



EUROPEAN CENTRE
FOR
MINORITY ISSUES

THE SPECTRE OF TERRITORIAL DIVISION AND THE OHRID AGREEMENT

Eben Friedman

ECMI Brief # 9

July 2003

The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) is a non-partisan institution founded in 1996 by the Governments of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the German State of Schleswig-Holstein. ECMI was established in Flensburg, at the heart of the Danish-German border region, in order to draw from the encouraging example of peaceful coexistence between minorities and majorities achieved here. ECMI's aim is to promote interdisciplinary research on issues related to minorities and majorities in a European perspective and to contribute to the improvement of interethnic relations in those parts of Western and Eastern Europe where ethnopolitical tension and conflict prevail.

ECMI Briefs are written either by the staff of ECMI or by outside authors commissioned by the Centre. As ECMI does not propagate opinions of its own, the views expressed in any of its publications are the sole responsibility of the author concerned.

ECMI Brief # 9
European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)
Director: Marc Weller
© ECMI 2003

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES (ECMI)
Schiffbruecke 12 (Kompagnietor Building) D-24939 Flensburg Germany
phone: +49-(0)461-14 14 9-0 fax: +49-(0)461-14 14 9-19
e-mail: info@ecmi.de internet: <http://www.ecmi.de>

THE SPECTRE OF TERRITORIAL DIVISION AND THE OHRID AGREEMENT

Eben Friedman¹

“Better a terrible end than endless terror.”²

Grafitto by supporters of VMRO-DPMNE
on Skopje’s Mount Vodno

On 18 April 2003, the Skopje newspaper Dnevnik published an article by former prime minister Ljubčo Georgievski entitled “Theses for Survival of the Macedonian Nation and State”. The current document offers a summary examination of Georgievski’s position in that article. Additionally, a look at the broader context within which Georgievski’s theses appeared provides a case for rapid and careful implementation of the Framework Agreement.

Georgievski’s Theses

Despite having signed the Framework Agreement³ in his capacity as leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), Ljubčo Georgievski has distanced himself from the document literally from the signing ceremony on 13 August 2001, when he displayed outrage at Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH) president Arben Xhaferi’s use of Albanian to address the press. On 3 September of that year, Georgievski made his position more explicit, stating in parliament that to approve the Framework Agreement would send a message that terrorism pays. Georgievski’s

¹ Research Associate, European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), Flensburg, Germany.

² “Podobro užasen kraj otkolku užas bez kraj.”

³ Attempting to balance remedies for many of the grievances of Macedonia’s ethnic Albanian population with the preservation of the state’s territorial integrity, the Framework Agreement was also signed by representatives of the country’s three largest political parties at the time: PDSH, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD), and Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM). For the text of the agreement, see <http://www.president.gov.mk/eng/info/dogovor.htm>.

clearest statement of his position, however, appeared in his “Theses for Survival of the Macedonian Nation and State”, published in the Skopje newspaper *Dnevnik* on 18 April 2003.⁴

Asserting that “[t]he Ohrid Agreement definitively marked the end of a Macedonia which we recall from history and from the ideals of all the fallen Macedonian patriots”, Georgievski claims that whereas Tetovo, Gostivar and Debar – all of which have an ethnic Albanian majority – “no longer constitute a problem” for “the Great Albanian strategy” as a result of an Albanian “demographic explosion”. The “next places for conquest” by the ethnic Albanian population, he claims, include a set of municipalities in which ethnic Albanians constitute a substantial minority. Georgievski further laments that “this total ethnic cleansing is covered up by various international organizations, and even by governments”. Equating continued implementation of the Framework Agreement with continued hopelessness, Georgievski grounds a call for territorial division on international experience in cases similar to that of Macedonia: “States solve ‘insoluble’ problems either by division or by fixing boundaries”. Should the Albanian political parties refuse to take part in an exchange of territories and population, Georgievski recommends proceeding “after the principle of the Israeli government” in demarcating the border between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians with a concrete wall.

While Georgievski does not outline a specific territorial arrangement in his article, a reference to “the theses set forth by some academics for exchange of territories and population” makes clear that Georgievski’s proposal is not the first of its type. Among the predecessors of Georgievski’s theses, the one which received the most attention surfaced in May 2001, at a time when fighting between the National Liberation Army (UÇK)⁵ and Macedonian government forces showed no signs of tapering off.

⁴ “Tezi za opstanok na makedonskata nacija i država”, available at http://dnevnik.com.mk/print_statija.asp?pBroj=2130&stID=17187. While the translations used here are the author’s, an English translation appeared in *MIC Daily News Service*, 21 April 2003.

⁵ In Albanian, ‘UÇK’ serves as the abbreviation for both the National Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare) and the Kosovo Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës). Rather than use the usual Macedonian abbreviation for the National Liberation Army –ONA–, the introduction to the Macedonian-language version of the website of the political party formed by National Liberation Army leader Ali Ahmeti makes use of the association between the two liberation armies, referring to “[t]he glorious struggle of our people organized in the UÇK” (see <http://www.bdi-press.org>).

Defending his own plan as a “document for the salvation of Macedonia”,⁶ then-chairman of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU) Gjeorgi Efremov proposed exchanges of population designed to make western Macedonia into a homogeneously ethnic Albanian enclave for eventual cession to Albania. In return, Albania was expected to yield to Macedonia a small area of land on the border near Lake Prespa with a small ethnic Macedonian population.⁷ While the division scheme was rejected out of hand by the (ethnic Albanian) PDSH and the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD), as well as by the (ethnic Macedonian) SDSM, Georgievski (at the time prime minister as well as leader of IMRO-DPMNU), did not denounce the proposal.

Responses to the Theses

Whereas representatives of the SDSM and Ali Ahmeti’s Democratic Union for Integration (BDI) were quick to reject Georgievski’s proposal (as were the ambassadors of the EU, NATO, OSCE, and US in Skopje), on 19 April Arben Xhaferi announced his resignation from the PDSH for lack of hope for a multiethnic Macedonia. In similar fashion, PDSH vice-president Menduh Thaci called the Framework Agreement “a dead document”, following up Georgievski’s assessment of a day earlier that “[t]he Ohrid Agreement has transformed Macedonia into a patient who has already confirmed the diagnosis of his own illness” with the prognosis that “Macedonia is like a patient that has survived the first heart attack, but won’t be able to survive the next one”.⁸ Although the PDSH has not issued a statement withdrawing its support for the Framework Agreement, the fact that party activities have been suspended since Xhaferi and Thaci’s respective statements suggests that the party is in disarray. The VMRO-DPMNE, on the other hand, seems to have weathered the storm more successfully by electing at the party’s congress on 24-25 May a leader supportive of implementing the Framework Agreement. The blocking by the VMRO-DPMNE deputies of an 11 June parliamentary vote on two laws regulating the use of minority languages in state institutions, however, suggests that the change in leadership will not effect a radical change in party policy.

⁶ Cited in Venon Latifi, “Storm Over Macedonia Partition Plan”, *Balkan Crisis Report*, 6 June 2001.

⁷ See the various articles published in *Dnevnik*, *Nova Makedonija* and *Večer*, 31 May–1 June 2001.

⁸ Thaci cited in Ana Petruševa, “Storm Over Opposition Resignations”, *Balkan Crisis Report*, 25 April 2003.

Territorial Division vs. the Framework Agreement

Contrary to Efremov's claim that the necessary exchanges of population and territory could be accomplished peacefully, Georgievski's recommendation that a wall be built if necessary to divide ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian populations accepts the possibility of considerable violence in realizing the proposed territorial division. Even were such a division to occur without bloodshed, however, it would generate a new set of problems likely to further threaten the already tenuous stability of the region. On the one hand, cession to Albania of an artificially created ethnic Albanian enclave could upset the country's (sub-)ethnic balance between Ghegs and Tosks.⁹ On the other hand, the loss of territory and population from the Republic of Macedonia would call into question the country's existence not only for reasons of size, but also because such truncation could lead to clashes between serbophile and bulgarophile elements of the ethnic Macedonian population intent on union with neighbouring states already short on administrative capacity.¹⁰ Thus, while ethnic partition might promise to ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian populations an escape from deadlock over the Framework Agreement, such an arrangement would pose a greater danger than does wrangling on implementation.

Whatever the impracticability of partition, the fact remains that the Agreement has thus far satisfied neither ethnic Macedonians nor ethnic Albanians. On the one hand, implementation of the accord has been marked by stalling on the part of ethnic Macedonian parliamentarians anxious to set conditions to be fulfilled before proceeding with promised reforms. On the other hand, this very stalling has led some ethnic Albanians to question ethnic Macedonians' commitment to implementing the Agreement.¹¹ At the same time, significant legislative reforms passed in the first half of 2002 provided some basis for the view that the document's provisions would be

⁹ Whereas the ethnic Albanian population of Macedonia consists primarily of Ghegs, Albania's political elite is predominantly Tosk. While cession of an ethnic Albanian enclave from Macedonia to Kosovo would not present the same risk of imbalance insofar as most of Kosovo's inhabitants are Ghegs, the province's administrative status renders this a moot point.

¹⁰ While the extent of serbophilia among SDSM supporters and bulgarophilia among members of the VMRO-DPMNE is not clear, these orientations constitute genuine currents within the ethnic Macedonian population, with the two parties frequently accusing one another of treachery and selling out to foreign interests. See, for example, Stojan Andov, "Do koga makedonskoto minato kje go preslikuvame vo idninata?", 3 (42) *Forum* (2000), 28-30.

¹¹ Moreover, some representatives of Macedonia's smaller minorities have expressed concern that many of the provisions of the Agreement effectively exclude them by placing them at an increased risk of discrimination in a regime emphasizing the rights of the ethnic Albanian population while neglecting the country's other 'communities'.

implemented after all, as did the results of the parliamentary elections of 2002, which brought to power a governing coalition led by the two parties most in favour of the Agreement: the SDSM and BDI.

Conclusion

Should stalling win out over implementation of the Framework Agreement, support within the ethnic Albanian population for radical groups outside of politics could increase, and recent converts to the political process might be propelled back into the realm of violent action.¹² If non-implementation risks provoking violence on the part of segments of the ethnic Albanian population, however, so is inept implementation of the Framework Agreement likely to encourage violence on the part of radical ethnic Macedonian groups anxious to capitalize on popular discontent associated not only with the terms of the Framework Agreement, but also with the country's dire economic situation. Moreover, both of these scenarios are likely to increase support for proposals to partition Macedonia, the liabilities of which have been discussed above. Thus, given the alternatives, it is crucial that the provisions of the Framework Agreement be implemented competently and in a timely manner.

¹² See, for example, Misha Glenny, "Dann kaufen wir neue Waffen", *Profil* 20 August 2001.