armed Albanian extremists in the country. The fighting had begun in February 2001 and resulted in more than 200 casualties, among them over sixty Macedonian soldiers and policemen. More than 100,000 persons were exiled or internally displaced, and relations between the ethnic Macedonian majority of the country and the Albanian minority reached a record low (for the course of last year's events see Brunnbauer 2001a). In order to prevent fully-fledged civil war from breaking out, Prime-Minister Ljubcho Georgievski ('Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party of National Unity', VMRO-DPMNE), Branko Crvenkovski ('Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia', SDSM), Arben Xhaferi ('Democratic Party of the Albanians', DPA) and Ymer Ymeri ('Party of Democratic Prosperity', PDP – the second Albanian party) agreed on a package of wide-ranging amendments to the constitution and far-reaching legislative changes that should meet the Albanians' long-standing demands. The agreement came after weeks of intense negotiations, in which two international mediators (François Léotard for the EU and James Pardew for the USA) took part. It was to be ratified by the party-leaders on 13 August.

However, the ink on the agreement had not yet dried when new outbreaks of violence called its ratification into question. On the same day, 8 August, a military convoy came under fire

and ten reservists were killed.<sup>1</sup> Responsibility for this attack was claimed by the ‘Albanian National Army’ (ANA, Albanian abbreviation: AKSh). ANA was allegedly founded in late 1999 by disaffected Kosovo UÇK fighters who had not found a role for themselves in the new life of post-war Kosovo, and stood for the unification of all Albanian areas in South East Europe and opposed the Ohrid Agreement (Mappes-Niediek 2001: 7).<sup>2</sup> The fact that eight of the soldiers killed came from the southern Macedonian town of Prilep sparked nationalistic violence there. A crowd of several thousand people took to the streets, destroying Albanian property and setting the central mosque in flames. Like with anti-Albanian riots in Bitola earlier the same year, the police did not intervene in order to protect Albanian property and lives.<sup>3</sup> Also in Skopje several Albanian shops and coffee-houses were destroyed.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, fresh fighting broke out in Tetovo, where the UÇK was increasing territory under its control, eventually reducing the area controlled by the state to police stations and police checkpoints (Brunnbauer 2001b: 8). The UÇK had utilized the cease-fire, which had been in force since 6 July, to improve its position in Tetovo and the surrounding areas. Expulsions of ethnic Macedonians from Tetovo and its surrounding villages by Albanian extremists further infuriated public opinion. On 10 August, the next challenge to the ratification of the Agreement was set in motion: Minister of the Interior Ljube Boshkovski, who was widely regarded as one of the most hawkish of the Macedonian authorities, sent police forces into the Albanian village of Ljuboten in Skopska Crna Gora (just a few kilometres to the north of Skopje), after eight Macedonian soldiers had been killed by a land-mine in the vicinity of the village. According to the police, the culprits of the attack were hiding in Ljuboten. The village was sealed off, and police began to shell it indiscriminately.

On Sunday, 12 August, police forces entered the village and began a house-to-house search for alleged Albanian UÇK-‘terrorists’. According to Human Rights Watch, which investigated the events in Ljuboten immediately after the police had left, ten Albanian civilians were killed by the police, seven of them shot deliberately, some at point-blank range. More than one hundred Albanian men were arrested and taken to police stations in Skopje where they were abused, before being released. Neither did the police attempt to prevent Macedonian civilians from beating up Albanians who tried to flee from the village. According

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<sup>1</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 August 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/newsline>.

<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of December 2001, President Bush prohibited members of ANA from entering the United States and decreed a financial embargo on the group (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 5 December 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/newsline>).

<sup>3</sup> *Dnevnik*, 9 August 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *Makedonija* 31 (10-23 August 2001), S. 9; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 August 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/newsline>.

to Human Rights Watch, not a single piece of credible evidence for the presence of UÇK rebels in the village was produced, despite the size of the police operation (Human Rights Watch 2001). Instead, the operation was purely a manifestation of strength and an ill-fated attempt to obstruct a political settlement to the conflict. Police brutality was so extensive that the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague initiated an investigation into the role of minister Boshkovski, who was present in Ljuboten during the police operation, at least on 12 August.

Under such circumstances strong international pressure was definitely required to ensure that the party leaders eventually ratified the Agreement on 13 August. The event itself was, nevertheless, very low key. National television did not broadcast it live, and the signatories to the Agreement did not display any great relief. On the contrary, an infuriated Prime Minister Georgievski left the press conference after the ratification as a consequence of Arben Xhaferi giving his statement to the press in Albanian without translation. The difficulties involved in reaching the agreement and the corollaries of its ratification therefore already provided a foretaste of the problems that were in store for its implementation.

## **II. The Ohrid Agreement**

The ‘Framework Agreement’<sup>5</sup> consisted of three parts: first, far-reaching amendments to the Macedonian constitution; second, changes to the current legislation; and third, a plan to end hostilities as well as a timetable for its implementation (for detailed analyses of the agreement see: Whyte 2001, Brunnbauer 2001c, Brunnbauer 2001d: 348-54). In short, the main provisions of the Agreement were:

- The Preamble to the constitution should be changed in a way to declare the Republic of Macedonia a state of all its citizens:

The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, taking over responsibility for the present and future of their fatherland, aware and grateful to their predecessors for their sacrifice and dedication in their endeavors and struggle to create an independent and sovereign state of Macedonia, and responsible to future generations to preserve and develop everything that is valuable from the rich cultural inheritance and coexistence within Macedonia, equal in rights and obligations towards the common good – the Republic of Macedonia, (...).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For the English text of the Framework Agreement see: <<http://www.president.gov.mk/eng/info/dogovor.htm>>, 16 August 2001. Macedonian version: <<http://www.president.gov.mk/mak/info/dogovor.htm>>, 16 August 2001.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.president.gov.mk/eng/info/dogovor.htm>, 18 August 2001.

The existing Preamble had defined the Republic of Macedonia as the

(...) [N]ational state of the Macedonian people, which guarantees the full civic equality and permanent co-existence of the Macedonian people with the Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and the other nationalities (...).<sup>7</sup>

Ever since the passing of the constitution in 1991, the Preamble was a major point of contention for the Albanians because they demanded equal status as the second constitutive people of the Republic. Eventually they agreed on the civic concept. The Agreement laid out also includes changes to some other articles of the constitution which previously had given the Macedonian people preferential treatment. The new wording of the constitution does not use the terms ‘Macedonian people’, ‘nationalities’, and ‘minorities’, but rather speaks of ‘majority population’, ‘communities’ and ‘communities not in the majority’.

- The Agreement met the Albanian demands with regard to establishing the official status of the Albanian language. Every other language other than Macedonian – which remains the main official language, to be used for example in foreign relations – that is spoken by more than 20 per cent of the population will henceforth be an official language on the central level as well as in communities where more than 20 per cent of the population speak that other official language. In fact, only Albanian fulfils this condition. Languages other than Macedonian which are spoken by at least 20 per cent of the inhabitants of a municipality will, however, also serve as an official language in local self government. Furthermore, the government will henceforth have to provide university education for language communities which speak another official language than Macedonian. This way the protracted ‘Albanian university’ issue, which has been a cornerstone of Albanian political activism in Macedonia since the early 1990s, should finally be put to rest.
- New parliamentary procedures require a majority also “of the Representatives claiming to belong to the communities not in the majority in the population of Macedonia” in order to pass laws “that directly affect culture, use of language, education, personal documentation, and use of symbols”. This provision also applies for the election of a third of the judges of the Constitutional Court, the members of the Republican Judicial Council, and the Ombudsman. The latter will give particular attention to the principles of non-discrimination and equitable representation of

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<sup>7</sup> “Ustav na Republika Makedonija” [Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia], 1991.

communities in public bodies at all levels and in other areas of public life. It will be up to the members of the parliament, however, to decide whether they are members of the majority or not. According to Nicholas Whyte, “[i]t is probably as close as you can get to the ideal of a civic democracy in an ethnically divided society” (2001: 2).

- The Agreement provides for stronger participation of members of the minorities in public institutions, as ‘equitable representation’ now becomes a constitutional principle. The state will continue its practice of positive discrimination of minorities in university enrolment. On the other hand, in the crucial sphere of the police, it was agreed that by 2004 the police force should roughly represent the ethnic composition of the country. In other words, in July 2002 and 2003 respectively, 500 new policemen from minorities will be employed annually. Here, the European Union, the USA and the OSCE have pledged financial, technical and training support for the new police forces. Policemen from minorities should mainly be assigned to regions where their ethnic group lives.
- The Agreement further provides for far-reaching decentralization of “possibly the most centralized state in Europe” (Loomis, Davis and Broughton 2001: 9). Local governments have as a result gained significantly more competencies. In order to make them viable entities, however, the financing of local government should be put on a sounder footing, and the numbers of municipalities should be reduced from the current number of 123 to 87. The Agreement also gave local governments a voice in the appointment of local heads of police, and the latter will report regularly and upon request to the council of the municipality concerned. Nevertheless, local police will remain under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, despite the initial demands of the Albanian parties to put them under the authority of local councils.
- As regards the cessation of hostilities, NATO troops were invited to collect the weapons of the UÇK and to supervise its demobilization, a mission which NATO referred to as ‘Essential Harvest’. NATO and the UÇK agreed that 3,300 weapons should be collected from the UÇK, despite government claims that the UÇK possessed up to 85,000 weapons (Alagjovovski 2001). The process of amending the constitution should start after the first third of the weapons has been handed in. After final demobilization of the UÇK, the Macedonian parliament was to pass the main amendments to the constitution and some accompanying laws by 27 September 2001 at the latest. Some other new laws were planned to be passed before early elections had been called or before the end of 2002 respectively. As a consequence, the

redeployment of Macedonian security forces in the insurgent areas should gradually commence under international supervision after demobilization of the UÇK.

This timetable soon proved over-optimistic owing to ethnic Macedonian attempts to renegotiate some issues of the Agreement, or to bring it down altogether. NATO declared 'Essential Harvest' successfully completed on 26 September after the UÇK had handed in more than 3,800 weapons, and Ali Ahmeti (the UÇK's political leader) declared the rebel organization dissolved on 27 September. Despite this, it took parliament until 16 November 2001 before it passed the constitutional amendments. Once again strong international pressure was necessary (Brunnbauer 2001d: 349). More recently, the law on local self-government, which was another major element of the Framework Agreement and a precondition for the holding of the international donors conference for Macedonia, was passed only on 24 January 2002, after an initial draft presented in December 2001 had been rejected by the ethnic Macedonian parties. The whole process of implementing the Framework Agreement proved that external monitoring, support and occasionally intervention is crucial for the realization of the planned reforms because, without international mediation, the political parties in the Republic of Macedonia hardly find compromises on those vital issues.

### **III. Macedonian Opposition**

What I hope to show in this paper is that the Macedonian opposition to the agreement was more than the usual tactics of filibustering in the Macedonian parliament. Through their opposition, Macedonian politicians consciously articulated and at the same time manipulated widespread fears among ethnic Macedonians about their national identity, which many saw threatened by the terms of the Agreement. As a consequence, opposition arose mainly to those provisions which dealt with the identity of the state and had a more symbolic character. The far-reaching changes concerning the official use of other languages, or the introduction of 'double majorities' in parliament did not, by contrast, provoke much public debate. Much more contested issues were the Preamble to the constitution, the paragraphs on the relationship between the state and church, as well as the law on local self-government. Legislative changes in these areas were directly related to the way ethnic Macedonians view themselves and the character of their state. It is therefore necessary to first shed some light on the peculiarities of Macedonian national identity as well as the relations between Macedonians and Albanians in the country – two problems that are in fact closely interrelated (see Voss 2001). However, it must be mentioned at the outset that the political and intellectual

elite of the country, who are the essential agents of Macedonian nation-building, seemed to be more resentful of the peace accord than ‘ordinary’ Macedonians.<sup>8</sup>

### *Powerlessness and defensive nationalism*

Ethnic Macedonian public opinion was largely hostile to the Agreement. Editorials in leading newspapers called it a fatal indulgence to ‘terrorism’ which would put the country’s future existence under threat because the ‘real’ aims of the extremist Albanians were not the acquisition of rights but territories. A number of commentaries compared the Agreement to earlier Balkan peace treaties (see Buechsenschuetz 2001: 2). The influential daily *Dnevnik* compared it with the Dayton peace accord of 1995; the big daily *Utrinski vesnik* drew a parallel with the Treaty of Bucharest of 1913, which divided the geographic region of Macedonia between Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia after the conclusion of the Second Balkan War. Such assessments evoked the notion of Macedonia being (again) the victim of Great-Power interference and unjust peace settlements (see Voss 2001: 273-4). Macedonian intellectuals and politicians, and also many ordinary Macedonians, felt betrayed by the international community, especially by the USA and NATO, who were said to be siding with the Albanians. The prominent Macedonian movie-maker Milcho Manchevski (director of the movie ‘Before the Rain’), for example, referred to Macedonia as the ‘collateral damage’ of NATO’s Balkan policy (Manchevski 2001: 2). Comparing the situation to 1913, when, according to the mainstream view, the ‘ethnic territory’ of Macedonia was partitioned, some academics have even argued that Macedonia again had no real allies and had to stand alone in its struggle for existence.<sup>9</sup> Many also fear that Bulgaria and Greece still has residual designs on Macedonia and want to destabilize the country as a means of occupying its territory. Keith Brown once wrote about such concerns, that they

resonate with the history that most Macedonians have learned either in school or from older family members, of a people who have repeatedly been incorporated into the state projects of powerful and more numerous others (2000: 135).

The Ohrid Agreement was perceived by most Macedonians as a severe loss of security (International Crisis Group 2001c: 9). This feeling of powerlessness has much to do with the way Macedonian national identity was formed and how national history is written. The

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<sup>8</sup> According to a poll conducted in December 2001, some 51 per cent of the ethnic Macedonians opposed the Agreement, while almost 44 per cent approved it. Among the Albanians, the Agreement had an approval-rate of 78 per cent. *RFE/RL Newslines*, 4 September 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/newslines>.

Macedonians were a late-comer to the nations of the Balkans, and their identity was not affirmed before the creation of a Macedonian People's Republic as part of the Yugoslav Federation in 1944. Before 1944, and especially before the Second World War, Macedonian national consciousness had existed only amongst rather marginal groups of intellectuals and political activists, many of whom had joined Tito's partisans in their war against German and Italian occupation. Macedonian national identity was therefore, above everything else, forged against claims by other, more powerful, nations because the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Greek nations claimed the Slavic Orthodox population of Macedonia as part of its own nation. During Yugoslav times, Macedonian national identity had a strong anti-Bulgarian edge, as the Bulgarians were culturally closest to the Macedonians and the need to create cultural differences against them was felt most urgently – also because Bulgaria was such a faithful ally to the Soviet Union (Palmer and King 1971: 153-4; Troebst 1992: 436). Serbian influences, on the other hand, were strongly felt in the process of Macedonian nation-building (Palmer and King 1971: 157). The dissolution of Yugoslavia and eventual independence, which was more accepted than actively sought by the Macedonian leaders, brought Macedonians into a precarious situation. First of all, they were no longer citizens of a big, respected and militarily powerful country, but henceforward rather a weak and poor state. Their existence as a nation was still not accepted by all neighbouring states, with Bulgaria refusing to recognize the Macedonian language and nation, the Serb Orthodox Church refusing to accept the autonomy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Greece voicing strong opposition to the self-styled name of the new state and hence delaying its international recognition. In such a situation, "Macedonian nationalism grows not so much from pride, but from desperation to survive" (Loomis, Davis and Broughton 2001: 12). The Albanian insurgency of 2001 could not but intensify among Macedonians the feeling that their national existence was threatened. Some Macedonian historians spoke of the 'Greater-Albanian' project of the Albanians in Macedonia as well as of the Albanian state. They draw a parallel between the current Albanian demands and the Greater Albania of World War Two, which was a creation of Fascist Italy and Nazi-Germany.<sup>10</sup>

The fear of Albanian secessionism, however, is often aggravated by demographic fears because Albanians have a much higher rate of growth than ethnic Macedonians and live primarily in the border regions to Kosovo and Albania. Ethnic Macedonians are therefore

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<sup>9</sup> See e.g. the interview with one of the leading Macedonian academics, Blaže Ristovski, in *Makedonsko sontse* 356 (20 April 2001): 10.

afraid of losing ‘their’ country to the Albanians. They also deplore the fact that many Albanians have immigrated from Kosovo. In an atmosphere of extensive discourses on national identity and the threats to it, most ethnic Macedonians see only one protector of their existence as a nation: the state.

### *The State as the protector of national identity*

Many Macedonians see their security as vested in a state that their language often represents as exclusively ‘theirs’ (Brown 2000: 135).

The history of the Macedonian nation proves the claim, made by modernist theoreticians of the nation, that nations are not so much the causes but rather the consequences of the creation of modern national states and their specific policies aiming at national integration and cultural homogenization (Hobsbawm 1990). It was the policy of the leadership of the Macedonian Republic within the socialist Yugoslav federation that gave the Macedonians all the attributes of a self-confident nation (language, history, religion, ancestry). This process – well described by Stephen Palmer and Robert King (1971: 153-74) – led to an almost congruent identification of the Macedonian nation with the state. The various constitutions of the Republic of Macedonia (before and after 1991) paid tribute, to different degrees, to the multiethnic character of the Republic. But state policies were clearly aimed at fostering Macedonian national identity (Troebst 1992: 431-2; Willemsen and Troebst 2001: 305), while the minorities were rather treated as guests with certain rights. The strong correspondence between the Macedonian state and the national identity of its Macedonian population was also articulated in the constitution of 1991. While most parts of the constitution followed a civic model, its Preamble declared only the Macedonian people a constitutive nation of the new state, at the same time guaranteeing equal treatment to the ‘nationalities’. Although the constitution of 1991 was certainly an advance in comparison to the one promulgated in 1989 (Willemsen and Troebst 2001: 308f.), it nonetheless reflected the feeling of most Macedonians that this state was theirs. The concept of civic identity, however, is still extremely weak, and many Macedonians therefore resented the proposed change of the constitution’s Preamble because they were afraid of losing the state for whose recognition they had to fight so hard. Politicians and intellectuals voiced concerns that, if the Macedonian people were not explicitly mentioned in the preamble to the constitution, the very existence of

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<sup>10</sup> See e.g. the interview with Mihailo Minovski in *Fokus* 23 (24 April 2001): 23-6.

the Macedonian nation would be in danger. This view resonates with the widespread notion among ethnic Macedonians that they, as a nation, have fought for centuries for their own national state, which they now do not want to share with anyone else. Historiography propagates the view that the largest part of the 'ethno-historical' territory of the Macedonians was grabbed by Greece and Bulgaria, but that at least the little that has remained should be ethnically Macedonian in outlook.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, two Macedonian opposition parties (Democratic Alternative and 'Real' VMRO) opposed the new Preamble because that would have extinguished the historic development of the Macedonian state.<sup>12</sup> Also, politicians from the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party said they would not vote for the new Preamble. President Boris Trajkovski, for example, asked US-President George W. Bush to help find a new compromise. The Albanian parties, on the other hand, rejected any re-negotiation. Finally, the NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson and EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana negotiated a new Preamble, which was eventually passed by parliament on 16 November 2001. It reads:

The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian people, as well as those citizens who live within the borders of the Republic of Macedonia and are members of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Serbian people, the Roma people and of other peoples, take on themselves the responsibility for the present and the future of their fatherland (.).<sup>13</sup>

Similar opposition as to that witnessed with the draft-preamble was voiced by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, especially to the new text of § 19 of the constitution, which separates state and church and gives religious communities the right to establish schools. The Macedonian Orthodox Church rejected the fact that it is mentioned on an equal footing with the Islamic Community, the Catholic Church and other denominations. It argued that it should be granted special status at least in Macedonia, since it was not recognized by the other Orthodox churches. The head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Archbishop of Ohrid Stefan, declared that the names of all members of parliament who voted for the proposal would be announced in church services. VMRO-DPMNE supported the church's cause, and a new compromise had to be reached (Stojanovska 2001). It consisted in the insertion of "as well as"

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<sup>11</sup> See for example the interview with Blaže Ristovski quoted above or the recent publication of Stoian Kiselinovski, who develops the concept of 'Macedonian ethnic space', parts of which have been 'de-Slavisied and 'de-Macedonised' respectively (2000: 49).

<sup>12</sup> "Preambulata ne treba da se menuva" ["The Preamble Must Not Be Changed"].  
wysiwyg://639/http://www.a1.com.mk.vesti/vest.asp?VestiID=3306, 30 October 2001.

<sup>13</sup> *Dnevnik*, 27 October 2001.

between the “Macedonian Orthodox Church” and the “Islamic Community” in order to make the Macedonian Orthodox Church stand out.<sup>14</sup>

*Whose is the state? Macedonian and Albanian claims*

Macedonian anxieties concern material issues as well. The Yugoslav Macedonian Republic did not only create and disseminate Macedonian national identity, but the state also provided large parts of the population with employment in the fast growing bureaucracy as well as the new industries. However, recruitment patterns after 1944 especially for administrative jobs had a clear ethnic pattern. This was on the one hand the consequence of the effort to establish a Macedonian nation, which gave state benefits mainly to ethnic Macedonians, whose feeling of belonging to the ‘imagined community’ of the Macedonian nation should be fostered. But, on the other hand, Albanians and Turks had an even lower level of educational achievement than the Orthodox Slavic population. The participation of tens of thousands of Macedonians in the administrative machinery of the Republic gave them a personal interest in the existence of the state and strengthened their identification with the new nation (see Palmer and King 1971: 141). In all levels of administration and government, the minorities were underrepresented, and also in industry Macedonians had a bigger share of employment than their share of the population (ibid., 178-80). The Albanian minority remained, on the contrary, much more rural, and when land became increasingly scarce, many Albanian men went to Western Europe as labour migrants. Aside from this, Albanian intellectual and political aspirations did not gravitate towards Skopje but towards Pristina, where most Macedonian Albanians with an academic degree had pursued their studies. Politically active Albanians were more eager to demand incorporation of the Albanian areas of Macedonia in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo than to seek more rights within the Republic of Macedonia (see Palmer and King 1971: 181; Reuter 1982: 93; Poulton 1995: 126). Albanian nationalist flare-ups in Macedonia, such as occurred in 1968 and 1981, were quite easily contained by the Macedonian leadership as Kosovo provided some sort of safety-valve for Macedonian-Albanian activism. During the 1980s, however, the Macedonian government imposed repressive measures against its Albanian population (Poulton 1995: 127-9; Mickey and Albion 1993: 57-8) that strengthened the historical experience among the Albanians of discrimination and alienation from the Macedonian state, which in turn has had repercussions on their contemporary political attitudes.

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<sup>14</sup> *Dnevnik*, 27 October 2001.

Things changed radically with the independence of Macedonia (1991) on the one hand and the *de facto* removal of Kosovo's autonomy by Slobodan Milosevic (1989/90) on the other. Albanians, who gained a much higher level of political representation in Macedonia than before, began to challenge the Macedonians' exclusive rights to the state. Albanians did not accept their treatment as a minority because they constituted, according to their view, some 30 to 40 per cent of the population of the country. Although this is an exaggeration, and a more likely figure for the Albanian population is between 25 and 28 per cent of the total,<sup>15</sup> it is quite clear that such a large minority cannot not be expected to accommodate with the same status as a minority which constitutes, say, two per cent of the overall population. Albanians therefore demanded to be considered the second constitutive people of the Republic of Macedonia and to have equal access to the resources of the state. Despite Albanian parties having been part of the government since 1992, this did not significantly improve the lot of their electorate. It was rather the party active and its clientele that enjoyed the gains of being in power.<sup>16</sup> Some measures of positive discrimination to improve Albanian participation in state employment were nonetheless initiated, especially after 1998 under the new VMRO-DPMNE and DPA-government, but they proved to be too slow to ease Albanian grievances.

Actually, Albanians remained underrepresented in all fields of the formal economy, which cannot be explained only by their lower qualifications and their more rural life-styles but is more likely the result of ethnically discriminatory recruitment patterns. In 2001, for example 84.5 per cent of those employed were ethnic Macedonians compared to 7.5 per cent Albanians whereas 20 per cent of those registered as unemployed were Albanian (Najchevska 2001: 11). Among public servants, 10 per cent are Albanian, and in 1997 only 4 per cent of the police force were of ethnic Albanian origin (Brunnbauer 2001a: 168). The constant as well as often aggressive and violent refusal of Albanian demands by the Macedonians therefore created a fertile soil for the growth of Albanian extremism among those parts of the Albanian population which did not profit from close relations with the Albanian parties in power. On the other hand, the Macedonian economy has been in a deep crisis for much of the last decade

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<sup>15</sup> According to the internationally funded and monitored census of 1994, the share of the Albanians was 22.67 per cent, but its results were not recognised by Macedonian Albanian leaders who claimed deliberate under-counting of Albanians.

<sup>16</sup> The relative stability of the VMRO-DPMNE and DPA government, which was established in 1998 and survived the influx of some 350,000 Kosovo-Albanian refugees in 1999 was explained by the division of the state's resources between the two coalition partners. It is said that the non-interference of the authorities in the alleged smuggling activities of DPA vice-chairman Menduh Thaçi across the border to Kosovo is part of the unofficial coalition agreement. This non-interference also led to a dramatic reduction of police forces in the Albanian rural areas.

owing to a whole host of factors: the breakdown of Yugoslavia, structural imbalances, economic restructuring, the Greek economic blockade until 1995, the UN-embargo against Yugoslavia until 2000, the Kosovo War and the refugee crisis of 1999. The resulting strained economic opportunities and high unemployment (around 30-40 per cent) made the ethnic Macedonian population even less inclined to share the little that had been left from socialist economic development. Hence their reluctance to relinquish their constitutionally and politically guaranteed preferential rights, which were symbolic but deeply inscribed in the ethnic Macedonian consciousness and their attitudes towards the state. The current conflict is therefore very much also one about economic resources which are closely connected to political power and organization of the state.

### *Cultures and societies apart*

Since independence, the main Albanian demands (such as for university education in Albanian, the status of second constitutive people for the Albanians and status of second official language for Albanian) were always quashed by the dominant Macedonian parties. Nevertheless, some progress was made, though disappointingly slow. Macedonian politicians did not recognize the changed dynamics as a result of the war in Kosovo that had provided extremist Albanians in Macedonia with a precedent that the use of violence could pay off. On the contrary, ethnic Macedonian and Albanian politicians of the ruling parties continued to speak of relaxed interethnic relations, an illusion that was shared by the international community, although some observers warned about potential conflicts. ‘Ethnobarometer’ for example stated in a report of early 2001, before violence broke out:

The climate in the country is of widespread pessimism. Some of the statements made from both sides, but especially from the Macedonian one, were extremely polemic and maximalist in tone (...). (...) [T]he almost total absence of dialogue and social interaction between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in everyday life is rather striking (quoted in Ethnobarometer 2001: 9).

This statement points to one of the major reasons for the Macedonian rejection of Albanian political demands in general and the Ohrid Agreement in particular: the deep divide between the Macedonian and Albanian populations in the country, a divide that concerns almost all walks of life. Here is not the place to describe these differences in detail, but some facts must suffice. The major difference, which has important social, economic and cultural consequences, is that Macedonians have become much more urbanized than Albanians after Macedonia had embarked on a process of industrialization and urbanization in the 1950s.

While most Albanians still live in the countryside, the overwhelming majority of Macedonians by contrast live in towns. Many Macedonians now deplore that urbanization has led to the ‘Albanization’ of Macedonian territory because the Albanians would follow a deliberate policy of demographic and territorial expansion. The Albanian Muslims

(...) were perceived often as occupying the physical and imagined territory of the countryside from which Macedonians left in the time of socialist Yugoslavia. This identification of Albanians clearly represented a negatively charged stereotype, imbued with certain qualities of alleged ‘backwardness’ (Brown 2000: 125).

The rural lifestyles of many Albanians contribute to their marginalization on the labour market (as well as being a result of this) and also to the continuity of patriarchal values.<sup>17</sup> Family and kin relations have much more importance among them due to their lack of trust in formal institutions. This nurtures fears among the Macedonians, who perceive Albanian micro-communities as virtually impenetrable and thus hard to control. Marginality, patriarchy and rurality also have an impact on the demographic behaviour of the Albanians (see the older but still valuable study by Grossmith 1977).

Although the birth rate among Albanians has experienced a decline over the last decades, it is still much higher than among the Macedonians. In 1999, 13,308 Macedonian mothers gave birth compared to 9,838 of Albanian mothers, while the Macedonian population roughly doubles the Albanian one (State Statistical Office 2000: 115). Albanians contribute almost 70 per cent to the natural growth of the population in Macedonia. The Albanian population is also heavily concentrated in the north-western parts of the country, where, especially in the villages, very few ethnic Macedonians are left. In twelve municipalities (out of a total of 123), Albanians make up more than 95 per cent of the population, in five between 75 and 95 per cent and in eight between 50 and 75 per cent (*ibid.*, 102). Outside the regions with an Albanian majority, mainly the capital Skopje, have a significant Albanian population (approximately 25 per cent). In Albanian villages in western Macedonia one could perfectly grow up and live one’s life without ever coming into contact with ethnic Macedonians. But even in mixed towns and cities social interaction is very limited. The minimal figure of only sixteen mixed marriages in 1999 are impressive proof of this.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> A good indicator for that is the very low employment rate of Albanian women: in 1999, only 5,261 out of 49,131 employed Albanians (i.e. 10.7 per cent) were female (State Statistical Office 2000: 187).

Macedonians and Albanians also hardly communicate with each other beyond the occasional *chevap* in an Albanian grill-bar, read different newspapers, go to different primary and secondary schools, listen to different radio stations and watch different TV-programs. Macedonians, especially, are largely ignorant of the Albanians because hardly anyone speaks their language. Mutual perceptions are fraught with prejudices, and Macedonians often voice anti-Islamic sentiments vis-à-vis the Albanians (who are overwhelmingly Muslim). Albanians are usually portrayed as an homogenous mass regardless of the actual divisions among them, which are for instance illustrated by the hostile attitude that the two main Albanian displayed towards each other during the last decade, although both parties shared basically the same program.

From a political point of view, a major consequence of the big divide is that most Macedonians assume that Albanians have a hidden agenda.<sup>19</sup> During the conflict in 2001, Arben Xhaferi, leader of DPA, who in the West is regarded a moderate, was usually portrayed by the Macedonian media as the devil who wanted to destroy Macedonia and employed ‘terrorists’ to achieve this aim. As evidence of this attitude, one need only look at a recent interview with the influential intellectual and member of the Macedonian Academy of Science Blaže Ristovski who claimed that Macedonia faced ‘Kosovo-ization’ and ‘IRA-ization’ because the UÇK had a terrorist and a political wing, the latter consisting of the Albanian parties in the Macedonian government and parliament.<sup>20</sup> Macedonian historians actively cultivate such views when they speak of a long tradition of Greater-Albanian ideology among the Albanians of former Yugoslavia. This view is widely shared by the ethnic Macedonian population and public. As a result, Albanian demands, however specific, are often regarded as a first-step towards secession (see Hatschikjan 2001: 325).

The fear that awarding more rights to the Albanians would imperil the state’s further existence came to the fore in the debates over decentralization which constituted one of the major elements of the Ohrid Agreement. Both Macedonians and Albanians seemed to regard devolution of power to the local governments as a zero-sum game, where one gained control over communities at the expense of the other (Loomis, Davis and Broughton 2001: 17). The

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<sup>18</sup> *Statistički pregled*, 2.4.011 (2000): 35.

<sup>19</sup> These assumptions do not completely come out of the blue. Especially in the early 1990s, radical Albanians pursued a policy of federalization with the perspective of secession, illustrated for example by an autonomy referendum in western Macedonia in February 1992 (Mickey and Albion 1993: 65). Also statements of leading Albanian politicians about their final goals are sometimes rather ambivalent (Hatschikjan 2001: 326).

<sup>20</sup> *Makedonsko sontse* 356 (20 April 2001): 9.

Macedonians fear that the Albanians, once in control of local governments with more powers, would start to sever the links to the central government, eventually pulling away from the Macedonian state as such. “They also fear that the Macedonian identity will be threatened in those areas in which Albanians dominate” (Loomis, Davis and Broughton 2001: 17). Macedonian politicians saw their concerns confirmed, when the Minister for Local Government, Faik Arslani (DPA), submitted to the parliament an ill-advised draft for the new law on local self-government. The draft proposed not only wide-ranging competencies for local communities in education and health care, but also the possibility for communities to merge and create common administrations (Brunnbauer 2001d: 363). Macedonian suspicions that this would lead to the creation of an autonomous Albanian region in north-western Macedonia through the back door were not unfounded. There were also concerns that state authority in Albanian areas would be further weakened if devolution went too far. Advocates of such a notion often referred to the problematic attitudes of Albanians toward formal institutions in Albania and Kosovo. As a result, both of the main Macedonian parties rejected the draft agreement although this led to a delay of the international donors conference. The Albanian parties, in their turn, began to boycott parliament sessions as long as the Macedonian parties did not withdraw their amendments to the draft law (the boycott of parliament used to be one of the Albanian parties’ preferred tactics when they were faced with votes in parliament they would not win). It took painstaking international mediation, mainly by Javier Solana, to reach a compromise that was finally passed by an almost unanimous vote on 25 January 2002.<sup>21</sup>

#### **IV. Outlook**

The peculiarities of the Macedonian project of nation-building shape the reactions of Macedonians to the Ohrid Agreement. This should not, however, lead to the conclusion that only history, and views on history determine the political responses. History might narrow the options for the future, but there are still decisions to be made. Opposition to the Ohrid Agreement was mostly aired by nationalist intellectuals, the Macedonian media and political hardliners who all should not be taken as representative of the whole ethnic Macedonian population. Political resentment must also be seen in the context of the campaign for this year’s general elections. Especially the Prime Minister, Ljubcho Georgievski, and the main

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<sup>21</sup> It was the first vote in parliament according to the new voting procedures. Eight of those representatives who “declared that they belonged to the communities not in the majority in the Republic of Macedonia” did not

hawk in the government, Interior Minister Ljube Boshkovski, tried to present their VMRO-DPMNE party to their ethnic Macedonian electorate as the only protector of the Macedonian nation and its state. While Georgievski and Boshkovski have strong nationalist credentials and are well known for irrational outbursts, they mainly seem concerned with the low popularity of their party. Around New Year, VMRO-DPMNE stood at less than 10 per cent in the opinion polls, while its main challenger SDSM was supported by between 14 and 25 per cent of the electorate (Jovanovski 2002, Bajic 2002). Nevertheless, the danger posed by Georgievski and Boshkovski should not be underestimated. Boshkovski, for instance, is responsible for the creation, legalisation and deployment of the exclusively ethnic Macedonian para-police unit the 'Lions', whose members are said to be very close to nationalist circles within VMRO-DPMNE. Observers not only fear that the 'Lions' might be employed against the Albanians but also against contending Macedonian parties. Boshkovski threatened peace also by early redeployment of Macedonian police in previously rebel-held villages. The Social Democrats on the other hand attempted to present themselves as the moderate alternative that supported the Ohrid Agreement. This strategy has, according to the opinion polls, paid off. SDSM left the government of National Unity once the constitutional amendments had been passed in an effort not to be tarnished by further cooperation with the erratic prime minister (Brunnbauer 2001d: 362). The international community will have to make great efforts to support moderate voices in future, although without being seen as intervening directly or treating Macedonia as a protectorate. The greatest guess is now to predict what are the plans of the Albanian parties. The two major parties support the Agreement, but lost their main political objects of the last decade as a consequence. Thus the exclusive concentration on ethnic demands will cease to be a feasible political strategy. For the Albanian political factor, much depends on whether Ali Ahmeti and the disbanded UÇK will enter the political race (Rusi 2002). There are some rumours in this regard, but at the moment any official political role for Ahmeti would be too much a provocation for the ethnic Macedonians, for whom he remains a perpetrator of war crimes. Nevertheless, among the Albanians, he is the most popular politician, and many hope that he will unite the notoriously quarrelsome Albanian political forces.

For ordinary inhabitants though the main concerns seem to lie elsewhere. People are much more concerned by the deplorable state of the economy. The figures for 2001 look grim, as does the outlook for this year: GNP was down by 4.5 per cent, industrial production by 8.8

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support the law (*Utrinski vesnik*, 26 January 2002; *Dnevnik*, 26 January 2002).

per cent and even agricultural production by 13.3 per cent. Export shrank by 19.2 per cent and the trade balance deficit reached US-\$ 513 million. The average salary amounted to € 170, while inflation was more than 5 per cent. Independent analysts put the unemployment rate at over 40 per cent, which is a record for Europe (Nanevska 2002). Some 42 per cent of the unemployed are less than thirty years old. Around 90 per cent of the population are said to live in outright poverty or on the verge of it. The government has no real ideas how to improve this situation, and is making matters worse by distributing some pre-election carrots which will put the budget further in the red. On the other hand, people close to the current and the former governments have accumulated considerable wealth over the past decade. While SDSM and PDP had also been involved in corruption scandals during their rule, VMRO-DPMNE and DPA were even less scrupulous in plundering the remaining assets of the state. Privatization was fraught with corruption, and even the highest levels of power were involved in fraudulent schemes. During last year's crisis, Defence Minister Ljuben Paunovski had for example to resign over allegations of fraud. VMRO-DPMNE is now rumoured to be one of the richest 'companies' in Macedonia, although political parties are prohibited by law to own economic enterprises. VMRO-DPMNE's corruption and the failure to deliver on its promises are the main reasons for its current lack of popularity. It is very improbable that even a nationalistic campaign would lead to a success of VMRO-DPMNE at the forthcoming general elections.

But the corruption scandals and the widespread poverty have a more generally disturbing effect on Macedonia's political life: there is hardly anyone who enjoys enough popularity and trust to be able to provide much needed leadership. The political class is widely held in disdain, and people have lost the little trust they had in their ruling elite. Such a situation could be utilized by radical politicians with a 'clean' image and a coherent program. This has not been the case yet. It will therefore be one of the tasks of the international community to prevent Macedonia sliding in a radical direction that would threaten the troublesome compromise of Ohrid. For this not to happen, it is first necessary to provide financial support for the implementation of the Agreement. Second, a realistic perspective of integration into the European Union must be opened in order to give Macedonians and Albanians the feeling that both have a stake in the development of their country. And third, the international community must address the ethnic Macedonians' fears and their perceived lack of security. The border to Kosovo must be better controlled and intrusions from Kosovo be prevented. The International Community has to give Macedonians also the feeling that their ethnic

identity is not threatened any more. The country should therefore be recognised by its self-chosen name ('Republic of Macedonia'), which by the way is also used in the Ohrid Agreement (International Crisis Group 2001c).

It would be an illusion to believe that Macedonians (and Albanians) would now suddenly define themselves and their attitudes towards the state in civic terms. This is a country where national identity is defined in ethnic terms, and that will not change immediately (see Loomis, Davis and Broughton 2001). But one precondition for the development of stronger civic identities is to generate exactly the kind of security people must feel with their cultural identity. Only then will the extraordinary obsession of the Macedonian public with questions of ethnic identity and national history give way to more inclusive modes of identification.

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