



## **Report on Assessment Trip to Macedonia**

July 23 – August 1, 2003

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### Executive Summary

Macedonia is past the violent crisis of 2001 but how it deals with the serious challenges facing it today will tell whether the society has the resilience to advance into a sustainable peace. The outbreak of armed conflict in 2001 following a decade of peace despite being in a dangerous neighborhood was ended with the signing of the Framework Agreement in Ohrid (therefore also known as the Ohrid Agreement) in August 2001. The Framework Agreement called for new laws to be written and the constitution revised in favor of democratic principles and the rights of minorities. Minority rights are key to the future – the Framework Agreement gives any minority with 20% or more of the population a number of important rights. Macedonia is looking to join the EU and so must move forward with Ohrid.

Tensions remain two years after the Framework Agreement between and within the ethnic groups (Macedonians and Albanians<sup>1</sup>) and between and within political parties. These ethnic tensions are aggravated by a poor economy partially caused by an embargo with Greece and closed borders with Serbia for a number of years in the 90s. The presence of organized crime, the lack of rule of law, and the distrust of all political leaders has created an atmosphere hostile to economic development and good governance.

Today, Macedonia faces two new challenges: how to decentralize and disarm. There are laws on decentralization and disarmament and both will get underway this fall and may be politicized to such an extent that tensions between ethnic groups rise again. In an already delicate situation,

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term “Albanian” is used here, it does not refer to people from Albania but Macedonians of Albanian ethnicity. Albanians in Macedonia prefer to be called “Albanians” and not “ethnic Albanians” or “Albanian-Macedonians.”

international observers are concerned about the short-term future of Macedonia, but hopeful about the long-term.

This assessment trip was extremely helpful in getting a clearer perspective of the situation in Macedonia. I would like to thank all of the people I met with who were very helpful. I believe this visit was necessary to determine next steps for the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.

#### Rationale for an IPJ assessment trip

This trip came as a response to inquiries made by participants (from both governmental and nongovernmental agencies) at the Institute for Peace & Justice's dedicatory conference in December 2001, just months after the signing of the Ohrid Agreement. In fall 2002, IPJ Program Coordinator Karon Cochran and I met with Macedonian Ambassador to the U.S., Nikola Dimitrov, who told us that the situation in Macedonia was stable and that the agreement was being implemented. This ran counter to what we were hearing from others who continued to ask for our engagement in peacebuilding in Macedonia.

With a grant from the University of San Diego's International and Interdisciplinary Development Committee, and because of an existing commitment in Europe paid for by the International Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution, I was able to travel to Macedonia July 23 – August 1, 2003 to gain a clearer understanding of the situation and whether there was a need for the type of assistance the Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) could offer with respect to peacebuilding in Macedonia<sup>2</sup>.

#### Goals, methods and meetings

The goals of the assessment trip were to:

- 1) gain an understanding of the current situation in Macedonia,
- 2) determine the challenges facing Macedonia,
- 3) make a recommendation about the role of the IPJ in Macedonia.

Having one person conduct a country assessment alone is not the ideal and the observations and recommendations in this report should be seen in that light. Although it would have been preferable to have had a team of at least 2, preferably 3 persons, so that we could compare our observations and have a more balanced perspective on Macedonia, IPJ finances did not permit this.

The method used for achieving the above goals was to speak with Macedonians from the government, political parties, and civil society (including NGOs) as well as from representatives of international governmental and intergovernmental organizations working in Macedonia. Meetings were held with individuals, not groups, to ensure confidentiality and openness<sup>3</sup>. Two of the participants at the 2001 dedicatory conference helped arrange some of my meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Paula Cordeiro and the members of the International and Interdisciplinary Development Committee at USD for awarding me the grant that made this trip possible. Macedonia has been of interest to me since 1992 when I helped organize a conference on "early warnings" on Macedonia and Kosovo.

<sup>3</sup> Due to Macedonia's history of socialism and its recent conflict, both of which caused suspicions between peoples of different political parties and ethnic groups, I preferred to meet with people alone (in a few cases, there was also an interpreter present).

Prior to the trip, I had made contact with several colleagues (either in Macedonia or outside – all experts on the Balkans) for recommendations about people I should meet with while there. During the trip, more appointments were set up, resulting in meetings with over 20 people. Unfortunately, due to the time of year and the heat in Skopje, many people had left the city.

#### Current situation in Macedonia

Macedonia consists of just over 2 million people, with up to 30% ethnic Albanians<sup>4</sup>. The flare-up of armed conflict in 2001 between Albanians and Macedonians<sup>5</sup>, after a decade of absorbing violence, refugees, and near-strangulation by an embargo, stunned many people, and caused a change in the mood in the country that continues today, despite a successful peace agreement signed in August 2001 and largely implemented. Perceptions of the implementation of the agreement leave the Albanian and Macedonian communities at odds, with Macedonians saying the Albanians are pleased with the agreement and Macedonians less pleased. In fact, with the exception of a representative from the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) who said the agreement was “in clinical death,” almost all the people I met with seemed to believe the agreement was being implemented.

An election last fall turned out the ruling VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Council - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) in favor of the less-nationalist (and former Communist) party of the Social Democratic League of Macedonia (SDSM) and unseated the more extremist DPA and gave seats instead to the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). Many people believe that the new SDSM-led government is less corrupt than the VMRO-led government of former Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski. Few think that the current government is not corrupt, just less than the last. Most of the people I met with ascribed positive attributes to the Crvenkovski government, noting, however, the many obstacles it faces in bringing about political, economic, and social change.

The international community is present in Macedonia, but a number of people said that when Kosovo erupted in 1998, it drew all the resources away from Macedonia. However, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives, which will end its work in Macedonia in September after 2 years, had a \$16 million budget to promote confidence-building throughout the country. The EU remains an important donor, but NATO is present because of being in neighboring Kosovo. Skopje is the transit point for everything in and out of Kosovo, but not necessarily where the attention lies.

In September 2002, Macedonia held elections in which the ruling Macedonian and Albanian political parties suffered large defeats. The new prime minister is with the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (former Communist party, reconstituted), and has appointed a coalition government that includes members of the Democratic Unity Party (DUI). While this government is seen to be less corrupt than the previous one under Prime Minister Georgievski of VMRO-DPMNE, most people I spoke with were not terribly hopeful about this administration’s ability

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<sup>4</sup> The new census, data to be released in November, will clarify what percentage of the population the Albanians are – during my stay, I heard estimates from 19 – 40%. Representatives of international organizations suspect the percentage will be around 25-30%, above the 20% set by the Ohrid Agreement for minority rights.

<sup>5</sup> Only one person I met with suggested that the war was more a power struggle within the Albanian community than between groups. According to this person, the cover of “ethnicity” was a convenience used to divert attention from what was really happening, the unseating of one Albanian political party from power and the replacement of another.

to deal effectively with the issues facing the country. Given that Macedonia had never governed itself until 1992, it may not be surprising that governance is not a strong suit. As one Macedonian put it, “our leaders were badly prepared for governance.”

Relations between Albanians and Macedonians are peaceful, but there are misunderstandings, fears, and stereotypes in how they view the other. There is little contact (very little intermarriage) and trust is lacking. Kosovar Albanians, in particular, are viewed with distrust and suspicion about their negative influence in Macedonia with respect to organized crime. The high level of unemployment, 40%, contributes to stereotyping the “other.” Different perceptions of the world are fostered through separate educational programs. Schools in Macedonia are segregated with students sharing the same physical space in shifts – so Macedonian children may attend school in the morning while Albanian children would attend from in the afternoon. Albanian children attend school in the Albanian language and are supposed to be learning Macedonian in school, but many do not speak it. There are religious differences as well with Albanians mostly Muslim and Macedonians mostly orthodox Christian<sup>6</sup>.

Accession to the European Union (EU) is a popular issue of discussion among the elites with some distressed at the idea that Bulgaria and Romania were being considered for EU membership in advance of Macedonia. Macedonians see themselves as at least as advanced as these two countries -- except for one outspoken NGO leader who said that if you looked at the progress made by Bulgaria and Romania in the past ten years and compared it to the progress in Macedonia and Serbia, the latter two had not moved forward at all while Bulgaria and Romania had made remarkable progress.

Some prime issues of concern include:

- a) the state of Macedonia & the neighborhood
- b) the position of Albanians in Macedonia
- c) corruption and organized crime

a) State of Macedonia & the neighborhood: Most people are hopeful about the future, despite the challenges they face in building the country. The Ohrid Agreement has been largely implemented, with massive writing of laws that have resulted in fundamental changes to the Constitution, to minority rights, to governance, and judicial processes. As one NGO leader noted about the Ohrid Agreement, however, “Macedonians perceive it as defeat; Albanians as a step forward.” There are still outstanding issues, notably disarmament and decentralization. A voluntary disarmament program will begin November 1 and last for 45 days, after which police will cite people who still hold semi-automatic or automatic weapons.

The new law on decentralization consists of two other important laws: the law on municipalities and the law on finance. Macedonians and Albanians believe that decentralization could be a “hot potato” as it involves re-doing municipal boundaries and providing money to local governments to take on the new responsibilities given them by the new law on decentralization that was part of the Framework Agreement. Currently, there are 123 districts and all have agreed on the need

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<sup>6</sup> There are some Macedonian Muslims and some Albanian Christians. A former Macedonian government official told me that there is a conflict brewing with the Serbs because of the Serbian Orthodox Church wanting to deny any independence to what the Macedonians want – an autocephalous Macedonian orthodox church. This person told me that mass was conducted in Serbian, which he viewed as offensive. An international representative said that the language used was Old Slavonic.

to consolidate these. If the Macedonians have their way, there will be 60-80 new districts in which they will be the majority in all; if the Albanians get their way, there will be 40 districts so that they are the majority in many of them. Finances going to these municipalities will be seen as ways to promote or exclude people of one ethnic group or another.

In Tetovo, a city that has been the flashpoint of ethnic tensions for the last decade, the Mayor said that financial resources have not been forthcoming for all the new responsibilities given to local governments since the Ohrid Agreement. He said he is now supposed to cover costs for all education, school structures, etc. and cannot do so. He noted that all the mayors in his area, many of whom are not Albanian, share the same concerns. He added that decentralization is a sensitive issue since Albanians may sense that they are not getting their due from the central government and are once again being discriminated against. Thus, decentralization, badly needed in Macedonia, will have to be implemented in a transparent and fair fashion if it is not to be a trigger for heightened tensions.

Some Macedonians expressed concern and frustration about the future of the state of Macedonia. An NGO leader said that Macedonia is in a “pre-political phase” because political elites were not ready for self-governance. In fact, some Macedonians fear the state will not survive because it will be split up; therefore, the long-anticipated decision on the status of Kosovo will be critical. One international representative said that if Kosovo were given independence from Serbia, it might cede Mitrovica to Serbia and expect something in return: the western part of Macedonia which is predominantly Albanian (and borders Albania). This could reconfigure the Balkans, with independence for Montenegro (this is likely no matter what happens in Kosovo), and part of Macedonia going to Bulgaria, which sees Macedonia as belonging to it (according to some people I spoke with). Some Macedonians harbor the view that the Albanians are pursuing a “Greater Albania” – a view held by Serbs since the early 90s and one of the causes/excuses for the oppression of Kosovar Albanians starting in 1989. Certainly in speaking with a representative of the DPA, he gave life to the notion of a Greater Albania when he said, “I don’t want to destroy Macedonia... We (DPA) propose self-determination with the possibility of secession at the end of a process of talks (with Macedonians).”

None of the other Albanians discussed wanting a “Greater Albania” and expressed no desire to leave Macedonia or to live in another country. Some said that they see themselves as loyal Macedonians whose past history and present commitment to building the country are not recognized by the majority Slav Macedonians. They spoke disparagingly of how Macedonians were creating a state out of one nation (Slav Macedonians) and that they were excluded. Some of the Albanians and many Macedonians I met with were concerned that Macedonia was following the single nation-state model the international community accepted in other parts of the Balkans. The representative of DPA, taking a provocative position, suggested that Macedonia would become so inhospitable to Albanians that only those who could not leave would. Those remaining would be those with little education, susceptible to manipulation by extremist Islamists who would come into Macedonia to mobilize people for terrorism.

In the former Yugoslavia, there were no borders and Yugoslavs could live and travel freely throughout the country. Macedonians miss this freedom, as do Albanians, but Macedonians use this also as a way of saying that the Albanians in Macedonia are not from Macedonia (many went to school at the University of Pristina in Kosovo, the only Albanian language university in the former Yugoslavia). An Albanian NGO representative, in countering this argument, said that many Macedonians had come to Macedonia from Greece in the last 40 years.

b) The position of Albanians in Macedonia: Albanians said that during Yugoslavia's existence, they were discriminated against and not allowed to enjoy the benefits of socialism. If Albanians needed medical care, which was free to all members of the state, they did not receive it without bribing someone – there were either no beds available, a long waiting list, or some excuse not to grant them treatment. Albanians were not given jobs in state-run enterprises nor provided with state-subsidized housing. Therefore, every Albanian family would have at least one member of the family working outside the country – often in Germany. They would send money home so that their families could build their own homes and start their own small businesses. Albanians say they have invested in Macedonia for years and view this as their only home.

The result of discrimination against Albanians has been that some say they were better equipped when Macedonia gained independence because they already had experience being entrepreneurial and creative in making a living. Several Albanians and a couple of Macedonians agreed, saying that Macedonians waited for jobs to come to them.

Macedonians say that although the Framework Agreement calls for Albanians to be represented at all levels of society and in government, there are not enough educated Albanians to fill the positions. The Albanians dispute this saying that there are many educated Albanians, but acknowledge that many have left the country seeking opportunities elsewhere. Some object to the use of the term “integration” as a goal since they say they are not new to Macedonia to need to be integrated, but rather have been there for as long as the Macedonians and helped create the state of Macedonia. They say the Macedonian government is using the model of France and Germany – both immigrant states—whereas they should be looking at Switzerland – a state with indigenous minorities.

While some Albanians feel discriminated against, their use of the Albanian flag in Albanian areas with no Macedonian flags, and the construction, following the war, of monuments to the fallen heroes of the National Liberation Army (NLA) are not appreciated by Macedonians, who say that if they are Macedonians, they should not be using the symbols of another country (Albania). This gives credence to Macedonians' concern that Albanians want to become part of a Greater Albania.

A very positive recent development has been the establishment of South Eastern Europe (SEE) University in Tetovo in 2001. Most people I met with thought this was a bright spot in Macedonia's future. SEE is known colloquially after the person who started it -- “van der Stoel U<sup>7</sup>.” SEE offers classes in three languages of instruction: Albanian, Macedonian, and English. It is funded by USAID, the EU, and Soros with the aim of providing Macedonian and Albanian students with European-standard tertiary education. There are currently about 3,700 students of which about 30% were ethnic Macedonians. The target number of students for 2005 is 5,500. The five schools at SEE are law, business, public administration, teaching, and communication sciences and technology.

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<sup>7</sup> Max van der Stoel, former Dutch Foreign Minister and former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities from 1992 – 2000, remains the envoy to Macedonia.

c) Corruption and organized crime: Corruption appears to be endemic in the Balkans and is abundantly present in Macedonia regardless of the ruling party. Everyone suspects people in power of being corrupt. These suspicions are not unfounded as those in power use their positions to give out gifts -- which may include jobs -- to consolidate their power and assure loyalty. This system goes back to the communist system, in which if you weren't a member of the Party, you had little to no access to good jobs, money, or power. One person noted that this corruption and nepotism goes back hundreds of years, to the time that Macedonia was part of the Ottoman empire when goods were distributed by those in power.

The police and judges are also suspected of corruption, and despite several years of projects by USAID and the EU to reform the police and the judiciary, many Macedonians, Albanians, and internationals remain skeptical about the independence and fairness of the system. Macedonia is also dealing with organized crime, particularly in the areas of human trafficking, drug smuggling, and prostitution. Most organized crime rings are said to be run by Albanians, with two people mentioning that Albanian organized crime was so effective that it had taken over prostitution rings in London from the Russians. When discussing organized crime, which was raised in 80% or more of my meetings, it never failed but that Kosovar Albanians were said to be responsible for most organized crime in the Balkans and that their kin in Macedonia were involved. One educated Macedonian said "although Albanians were not born with criminal genes," their family structure lent itself well to organized crime as they have large families that are tightly woven. Several people compared Albanian families and clan structure with the mafia.

Despite stereotypes and tensions between groups, political parties that function like patronage systems, and difficulties with everyday life, everyone I met with, Macedonian and Albanian alike, want the state of Macedonia to succeed as a prosperous and peaceful state. Most of the NGO representatives are optimistic about the future although realistic about the challenges. The hopes expressed were for improvement in the economic situation, employment opportunities, and a satisfactory handling of issues of organized crime and corruption.

#### Challenges facing Macedonia

Many of the major challenges facing Macedonia revolve around economic issues. Rampant corruption at all levels of society, from the "cop on the beat" to the President undermines confidence and faith in Macedonia's future. Economic life will improve in Macedonia, according to some international organization representatives, if Macedonia does a better job promoting itself to the outside world. Bulgaria was often cited as an example of a country that has done a good job of cultivating foreign investors. Macedonia was cited as a country doing nothing to promote investment. Until the Macedonian government is able to make a dent in organized crime and corruption, largely through serious advances in respect for rule of law, it is doubtful foreign investors will take the risk of doing business in Macedonia.

Subsumed in these economic challenges is a change of attitude and behavior in the political arena. Currently, the political party system functions as the Communist system once did -- those who are members get the benefits. Political power is an economic resource as the party in power dispenses benefits, thus people aspire to political office not so much for the common good or to promote an ideology, but to advance their own financial causes, including assisting their families, friends, and allies. Several of the people I spoke with in their twenties, when I asked

why they belonged to such an such a party, responded that it was the party their parents belonged to or that they had friends who had joined. Of the few young people I spoke with about this, not one mentioned joining a party because they believed in one or more of the party's goals or its ideology/philosophy.

These issues extend into civil society. NGOs in Macedonia consist more of the elite than the members of civil society they say they serve. Several Macedonians and one or two international organization representatives said that Soros' Open Society Institute in Skopje, the largest local grant-giving organization in Macedonia, was a monopoly and run by a member of the ruling political party (SDSM). They said that several other prominent NGOs were funded by Soros, and the top positions in these NGOs were also held by members of the SDSM. There has been a good deal of money coming into Macedonia for work on civil society, and this has provided a growth industry for Macedonian NGOs. The USAID/OTI representative noted that they gave their money directly to communities and worked little with NGOs.

Many people commented that they believed ethnic tensions between Albanians and Macedonians would dissipate given adequate employment and economic development. Given the fact that these two groups have coexisted peacefully for hundreds of years, this may be true. At the very least, economic factors exacerbate ethnic tensions. Nonetheless, ethnic differences and tensions are real. Some of this tension is caused by separation and by how little they know about the other.

Women's roles in the political and economic arenas are weak. Women are victims of trafficking, prostitution rings, and domestic abuse. Traditional life in Macedonia is male-dominated, particularly in the Albanian community. There are a number of women's NGOs in both rural and urban areas trying to deal with these issues as well as training women in political decision-making to have a greater voice in local and national politics.

## **Macedonia Assessment Trip**

### **List of meetings**

**July 24 – August 1, 2003**

#### Government/Political leaders

1. Murtezan Izmaili, Mayor of Tetovo
2. Nikola Kolevski, Head of Sector, Agency for Youth and Sport
3. Dr. Trpe Stojanovski, advisor, Ministry of the Interior
4. Menduh Thaci, Democratic Party of Albanians
5. Georgi Trajchev, Director, Agency of Youth and Sport
6. Musa Xhaferi, Deputy Prime Minister, Political Systems in charge of Ohrid Agreement (DUI)

#### Civil society/NGOs

7. Miralem Asani, Center for Dialogue Development (based in Tetovo)
8. Shpend Devaja, attorney and head of Civil Society Resource Center (human rights)
9. Joran Donev, Director, Euro-Balkan Institute
10. Zoran Jachev, President, Transparency International of Macedonia
11. Ibrahim Mehmeti, Director of Media Programs, Search for Common Ground
12. Vladimir Milcin, Executive Director, Open Society Institute-Macedonia
13. Albert Musliu, Executive Director, Association for Democratic Initiatives
14. Savka Todorovska, President, Union of Women's Organizations

#### Academics

15. Dr. Alajdin Abazi, Rector, South Eastern European University, Tetovo
16. Amb. Dimitar Mircev, former Macedonian ambassador, university liaison between Skopje and University of Pittsburgh
17. Biljana Vankovska, Professor, Skopje University & Director of Center for Democracy & Security at Euro-Balkan Institute

#### International governmental and intergovernmental agencies

18. Marcin Czaplinski, Senior Advisor, High Commissioner on National Minorities, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, The Hague
19. Ed Joseph, International Crisis Group, Skopje (by phone)
20. Eleanor Nagy, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy
21. Harold Schenker, Political Advisor, OSCE
22. Christa Skerry, USAID/OTI