

**FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA:
EDUCATION AS A POLITICAL PHENOMENON**

Report
by
Ronny Myhrvold

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Preface

The report is written by Ronny Myhrvold, as an assignment through NORDEM, authorised by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main aim is to give a deeper understanding of one of the prevailing contested political issues in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the issue of education. The report places education disputes in a historical context but the primary objective is to describe and interpret events taking place in the aftermath of the 2001 armed conflict. Two fieldtrips were carried out during the assignment, one in March and one in September 2004. By comparing the situation in three inter-ethnic urban centres, an account of the polarising effect the issues have on inter-ethnic relations is given. Similarly, the report endeavours to describe how the structure of the education sector possibly adds to the level ethnic segregation.

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Introduction

With the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on 13 August 2001, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (henceforth Macedonia) commenced a trail towards peace and ethnic re-conciliation. The road has so far been convoluted and marked by a wide diversity of political manifestations depicting deeply rooted conflicts of interest. The education sector has been almost continuously subject to ethnic tensions and political controversy since 2001.

The purpose of this report is to analyse education as a political phenomenon in Macedonia. It will first and foremost endeavour to assess whether recent conflicts related to education issues emerging in Skopje, Kumanovo and Bitola in 2003 and opposition to decisions made by the Ministry of Education and Science reflect a continuing trend of increasing cleavage between the two major ethnic communities in the country. Accordingly, this report places emphasis on both the ethnic context and the Ohrid Framework Agreement with its focus on the preservation and promotion of the state as a multi-ethnic society. Additionally, it will endeavour to analyse other important aspects of the Agreement, such as the principles of re-integration and reconciliation and assess how far these processes have developed in the aftermath of the armed crisis in 2001.

The second main purpose of this report is to describe whether the organisation of the education sector, basically by keeping children from different ethnicities separated, in fact contributes to widen the existing gap that has developed over the years. Ideally schools and national curricula could be used as instruments in promoting mutual understanding between different ethnic communities and serve as a tool to enhance confidence building. However, instead of constituting means of conflict resolution continuing and re-emerging education conflicts indicate that the cleavage between the two largest communities is becoming deeper. The report aims at assessing whether the physical separation of children in the education system might contribute to this development of ethnic segregation. Besides, since there seems to exist a lack of a clear political strategy in how to overcome recent trends of conflicts and to develop schools to become instruments in achieving inter-ethnic integration, this political deficit will be additionally analysed.

It is also reasonable to assume that decisions made by the Ministry of Education and Science to induce new arrangements in schools and/or planned reforms of the education sector linked to the foreseen decentralisation process will initiate a certain anxiety among Macedonians that the reforms might have serious consequences for the quality of education of their children. Bearing in mind the stagnating and continuing recessing economic performance of the country, in terms of high unemployment figures and declining industrial output, combined with inter-ethnic antagonism, it is more than likely that recent attempts by the incumbent government to change the ethnic composition in some schools would meet resistance from the ethnic majority. However, in some cases the transfer of ethnic Albanian students back to their schools of origin is not welcomed by that ethnic community either. Nonetheless, any action taken by the Macedonians are

met by a re-action from the ethnic Albanian community, either locally or nationally. Thus, the government is facing a difficult challenge in order to fulfil one of the main objectives of the framework agreement, the promotion of a genuine multi-ethnic society.

Regretfully it is not within the scope of this report to cover all aspects of education issues and how provisions for other ethnic minorities than ethnic Albanians are included in the Ohrid Framework Agreement. There is a certain possibility that those other minorities in Macedonia do not receive the support, attention and resources needed, especially from national political institutions, to preserve their rights as set out in the agreement. Generally comprising only small percentages of the total population, these minorities remain without power to influence general politics. Thus, instead of promoting a genuine multi-ethnic society, solely the interests of the two major ethnic communities, Slav-Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, will prevail. Preferably, more attention should be paid on how reforms in the education sector, or the lack of them, will affect the rights of the smaller minorities. However, since the armed insurgency in 2001 basically was instigated by ethnic Albanian insurgents claiming to fight for basic human rights and the two largest groups comprise about 90 per cent of the population, focus will predominantly be paid to analyse current inter-ethnic relations between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in light of sensitive education conflicts.

Methodology

This report is based on different types of information gathering. Parts of the information are based on personal experiences obtained while working for the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) for nine months in Macedonia, from May 2002 until late February 2003. During the time spent in the country knowledge was acquired through meetings with people with a variety of different personal and professional backgrounds, conversations in addition to close observation of the political, security and social developments. However, in order to obtain the most reliable information on the current situation in areas with a mixed population and to identify the political and social implications of education related conflicts, three cities in Macedonia were visited. Two excursions were carried out, one in March 2004 and one in September the same year. The three urban centres comprised Skopje, Kumanovo and Bitola. During the field-trips in-depth interviews with different stakeholders such as students, student union representatives and parents' boards on both sides of the ethnic divide were conducted. Besides, representatives of government institutions, both local and national, academicians and teachers were asked about the contested question. Finally, local NGOs and international organisations like the OSCE and EU organisations shared their opinions and experiences. In all of the cities visited the ethnic composition is unique and the armed conflict in 2001 affected them differently. One of the aims of the qualitative interviews was to survey attitudes and perceptions of the informants in a context in which they were familiar with. Students on both sides of the ethnic divide were interviewed both individually and in groups and interviews were mainly conducted in schools or close to the areas the interviewees resided. Focusing on predominantly Macedonian and ethnic Albanian inhabited areas due to the limitations of the research,

the other minorities are only briefly mentioned in this report. Additionally, assessments and data are supported by literature on social, economic and political developments of the republic. It should be mentioned that in addition to in-depth interviews and studying of relevant literature, much of the report will be based on experiences obtained while working in Kumanovo. Finally, it is important to underline that in order to avoid any confusion concerning designation of education institutions; what is generally known as high schools in the American term will henceforth be referred to as secondary schools.

The Ethnic Context

School disputes in Macedonia take place within a particular ethnic and social context that is characteristic for the country. These disputes have a nasty tendency of turning into political mine fields with a clear ethnically based motivation that largely overshadows all other aspects of controversial issues. In some cases conflicts lead to violent clashes between members of different ethnic communities, regularly they display the wide cleavage that has evolved between them. Inter-ethnic relations are marked by deep mutual mistrust and suspicion, at least regarding the two major nationalities, Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, built up over time and intensified substantially the last two decades. However, unlike the majority of the other former states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Montenegro apart, Macedonia did not experience serious political conflicts stemming from ethnic grievances at the time of independence in 1991. The wars in the Western Balkans, which tormented the region from the beginning until the end of the 1990s, only affected the country indirectly. Domestically the large ethnic Albanian minority constituted a potential destabilising factor, but it was Macedonia's neighbours' refusal to recognise the newly established state or denied its existence that initially caused most harm. Disputes with neighbouring Greece over the newly established state's name and flag, Bulgaria concerning the official language and Serbia over the autocephalous Macedonian Church had serious impact on the economy and undoubtedly challenged the identity of the majority of the population. Thus, primarily due to the absence of open ethnic conflict, Macedonia was therefore long considered the last bastion of stability in the region.

The socialist period

Nevertheless, inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Macedonia have for the last decades been characterised by augmenting tension and segregation, both politically and socially. This is especially the case when considering the two largest ethnic communities; the Macedonians and the ethnic Albanians. The development is attributable to different circumstances, some dating back to policies adopted in the period of socialism, others to events taking place after independence. It has been argued that the basis of contemporary ethnic grievances can be found shortly after the end of the 2nd World War. In an attempt to unravel immanent ethnic and national problems, the Yugoslav authorities from the outset created the slogan of "Brotherhood and Unity", to put an end to the ethnic animosities tormenting the Western Balkans intermittently for

centuries. For the Macedonians this meant that they for the first time were recognised as a separate nation with its own political and distinct cultural institutions.¹ The ethnic Albanians on the other hand were only recognised as a nationality of Yugoslavia but not as a nation, which entailed some political rights limitations.² Notwithstanding this denomination, ethnic Albanians were granted educational and several cultural rights. However, these rights were obviously not perceived as formulating satisfactorily the desires of the Albanian population. Thus, when the communist leaders of Yugoslavia established the Federal Republic of Macedonia they simultaneously created a system of positive discrimination of the majority of the population. The Yugoslav authorities' ambitious project of setting up a unitary state while simultaneously preserving ethnic identity contributed to and reinforced national perceptions. The attempt, which was executed by distributing economic, political and cultural power along ethnic or national lines, resulted in the fostering of Macedonian national consciousness and identity taking place at the expense of other minorities in the country. Nationalist sentiments were given fertile breeding ground through the structuring of the state. First, the creation of standard literary Macedonian as the official language of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was a major contribution to the construction of a distinct Macedonian nationality.³ Later on, the establishment of main Macedonian cultural institutions such as the National Library, the Academy of Science, the National Theatre and the autocephalous Macedonian Church benefited the Macedonian majority but partially excluded the other minorities. The Macedonian project is generally believed to have been carried out because Yugoslav authorities deemed expedient to be more tolerant towards Macedonian nationalism.⁴ In 1968, after Tito's purge of the Yugoslav Security Police (UDBa), headed by Aleksandar Rankovic two years earlier, riots broke out in Kosovo.⁵ Kosovo Albanians students, encouraged by increased openness and the province's newly granted status as a "socialist autonomous province", demanded Kosovo to be acknowledged as a seventh republic in the federation. During these first truly violent disturbances in the Yugoslav federation, ethnic Albanian demonstrators in the Tetovo region of Macedonia took to the streets and required that the Albanian areas of Macedonia should merge with Kosovo in a predominantly ethnic Albanian republic. Later on, dissatisfaction in Kosovo received open moral support from their fellow kinsmen in Macedonia. When Serbian authorities came down hard on Kosovo Albanian nationalist demands in the beginning of the 1980s and onwards, Macedonian authorities went even further in employing repressive measures to curb concurrent increasing nationalism within the ethnic Albanian community. Several different methods were put to use. Measures ranged from long prison sentences for nationalist manifestations to several regulations on the media, the

¹ Throughout the interwar period and during the short-lived Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in which the northern parts of ancient Macedonia formed part after the Balkan wars in 1912/13, the Serbian position was that the Slavs of Macedonia were solely South Serbs. Macedonia was accordingly referred to as South Serbia.

² The Albanians in the whole of the Federation, as well as for example Hungarians from Vojvodina, were seen as a minority with their national home being outside Yugoslavia.

³ Vik "Divided Communities" 2001.

⁴ This policy was meant to diminish Serb dominance in the federation and deprive Bulgaria of any possible claims to Macedonian territory by establishing a genuine Macedonian identity.

⁵ UDBa was in the 1950 and 1960s conducting a very harsh discriminatory policy against ethnic Albanians in the federation.

use of Albanian names, and additionally; by revising the national curricula by increasing the number of hours devoted to the state language in non-Macedonian schools, this policy worsened the already fragile inter-ethnic fabric between Macedonians and the largest minority. In 1989 the republican constitution of Macedonia was amended and the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was declared to be a nation state of Macedonians. Previous reference to Albanian and Turkish minorities as a legitimate component of the state was removed completely.

Increasing tensions after independence

Inter-ethnic relations were therefore strained at the dawn of the new republic and soon became worse. Ethnic Albanians in large part boycotted the 1991 referendum on independence claiming that their basic human rights were not properly respected. Later in November the same year, ethnic Albanian members of parliament abstained from ratifying the new constitution on grounds that its preamble mentioned ethnic Albanians as a minority not as a constituent nation with equal rights as the Macedonians. More precisely the constitution stated that Macedonia was “a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens is provided for Albanians, Turks, Roma and other nationalities living in the republic”. A principle of constitutional nationalism was established, according to which Macedonians, being the dominant nation, were privileged over others. This partially formed a contrast to the principle of democracy according to which all citizens of the state, regardless of nationality, are sovereign. In addition to these two events, in January 1992 the largest ethnic Albanian political party, Party of Democratic Prosperity of Albanians (PDP) organised their own referendum, where a large majority of the ethnic Albanians voted in favour of political and territorial autonomy of their nation within what they believed would sooner become a Greater Albania.⁶ These developments contributed to spur suspicion among Macedonians whether ethnic Albanians could be relied upon as politically committed to the construction of the new state or opted for inclusion in Kosovo or the Republic of Albania.

During the 1990s a wide range of issues, the most crucial possibly being the one on higher education, contributed to enhancing the already existing cleavage between the two communities. At the end of the decade the Kosovo crisis stretched the already volatile inter-ethnic relations further. Evidently, the two major communities viewed the conflict across the borders differently. Macedonians in general were strongly against the NATO bombings in Kosovo and Serbia and consequently organised large protest against them in several cities around the country. Ethnic Albanians, on their hand, unsurprisingly supported their kinsmen in the Serbian province, whom they, as mentioned, on several previous occasions had joined forces with. The influx of around 350,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees in the midst of the fighting worried Macedonians deeply because many believed a permanent settlement of refugees would dramatically alter the demographic composition of the country. Macedonian authorities' closure of borders to

⁶ Vickers and Pettifer 1999 “Albania: From anarchy to a Balkan identity”. Commentators such as the ICG and Poulton claim that the referendum aimed at measuring the support for ethnic Albanian autonomy within Macedonia.

fleeing refugees angered the ethnic Albanian population and made them question once again the legitimacy of their own government.

Parallel societies

Despite institutionalisation of collaboration between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political parties at governmental level in every state administration since independence in 1991, with the exception of the first interim government, the society as such has become increasingly polarised. Keeping the political manifestations and activities aside, the two principal ethnic groups, the Macedonian majority and the ethnic Albanian minority, in addition to speaking different languages and mainly practising different religions, are in large parts of the country living in separate geographic regions and, at micro-level, mainly in separate neighbourhoods.⁷ Moreover, Macedonians and ethnic Albanians tend to operate in more or less independent economic spheres. This development, which dates back for decades, has in general thwarted social inter-action, which in turn contributes to the establishment of prejudices and stereotypes. Having few points of contact and sporadic social inter-action, ethnic Albanians and Macedonians have little understanding of each other's language, culture and history. Communication between the two groups is at ground level fairly limited and inter-ethnic dialogue marked by intolerance, suspicion and mistrust.

Several scholars and reports have concluded that most of the ethnic Albanians enclose themselves increasingly with their ethnic group, taking into consideration only the interests of their own group. The same has happened to the ethnic Macedonians where most people have retreated into their ethnic group to unite in protecting themselves against the ethnic Albanians. The fact that Macedonians read the Macedonian language press, ethnic Albanians the Albanian press, Turks the Turkish newspapers and so forth only contributes to widen the already existing gap between different ethnic groups. In light of this it is therefore reasonable to claim that ethnic groups co-exist in parallel rather than live together in contemporary Macedonia. The level of mistrust and suspicion between the two peoples reached a level in the 1990s which encouraged ethnic Albanians to develop separate and parallel systems, particularly in higher education, in opposition to state structures.⁸ It is in this atmosphere conflicts related to education issues recently having taken place.

It has to be emphasised, though, that the picture is not totally bleak. Aside from a general situation of ethnic division separation is far from complete. Macedonia, like many other countries in the Balkans, is truly a melting pot of different ethnicities with unique languages, traditions, cultures and religions. Travelling around the country it is impossible to ignore the cultural, religious and ethnical diversity which clearly shows a long history of ethnic co-habitation and co-existence. Notwithstanding, the increasing gap and the fact that ethnic communities primarily live separate lives, there is also a long tradition of coexistence and countless areas where different ethnic groups enjoy the possibility of, at least on the surface, meeting each other. In urban centres like

⁷ Although one would meet ethnic Albanians residing practically all over the country, the majority live in the western and northern parts of Macedonia closer to the borders with Kosovo and the republic of Albania.

⁸ ICG "Bridging the Gap" 2000

Kumanovo, Skopje and Bitola, as well as in other parts of the country, one would find certain mixed neighbourhoods where, although the demographic structure has changed over time and developments point towards the creation of ethnically “pure” areas, people interact on a daily basis. Common meeting places are for example different kinds of markets, shopping malls, international cultural events such as pop concerts and suffice to say, public offices manned by servants of all kinds of ethnic origin. For some people employment in especially the public administration and international organisations also constitutes a possibility to establish professional relationships. Last but not least, children of different ethnicities would, when reaching the age of commencing secondary school education, have the opportunity to meet representatives of other ethnic groups. Sadly, the education system does not encourage social inter-action. On the contrary, the actual separation of pupils of different ethnic backgrounds contributes only to widening the gap between them.

The impact of the 2001 armed insurgency

Undoubtedly, the ethnic Albanian armed insurgency in 2001 has had a negative effect on inter-ethnic relations in the republic of Macedonia. Strong indications suggest the process of ethnic segregation being sped up in the aftermath of the crisis. On the verge of bringing the country into an all-out civil war, it can come as no surprise that wounds it will take time to heal were opened wide. Accordingly, suspicion on both sides was given fertile ground to flourish and the level of mistrust rose as a natural consequence. The actual cessation of hostilities was promised by the ethnic Albanian insurgents, the National Liberation Army (NLA), in exchange for increased rights for ethnic Albanians within the republic. Designed to create a favourable environment for re-conciliation and co-existence the intentions so far exceed the factual results. Peace has been secured and law and order re-established in most of the country, but Macedonian and ethnic Albanian people are probably more distanced from each other socially than they have ever been. By large the conflict caught the majority of Macedonians and the international community at unawares. The increasing ethnic division and tension had been recognised in the years preceding the outbreak of violence but few anticipated the emergence of an armed insurgency by ethnic Albanian forces.

As described above, the level of mutual suspicion to a large extent coloured the understandings of each other’s community. Social relations between especially the two largest ethnic communities have deteriorated further after the conflict and the challenge of establishing sustainable stability in Macedonia prevails. Important perceptions of the reasons for NLA to take up arms and the course of events during the short conflict differ substantially. On the Macedonian side the use of violence in pursuit of political demands was and still is seen as unacceptable. The fact that NLA attacked the state the ethnic Albanians should be loyal to just add to the suspicion amongst Macedonians whether their ethnic counterparts want out of the republic to merge with a foreseen independent Kosovo, or ultimately a unified Albanian territory.

On the other hand, quite a few ethnic Albanians think that the crisis was imposed on them and only resulted from decades of discrimination executed by the majority population. When political dialogue and negotiations failed to correct the wrong doings of the past, taking up arms was the better option. Moreover, several ethnic Albanian sources have argued that the state security forces employed unnecessary force during the

period of clashes with the NLA. Especially some incidents, for example the shelling of villages in Lipkovo municipality close to Kumanovo and the Ljuboten case, gave support to claims of Macedonian brutality and continued discrimination. Since the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, ethnic Albanians have expressed doubts as to the will of the majority to share the political power in the republic.⁹ Regarding the other smaller minorities, all gave unreserved support to the Macedonian authorities at the time of the conflict. Later, several representatives of the same minorities have remarked that implementation of the agreement is taking place mainly to the benefit of ethnic Albanians and that the needs of other minorities are neglected in the process.

The armed conflict in Macedonia affected the three areas visited for the purpose of this report differently. All of them will be given a more meticulous description below. Shortly, it can be noted that none of the areas visited during the field trip has an ethnic Albanian majority similar to the ones one would find in the western parts of the country, more specifically in the so-called Tetovo valley. Nevertheless, descriptive of the new situation are several statements given during interviews with Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in these urban centres. A young ethnic Albanian from Skopje explained that inter-ethnic relations had become more strained after the armed conflict in 2001:

Where I before the crisis used to have friends with different ethnic backgrounds and frequently spent time with Macedonians, this was after the conflict almost impossible. Most of the Macedonian neighbours and friends I previously shared my leisure time with nowadays refuse to have anything to do with me. For a long time I rarely had any social contact with Macedonians and when it happened it was primarily through the part-time job I am holding. Things are fortunately slowly returning to normal but it has taken time.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement and after

The agreement

Numerous reports have been written on developments leading to the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement which re-established peace in Macedonia. In brief, it should be mentioned that on 13 August 2001 President Boris Trajkovski and the leaders of the four main political parties in Macedonia, the Macedonian VMRO-DMPNE and SDSM and the ethnic Albanian DPA and PDP, signed a general framework agreement for peace.¹⁰ Mainly due to strong international pressure, Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political leaders had been persuaded to find a political solution, which prevented the conflict to escalate into a full-scale civil war. The aim of the agreement was, on the one hand, to institutionalise ethnic equality between the Macedonian majority and the ethnic Albanians. On the other, it extended international engagement in terms of co-ordination, facilitation and monitoring of the peace process. Support to facilitate structural reforms

⁹ The Ohrid Framework Agreement and anticipations will be dealt with thoroughly in the next chapter.

¹⁰ The agreement, which ended armed hostility and provided for the disarmament of the ethnic Albanian rebel group, the National Liberation Army (NLA), materialised after a considerable political tug of war.

and financial aid was also promised. In connection with the agreement NATO was mandated to oversee the collection of in weapons from the NLA. This operation called “Essential Harvest” was concluded in September 2001, but the mandate was later extended with the objective of supporting the process of returning to peace under the name “Amber Fox”.¹¹

The general agreement comprised some basic principles intended to endorse several amendments to the country’s constitution. Most importantly, the preamble to the constitution was changed. All references to minorities as nationalities were removed. In stead, all the different ethnicities residing in the country are described as peoples with equal status as citizens of the republic. Regarding language rights, article 7 of the new constitution sanctioned “any other language (than the Macedonian) spoken by at least 20 per cent of the citizens shall also be official”. With this declaration the Albanian language was acknowledged as the republic’s second official language. It could be used both at national and local level, i.e., in municipalities where ethnic Albanians are also reaching the 20 per cent threshold stipulated in the agreement. Other important changes comprised proportional representation of minorities in public offices, changes in the structure of the police and the army with higher proportional numbers of ethnic Albanians, qualified majority voting in parliament, and finally, a new law on local self-government. Amendments of articles in the constitution describing primary and secondary school education did not represent a large change in the way minorities should be catered for. The most important changes pertained to the issue of higher education. However, as decentralisation plans are under way to become finalised there will also be a need for making new laws on primary and secondary education. The reason for this is that decentralisation would imply a transfer of responsibility for lower level education from the state to municipalities. Education laws have to be changed accordingly, to be adapted to the new structure of political authority.

Opposite perceptions

The parliament ratified the amendments to the republic’s constitution in November 2001 after hefty debates in the assembly. Disputed and contested by many Macedonians, the general framework agreement, nevertheless, constituted a way to end increasing hostilities and it was generally seen as an unavoidable compromise to maintain peace. Despite supporting the agreement on this basis resentment to it survives. A large part of the Macedonians share the opinion that especially ethnic Albanians, and other minorities, had their rights respected with the old constitution. Several concessions to ethnic Albanian demands in the years before the crisis and systematic rejection of claims of discriminatory policies towards minorities in the republic supports such opinions. Moreover, the whole peace accord was generally perceived as being struck totally on the terms of ethnic Albanians and to the disadvantage of the Macedonian people, who chiefly would stand to lose more than it will gain from its implementation. The international community, the prime mover behind the signing of the accord, is equally blamed for taking sides in the conflict and then only the ethnic Albanian one. The ultimate objective of the Ohrid Framework Agreement is that both ethnic Albanians and

¹¹ The NATO troops, also deployed to protect international observation members of the OSCE and EUMM, were replaced by European Union forces under the name of “Concordia” in spring 2003.

Macedonians, evidently also including the other ethnic groups, should be able to regard the state as their own. In that respect broad common political ground should be found to move the country towards the establishment of a truly multi-ethnic society. Comments made by a Macedonian girl on the debate on territorial division may serve as a good example depicting how the political climate still is marked by profound opposing conflicts of interest:

The whole debate is very strange. The Albanians will promote their demands and stick to them until we give in. It happens every time; the Albanians are not willing to compromise and use the threat of starting a new crisis to bend our will so they could have theirs. It would be better to just give them what they want because they will get it one way or another.

One could probably expect that opposition to the agreement has decreased three years after the conflict. However, perceptions on how far this process has evolved are vigorously disputed. Many Macedonians doubt whether ethnic Albanians are loyal to the state. Arguments in support of such views are the display of the Albanian national flag and not the Macedonian in predominantly ethnic Albanian areas in especially the western and northern parts of the country, continuing demands for the fulfilment of the agreement with the focus on their objectives solely, lack of commitment to the establishment of law and order, and so forth. There seems to exist a common impression amongst Macedonians that the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which should guarantee the preservation of the unitary state and future peace, is not respected. As a Macedonian interlocutor revealed in Skopje:

The framework agreement was for us perceived to constitute the end of concessions to the Albanians in exchange for peace and rule of law. The problem is that we have not been able to re-establish law and order and continuing demands just become unbearable. Implementation of new laws would have been acceptable if both parties involved would be committed to the agreement. Currently, there seems to be one law for the Macedonians and one for the Albanians.

The ethnic Albanian community was and still is more in favour of the Ohrid Framework Agreement than their Macedonian countrymen. Expectations have been high in what was perceived by ethnic Albanians to improve their official status in the republic. The leader of NLA, Ali Ahmeti, stated in August 2001 that the concord found in Ohrid was what the rebel organisation had fought for. The organisation announced that the fight was not a matter of territorial gains but of obtaining the rights ethnic Albanians had been refused for decades such as equality;

*their language and the right to veto over issues concerning national issues.*¹²

While there is dissatisfaction on the ethnic Albanian side with the pace of implementation of the general peace agreement, and with the delivery of promised reforms, especially equitable representation in state structures three years after the crisis, a point of new crisis has not been reached. Sphetim Pollozhani, former deputy president of the Albanian political party, PDP, mentioned in an interview that the situation has improved little:

Everything is going in circle and the Macedonians have not changed at all. We (ethnic Albanians) are willing to live together in this country which belongs to all different ethnic groups. But the

¹² Suspicion ran deep regarding the commitment of the Macedonian counterpart to maintain peace and implement the agreement and Ahmeti at the same press conference greeted the deployment of NATO forces. From Ethnocbarometre, 2001.

*Macedonians are unwilling to share common goods and maintain policies they have employed for decades.*¹³

According to a UNDP survey, the majority of ethnic Albanians still see the implementation of the agreement as imperative to uphold the unitary character of the state and prolong stability. In Kumanovo, the ethnic Albanian principal of the Albanian-language branch of the “Goce Delcev” gymnasium, was far more positive in describing recent trends and stated that;

In the aftermath of the signing of the treaty, Macedonians have begun to realise that we are a nation with equal rights and consequently should have the same access to all public services.

Some radical ethnic Albanians have continued to doubt whether the agreement would provide equality for the Albanian population in Macedonia or not. The so-called Albanian National Army (ANA) with its political outlet, the Albanian National Union Front (ANUF), advocates the establishment of a Greater Albania and interpret the Ohrid Framework Agreement as dysfunctional and invalid. There is little evidence of large or even modest popular support for the ANA and it remains basically a shadowy internet organisation with some followers in Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and South Serbia. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) ANA never managed to capitalise on discontent with peace agreements reached in Macedonia and South Serbia to gain popular credibility.¹⁴ Violence in the cause of a Greater Albania, or any shifts of borders, is thus neither politically popular nor morally justified.

In Macedonia the National Democratic Party (NDP), currently only holding one seat in parliament and practically marginalised due to internal wrangles in 2003, upholds the idea of federalising the republic.¹⁵ However, last year the leadership of the second largest Albanian party, DPA, one of the four signatories in 2001, president Arben Xhaferi and vice-president Menduh Thaci, claimed that the implementation of the agreement was going far too slow. In fact, the party went further and decided in spring to withdraw from all political activity. DPA members of parliament and the party’s provincial mayors suspended all their activities. Being an opposition party in decline with regard to electoral support and political influence, DPA’s performance was largely interpreted as an attempt to re-gain credibility as the genuine mouthpiece of the ethnic Albanian population at the expense of the successful Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). The political moratorium was followed up with statements by both DPA principals stating that unless the Ohrid Framework Agreement was “honoured” to the full extent, the best option for the ethnic Albanian people would be a separation of the country along ethnic lines. Dissatisfaction with certain laws passed in parliament such as the passport law, disputes over the use of the Albanian language in the national assembly and alleged breaches of the amnesty granted to former fighters of the NLA were additional arguments employed to come forward with the proposition. In line with the DPA approach, the former head of VMRO-DPMNE and former prime minister, Ljubco Georgievski, who stepped down as president of the party in spring 2003, almost

¹³ Interview, September 2004.

¹⁴ ICG Report no. 153.

¹⁵ In the summer of 2003 NDP was merged with DUI and leader Kastriot Haxhirexha, with the support of the majority of party members, decided to de-register the party. However, some members, amongst others MP Xhezair Shakiri, opposed the ruling and continued party activity under the old name.

simultaneously expressed extremely controversial but well-known views on the future of the country. Mr Georgievski reiterated the proposal emerging from the Macedonian Academy for Science and Arts (MANU) in 2001 and announced that only partitioning of the country would end ethnic conflict. According to the plan, major Albanian settlements in Western Macedonia would be annexed to Albania whereas Macedonia would get access to the Adriatic Sea through a concession of Albanian land. Included in the plan, a population exchange between the two mentioned countries should also be carried out. The former prime minister went as far as proposing the erection of a concrete wall separating the two communities. Evidently, in an atmosphere where important political figureheads openly question the future of the unitary state and moreover seem to discard the notion of multi-ethnicity on the basis that it is an outdated idea, at least in poor countries with limited public resources available for distribution to the population, such ideas influence the general situation on ground level. More than likely, these sentiments would also have a negative effect on conflicts related to education issues.

An Economy in Transition

Macedonia has since independence experienced severe economic problems. Endeavouring to transform the economy from a primarily planned socialist economy, although markedly different from models employed in other communist systems in Eastern Europe, to a free market oriented economy, has met with serious obstacles and still constitutes a major challenge for the government.¹⁶ It is essential to look at the ongoing conflicts in the secondary education sector in this context as the current economic situation, and especially unemployment numbers, possibly forms an important part in the rationale behind opposition to political decisions made by the government. Ethnic antagonism has, to some extent, been further strengthened by more than a decade of economic stagnation and subsequent deterioration of living standards. While reforms laid out in the Ohrid Framework Agreement undoubtedly are needed to maintain peace and procure future stability, it is equally clear that these reforms and concurrent consequences would put further strains on an already manifested ethnic cleavage. The key provisions of the agreement will require an ambitious programme of redistributing public resources. Given the significant weakness of the Macedonian economy, such redistribution would become even harder to accept for the group perceiving its public services under threat. In the inter-ethnic context marked by overwhelming suspicion and hostility intensified by the violent crisis of 2001, conflict lines would be ever more difficult to overcome. Shpetim Pollozhani said:

With the current social crisis the country is experiencing numerous people become increasingly frustrated and angry. In such a situation it is easy to manipulate the masses for political purposes. Likewise, this sense of pessimism and lack of prospective employment might work as an inducement for some elements to pick up guns. People do that out of despair.

¹⁶ The Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia employed specific policies such as self-management, decentralisation and "market socialism"

External factors

The point of departure was difficult for the new independent republic. During the communist period Macedonia was considered to be the poorest of the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia's six republics, contributing less than seven per cent of the federation's gross domestic product. Macedonia, with its limited natural resources, depended until the break-up of Yugoslavia heavily on transfers from the other republics, most significantly from Croatia and Slovenia. The sudden cut off of subsidies from the federation ensuing independence exacerbated initial problems. Domestic and international events complicated the economic transition further. The war in Bosnia/Herzegovina and the United Nations induced sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro, denied Macedonia access to its largest trading partner in addition to closing off the overland corridor to Western Europe. Greek trade embargos imposed in 1992 and 1994 were almost equally destructive. Contesting the name of the newly independent republic and its national flag, Greece, in addition to the embargos, also impeded Macedonia an early international recognition. Combined, these developments had serious negative effects on the Macedonian economy since they hindered import of raw materials and exports of processed goods to Greece, as well as denying Macedonia access to the harbour at Thessaloniki. Due to lack of international recognition, Macedonia experienced difficulties in obtaining important financial and political support. Loans from the "International Bank for Reconstruction and Development" (World Bank) and potential international investments were delayed until the republic was recognised as the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and admitted membership in the United Nations in 1993. During a four years period between 1996 and 2000 the economy recovered gradually. In 2000 GDP growth was estimated at four per cent but unemployment rates remained exceptionally high. Before the relatively high growth of the year 2000, the Kosovo war in 1999 and the influx of about 350,000 refugees for a short period placed considerable strains on the already fragile economy, damaged the infrastructure that were not sufficiently compensated, in addition to impinge on the social fabric of the country.¹⁷

The 2001 domestic crisis instigated by the ethnic Albanian rebel army, NLA, also had serious ramifications for the economic standings of Macedonia. As mentioned above, after five years of continuous economic expansion the growth was interrupted by the armed conflict, which led to a close to five per cent contraction that year. The then ruling VMRO-DPMNE/DPA government's commitment to economic reform, free trade, and regional integration was not enough to prevent an almost unavoidable setback. The economy shrank mainly because of decreased trade, intermittent border closures, increased deficit spending on security needs, and investor uncertainty. Especially spending on security measures increased substantially during the conflict. The government invested a considerable amount of the annual budget in armoury and weapons. Industrial production simultaneously saw a sharp decline and fell nearly nine per cent. Growth barely recovered in 2002 to 0.9 per cent, and then rose to 2.8 per cent in 2003. GDP growth has augmented more than international experts anticipated but

¹⁷ Rough estimations indicate the losses induced on Macedonia from the Kosovo crisis amount to more than 600 million dollars. By the end of 1999 the international community had only reimbursed 60 million of them.

remains irrespectively amongst the lowest in the whole region. Besides, industrial output is falling and unemployment at one-third of the workforce remains the most critical economic problem, especially since a large portion of the working age population is facing long-term unemployment.

Restructuring of the economy

Apart from international and domestic events creating severe problems for the economy of Macedonia in its early stages of independence, transition from communism to a free market economy has been a painful process. The immediate consequence of the economic transformation has been declining living standards for the majority of the population in Macedonia, which, unsurprisingly, also affects inter-ethnic relations. Despite economic growth obtained through restrictive macro-economic policies, unemployment figures have stabilised on a high level without any prospects of a swift improvement. Unemployment has thus evolved into one of the gravest and most difficult economic, social and political problems.

Macedonians, for a long time the primary beneficiaries of the industrialisation process of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, currently experience that the situation is improving little. On the contrary, a majority of them have experienced that their living conditions have steadily deteriorated since the beginning of the 1990s. Having previously worked in mostly socially owned and now privatised or defunct enterprises, Macedonians have born the brunt of the country's economic downturn. Privatisation of socially owned enterprises initiated after independence in the 1990s and at present in the stages of being completed, has not yet yielded desired results in form of creating new jobs. In stead, loss making socially owned enterprises are continuously being liquidated or run at low capacity. Influx of foreign capital is very limited due to the prevalence of instability in the country and an unfavourable investment environment. In addition to the limitations imposed by a lack of funds, also domestically based finances, the restructuring of ownership and production over the past decade has had a major effect on the unemployed, as has the poor private sector development, which has failed to develop sufficient powers to absorb workers.

Simultaneously, public administration is under pressure both to downsize and to make space for more minority representation. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), one major multilateral producer of conditionalities, on one hand has conditioned new agreements with Macedonia on structural reforms in the public sector. One of the requests is a downsizing and rationalisation of the inflated public sector. Minority representation in public administration in proportion to the percentage of the population as described in the Ohrid Framework Agreement is a second requirement having an impact on social relations. Macedonians constitute by far the largest majority of public servants. A combined downsizing and sharing of public sector employment will inevitably perceive these new conditions as threatening to their somewhat previous privileged situation. Consequently, many Macedonians face long-term unemployment and with the disappearance of each job another household might be pushed into poverty. Combined, all these difficulties have led to a dramatic reduction in average income. Ethnic Albanians on the other hand, largely underrepresented in public offices and state enterprises before and after independence, have managed to cope with the situation in a

better fashion.¹⁸ The partial exclusion of ethnic Albanians from the socialist sector and the benefits it offered, forced them to find alternative strategies to survive. These strategies also made them better equipped to handle the collapse of the socialist system. While Macedonians obtained employment in public factories as well as public administration, their ethnic counterpart developed small private business and their own informal economy. In addition, a large number of ethnic Albanians, especially the male share of the population, have for decades migrated to countries in the western hemisphere as guest workers. The money they have sent and still send back to Macedonia provides their families with a considerable income by Macedonian standards. Possibly, the ethnically divided economy adds to and reinforces ethnic tensions in Macedonia. Clearly new laws on proportional representation in the state sector alone will be a major source of competition and tension. Declining living conditions and loss of jobs and privileges among an increasing proportion of Macedonians has created a sense of acute economic insecurity. Comparisons between their new fortune with the one of the relatively prospering ethnic Albanian has led to a feeling of distrust and dissatisfaction with Macedonian political authorities, as well as the international community, who are being blamed for favouring the ethnic Albanians uncritically. The relative economic growth in some predominantly ethnic Albanian areas, visible through for example extensive construction activity, combined with the existence of an Albanian grey economy has additionally generated speculations and suspicion as to the nature and possible sources of funds.

Resulting from the last decades' domestic and external complications, unemployment figures have thus stabilised on a high level. Nationally, 37 per cent of the work force was registered unemployed in 2003; an increase of five per cent compared to 2002. Statistics available from year 2001 reveal that around 70 per cent of the unemployed are below the age of 25. Moreover, the majority is also poorly educated. Taking into account the inadequate nature of the private sector in creating permanent employment opportunities, jobs in the public sector still is the most secure way to obtain a stable income. For Macedonians the sharing of limited public resources, such as education, will become less acceptable while ethnic Albanians desire equal opportunities to income generating positions. It is worth mentioning that unemployment numbers may be inflated since many employed people go unreported. Activity in the informal economy, or grey market, is thriving and was in 2003 estimated to constitute 40 per cent of Macedonia's GDP. In fact, according to the World Bank, informal employment is as common as a formal job. But this kind of employment is often not permanent and a large part of the work force is engaged in low productivity or occasional work. Keeping this in mind, it is needless to say that factual unemployment numbers are high. In several surveys conducted by amongst others the American International Republican Institute (IRI), it was revealed that the main concern amongst the population has over the two last years shifted from security issues to employment and future economic prospects.¹⁹ Finally, despite extensive activity in the informal sector, little of this activity leads to much needed investment in infrastructure and other important public sectors. The economic situation,

¹⁸ This does not imply low unemployment figures among ethnic Albanians. Previously public sector employment was primarily preserved Macedonians, except for teachers. Working abroad is not an option for all ethnic Albanians either.

¹⁹ www.iri.org, 2003

especially reduction of unemployment rates, is declared by the incumbent government to constitute one of its major challenges. So far their success has been limited.

The Education Sector in Macedonia

In order to conduct a thorough examination of recent developments in the Macedonian Education Sector, a description of both the legal and institutional framework in which conflicts materialise, is required. Minority rights are built into the constitution. In the same way are basic laws on education covered by the constitution. Although the focus of this report is on secondary school education, it should be pointed out that the educational system in Macedonia is divided into four main segments: pre-school care and education catering for children of six months to seven years of age; primary education - which lasts up to eight years; secondary education – which lasts from three to four years; and higher, i.e. university education – which can last from two to six years. The Macedonian constitution guarantees the right to free primary and secondary education for all of the citizens of the country. Higher education is partially financed by the state but requires university students to also participate in its funding. Generally, the education levels in the republic are high. 95 per cent of the population is literate and primary school enrolment close to universal. However, concerning secondary school education drop out rates are worrying. This especially applies to members of the Roma community and females of ethnic Albanian origin.

Minority rights

Minorities are recognized by the state as groups with particular rights and privileges. Protection of minority rights is built into Macedonia's constitution and Article 48 specifically mentions special guarantees of minority rights. A general regulation of the sphere of education is also included in this article. Article 48 states:

1. Members of nationalities have the right to freely express, foster and develop their national identity and its attributes.
2. The republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of nationalities.
3. Members of nationalities have the right to establish institutions of culture, art, education and other associations in order to express, foster and develop their identity.
4. Members of nationalities have the right to instruction in their own language in primary and secondary education, as determined by law. In schools where education is offered in the language of a nationality, the Macedonian language must also be studied.²⁰

²⁰ It is worth mentioning that the term “nationality” was replaced with “community” after the constitution was amended in 2001. Members of minorities are simply called “members of communities”. Thus, the article referred to is to some extent a bit out-dated.

In view of legal provisions of minority rights, the main body of the constitution of 1991, influenced by Western European models, contained explicit references to the equality of citizens before the law. The constitution provides for the protection of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of minorities in the republic. Within the Ohrid Framework Agreement, laws on education are specified in article 6 on "Education and use of languages" and in 6.1 specifically. The article covers education for all members of other communities than the Macedonian at primary and secondary levels. Here it is stated that it is the obligation of the state to provide teaching in the native tongue of different minority groups if requested. The article also promulgates the principle of uniform standards for academic programmes to be applied throughout the country. At the same time the provision of tuition in the Macedonian language is implied. Noteworthy is the fact that at present Macedonian is taught as a separate subject from the third grade on. Secondary school students who belong to a nationality other than Macedonian are obliged to follow two classes in Macedonian language per week.

In terms of lower level education, both primary and secondary education, amendments agreed upon therefore represent little but maintenance of already existing laws as described in the 1991 constitution. Foreseen reforms pertaining to another important part of the general agreement, namely the decentralisation of political authority, would undoubtedly have larger consequences for the implementation of national education laws and the division of responsibilities. Whereas amendments of the law on primary and secondary levels might represent mere cosmetic changes, the law on higher education is the area where most profound changes were introduced. The Ohrid Framework Agreement stipulates that the state is responsible for funding tertiary education for communities comprising more than 20 per cent of the population. Ethnic Albanians were therefore entitled to higher education in their own language but the agreement is vague in how this is to be implemented. Clearly it does not say anything about a state funded Albanian-language university.

Education at primary and secondary levels is currently available in four languages: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian, as well as optional language classes in Romany and Vlah. While instruction in all first four languages is given to children at primary school level, tuition in Macedonian, Albanian and Turk is confined to the three largest ethnic communities as regards secondary level education. The limitations to education in mother-tongues are stated in the education law. A number of 24 pupils is required to open or sustain such classes and education is offered where it is feasible in line with the requirement. Pupils from other communities study the Macedonian language.

The Education Law

The right to education in Macedonia is laid down in the 1991 constitution articles 44 to 48. It is stated that the state is responsible for providing instruction to all children regardless ethnicity and gender. More specifically it is asserted that education should be accessible under equal conditions to all on the basis of merit, without discrimination on gender, nationality, social, political or religious persuasion Primary school education is compulsory and free and lasts for eight years. Secondary school education is non-

compulsory and free. Every pupil between 15 and 19 who has completed primary school has the right to attend classes at secondary level. Currently, around 85 per cent of students utilise this right and enrol into a secondary school. Education on this level is conducted in different vocational training schools aiming at providing specific preparation for the entrance into different categories of labour and general secondary schools (gymnasiums).²¹ Vocational schools last either three or four years. Vocational education has two aims: students who have finished a four year course are prepared for continuation of education in tertiary or higher education institutions. It also prepares students for employment in industry, trade, services and other areas that pupils have chosen. Gymnasiums last four years and prepare pupils for university studies. In addition to general secondary and vocational schools one would find secondary schools for arts. Primarily, secondary education is stipulated in the law to be free. However, most secondary school students have to pay either an annual fee to the administration of the school they are attending or to their teachers. The sum, which basically varies from 500 to 1,000 Macedonian denars, is supposed to cover expenses of school materials. School fees are not defined in the law on education and are, according to one civil servant at the Ministry of Education;

A custom that has become permanent in most schools as a result of limited resources available for buying material necessary to provide adequate education for the pupils.

Originally, it was the parents' councils of vocational schools which decided to adopt this policy. Nevertheless, it developed to a precedent and has later been a standardised custom in most schools in Macedonia.

Separate classes and physical segregation

Like former Federation of Yugoslavia, Macedonia has tried to equate its political and ethnic pluralism with tolerance. But as in Yugoslavia, Macedonia's pluralism has been bought at the expense of segregation rather than integration. Pre-school, primary and secondary education in Macedonia is not encouraging social interaction due to the fact that the education system allows children belonging to different ethnic groups to follow instruction in separate environments. Macedonian children predominantly go to school with their Macedonian peers, Albanians with Albanians, Turks with Turks and so forth. In former Yugoslavia this system of "separate but equal" tracks was originally meant to satisfy the social and cultural needs and even political ambitions of the country's divergent nationalities. In Macedonia, however, it has contributed to the creation of parallel, non-intersecting communities. Macedonia's educational system can thus only be described as chiefly ethnically segregated, at least concerning the two main ethnic groups of the country, despite attempts to reverse the situation by the Minister of Education, Aziz Pollozhani. Although differences exist in the way this practise is operationalised, generally students of opposing ethnic background do not enjoy to be instructed in the same classes. This system is basically cemented as regards primary school education, where ethnic Albanian children attending classes with peers from other ethnic communities, is practically non-existent. On secondary school level, organisation of tuition is more complex. Segregation is not complete and its practical organisation can be divided into three different categories;

²¹ National report for development of Education, 2004.

1. In the first category, ethnic Albanians pupils, and members of other minorities, study in Macedonian-language classes. In such cases, the number of students of certain community that enrolls at the beginning of the school year decides whether separate instruction in the mother-tongue is provided. According to the law on education, a number of 24 pupils are required to open or maintain separate teaching for other peoples than Macedonian. One such example one would find in Bitola where instruction in the two gymnasiums is given in the Macedonian language. Ethnic Albanian students, who either fulfil educational qualifications and/or refrain from commuting to Struga or Kicevo to attend Albanian-language classes, stay in Bitola. One would also find some ethnic Albanians who prefer to attend classes in a Macedonian environment. The former president of coordinative body, Mrs Zorica Srbinovska, explained that before the transfer of ethnic Albanian students to the Secondary School of Economics "Arseni Jovkov" in September 2003, 120 ethnic Albanian pupils out of a total number of 1,670 followed classes in Macedonian. The latter example is nonetheless becoming increasingly rare.

2. Secondly, and most often, one would find a so-called 'two schools under the same roof' system being employed. In these ethnically mixed schools all students study in the same education venues but are divided in separate classes along ethnic lines. Notably social inter-action does not take place, even during breaks and extracurricular activities despite the sharing of the same premises. A group of Macedonian secondary students in Kumanovo pronounced that;

Even before the conflict when Macedonians and Albanians were studying at the same school, "Goce Delcev", we did not have any contact with the Albanians. Occasionally, we could greet each other when entering or leaving the school but that was all. And, normal greetings just took place between individuals. If Albanians were gathered in a group such exchange of sentiments would not take place at all.

Moreover, in these schools a shift system is being used where Macedonian and ethnic Albanian pupils are following classes in separate shifts to avoid conflict situations and to decrease potential tensions. This is currently the case in Skopje where two secondary schools share premises. One, "Nikola Karev", is predominantly Macedonian while the other, "Shef Lush Marku", is Albanian. However, the shift system has been utilised in Macedonia for several decades. Depending on different conditions, most often lack of or limited space, a great number of schools hold classes in two shifts, one shift having instruction before noon and the other one after. According to official numbers available in a report produced for the Ministry of Education and Science, approximately 40 per cent of the pupils attended classes in two shifts in 2001.

3. The third option, which since the crisis in 2001 has manifested itself in Kumanovo, contains a physical separation of both students and administration. Here students at secondary level are attending classes in independent premises. Administration of these schools is also divided along ethnic lines, one for each school, although salaries and other technical matters are dealt with at the "main" school. Technically, students also are achieving the official diploma of the school they are enrolled in. The example of Kumanovo may again serve as an example; ethnic Albanian secondary students follow classes in separate premises but are still recognised as pupils at the "Goce Delcev" gymnasium, a school they left during the armed uprising in 2001. A similar development has materialised in Skopje, where a large number of ethnic Albanian secondary students are enrolled at the "Shef Lush Marku" gymnasium which became a mono-ethnic education facility in October 2002. This school, in some cases sharing some premises

with Macedonian-language schools and in others having separate buildings, used to be multi-ethnic but is now almost entirely catering for ethnic Albanian students.

Combined, all these examples make it tempting to assert that the education sector constitutes one of the major contributors to the de facto separation of Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities. Instead of constituting an adequate tool for reconciliation it reinforces differences and stereotypes. The overwhelming majority of ethnic Albanian children, at least in areas where they comprise a sufficient number, are being taught in separate classes. Even in so-called mixed inter-ethnic schools, joint curricula and extracurricular activities are practically non-existent.

Segregation on ethnic lines is not confined to students at primary and secondary school levels. A similar situation exists for teachers. Even if they are colleagues in the same school and have to share the same facilities, professional co-operation is limited and social inter-action is virtually non-existent. One ethnic Albanian teacher in Skopje explained that;

The situation is a bit awkward. There is no outspoken animosity between teachers and in general inter-ethnic relations are good. However, social inter-action is limited and teachers from the Macedonian community have advertised for their ethnic Albanian colleagues to spend more time in the rooms ascribed to the tuition staff because they seldom were present there.

As mentioned above, in Kumanovo the administration is also divided. The principal of the recently established ethnic Albanian branch of the gymnasium "Goce Delcev" stated that only practical issues, like the handling of salaries and other technicalities are, dealt with at the main administration office of the school. The fact that the school is currently operating with two principals, one for the Macedonian and one for the ethnic Albanian, explains how wide the split has become in terms of practical co-operation. A Macedonian teacher in Skopje explained that relations between tuition staff had become gradually more problematic;

With increasing numbers of ethnic Albanian teachers at the school I have been working in from the 1990s, one had the feeling of being somewhat excluded from normal conversations because Albanians were always talking in their own language, which the rest of us could not understand. Personal friendships were to a certain degree maintained but the atmosphere changed completely.

Education of teachers and national curricula

Education of teachers at all levels of the education sector is monitored and to a large extent provided by the state. In 2004, higher teacher education/training is offered at three pedagogical faculties (pre-school and first to fourth grades), three subject-specific teaching faculties, and two arts academies (fifth to eighth grade and general secondary). Two state universities, "Sv Kiril and Metodij" in Skopje and "Sv Kliment Ohridski" in Bitola, conducted the instruction of prospective teachers until year 2001. One of the main complaints being forwarded by ethnic Albanians in the 1990s was that education in their own language was inadequate, which in turn prevented them from reaching parity with Macedonians. At the time of independence, the Macedonian government opened a Pedagogical Academy with a two-year teacher-training programme in Albanian at Skopje University. In 1995/1996, the Pedagogical Academy was transformed into a Pedagogical Faculty with a four-year study programme intended to train teachers for pre-school and primary school teachers. Education of fifth to eighth grade and secondary school level teachers and appurtenant subjects were on the other hand only given in the

Macedonian language. Despite numerous government promises, neither the academy nor the faculty has been opened to educate ethnic Albanian teachers for fifth to eighth grade and secondary school levels and subjects in their mother-tongue before the recognition of the University of Tetovo in 2004. For other ethnic groups, Roma and ethnic Serbs, no pre-service education is available and members of these communities have to go elsewhere to get proper teacher education. Still there is a shortage of qualified ethnic Albanian teachers able to offer instruction in the Albanian language at secondary school level. This has necessitated short-term employment of unqualified teachers on one-year contracts in order to fill vacant positions. These numbers are on the decline though as qualified teachers are finishing studies at the private South-East European University and the Tetovo University.

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the overall curriculum and content of pre-school, primary and secondary education levels. The Bureau for Development of Education is in charge of the development and assessment of all curricula for all ages and subjects, including a Health Education Curriculum. The bureau also publishes textbooks, implement the objectives of quality at primary and secondary school levels and has the responsibility of improving educational methodology. In a meeting with representatives at the Bureau for Development of Education, it was revealed that the national curriculum, one prepared for all levels except higher education, has tended to be rigid and inflexible. Curricular standards are overwhelming and leave little room for adjusting to changing local needs or pedagogical innovation. Teaching materials and textbooks are primarily fact-based and often a hindrance to develop pupils' critical thinking and learning skills. Moreover, instruction is teacher-centred, which also include lecturing and oral exams conducted by teachers. Some reforms have been introduced in the past years in which active participation of pupils in the education process has been encouraged and focus on critical thinking has been given more attention. So far the most important changes are applied at primary level education but secondary level will follow suit. Regarding contentious inter-ethnic educational subjects, such as history, it was said that a new curriculum was in the bidding. In the future there will be one national history taught in Macedonian schools while members of minorities will have the possibility to learn the history of their own community. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science has not developed a national test to asses the level of learning amongst pupils attending primary and secondary schools in Macedonia. Subsequently, marks are to a large extent decided by teachers and based on impressions during lectures and oral and written tests. Both Ministry of Education and Bureau for Development of Education representatives revealed in meetings that an examination formula is currently being organised in order to enable the setting of marks in written official examinations. Several sources stated that the contemporary system leaves ample room for corruption, as some students would and could pay money to get good marks. Admission into higher education is depending on results obtained in an entrance exam. The quality assessment reform is moreover being developed with the aim to standardise quality assessment and evaluation of education standards. In addition to public schools, private educational institutions for all degrees are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Centralisation and administrative structure

In order to examine recent conflicts related to education issues it is important to look at the structure of the department, which has the responsibility for the functioning of the education sector, namely the Ministry of Education and Science. At present, the education sector in Macedonia, as all other departments and ministries, is highly centralised. The level of centralisation has changed over time but the federal authorities in the years after the Second World War gradually offered more power to local self-government units. The new state was at first highly centralised both politically and economically, with power held firmly by Tito's Communist Party of Yugoslavia and a constitution model close to the one in the Former Soviet Union. In 1953, 1963, and 1974, however, a succession of constitutional reforms created an ever more loosely coordinated union, the locus of power being steadily shifted downward from the federal level to economic enterprises, municipalities, and republic-level apparatuses of the Communist Party. Throughout this complex evolution, the Yugoslav system consisted of three levels of government: the municipalities, the republics, and the federation. The municipalities were direct agents for the collection of most government revenue, and they also provided social services. With the introduction of social self-management in the 1950s, municipalities were awarded self-government functions and its powers and authority constantly increased until the dissolution of the Socialist Federate Republic of Yugoslavia. In the beginning of the 1970s, the Yugoslav Federal Republican authorities carried out a comprehensive economical and political reform. Aiming at increasing industrial output, decision-making procedures in socially owned enterprises were decentralised even further. In this period, municipalities were large and had broad powers, including those in the area of economy and defence.²² Local authority over schools was extensive. School boards had the task of assessing applications and assigning head masters of schools after an assessment of qualified candidates for announced positions.

With independence and with the creation of a new constitution in November 1991, political and administrative power was again transferred to central levels of the state. Simultaneously and evidently, the structure of the Ministry of Education was altered to a centralised one.²³ Essentially, to avoid the confusion and inefficiency pertained to decision making which had characterised the last years of the Yugoslav Federation, a high degree of power was concentrated in government. Although the constitution guarantees the right to local self-government it reduced the competencies of municipalities when compared to the socialist period to such an extent that there is no room for local-government manoeuvre. Amongst others, responsibilities for lower level education were taken over by the state. Currently, education, legislation, management and financing are dealt with at state level. Since the ministry has to deal with all sorts of administrative matters, this leads to an overburdening of the ministry which limits its ability to focus on strategic and/or policy issues. Often the consequence is hastened decision making and sometimes inadequate planning of numerous projects. According to

²² According to the UNDP, the autonomy municipalities exercised in this period was so high that it allowed some of them to enclose themselves within their own borders.

²³ The Ministry of Education was restructured in 2001 by combining the ministries of education and science into one ministry, the Ministry Of Education and Science (MoES).

the law on local self government as laid out in the constitution, local government authorities have the right to improve the conditions in some social fields which are under the responsibility of the central authorities. In the field of education, municipalities can technically give some extra money to kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, which are otherwise administered and financed by the Ministry of Education and its local representatives, in order for the latter to provide teaching aids, organize transport of pupils from remote villages, reconstruct school buildings, and likewise. Revenue available for local authorities is fairly limited; currently their only income derives from taxation of properties, inheritance and gift taxes and taxes on real estate and rights transactions. Thus, funds for local purposes are poor, only two per cent of all public funds. Higher quality revenues such as VAT, personal income taxes and profit taxes are available for central authorities only. Municipal budgets barely cover administrative salaries. The system renders municipalities almost totally dependent on transfers of funds and inhibits any local control over the education system.²⁴

Preparation of school budgets is under the auspices of the ministry of Education. Financing of education institutions is based on the number of pupils enrolled in each school and on the number of pupils attending the school the previous school year. Payment of salaries to teachers, administrative staff and maintenance personnel is accordingly the responsibility of the central authorities. The level of centralisation leads to undemocratic governance of schools. In most schools, major stakeholders are neither consulted, involved, nor informed about government or ministerial decisions. Ideally, schools should be managed by school boards comprising nine members; two representing the state, three the parents of pupils and four the teaching and administrative staff. School boards are elected for four years and their respective stakeholders elect each group, e.g., teachers elect teachers. All the representatives of parents, regardless of ethnic background, complained about the centralised leadership in interviews conducted in Skopje, Kumanovo and Bitola. The leader of the parents' council of ethnic Albanian children in Bitola went as far as claiming that;

The central authorities have no clue what is going on in Bitola. We (ethnic Albanians) did never ask for a separate Albanian-language secondary school class to be opened and were never informed properly about the decision.

From this it can be deduced that the education sector is run completely by the ministry itself, which deals with all matters through their local district offices. Currently, there are 34 such district offices in Macedonia which function as a regional-district level administration. Local ministry representatives have no independent clout to decide on educational policies. They can only be seen as the prolonged arm of the state. In the worst cases, local representatives are not even informed about or consulted on government decisions.

However, the preparation of a new legal framework for decentralisation will also include planned reforms in the spheres of primary and secondary school education. The main objectives of the decentralisation process are to bring government closer to the people and improve the delivery of public services. The new local government

²⁴ The few responsibilities of the municipalities include construction and maintenance of local roads, streets and parks, water supply and street lightning, garbage collection, the administration of markets and graveyards and a certain degree of urban planning.

structures, decided after the re-drawing of municipality boundaries, are meant to have the power to make decisions in areas such as culture, primary and secondary education, health care and local policing. According to newly proposed amendments of the Law on Education, management and responsibility for secondary schools will be based on a two-tier system. While all primary schools will be under the responsibility of municipal authority, secondary schools will be divided between municipalities and the state. Only a few secondary schools, the ones that require a high degree of specialised tuition staff and equipment such as e.g., medicine or ballet, will remain state schools.

Nepotism and politicisation of the education sector

In addition to the high level of centralisation, the general impression is the prevalence of a high degree of political nepotism in the current public administrative system in Macedonia. Political or personal connections are to a large extent imperative to obtain jobs in public administration, even at relatively low administrative and professional levels. With every change in government there is no doubt that the upper levels of the administrative structure are reshuffled. In that respect, there is little difference between the individual ministries and this also strongly applies to the Ministry of Education. According to the current legislation, the government, in the case of the Ministry of Education, takes decisions on all appointments and dismissals following advice from the Bureau for Development of Education and school boards. Practically, however, school boards have no influence and most decisions are made directly by the minister him/herself or political party representatives. This practice implies that most often the selection of school directors is extremely politicised with the result that the large majority of rectors of schools belong to the party in power or at least sympathising with it. There are no ethnic imbalances adhered to the system. Both Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political parties after seizing government power tend to uphold it whilst in power. All political parties, regardless of ethnic belonging, would automatically take advantage of being in power and appoint their own people to important positions within the education sector. At lower levels of the system, nepotism is also prevailing. School staff is politically influenced and is often replaced with following changes in school leadership. Even though the Laws on Primary and Secondary Education state that public schools should be free of any kind of political and religious activity this is simply not the case. On the one hand, the administrative staff and teachers become political tools working for incumbent governments; on the other, they constitute an important factor when and where conflicts emerge. Descriptive in this respect is the fact that teachers often get involved in controversial issues and actively partake in demonstrations, protests and vehement disputes. One ethnic Albanian teacher from Skopje pronounced in an interview that;

I am proud to have been part of the transfer of ethnic Albanian students to the secondary school of economics "Arseni Jovkov" in Cair. We (ethnic Albanians) have the same rights as Macedonians as regards education facilities and premises, and I was a part of the struggle to get the transfer accomplished.

As can be read below, Macedonian teachers have also been, and still are, actively involved in numerous protests or demonstrations including those in Bitola, Kumanovo and Skopje.

Education Issues: A Historical Background

Although education issues and related conflicts have emerged after the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001, similar events have surfaced frequently on the political scene for several decades. This chapter will focus on education issues separately and place recent events in a historical context. Education as a political phenomenon has steadily borne ethnic connotations. Nationally, the education system in Macedonia is, as described above, multilingual. In this respect, both the socialist and post-independence authorities have provided instruction in the mother-tongue of most minorities.

Multi-lingual education sector

The education system induced after independence lent much to the heritage of Yugoslavia. Macedonian schools have for decades provided tuition in four different languages: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian. The system of multi-lingual education was established with the creation of the Yugoslav Republic. As noted, ethnic Albanians in the Yugoslav Federation were recognised as a nationality, which basically implied minority status with extended educational and cultural rights. Ethnic Albanian children in Macedonia were consequently given instruction in their mother-tongue also during the communist period. By 1951, there were over 200 Albanian-language schools in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia employing 600 teachers and catering for more than 26,000 pupils. The number of Albanian schools was later increased piecemeal. In 1973, the number of schools were 248 employing 2,150 teachers and catering for over 60,000 pupils. In 1981, the number had reached 287 primary schools employing about 3,000 teachers with over 74,000 pupils. The same year 8,200 secondary school students followed classes in the Albanian language.²⁵ In the 1980s, Macedonian authorities became more repressive with respect to Albanian nationalism which also included the fields of education and language. At the beginning of the decade, somewhat reflecting the increasingly harsh Serbian government measures employed in Kosovo, Macedonian authorities began to come down hard on more radical Albanian political expressions and the use of distinctive Albanian symbols. Regarding primary and secondary education, what could be perceived as a system of assimilation of all minorities was induced in the mid-1980s. Stemming from a growing fear of Albanian nationalism that surfaced with the troubles in Kosovo, combined with increasing awareness among the largest minority community, a campaign against such tendencies was conducted. One of the measures applied was the adoption of a law on secondary education stipulating that classes with less than 30 pupils enrolled for tuition in the Albanian language, would not be opened. The law was even more strictly enforced and Albanian-language schools with insufficient intake of students were closed, compelling ethnic Albanians to attend mixed classes with the instruction in Macedonian. Moreover, numerous ethnic Albanian teachers who refused to accept the new curriculum, in which the use of the Albanian language was curtailed, were removed from their position.²⁶ Resentment to the new system of increased compulsory tuition in Macedonian was so strong that numerous

²⁵ Poulton "Who are the Macedonians" 2000

²⁶ Ibid.

ethnic Albanian students boycotted classes. In 1988, the situation boiled over with demonstrations held by young ethnic Albanians in Kumanovo and Gostivar resulting in the detainment of 128 ethnic Albanians and the imprisonment of some of the organisers. According to Vickers and Pettifer, the number of ethnic Albanian teachers employed by the state sank substantially after independence. By the summer of 1994, the number of Albanian-language classes had also dropped, only 400 teachers remained, compared to nearly 2,500 in the autumn of 1991.²⁷ The number of ethnic Albanian teachers and pupils at both primary and secondary school levels has increased substantially in the later years. In the academic year 2002/2003, the number of ethnic Albanian teachers was 836 at secondary school level, 17,135 students were enrolled and 23 schools provided instruction in the Albanian language. The total number of ethnic Albanian pupils, primary and secondary education combined, reached 92,678.²⁸ In addition to the abovementioned developments in lower level education the struggle for education and language rights emerged on the political scene in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. After Macedonia's independence in 1991, ethnic Albanians made two demands; reinstating Albanian-language instruction at the two-year Pedagogical Academy, and upgrading the academy to a four-year Pedagogical Faculty.²⁹ The academy had prepared teachers for first to fourth grade classrooms only, whereas the faculty would train teachers for fifth to eighth grade subjects. Ethnic Albanian political leaders considered educational reform key to achieving parity with the country's Macedonians, whom the ethnic Albanians considered to be privileged in all aspects, including the quality of their education. Education of fifth to eighth grade and the education of secondary school level teachers were only given in the Macedonian language. Ethnic Albanian students began boycotting courses offered in Macedonian only. In early 1997, the government finally passed a law permitting the Pedagogical Faculty to teach all the courses for ethnic Albanian students in the Albanian language. This, however, led to protests by ethnic Macedonian students.

The sensitive issue of higher education

Although this report is written to describe how the question of education on secondary level turn into a field of political controversy, one of the most divisive issues in the new republic was the one concerning higher education in the Albanian language. The closing down of the Albanian-language university in Pristina, Kosovo, in 1992 and the sealing off of borders with the Federal Yugoslav Republic of Serbia and Montenegro during the UN imposed sanctions, restricted substantially ethnic Albanian students from going to a higher education institution providing lectures in their mother tongue. With augmenting nationalistic sentiments among both Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in the time span after independence in 1991, debates over primary and secondary education also became more heated. Without implying that nationalistic parties exacerbated the debates

²⁷ Vickers & Pettifer "Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan identity" 1999

²⁸ Ministry of Education "National report for development of education" 2004

²⁹ During the Yugoslav period, most ethnic Albanian students from Macedonia attended Pristina University. In the independent republic the government provided higher education in Albanian for teacher training programmes only. The trigger of the conflict over higher education was the closure of Albanian-language courses in Pristina in 1991, which resulted in a shortage of qualified ethnic Albanian teachers.

deliberately, although use of language and rhetoric certainly indicates so, language issues and appurtenant education issues have been a continuing focus of controversy, especially the establishment of a genuine institution for higher education in the Albanian language. In December 1994, ethnic Albanian intellectuals headed by former Pristina University professor Fadil Sulejmani founded the so-called illegal university in Tetovo. In the following year, two days after the opening, the SDSM led government of Branko Crvenkovski, currently president of Macedonia, moved to close down the unrecognised university. The attempt led to massive and violent demonstrations. One ethnic Albanian demonstrator was killed and a large number of others wounded. In 1997, Macedonian police forces, in an attempt to forcibly remove the hoisted Albanian national flag on the municipal buildings in Tetovo and Gostivar, met fierce opposition. The crackdown initiated violent riots. At least three young ethnic Albanians were killed and 40 people suffered serious gunshot wounds in the latter town. In Tetovo, demonstrations involved ethnic Albanian students at the illegal university in the suburb of Mala Recica which had been allowed to operate by the state authorities, although not officially recognised. Perhaps not resulting directly from the latest demonstrations as such, concessions were sooner granted to calm down the atmosphere and appease the ethnic Albanians. Amongst others, an Albanian-language section was added to the newly established pedagogical faculty at the university in Skopje after years of partial closure of the Academy for Education for ethnic minorities, and four years training of ethnic Albanian teachers in their mother tongue was commenced. This decision incited thousands of Macedonian university and secondary school students to arrange massive protests in the streets of Skopje. However, the status of the university in Tetovo continued to constitute one of the most divisive political issues in Macedonia and it has also remained the symbol of ethnic Albanians' struggle for their rights until its official recognition in January 2004. With the legalisation the government reached an important political compromise on the sensitive issue, which could and should alleviate inter-ethnic mistrust. The compromise was reached although the establishment of a third state university was not stipulated in the Ohrid Frame Agreement and has probably strengthened the coalition as DUI now can be seen as the achiever of one of the main ethnic Albanian goals. However, for SDSM and its leadership, the decision has added to declining standings in opinion polls, primarily because a considerable number of Macedonians opposed the whole idea in the first place.

New government – recurring conflicts

After the last parliamentary elections in 2002, several events depict an increase in tension and suspicion between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. This development can be noticed with regard to numerous demonstrations organised on a wide variety of reasons that are outside the scope of this report to cover. Irrespectively, politics in Macedonia are mostly ethnically centred. First and foremost, the government has been devoted to re-establish law and order all over the territory of Macedonia ensuing as a result of the armed conflict. However, education issues also constituted a sensitive topic of concern. While legalisation of the so-called illegal university in Tetovo was debated among top-level politicians, at least from spring 2003, incidents and protests with racist connotations at the reopening of schools illustrated a worrying politicisation of the education issue. Politicisation of these issues is one thing; there is also a danger that the separation along ethnic lines should continue to widen. Over-politicising of the

education issue which has taken place in several areas of the country may well put at risk progress in a key area for the future of the country.

The new government, inaugurated in November 2002, and especially the Ministry of Education, from the outset had to deal with events outside its control. However, several decisions made by the government itself, due to bad planning and lack of communication with major stakeholders have incited fierce opposition at grassroots level. In Skopje, Kumanovo and Bitola, as well as in Tetovo and Struga, students at primary, secondary and tertiary level, parents and parents' councils, teachers and common citizens, have either arranged demonstrations or participated in them to express disapproval with and opposition to decisions made by, primarily, the Ministry of Education and Science. The incumbent government coalition, consisting of the predominantly Macedonian political parties, SDSM and LDP, and the predominantly ethnic Albanian NLA, offspring DUI, is committed to and show resolve in implementing all sides of the General Framework Agreement of 2001. Winning the parliamentary elections in 2002, by what was mostly understood as a landslide, their mandate is secured through an overwhelming majority in parliament.³⁰ Several laws have been amended and by summer 2004 one of the most important laws, the one pertaining to the whole decentralisation process; the new territorial division of municipalities, was debated in the assembly. The debate over the new territorial division has put considerable strains on government co-operation. A referendum on the proposal will be held in November 2004 after a petition obtained more than the required 150,000 signatures.

Education related conflicts emerged soon after the parliamentary elections held in September 2002. First, the Secondary School Student Union of Macedonia, SUM, arranged several demonstrations in Skopje in October 2002. Alexander Nikolovski, the former president of the union, pronounced in a meeting in Skopje in March 2004, that the intention of the first arrangement was to draw attention to the Semsevo school name issue.³¹ In November, the same secondary school union managed to mobilise several thousand students in massive protests to the killing of a Macedonian secondary school student in Tetovo. In the protest, which degenerated into a demonstration with anti-Albanian connotations, Macedonians demonstrators shouted nationalistic and racist slogans. At the time of dissolution of the protest, some innocent bystanders were beaten up, amongst others a Macedonian muslim who were apparently mistaken for being ethnic Albanian. Possibly the most serious incident occurring in Macedonia after the 2001 crisis, was the Kumanovo bomb attack on 25 December 2002. Placed in a garbage

³⁰ Frictions within the government have materialised and its existence was jeopardised by heavy-handed operations carried out by security forces on a few occasions against ethnic Albanian criminals and suspected terrorists in the Tetovo and Kumanovo regions.

³¹ Semsevo is a village located close to Tetovo in the municipality Jegunovce. The name of the primary school, catering for both Macedonian and ethnic Albanian children was changed in September 2002 without the consent of Macedonians residing in the municipality. Ethnic Albanians in the community and the principal of the school ignored normal procedures and changed the name of the village's school of a Macedonian hero to a local Albanian one and erected a statue of him outside the school building. Macedonians, angered by this move decided to take their children out of the school and transfer them to one in Jegunovce village. Attempts by the government and the international community to overcome the deadlock have since been futile and Macedonian school children attend classes in the abovementioned Macedonian primary school.

bin in the centre of the city the explosion killed an innocent bystander and slightly injured another. However, the incident could have had a far more tragic outcome as the bin was placed close to one of the high schools and the bomb went off just minutes before the school bell rang at the end of the first shift. The exact motivation behind planting the bomb is still a mystery as no-one has taken the responsibility for planting the bomb at the location. A culprit of the crime has never been found. However, since the attack took place in the vicinity of a predominantly Macedonian school, rumours soon surfaced about ethnic Albanian extremist involvement. In 2003, disputes over secondary level education emerged on the scene in Skopje, Kumanovo and Bitola. A more meticulous description of these events will be given in the chapter regarding the field research below. However, sustained tension between adolescents from the two major ethnicities is also visible in other fields of every day life. During the year 2003, numerous physical fights between adolescents in Skopje, on buses, bus stations and in the vicinity of schools, forced the authorities to command the police to take special measures to prevent such incidents to spiral out of control. The violent brawls show that the situation is still fragile. Just a small ignition can have severe consequences. Several examples show that this development has become more widespread. In the ethnically mixed city of Struga, in the south-western parts of the country, Macedonian and ethnic Albanian secondary level students got involved in physical fights that lasted for two days before the police took preventive measures to end them. In Tetovo a young Macedonian secondary school pupil was shot dead by ethnic Albanians while playing basketball in a school playground in fall 2002. The tragic incident incited demonstrations by thousands of Macedonian pupils which has been described above.³²

One has to bear in mind that school disputes are not confined to Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. In spring 2003, the parents of ethnic Turk pupils at the primary school in Centar Supa, one municipality close to Debar in the western part of Macedonia, held their children back from attending classes at the local primary school in a protest to the appointment of an ethnic Albanian principal. Ethnic Turks, as well as their political representatives, claimed the appointment touched on two important issues. First it was stated that the Ohrid Framework Agreement should be considered an accord dealing with the concerns of all minorities in the country, not solely the ethnic Albanian. It was argued that the manner the agreement currently is implemented only favours the Albanian community. Comprising a majority in the mentioned municipality, ethnic Turk inhabitants claimed, with the support of the provisions of the general agreement, that they were entitled to have the principal at the local school selected from their own nationality. Second, ethnic Turks are increasingly worried about being exposed to an attempt of assimilation with ethnic Albanians. The examples above show that education issues have constituted a considerable ground for conflict over a long period of time. Some of the contested issues have been solved at government level, e.g. the Tetovo University, while others remain without a satisfactory solution.

³² Apparently the killing was the grotesque response to an incident involving the police and an ethnic Albanian the day before. Nonetheless, it shows the level of tension that exists between the two major ethnic groups and how easy violence is being utilised.

The Field Research

This chapter will primarily deal with recent events concerning secondary school related conflicts. Focus will be centred on developments emerging after the 2001 armed crisis and especially on problems occurring in 2003. The current situation will be described to give an indication of how conflicts related to secondary school education have become highly politicised as different professional and social groups have mobilised to express their opinion on education issues.

Skopje

Skopje is the capital of Macedonia and by far the largest city. According to the 2002 census results, 467,257 registered inhabitants currently reside within its administrative boundaries. The ethnic breakdown is as follows; Macedonians 71 per cent, ethnic Albanians 15 per cent, ethnic Turks 2 per cent, Roma 5 per cent, Vlachs 0.6 per cent, ethnic Serbs 3 per cent, ethnic Bosniacs 1 per cent, and others 2 per cent.³³ Being the capital, Skopje is the political, administrative, economic and cultural centre of the country. Characteristic for Skopje is the multitude of historical sites, the ethnic diversity, the numerous religious monuments and buildings in close vicinity of each other. Here one can find the old Bazaar dating back to Ottoman reign, remnants of Roman construction and influence, large old Orthodox churches and numerous mosques which so clearly depict the long tradition of inter-ethnic cohabitation. In anticipation of the new territorial division and redrawing of the map of Skopje, the city is currently divided into seven administrative districts or municipalities which they are often referred to.³⁴ The ethnic composition varies from district to district, all of them having a mixed population, although some being more heterogeneous than others. The municipalities north of the Vardar river and in the centre of the city, Cair, Suto Orizari, Gazi Baba and Centar, are especially characterised by their ethnic diversity. The ethnic diversity in the four districts, except Suto Orizari, is slowly coming under threat.³⁵ Several indications point to the establishment of the river Vardar as a de facto boundary between the two largest ethnic communities because of migration trends. Although there has been a mixed population north of the river, ethnic Albanian migration really picked up in the beginning of the 1990s when the numerous ethnic Albanian families moved from mountainous villages and also Kosovo. Recently, and especially after the crisis of 2001, demographic developments show that Macedonian families are selling their property in Cair, Centar and Gazi Baba and move to predominantly Macedonian districts south of the river. Mostly ethnic Albanians buy the offered properties. Several reasons are given to explain this trend of migration. Some claim to be threatened to move or feel insecure in the new environment, while others prefer to reside in a community where they are

³³ The numbers are rounded off.

³⁴ In an agreement reached between the ruling parties SDSM/LDP and DUI in summer 2004, it is stipulated that Skopje will consist of nine administrative units after decentralisation has been completed. Interestingly, inclusion of two bordering municipalities, Saraj and Kondovo, will be included in the new administrative unit.

³⁵ Around 80 per cent of the population in Suto Orizari are of Roma origin.

more socially comfortable. In one of these administrative districts, namely Cair, is the secondary school “Arseni Jovkov” located, which was subject to intense controversies in September/October 2003. Cair can only be described as a genuine multi-ethnic community inhabited by Macedonians (48.6 per cent), ethnic Albanians (38.4 per cent), ethnic Serbs, ethnic Turks, Roma and ethnic Bosniacs. The municipality stretches from the centre of the city until the border of Kosovo to the north.

During the armed insurgence in 2001, the fighting did not reach the urban parts of the administrative districts in Skopje. However, at the very outskirts of the city, in the mountainous area, called Skopska Crna Gora, and in bordering municipalities, clashes between the security forces and ethnic Albanian rebels occasionally took place. In the summer and for a short but critical period of time, villages in close vicinity of the capital, Saraj and Aracinovo, were occupied by NLA and Macedonian inhabitants were forced to flee. Almost simultaneously, the NLA threatened to attack the parliament, government buildings as well as the international airport situated only kilometres away from Aracinovo. This created a high sensation of fear among ethnic Albanians in Skopje and surrounding areas, leading to the exodus of thousands of refugees to Kosovo. These developments notwithstanding, the tense atmosphere lasted only for a few weeks; the situation in the urban districts of the city remained calm. One female Macedonian high school student who had grown up in the municipality of Butel, neighbouring Cair, explained that the situation in the centre of Skopje changed little on the surface during the period when the armed conflict had reached the outskirts of the city. She said;

No special measures by state or local authorities were taken to prevent possible incidents that could have occurred between individual representatives or groups of different ethnic communities.

Police and military checkpoints were erected around the city to control the commuting of people from the crisis area. Similar to the situation in Lipkovo, only a few Macedonian inhabitants from Aracinovo have returned to their homes. In the aftermath of the crisis the situation has remained calm and unproblematic in the mixed neighbourhoods, Cair and Butel. Both Macedonian and ethnic Albanian adolescents from these districts revealed that inter-ethnic relations are relatively good as both sides want to keep the calm.

Tensions surrounding the “Arseni Jovkov” School of Economics commenced when the Ministry of Education and Science issued a decree stating that seven Albanian-language classes were to be transferred to the school in the beginning of September 2003. Those classes belonged under the “Arseni Jovkov” administration but had been catered for in different premises in another part of the city, called Avtokomanda. The school is called “8 September” and here ethnic Albanian students share facilities with Macedonian pupils. The original plan of desegregation was to execute the transfer in two rounds of which four classes should be in the first one. Lack of space at the main “Arseni Jovkov” school in Cair prevented transmission of all four school years, so only first and second year classes were part of the Ministry of Education and Science proposal. The transfer soon met fierce opposition. Macedonian students and parents rallied against it in front of the entrance and impeded the ethnic Albanian students trying to enter the school. The main argument expressed was the deterioration of the quality of the school resulting

from reduced space for the students.³⁶ Another argument was security. Macedonians feared the transfer would entail inter-ethnic violence, apparent in other parts of Skopje, to find outlets at the school. For a short while the decision was put on hold in order to decrease any tension. In this period of impasse around 200 ethnic organised protest marches from the “8 September” school to Cair on 17 and 18 September. In the demonstrations, the young ethnic Albanians chanted slogans such as “UCK”, “UCK”.³⁷ Simultaneously, Macedonian students, accompanied by pupils from other secondary schools in Skopje, arranged several demonstrations in the centre of the city; in front of the parliament, the government and on the streets. The ultimate demand was for the Minister of Education to withdraw his decision to go on with the transfer. However, strong nationalistic and racist expressions were uttered and on the last day of protesting two innocent bystanders were attacked by radical elements among the protesters. After a short postponement the first four Albanian-language classes were nonetheless transferred to “Arseni Jovkov”. The transfer was not unproblematic and due to administrative confusion over distribution of class rooms, Macedonian and ethnic Albanian pupils, with alleged involvement of their teachers, got into a brawl later to be investigated by the police. The fight led to the replacement of the school’s principal and his ethnic Albanian deputy. In March 2004, the last ethnic Albanian classes were moved to “Arseni Jovkov”, this time without meeting any resistance.

Arguments against the move of Albanian-language classes from the school in Avtokomanda to Cair did not stop at lack of space and security. On-going demographic changes and speculations over the new municipal boundaries also formed part of the protests. One of the persons deeply involved in the dispute, the former head of the coordinative body at the school Zorica Srbinska, claimed in an interview that;

The transfer of the ethnic Albanian classes formed part of a plan to create a mono-ethnic area north of the Vardar river. Foreseen decentralisation reforms would include the augmentation of administrative districts to nine. Two predominantly ethnic Albanian municipalities would be added, making the Albanian language official in Skopje. The transfer is just the first step in establishing an Albanian-language school in Cair.

Ethnic Albanians on their hand argued security as the main motivation for the transfer to “Arseni Jovkov”. Other aspects were the right to equal access to proper education facilities and proximity to the same facilities. Ethnic Albanian secondary level students belonging to the “Arseni Jovkov” Secondary School of Economics did not have, until fall 2003, the opportunity to have instruction in their own language in school premises in Cair. In a meeting with one ethnic Albanian student at the school it was revealed that security was an issue, but most important for him was to be spared the travelling distance to the school in Avtokomanda. He said;

I have not experienced any problems within the premises of the mixed school in Avtokomanda. Some fights have taken place in buses, but personally, I have not witnessed any. I think it is a great improvement just to save time going to and fro school every day in the neighbourhood I live, which is Cair.

³⁶ In order to make space for the new classes, special cabinets at the “Arseni Jovkov” had to be dismantled. Macedonian parents and students claimed that this would affect the quality of the school.

³⁷ UCK is the Albanian language abbreviation for NLA (National Liberation Army).

Kumanovo

Kumanovo is, according to the latest census results, the second biggest city in Macedonia. It is situated to the north of the country close to the borders with Serbia and Kosovo. As a multi-ethnic city with residents of Macedonian, Albanian, Serb, Turkish, Vlah and Roma origin, Kumanovo represents near to a reflection of the republic's ethnic composition. According to the 2002 census, Macedonians comprise around 60 per cent of the population, ethnic Albanians 26 per cent, Roma 4 per cent and the last big community, the ethnic Serbs 9 per cent. Geographically, Kumanovo is located close to the main north-south route between Belgrade and Thessaloniki as well as the main northern road to Sofia in Bulgaria. Inter-ethnic relations have for some time been on the decline and already before the crisis in 2001 the situation was marked by tension, intolerance and mistrust. As commented by Miriana Jancevska, social interaction between Macedonians and ethnic Serbs on one side and ethnic Albanians on the other "have continued to degenerate into a state of constant animosity, an absence of communication, a division of the groups into their respective separate worlds and a lack of unifying projects".³⁸ One Macedonian girl who grew up in the centre of town explained that she during her childhood and formative years never had had any ethnic Albanian acquaintances. Actually, she did not get to know anyone from the other ethnic group before she started working for an international organisation after starting her studies at the university.

In 2001 heavy fighting took place between Macedonian security forces and NLA insurgents in bordering municipality Lipkovo, just a few kilometres from the centre of Kumanovo. The local authorities in the city established an inter-ethnic council to forestall potential inter-ethnic incidents from taking place and to alleviate the tension. However, inter-ethnic relations were put under severe strain during the fighting. In summer 2001, the NLA cut off the water supply for two months by closing the valves to the Lipkovo dam which seriously affected the civilian population. Moreover, numerous ethnic Albanians had relatives trapped in houses during the shelling of villages in the rebel area and some lost their relatives in the same bombardment by the state security forces. On the Macedonian side, several families have members or acquaintances who were forced out of the villages in Lipkovo and later became IDPs in either collective centres or in private accommodations. Police and military check points were erected on the roads leading from the neighbouring municipality to Kumanovo, and commuters, especially ethnic Albanians, were frequently inspected by the security forces. It currently looks as if conflict lines were strengthened in the predominantly ethnic Albanian inhabited Lipkovo municipality as a consequence of the armed fighting that took place. The divide has widened and has become more or less cemented. Socially, it is less acceptable to have friends from the "other" side than was the case before the crisis. An ethnic Albanian student in his early twenties said that he would not dare to socialise with Macedonians, mainly because he feared the reaction from his own friends and kin. Professional inter-ethnic relations are not met with opposition, but personal relationships are much more difficult to maintain.

³⁸ Jancevska: "Bilingualism in a Kumanovo kindergarten", 2001.

In an interview conducted with three Macedonian high school students from Kumanovo it was stated that;

We do not have any Albanian friends and there is no socialising with them either. The first time we made real acquaintances with Albanians was when we became members of a local NGO.

Ethnic Albanian adolescents confirmed this impression and added another dimension to the talk. Two students at a secondary school said;

Kumanovo has become increasingly divided after the 2001 crisis. Although the situation is improving gradually, it is still unsafe for us to go to predominantly Macedonian areas in town. There we risk at least verbal humiliation and even to be beaten up.

Before the crisis in 2001, the four secondary learning institutions in Kumanovo were multi-ethnic. Although not multi-ethnic in the broad sense, but pupils were catered for under the same roof. Macedonian and ethnic Albanian pupils did not attend the same classes and there was not a single activity in which children of opposite ethnic backgrounds could interact. Similar to the organisation of schools in the rest of the country, secondary school pupils had instruction in shifts. In September, at the beginning of the first term of the academic year 2001/2002, ethnic Albanian students from all the secondary schools in Kumanovo were taken out of the mixed schools and transferred to three other locations, two primary schools catering for ethnic Albanian pupils in the centre of Kumanovo and one in the municipality of Lipkovo. Allegedly, the parents of ethnic Albanian students had made the decision, and obtained the approval of the Ministry of Education and local authorities, arguing that the security of their children had become threatened. Tensions had been on the rise for some time before the actual transfer. In spring, before the end of the previous school year, an ethnic Albanian teacher at the “Goce Delcev” general secondary school had been beaten up just as the situation became heated amid the conflict with the NLA. Frequently, Macedonian and ethnic Albanian students were involved in violent clashes outside school premises and on the way to and from schools. Both Macedonian and ethnic Albanian interviewees believed that the physical fights did not take place between students themselves but was initiated by thugs looking for an opportunity to provoke and worsen the already tense atmosphere.³⁹ The sense of fear and intimidation led to a complete separation of teaching, an arrangement that was kept until spring 2003. An attempt to reverse the situation was met with fierce opposition from both Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. When rumours started circulating in March 2003 about transferring ethnic Albanian from the Technical School, the Gymnasium and the School of Economics, Macedonian students organised a protest in front of the school. On a few occasions they decided to boycott classes. Simultaneously, Macedonian parents expressed strong aversion to the proposal and insisted ethnic Albanian pupils to be transferred back to their school of origin. Any other solution was not acceptable. In May 2003, Macedonian students at one of the secondary schools blocked the entrance of the building and shouted Macedonian slogans when a large group of ethnic Albanian students tried to enter. The ethnic Albanian students had to give up entering due to security reasons. The following days, several hundred ethnic Albanians, students, parents and local residents established roadblocks on the main entrance to the Skopje highway and arranged a protest march through town. 13 ethnic Albanians, amongst them several teachers, soon initiated a hunger strike to draw

³⁹ Interviews with Macedonian and ethnic Albanian students, March 2004.

attention to what they perceived as Macedonian unwillingness to find a sustainable and reasonable solution. However, no solution could be found and at the beginning of the school year 2003/2004, the ethnic Albanian students had been transferred from the mentioned primary schools to one abandoned state building which was taken over by the Ministry of Education and Science and the “Labour University” in town.

Opposition to the transfer of ethnic Albanian students came from inhabitants, parents and students, but mostly from residents in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood in Kumanovo. Macedonians stated that they felt threatened by potential ethnic Albanian domination and that the transfer of ethnic Albanian students was part of a hidden agenda employed to pressurise the Macedonians to move out. When rumours surfaced early 2003 that the Ministry of Education and Science had made a decision in which secondary school students should be transferred to the Technical School and an adjoining primary school, the response was negative. This school is located in a mixed area of town and has been subject to the largest disputes. Confusion over the number of ethnic Albanian students prevailed but it was claimed that all of them were to be transferred to the same school. It was also argued that a transfer of that many ethnic Albanians would alter the ethnic composition in the school, which in turn would put Macedonian children in jeopardy. Macedonians were willing to accept a transfer, however, only if the transfer led to the re-introduction of ethnic Albanian students in their schools of origin. In that way, Macedonians would constitute the majority in all schools. Typical for the situation in Kumanovo was also the lack of transparency that the Ministry of Education and Science showed in proposing the transfer of ethnic Albanian high-school students back to their original school. The head of the parents’ council of Macedonian secondary school students, Jagoda Gligorovska, said:

There was a total lack of communication between the Ministry of Education and Science and ourselves. Moreover, there was no information given on the decision. Regarding co-operation and communication between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian parents it was in the beginning non-existent.

On the opposite side of the conflict, ethnic Albanians have impeded a solution to be found. They have continued to argue that a transfer of students back to their schools of origin could not take place due to security and fear. Two of the four secondary schools in Kumanovo are located in predominantly Macedonian districts of town. Ethnic Albanians claimed that a transfer would put their children at risk as had happened in 2001. The education environment in the primary schools had become intolerable but only a transfer to the “Technical” school in the mixed area or the construction of a new Albanian-language school was acceptable. When the Ministry of Education and Science offered two buildings in predominantly ethnic Albanian areas as a temporary solution, the offer was grabbed happily. At present, ethnic Albanian students are still instructed in these badly conditioned facilities. Segregation is complete and both sides seem satisfied with the solution.

Bitola

Bitola (or Bitolj as it is called in Serbian, Monastir in the Turk language) also has a particular ethnic composition. Situated in the southwestern part of the country, the city is historically important to Macedonians. Visible remnants of the old Macedonian city, Heraclea Lyncestis, and the roman trade route, Via Egnatia, just outside the city centre

makes evident the city's historic importance and ancient position as a trading point between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. From the 14th century on, Bitola was long time one of the military and administrative centres in the Ottoman Empire while at the same time development of extensive trade of goods from Greece, Albania and surrounding areas took place. In the first Balkan war, one of the major battles took place in the vicinity of the then small town. After three days of fighting, the Turks capitulated on 18 November 1912 marking the end of Ottoman rule in Macedonia.⁴⁰ The importance of Bitola as a regional and economic centre in this part of the country is a position the city has retained. Although the industrial sector has experienced the same difficulties as the rest of the country, some foreign investment, especially Greek, are directed into the area's textile and agricultural industry. In addition to the administrative and military importance, Bitola also emerged as an educational centre during Ottoman occupation. Currently in Bitola, one would find the second state university in Macedonia "St Kliment Ohridski", which was founded in 1979⁴¹. The university has also established separate faculties in the neighbouring towns Prilep and Ohrid. Regarding secondary school education there are seven secondary schools in the city; one general (gymnasium), one mixed general and special and five special secondary schools in the city. Historically, the city and the surrounding area used to have a large ethnic Albanian and ethnic Turk population. However, between 1953 and 1966 a large wave of emigration in which ethnic Turks in the whole of the Yugoslav federation were moving to Turkey led to diminish numbers also in this part of the Balkans. Estimations from Yugoslavia's statistical yearbook state that 80,000 ethnic Turks left Yugoslavia in the mentioned period. Many of these were probably also ethnic Albanians and Muslim Macedonians declaring themselves as Turks to escape from communist Yugoslavia.⁴² According to the 2002 census, out of the total population of 86,408, 77,470 are Macedonians, 2,522 ethnic Albanians while the remaining ethnicities, Serbs, Turks, Roma and Bosniacs constitute 7.4 per cent of the population. Bitola and the surrounding district are often considered to be one of the strongholds of Macedonian national sentiment. The two main Macedonian parties, SDSM and VMRO-DMPNE, share electoral support in Bitola. In the presidential elections of 2004, the candidates of the parties received almost the same number of votes. Bitola did not experience any real fighting during the insurgence in 2001. However, probably the most serious expressions of anti-Albanian sentiment during the armed conflict found its outlets in this city. On 1 and 2 May 2001, and again on 6 June, rioting by Macedonians resulted in the entire Albanian population of some 10,000 leaving the city and the surrounding Lake Prespa region. Between 40 and 50 properties held by ethnic Albanians were destroyed during the first round of disturbances, incited by the death of eight Macedonian soldiers, of whom four were from Bitola, in an ambush conducted by the NLA. When the riots were repeated on 6 June, the immediate cause was allegedly the killing of five policemen, three of them from Bitola, by insurgents of the NLA the day before. Homes

⁴⁰ Glenny "The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers" 1999.

⁴¹ With the recognition of the illegal university in Tetovo in January 2004 Macedonia currently has three higher education state institutions. Additionally one would find the South East European or "van der Stoel" university, financed by private and international donations.

⁴² Poulton "Who are the Macedonians" 2000. It has to be mentioned that estimations on migration trends from Bitola are not available but several sources claimed the number was considerable.

of ethnic Albanians and about 100 stores and coffee shops owned by people from the same community were again subject to arson and looting. The ethnic Albanian commercial district thus received severe damages that are still visible in the centre of the town. One of the mosques was also vandalised during the riots in which enraged Macedonians shouted slogans such as: “Death to the Albanians”, “Bitola for Macedonians” and “Albanians go to Albania”. One Macedonian interlocutor explained that inter-ethnic relations between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians at the time of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement were at an all time low. He said;

The level of mistrust between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians had reached its bottom level. Moreover, the majority of Macedonians share the opinion that their politicians had sold them out. The agreement did not represent anything but a capitulation to terrorists and war criminals.

According to a journalist from the city, Mr Bobi Siljanovski, the situation has later improved considerably. Most of the ethnic Albanians who decided to leave the area during the time of riots have returned. Shops have been re-opened and children have restarted following classes in the schools they originally belonged to. From the ethnic Albanian point of view, the situation has not returned completely back to normal. One representative of the parents’ council explained that he still chose to accompany his daughter to school because he was afraid of her being exposed to intimidation and danger. He also said that, although there was no direct request from ethnic Albanians to have a secondary class opened in Bitola;

Such a measure would be preferable in order to avoid discrimination that was taking place daily in schools where Albanian pupils are being taught by Macedonian teachers. Such discrimination could vary from pure negligence to outspoken harassment of Albanian children.

Local Macedonian resistance to the establishment of an Albanian-language class at one of the city’s secondary schools is not a novel feature. In May 2000, several thousands of teachers, students and parents took to the streets to express discontent with the then ruling VMRO-DPMNE/LP and DPA government plans to open a class only for ethnic Albanian pupils at the “Josip Broz Tito” gymnasium in the centre of town. Demonstrators claimed that the rationale behind opening such a class was based on flawed premises since there was no demand for starting Albanian-language instruction for secondary level students in the city. Then, as in fall 2003, the argument used was that since ethnic Albanians only comprise three per cent of the population, the requirement of a presence of at least 24 pupils in a single class before tuition in the mother-tongue can be provided, could not be met. Demonstrators also argued that in order to obtain the number of students required by the law, ethnic Albanian children from the neighbouring areas, Kicevo and Gostivar, had to begin their education at the prospective school. The traditional small number of ethnic Albanian students that were qualified for and applied to gymnasiums in Bitola was used as a supportive argument.⁴³ Thus, the proposal was perceived as a political game of the then incumbent government. The opposition proved to be so fierce that the cabinet decided to abandon the proposition. In the summer of 2003, the first speculations circulated that the Ministry of Education again would endeavour to open an Albanian-language secondary class in Bitola. The exact location of this class was not given but Macedonian opposition was soon to become evident. The

⁴³ Currently, there are only four ethnic Albanians attending classes at the “Josip Broz Tito” gymnasium in Bitola. According to the principal this number has been stable for decades.

real trouble started immediately after the Ministry of Education and Science announced the opening of the class in beginning of September. On two occasions the local branch of the secondary school student union "SUM" organised protests in the centre of Bitola. The first took place at the beginning of the school year when hundreds of Macedonian secondary students and other local inhabitants took to the streets and demanded the proposal to be withdrawn. Some demonstrators insisted they would never allow an Albanian-language class to be opened in Bitola.⁴⁴ Later the same month, when the Ministry of Education proposed to open the Albanian-language secondary class in a primary school catering for ethnic Albanian and Macedonian pupils, both the student union and parents demanded fiercely the decision to be revoked. Also ethnic Albanian parents in Bitola supported the last request because they disagreed in having pupils with a large age difference in the same school. In the end, the Ministry of Education, despite serious attempts to convince the local population through open communication, had to give up the idea of opening a separate ethnic Albanian secondary school class due to massive Macedonian protests, which raised security concerns. Rumours spread in town after the unsuccessful attempt to open the mentioned class are indicative of the level of suspicion. For a short period it was claimed that the class was working clandestinely in a private accommodation. Mr Siljanovski denounced the speculations and said;

This is only propaganda spread by Macedonian extremist from the area. It has no basis in reality and to my knowledge the proposal has been revoked completely.

Currently, there have been no new movements on the issue and ethnic Albanian students are instructed in the Macedonian language.

Possible manipulation by political parties

The above described incidents and the opposition to decisions made by the Ministry of Education and Science, although not directly political, has the potential to be understood as such by the people in Macedonia. Several interlocutors emphasised that problems related to secondary school education issues, and especially the transfer of ethnic Albanian students, has an intrinsic political motivation. Clearly, almost all decisions are unavoidably political. They are undoubtedly made by the ruling political parties, but there is no clear evidence of exploitation of the different situations by the opposition. Nevertheless, alleged involvement of political parties in conflicts related to education issues opposite opinions seem to flourish. While members or sympathisers of the three government parties would claim that opposition to decisions made by Ministry of Education and Science and organised protests form part of consorted attempt to discredit the authorities, their political opponents would deny such allegations. In Bitola, the spokesperson of VMRO-DPMNE stated that neither the party nor party members had been involved in protests arranged to prevent the establishment of a pure ethnic Albanian high school class at the gymnasium. The local party branch was opposed to the decision made by the Ministry of Education and Science but based its opposition on technical grounds. The interlocutor reiterated arguments mentioned above and stated that there was no real need for such a class in Bitola since the ethnic Albanians constituted no more than three per cent of the population in the municipality. Slavica Grkovska, deputy co-ordinator of SDSM's parliamentary group was, on the other hand, convinced that;

⁴⁴ IWPR Balkan Crisis Report 2003.

Some political parties, especially those complaining about the Ohrid Framework Agreement, were using the sensitive education issue as a political tool to discredit the government and regain electoral support.

One ethnic Albanian supported this view but went a bit further;

Every incident in this country is manipulated by people with authority and power. Education disputes are no different in that respect. Political parties are using the sour inter-ethnic atmosphere to gain political points.

The mere fact that the current Minister of Education and Science is an ethnic Albanian gives at least some Macedonians ammunition to claim that a policy favouring ethnic Albanians has been carried out. Moreover, political parties have not developed strategies in order to use schools to promote multi-ethnic diversity and co-existence. Slavica Grkovska from SDSM said in an interview that the party would do its utmost to fulfil the prescriptions of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. However, it had not worked out a plan to enhance mutual understanding and promote inter-ethnic inter-action by using the education system. The head of the local DUI branch in Kumanovo, one of the government coalition partners, simply meant that if Macedonians and ethnic Albanians had no interest in sharing education facilities, there should be no reason to force them to stay together either. Moreover, the specific events taking place in 2003 had not been debated in parliament. To conclude, there is a lack of a comprehensive political strategy to use the education system in order to discuss inter-ethnic issues and most parties seem to leave the topic aside. Involvement of political parties in demonstrations, using the opportunity to score political points on controversial themes remains disputed, but none of the parties have admitted active participation in or outright support to them. However, it might be worth mentioning that the former leader of Union of Secondary School students “SUM” later has been elected head of VMRO-DPMNE’s youth branch. As mentioned, the announcement made by the leaders of the two main opposition parties, did not, to say at least, have a positive effect on the general atmosphere in the country.

European Integration

When Macedonia declared independence in September 1991, the European Union, which had set up the Badinter Commission to evaluate the cases for autonomy for republics of the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia, recommended Macedonia to be recognised as an independent and sovereign state. Focus was then placed on the examination of constitutions, with particular emphasis on the rights of minorities. The commission was composed by the presidents of five constitutional courts of the European Community member states and headed by lawyer Robert Badinter. It reported that Macedonia’s new constitution respected human rights standards as set out in international human rights laws and had been drawn up in accordance with basic democratic and liberal principles.⁴⁵ In April 2001, just before the armed conflict spread

⁴⁵ The constitution was in fact altered on the recommendation of the Badinter Commission to remove overt references to the state as the ethnic property of the Macedonian nation. From Poulton “Who are the Macedonians”, 2000.

to the predominantly ethnic Albanian parts in the northwestern parts of the country, Macedonia signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union (EU). The agreement has later been ratified by all EU member states. Aiming at improving the performance of several government institutions, both at local and national level, and at enhancing democratic procedures which would pave the way for accession to both the EU and other trans-Atlantic structures (NATO), the SAA involves mutual commitment to continuing reforms. The primary objective is to focus on four main priority sectors; democracy and the rule of law, economic and social development, justice and home affairs and the environment and natural resources. For Macedonia this means working towards streamlining to prepare the country for prospective membership by enhancing the quality of political decision making through inclusion of local authorities and increased public participation. Through the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (CARDS) programme, the EU has commenced a project inclined to distribute approximately five billion Euros to the countries in the Western Balkans, including Macedonia, in the period 2000 to 2006, aiming at preparing the ground for accession to the union. Before 2000, Macedonia received financial aid and expertise from the EU through the PHARE programme. Several international institutions, such as the World Bank and the OECD, have commented on the need for a restructuring of vocational secondary school education. The EU has given assistance and advice to the Ministry of Education and Science in order to establish a curriculum which is better adapted to local needs of the local labour market, the so-called VET programme (Vocational and Educational Training). Reforms pertaining to the public education sector are underway. According to government coalition partner, SDSM's Slavica Grkovska, the government has currently made the largest improvements in higher education reforms. Reforms related to primary and secondary education, which are also closely linked to the decentralisation process, are these days reaching finalisation and are expected to be passed in parliament in the near future. The EU has made a considerable political investment in the Ohrid process and Macedonian stability, in addition to the mentioned economic investment intended to strengthen political developments. Macedonia submitted an application for EU membership on 22 March 2004. Currently, prospective integration into EU structures gives politicians a considerable incentive to pursue needed reform policies and undoubtedly helps guarantee peaceful co-existence between the two larger ethnic groups. In addition, it should be borne in mind that both the European Council and the EU Special Representative in Macedonia, as well as NATO officials, on numerous occasions have announced that prospective membership in Euro-Atlantic structures depend fully on a complete implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Decentralisation of political authority forms an important part of this agreement but is temporarily put on hold in anticipation of the result of the November 2004 referendum.⁴⁶ Macedonian authorities, on their hand, have recognised the need for reform of the education sector to make it more in line with European standards. Consequently, co-operation with international expertise is considerable and reforms to de-politicise management, increase

⁴⁶ Opposition to the new territorial division of municipalities passed in parliament this summer, proved to be so strong that more than 150,000 signatures were gathered in support of holding a referendum on the issue.

local participation in school governance, improve quality assessments and enhance the general quality of schools, are continuously being formulated.

Conclusion

As the content of the report has endeavoured to depict, education disputes has ridden Macedonia for more than two decades. These disputes, with a few exceptions, tend to reflect the persistence of the inter-ethnic political struggles that are distorted by profound mistrust and suspicion between the two major ethnic groups, Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. In general, it can be argued that themes of current interest turning into political issues chiefly contain strong ethnic connotations. Focus on other important local or national matters such as, e.g. the high level of corruption or gender issues, are in comparison relatively neglected and receive neither much public nor political attention. This is also the case regarding the sphere of education where conflicts related to secondary school levels are becoming increasingly political and controversial as soon as ethnicity is becoming a topic. All the examples described show strong opposition to proposed changes promoted by the Ministry of Education and Science. Political expressions of dissatisfaction come from both the Macedonian and the ethnic Albanian side of the ethnic divide. From this, it can be deduced that Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities perceive each other as inflexible adversaries fighting either to maintain the status quo or demanding more than they are actually entitled to. Evident through manifestations and mobilisation of different social strata of the population, such disputes only have worked to strengthen existing differences. In the aftermath of the armed insurgence in 2001, school conflicts have become frequent and animosity between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians has increased further. The Ohrid Framework Agreement partially transformed the country. Ensuing amendments to the constitution were meant to ameliorate inter-ethnic relations through the establishment of a genuinely multi-ethnic state. The citizens of this “new” state are now expected to integrate into a common civil society where any ethnic distinctions ideally should have been removed. However, the incumbent government’s resolve to promote ethnic diversity in the education sector by attempting to transfer ethnic Albanian pupils or establishing new Albanian-language classes remains largely to no avail. Opposition on both sides to find a common sustainable solution is more or less manifest. Limited success can only be found in Skopje where, after considerable initial difficulties, ethnic Albanian 1st and 2nd year students could commence instruction at the main school in the mixed municipality of Cair.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the previous chapters. First, education issues continue to constitute a political factor in Macedonia. This is understandable, since education in the broadest sense has a certain meaning to most people regardless, age, gender, social and ethnic background. Almost everyone has a particular opinion on how education should be organised, as most people have been or are part of the education system. Thus, the question of education attracts much attention and is often the object of hefty debates. In contemporary Macedonia, in a period of large economic and societal transformation, the dramatic alterations of the socio-economic

fabric will be difficult to cope with for substantial parts of the population. It goes without saying that in an atmosphere of strained inter-ethnic relations between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, attempts at introducing new arrangements are almost bound to be met by reluctance and opposition. More worryingly is the fact that these education disputes radicalise the young generations of the country, increasing the gap between the major ethnic groups by cementing differences and re-enforcing “us” and “them” terms. Ultimately it jeopardises the prospects of promoting co-existence and co-habitation set forth in the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

Resistance and opposition to the Ministry of Education’s decisions could be observed as a local phenomenon. Every conflict contains specific characteristics due to differences in the ethnic composition and distinct experiences with the violent conflict in 2001. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a comparative analysis of on-going and recurring conflicts as many similarities could be found during the research. In Kumanovo, the impact of the armed conflict, which undoubtedly has strengthened tendencies of ethnic segregation, combined with the dissatisfaction with the provisions set forth in the Ohrid Framework Agreement, renders the transfer of ethnic Albanian students impossible at present. Both Macedonian and ethnic Albanian students and their parents refute the idea of re-introducing instruction in mixed schools. Arguments expressed to support such resistance are security, fear, and lack of space in educational institutions. As regards the latter argument, several sources have noted that one of the main problems the education sector is facing is the lack of access to classrooms, overcrowding and poor infrastructure. Apparently, Macedonian students have benefited from the situation created in 2001, as they have become accustomed to an improved spatial situation. They currently have more classrooms at their disposal than they used to and are spared sharing limited material resources with ethnic Albanian students. Tome Spirovski, regional representative for the Ministry of Education and Science in the Kumanovo region, estimated that the municipality is in need of two rooms for classes attending the Secondary School of Economics. Six rooms are lacking for classes in the Technical School, and six rooms are needed in order to cater for all students at the city’s gymnasium. He said;

These rooms will facilitate teaching for a total number of 30 classes. So, in other words, we are lacking one school here in Kumanovo.

Similar arguments were used in Skopje. Also there the lack of space explained Macedonian reluctance to the transfer of ethnic Albanian students to the “Arseni Jovkov” secondary school. The former head of the coordinative body at the school explained that the main argument was not to be ascribed to a general opposition to ethnic Albanians pupils obtaining an adequate education. What was at stake was the quality of the education of Macedonian children;

Basically, the government is not investing sufficiently in the education sector. At the “Arseni Jovkov” the transfer of ethnic Albanian students meant that the cabinets had to be dismantled to provide an adequate number of classrooms.

There is no reason to disparage the lack of space argument, which is applicable for almost all schools in the country. However, it requires further discussion. Ethnic Albanian students attended classes in mixed schools in Kumanovo before the 2001 crisis. Unless their numbers have increased substantially in the meantime, a re-introduction in their schools of origin should be feasible. At “Arseni Jovkov” the transfer

of the first four Albanian-language classes met serious obstacles but has later been accepted by pupils as well as parents. It is therefore more reasonable to assume that opposition to decisions made by the Ministry of Education and Science can be ascribed to limited knowledge of the other group in combination with persisting animosity and current social difficulties experienced by a majority of the population. Any attempt at establishing Albanian-language classes in Bitola is almost bound to meet fierce resistance and seems to be a nearly over-ambitious project at present. Taking into account the ethnic composition in the city, such a proposition has on two occasions been stopped after the Macedonian population carried out heavy demonstrations. The decision to open an Albanian-language class in Bitola seems to be hasty and badly planned. It only served the purpose of re-igniting tensions from the heated summer of 2001. Economically, a pure Albanian-language class in the city would be too expensive and probably unacceptable to local inhabitants, even if all stakeholders were consulted on the issue. Following a decade of social decline and an unfair peace accord reached in 2001, many Macedonians feel under siege, both socially and economically. In such an environment, influenced by decades of suspicion and mistrust that reached the highest levels during and shortly after the armed crisis of 2001, the struggle for control over diminishing public recourses has taken an ethnic colour.

A general feeling predominates among Macedonians that the Ohrid Framework Agreement has been implemented too fast and to an extent not agreed upon during the final negotiations in August 2001, and that there should be an end to all the concessions. Ethnic Albanians, on the other hand, claim that implementation is met by considerable slowness. Macedonian politicians are blamed for either their unwillingness to accept the basic principles of the agreement, or doing their utmost to postpone and undermine important decisions pertaining to it. In addition to deep-rooted animosity, resistance is due to the lack of transparency in decision-making processes. Important stakeholders, such as parents, local authorities, students and occasionally, regional state representatives, are not consulted or informed about important decisions made by the central authorities. On ground level, understanding of and receptiveness to structural changes and new decisions will meet opposition as long as the stakeholders affected by reforms do not see what to gain by the new situation. Thus, the outspoken Macedonian opposition to some of the changes that follows as a direct provision of the Ohrid Framework Agreement seems, to a certain extent, justified. Probably, the largest obstacle to a smooth transfer of pupils or progressing problems in the education sector has to be ascribed to the current economic situation. In this respect, it is important to take into account zero-sum models where one community only gains something at the expense of another. The main dilemma remains what different factions of society stand to lose or gain by major changes. The most favoured by the established order would struggle to maintain it, while others seeking to improve their situation, would find themselves in conflict with the power holders. It is therefore reasonable to assume that deteriorating economic and social conditions exacerbates education related conflicts. Clearly, in the current environment of slow economic recovery and anticipated protracted high numbers of unemployed, distribution of limited public goods would be a struggle that could affect the inter-ethnic relations negatively. A fast turnaround is not to be foreseen in the near future.

Secondly, the education system is probably one of the most visible symbols of the country's ethnic segregation. The structure of the education system in Macedonia, which

bears similarities to systems employed in other parts of the Western Balkans, contributes to widening the gap between different ethnic communities. This in turn, maintains the prevalence of prejudices and stereotypes more than it ameliorates tense inter-ethnic relations. In short, it can be assumed that the central authorities' inability, regardless political colour and ideology, to create an atmosphere where children of different ethnic origin can have instruction in the same facilities, will contribute to widening the gap between members of different communities. It should be mentioned, though, that success in that respect only will partially solve the problem of an ethnically divided education system. By this, it is understood that physical segregation of pupils along ethnic lines is the norm more than an exception in Macedonia. So far this system has not yielded results in form of any real rapprochement between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Only occasionally one would find children of different ethnic groups attending the same classes. Even in ethnically mixed schools, where all students are catered for in the same premises, separation and the lack of communication is prevailing as there are no incentives to facilitate inter-action and the students distance themselves from each other. One of the gravest consequences of the physical separation is that children growing up under territorial and educational isolation will rarely be afforded a meeting point with other ethnic groups. Such is the magnitude of segregation that, more often than not, it will continue to foster mistrust and intolerance between the two major ethnicities. As described in the chapter on ethnic relations, different ethnic groups have lived together in Macedonia for a long period of time, some of them for centuries, and there exist numerous meeting places where they interact. Uneasy as the co-existence may seem, clearly affected negatively by the armed insurgence in 2001, schools could ideally be a suitable tool employed to establish points of contact between the different ethnic groups. Especially between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians where hostility and suspicion seems most cemented. But due to the intrinsic obstacles in the education system, i.e. the physical separation of students, and additionally, recent increasing segregation, no such opportunity currently exist. The lack of a clear political formulated strategy or consensus on how schools can be employed to create an atmosphere for mutual understanding leads to confusion and ample room for different interpretations. In line with this, some scholars advocate instruction under one roof as the basic requirement for ethnic integration while others argue to the contrary. Others again are focusing on language rights and claim respect for minority languages as essential to obtain integration, while others argue that integration is impossible without knowledge of the state language by the ethnic minority groups. In any case, the confusion surrounding which way to follow, despite the devotion of the Minister of Education and Science to promote policies of ethnic integration, constitutes one of the causes of recent inter-ethnic tension.

Future Challenges and Recommendations

If continuing conflicts related to secondary education should be resolved, it is not a question of either/or but rather of a complexity of causes and preconditions which must be dealt with. Obviously, there is no easy way to reach a satisfying compromise, which is certainly needed in the near and distant future to move the republic of Macedonia

towards peace, re-conciliation and the promotion of a genuine multi-ethnic society. Recent and current conflicts in the sphere of education in Macedonia indicate that the issue bears strong political connotations. Moreover, it also reveals that ethnic cleavages are manifest and deeply rooted as the conflict transcends both political regimes and different governments. However, there is no reason to believe that this situation is irreversible. Numerous examples from other countries show co-existence and ethnic reconciliation taking place at several different social levels.

Some basic recommendations

i. If the government is to fulfil the obligations set forth in the Ohrid Framework Agreement and which is required to maintain the unitary character of the state, it would have to work out a clear strategy to prevent ethnic segregation from gaining more pace. In order to use the education system as an instrument to promote multi-ethnic diversity, a set of goals and means with a specific implementation strategy needs to be formulated. It is moreover of crucial importance to obtain political consensus on such a policy as well as the involvement of different ethnic groups in the process.

Without the support of the majority of the political parties in Macedonia, the endeavour would meet serious obstacles. Likewise, the inclusion of all ethnic groups in the development of a joint policy would constitute the only way to make the project feasible. Much will depend on the government's ability to convey the message to the constituency and future generations if a multi-ethnic school system is to be maintained or be (re-) established. However, one other main question which has to be dealt with is whether schools can be used as tools to create societal change. If the answer is positive, the pivotal to succeed in achieving ethnic integration through education would be the political commitment to carry the project through. This is necessary because there will be a need to involve the whole society in changing current attitudes of suspicion and mistrust.

ii. Until such a strategy is articulated and developed, a pragmatic approach should be employed in promoting decisions made by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Probably, the time is not ripe for carrying through politically desirable targets in all parts of the country. Evidently, there is no point in making hasty decisions inevitably provoking a negative response, which in turn would ignite tensions and contribute to increasing the already established ethnic cleavage. In this respect, local and regional approaches which are acceptable for the people affected by these decisions, have to be developed. If and when there are foreseeable problems emerging, the best solution is to put the decision on hold until major stakeholders have been consulted on the issue and been given the opportunity to articulate their opinions.

iii. With regards to basic international human rights documents, Macedonian authorities fulfil most criteria for preserving a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. As illustrated in this report, equal access to secondary education is somewhat distorted by the fact that there is a lack of qualified Albanian-language teachers. This imbalance will be removed with examinations at the Tetovo University and the South-East European University. The question remains, nevertheless, whether over-emphasis on language rights would actually increase ethnic disparities or lead to desired improvements. Internationally, it is generally recognised that instruction in the mother-tongue of ethnic minorities is a good

approach for the inclusion of these minorities in the educational system. A UNDP report illustrates the complexity of the issue;

Seen from an educational perspective, however, minority language as language of instruction can have its challenges. While it makes children's contact with the educational process easier, minority-language teaching also carries a risk of enclosure of the ethnic minority within its own cultural codes and values if perceived as an alternative to proficiency in the majority language.⁴⁷

In order to avoid such enclosure, contributing consequently to ethnic segregation, teaching in the minority language should be an intrinsic component of a bilingual education system.

Accordingly, it should be no contradiction in implementing a policy, which assures the rights of a minority ethnic group to have an education that allows it to protect its cultural heritage, while preparing it to participate in the broader society in a meaningful and productive way.

Minority-language teaching therefore cannot be an alternative but should be complementary to majority language proficiency, providing children from minorities with the additional opportunity of learning another language and obtaining the key to another culture. Only then will children have both the opportunity to retain and develop their identity, so as not to lose the opportunity for integration in the mainstream society. As the experience of many countries worldwide shows, bilingual education is the winning approach.⁴⁸

The problem in Macedonia is rather whether ethnic Albanians learn Macedonian sufficiently to be properly prepared for participation in a society where they still constitute a minority, as they only receive two classes of Macedonian language per week. Voices have been raised that the low number of ethnic Albanians in tertiary education institutions is required to pass entrance exams due to the lack of language skills in Macedonian. More worryingly, though, is the increasing tendency of ethnic Albanians not speaking the state language in areas where there is only one ethnic community.

Thus, it is advisable to increase the number of Macedonian language classes, in order for ethnic Albanians to obtain appropriate proficiency in the state language so they can effectively participate in the political, economic and social life of society and have sufficient skills to continue tertiary studies.

Besides, several surveys conducted in areas with minority representation around the world convey the message that bilingual education is more efficient than monolingual because it enhances the performance of the children.

iv. Clearly, the economic situation would constitute a serious limitation to local and central authorities' room for manoeuvre.

International financial aid would be needed in the future to improve school infrastructure as the state of the economy of Macedonia currently impedes larger scale investment. Financial aid could be used to ensure adequate learning environment aiming at removing the factor of competition for limited resources. Equal distribution of classroom facilities, equipment and other education devices, would constitute a means to achieve the goal of ethnic integration in schools. The international community could,

⁴⁷ UNDP "National Development Report" 2004

⁴⁸ Ibid.

additionally, support political authorities in the construction of larger schools that can cater for pupils of different ethnic backgrounds.

Moreover, without future prospects of rapid economic growth that can secure income opportunities of future generations, education issues will certainly continue to be an important issue of controversy. Unemployment rates are likely to stay high and the appurtenant social crisis will prevail accordingly. Certainly, there is no easy way to overcome this economic difficulty but hopefully the government in the future will show commitment in establishing an environment conducive to much needed foreign investment.

v. One of the main problems that has to be dealt with is, nevertheless, the lack of communication between state institutions and major stakeholders. As illustrated in this report, the existence of school boards does not secure that information is passed on from central level decision-makers to important stakeholders. Nor does it ascertain practise of democratic procedures. Currently, school boards, originally meant to have an opinion and influence on school issues, such as appointments and dismissals of principals and teachers, are without any real power and leverage.

The lack of democratic school governance is supposed to see an end with the planned decentralisation. Hopefully, devolution of political power would lead to more influence being transferred to school boards.

In an interview with one representative of the “Local Government Reform Project” it was stated that a new law on selection of school principals would re-introduce the active involvement of school boards. This would secure both a higher degree of professional management of schools and an increased participation of local stakeholders. According to the newly proposed amendments of the Education Law, responsibility over primary schools would be transferred to local government, while management of secondary schools will be divided between municipalities and the state. The mayor of a municipality will order the school board to open a public competition for selection of new principal three months before the end of the term in office of the incumbent principal. Thus, the mayor of any particular municipality would get the authority to appoint and dismiss directors of future municipal schools, on the recommendation of school boards, as well as achieving substantial independence in the management of schools under its supervision. Devolution of power should lead to the introduction of more democratic standards regarding the division of responsibility for schools. However, there is a danger that the system of nepotism and politicisation of the public sector would survive delegation of power to local government. There is no guarantee that the transfer will render desired results.

The chances for the system to outlive planned reforms are not likely unless a change in the political culture in Macedonia is introduced. Generally, the decentralisation process needs to be accompanied by establishing new governance structures in addition to a new culture of democratic decision-making in schools.

vi. Macedonia is currently receiving international support in the form of expertise and financial aid. The international community is thus already involved in finding ways out of the current deadlock related to education. Amongst many bi-and multilateral projects on how to improve education capacity and school management, a few will be mentioned. At present, the OSCE is actively trying to mediate in on-going conflicts in Kumanovo

and the predominantly ethnic Albanian region of Tetovo. The organisation has recently established education units to facilitate communication between the two major ethnic groups and has organised several meetings with the main stakeholders; local authorities, parents' councils, representing both major ethnic communities and regional Ministry of Education and Science representatives. The EU Special Representative (EUSR) to Macedonia and other major representatives of the international community have been directly involved in negotiations to find a satisfactory solution to e.g. the sensitive question of primary school education in Semsevo. Additionally, the office of the EUSR to Macedonia, as well as NATO representatives, have on several occasions emphasised the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement as a requirement for membership in Euro-Atlantic structures. The "Nansen Dialogue Centre" (NDC) in Skopje is one local NGO that is preparing several projects to promote education in a multi-ethnic environment. Veton Shekolli explained that a successful programme had been brought to an end at one of the secondary schools mentioned, the "Arseni Jovkov" secondary school in Skopje. Moreover, NDC has already contributed with expertise in seminars with parents from both major ethnic communities organised by the OSCE. Obviously, such approaches can prove important to deal with deteriorating trust and confidence that has increased after the armed conflict in 2001. However, NGO's generally have too limited funds to achieve wide-ranging effects.

The international community, deeply committed to preserve the multi-ethnic character and promote the establishment of a truly multi-ethnic society, should therefore in the future continue to give aid in form of financial funding, expertise and moral support for Macedonia to overcome the current situation. The articulation of a common strategy, including both international donors and local NGOs, might be needed to improve outcomes of intended objectives.

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