



Institute for Regional and International Studies

THE PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION IN MACEDONIA

**Risk Assessment of the Regional Instability
Factors Impacting on Macedonia's Inter-Ethnic
Peace**

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**SOFIA
2006**

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Introduction

A couple of factors in Macedonia's foreign policy increase the country's chances for inter-ethnic peace and stability following the 2001 spillover crisis. All of them are related to the country's increasing perspectives to join the European Union. They are these. The signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in April of 2001 was the first major step in Macedonia's European integration process. It created a contractual relationship between that country and the European Union. Next was Macedonia's application to join the European Union dated March 2004, and the follow-up country's effort to meet the EU candidate status requirement

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The current policy analysis was developed within the framework of the project on "The Process of Decentralization in Macedonia: Prospects for Ethnic Conflict Mitigation, Enhanced Representation, Institutional Efficiency and Accountability". The project was implemented by the Institute for Regional and International Studies – Bulgaria and the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" Skopje - Macedonia. The project was supported by the Regional Networking Project of Freedom House Europe (FH-Eu) in Budapest with funding provided by the United States Agency for International Development. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Freedom House or USAID.

identified in the 4,000 queries questionnaire of the European Commission. Third is the European Commission's endorsement of Macedonia's advancement to the EU candidate status in November of 2005, based on the country's implementation of the EC recommended requirements. Fourth is the European Council's would-be endorsement of Macedonia's candidate status in December of 2005.

All these steps in Macedonia's foreign policy are not only well received at home. They help bridge inter-ethnic divide between the Slav Macedonians and the Macedonian Albanians. As indicated by an early 2005 survey of the International Republican Institute 97 per cent of Macedonia's multi-ethnic population favors EU membership¹. Is then the EU integration process a sufficient outer condition to guarantee Macedonia's domestic inter-ethnic peace? We argue it is. Yet we also argue that other factors can impact on-, and complicate Macedonia's interethnic stability. We identify two major factors of that kind. One is the EU integration of the Western Balkans in general. The other is the inter-ethnic situation in neighboring Kosovo and south Serbia following the United Nation's Security Council's approval of initiation of talks on Kosovo's final status. We argue that the Kosovo status issue is very complicated and it can spark spillover crisis in Macedonia. We hereafter address each of these two factors assessing the risk they pose on inter-ethnic peace in Macedonia.

The EU Integration Policy toward the Western Balkans

How does the EU integration policy toward the Western Balkans impact on Macedonia's interethnic stability? Macedonia was the first country in the Western Balkans to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU. The integration process of other Western Balkan countries is underway. Croatia was the second Balkan country that signed the EU Stabilization and Association Agreement. Albania and Serbia and Montenegro are currently in the process of negotiation. And as of late October of 2005 the European Commission has recommended to the Council opening of talks with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While promising and perspective the EU integration process is not as strong stability factor as we wish it were. The initial enthusiasm about the Western Balkans' EU integration seems to be waning away as evidence amounts that both, - the EU; and the Western Balkans, - are gradually losing attraction for each other. Thus on one hand, the EU showed change of heart

when France and the Netherlands rejected the proposed EU constitution. The French and the Dutch referendums sent clear messages indicating the EU fatigue with its own expansion, following the 2004 admission of 10 new members. This vague 'European perspective' for the Western Balkan countries cooled down some Balkan countries initial enthusiasm about their EU membership. Croatia's reaction is indicative. Opinion polls indicate that as of late August 2005 only 39 per cent of the Croats show interest in joining the Union. For comparison, strong majorities used to support the idea in previous years. And while some analysts tend to attribute this fact to the Gotovina affair alone, a more plausible explanation is Croatia's perspective economic relations with the EU. In particular, Croatia considers the high unemployment-, and inflation rates within the EU that accompany the introduction of a single currency within the Union and their possible impact on Croatia's national economyⁱⁱ.

Euro skepticism is also registered in Bosnia. It manifested itself in the long-lasting ethnonational opposition of the Bosnian Serbs to the EU -backed police reform package. This package aimed to reorganize Bosnia's police and draw its administrative boundaries along non-ethnic lines. And while as of 5 October 2005 the Bosnian Serb Parliament finally accepted the proposed packageⁱⁱⁱ, Bosnia was yet warned that her ethnonationalist reactions would not be tolerated. Should she want avoid delays in EU talks she must continue to make progress in a number of areas. Most important within them remain the implementation of the police reform; and the improvement of co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia.

The EU integration policy toward Macedonia is a primary international factor positively impacting on the country's inter-ethnic stability. The EU policy toward the rest of West Balkan countries too props up inter-ethnic peace in Macedonia, and the region at large. However retarded and uneven EU integration of the Western Balkan countries may cause problems. In particular, the EU membership dilemmas of neighboring Balkan countries may provoke change of heart in the Macedonians, or at minimum induce societal tensions.

Threat of Conflict Spillover from Kosovo and South Serbia to Macedonia

The serious outer factor challenging interethnic peace in Macedonia is the poor interethnic situation in neighboring Kosovo and south Serbia. Conflicts in these two areas are interconnected and frequently move forth and back

across the “border”. At times the conflict also reaches Macedonia. How dangerous is this perspective in the near future? We argue that spillover crisis scenario in Macedonia is possible. We first review the Kosovo situation. We then discuss cross-border actors and dynamics of conflict regionalization.

The Kosovo situation. It is common that the end of the Bosnian conflict in 1995 brought also to end conflict diffusion from-, and out of Bosnia. Unlike that the end of the 1998/99 insurgency, staged by the *Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)* and supported by NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia provoked, rather than terminated recurring spread of conflict from Kosovo to Serbia and Macedonia. The reason is the yet undetermined status of Kosovo. Talks on the Kosovo status are to begin in 2005/2006.

In the meantime the Kosovo insurgency of 1998/1999 evolved into campaigns of terrorism, aimed at the speedy settlement of the Kosovar issue. The Kosovars formulated as minimal demand independence for Kosovo; their maximal demand includes further boundary revisions. Ethnic cleansing of Serbs, Jews, Roma and Muslims; and interethnic incidents are being reported since 2000. Most serious are the interethnic incidents in Mitrovica from 2000 and 2004. Interethnic tension in Mitrovica from March of 2004 sparked out of unfounded allegations of Serbs drowning Albanian children and evolved into a Kosovo-wide riots, which lasted two days, killed 19 and wounded 900. The pogrom was condemned by the NATO commander as “ethnic cleansing”^{iv}. Kosovo terrorist attacks also recurrently challenge international attempts to help Kosovars build the provisional institutions of self-government, defined within the April 2001 Constitutional Framework. Terrorist attacks increased in 2001 in protest against the closer links established between NATO and Belgrade. Since then well until present they are being staged against peacekeeping units^v, the office of the Yugoslav government in Pistina^{vi}, the ethnic Serbs living in the province. Attacks intensified in the summer of 2005 as talks on the Kosovo status were to begin. Recent attacks were staged against the UN mission, the provincial parliament, the European Agency for Reconstruction in Pristina, the OSCE headquarters. The terrorist *Albanian National Army (ANA)* is behind them. Countering terrorism and criminality in the province is a challenge because of the linkage that exists between them and the newly established Kosovar institutions. The unit responsible for countering terrorism is the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). It sprang out of *KLA*, and is blamed for maintaining links with political violence, terrorism and crime.

What is the general picture of Kosovo at the wake of the Kosovo status upcoming talks? It is obvious that chances for interethnic peace and stability in Kosovo are bleak. Corruption, human trafficking, smuggling of arms and other kinds of contraband mark the province’s everyday life. The two major ethnic groups back controversial stands on the Kosovo status. Thus all public opinion surveys show that less than 10 per cent of the Serbs support the idea

of Kosovo independence while all Kosovars want nothing less than independence. Furthermore, Serbs are often targets of assassinations, kidnapping or other forms of intimidation. Arm groups carry out illegal checkpoints of cars and even peacekeeping vehicles^{vii}. KFOR and UNMIK are being increasingly challenged by terrorism and organized crime. Clearly, Kosovo is a conflict zone. And there is an opportunity that the Kosovo conflict spill over into Serbia and Macedonia. That has yet happened twice in the past five years. Who is responsible for the transfer of conflict across borders? I turn next to the regional aspects of the Kosovar conflict.

Cross-border actors and dynamics of conflict regionalization. The actor responsible for the transfer of conflicts across borders is the transborder Albanian ethnic movement. It is composed of the entire ethnic Albanian diaspora of ex-Yugoslavia. Its most active segment are the Kosovar Albanians. For nearly 25 years they have set the tone of the ethnic Albanian cross-border activities by formulating mutable territorial objectives, ranging from autonomy, to secession and unification with kindred group(s) or state across the border. The movement underwent considerable evolution since the (re)activation in the early 1980s of its most active segment, - the Kosovar Albanians. The first change was the movement's radicalization in the early 1990s when Kosovo autonomy was abandoned as political goal and replaced by demand for secession /and unification with kindred group(s) and state across the border. Indeed, the two major political parties in Kosovo, - Rugova's *Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)* and Ramush Haradinaj's *Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)* have no disagreements on the final political goal, - which is Kosovo's independence. The second change was the movement's fractionalization. All fractions of the ethnic Albanian movement, - the newly emerging included, - are radical in their political objectives. However not all of them are extremist in their tactics. The emergence of ethnic Albanian extremism on the turn of the century is the third significant change within the movement's evolution. And we point to the newly emerged ethnic Albanian terrorist paramilitary groups as to the most serious threat to interethnic peace and stability of neighboring countries, - Macedonia in particular. Who are these groups?

The *Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)* is chronologically the first one. It is a paramilitary unit organized as a scattered guerrilla movement. The political unit, which funded *KLA* was the *People's Movement of Kosovo (LPK)*, - a rival movement to the legal *Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)*^{viii}. Information also exists that Al-Quaeda had sent financial aid and organized the arrival of mujahideen from Islamic countries into Kosovo^{ix}. *KLA*'s claims are equivocal. *KLA*'s radical left and radical right argued "over whether to carry the fighting to the pockets of ethnic Albanians who live in western Macedonia and neighboring Montenegro"^x. Both wings only agreed "on the need to liberate Kosovo from Serbian rule", while all else was left to be decided later^{xi}.

The Army first appeared in 1995 when it launched some isolated attacks on the Serbian police. One year later, in June of 1996, the *KLA* assumed responsibility for a series of acts of sabotage committed against police stations and policemen in Kosovo^{xii}. In 1997 the *KLA* benefited from the spring rising in Albania, following the collapse of the financial pyramid scheme, when large numbers of looted weapons found their way to Kosovo^{xiii}. In early 1998 *KLA* entered an open conflict with the regime in Belgrade and symbolically indentified itself with the whole people of Kosovo for its capacity to inspire fear in its opponents and respect among politicians in the West^{xiv}.

The emergence of *KLA* brought some new elements to the pre-existing transboundary mobilization of ethnic Albanians. One of them was the activation of a network of Albanian criminal clans known as *fares*. Dispersed in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, *fares* smuggle arms and men across boundaries. They help in the founding of the *KLA* as well as in the establishment of *KLA*'s bases in neighboring Albania and Macedonia. Another new element was the establishment of logistic bases and smuggling routes for weapons and fighters for *KLA* in Albania^{xv} and Macedonia^{xvi}. In Albania rebel training camps were established near Tirana and along the Yugoslav border while soon after the onset of the Kosovo uprising, Northern Albania became a vital staging area for the war.

KLA dissolved with the end of the Kosovo 1998/99 insurgency. In fact, it was transformed with the help of UN and KFOR into Kosovo Protection Corps and the Kosovo Police Service. Most prominent *KLA* commanders engaged in politics. Hashim Thaci and Ramush Haradinaj are examples. Parts of *KLA* however gave birth to new paramilitary organizations across the border. The first paramilitary off-shoot of "mother" *KLA* was the *Liberation Army of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja (UCPMB)*. It activated in 2000 in south Serbia municipalities of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, - home of some 70,000 Albanians. *UCPMB* was trying to export the Kosovo insurgency into south Serbia. Smuggling of arms and cross-border incursions from Kosovo into Preshevo valley recurred throughout the year^{xvii}. The Albanian separatist guerrillas were using the buffer zone around Kosovo to stage the incursions into southern Serbia^{xviii}. The Albanian political leaders called for the expansion of the NATO buffer zone and for an internationally supervised demilitarization of the valley, which if accepted, - would have resulted in the extension of Kosovo's protected status to south Serbia^{xix}. In early 2001 the cross-border violence ended in an ethnic Albanian rebellion in south Serbia^{xx}, which was suppressed.

Cadres of the former *KLA* than moved to Macedonia. A new paramilitary unit, the *National Liberation Army (NLA)* was created. The *NLA* staged a rebellion against the Macedonian authorities in early 2001. Some analysts argue that immediate reason for the spread of the conflict to that country was the ratification by the Macedonian parliament of a long-awaited border treaty with Serbia^{xxi}. Conflict dynamics was clearly regional. Reports observed simultaneous fighting of ethnic Albanian insurgents against Yugoslav police in

the Preshevo valley, and against the Macedonian forces in Brest^{xxii}. On other occasions, rebels from *UCPMB* were crossing the border to help *NLA* fighting against Macedonian military patrols^{xxiii}. *NLA* dissolved after signing of the Ohrid Agreement putting to end the 2001 Macedonian spillover crisis. Before returning back to Kosovo the paramilitary *NLA* cadres established the *Albanian National Army (ANA)*, which urged the creation of a “greater Albania”^{xxiv}. This did not suit the provisional authorities in Kosovo who urge instead the establishment of independent Kosovo. In the meantime the US blacklisted *ANA*, while the head of UNMIK Michael Steiner branded it as terrorist group in 2003 following its attacks in northern Kosovo, southern Serbia and northern Macedonia.

After the end of the conflict in Macedonia a new terrorist paramilitary group emerged in Kosovo. And this is the *Army for Albanian Liberation and Unification (Front for the National Unification of the Albanians)(Albanian National Unity Front)*. Its armed fist is *ANA*. Its members are organized in groups on military principles. They have developed infrastructure, armament and efficient intelligence. They also have reliable networks, money and the support of individual transnational Islamic terrorist organizations^{xxv}. The program of the *National Unity Front* is in conformity with the program of *Al-Qaeda* transnational terrorist network. It describes the UN mission in the province as Kosovo occupier^{xxvi}. It is possible that the organization start attacking UNMIK, because of its extreme fanaticism. The *Army for Albanian Liberation and Unification* demands immediate recognition of Kosovo independence^{xxvii}. It has given up the establishment of Greater Albania as final objective. However it has formulated a new irredentist goal, which is the merging of the Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja of south Serbia with independent Kosovo^{xxviii}. To this end one more ethnic Albanian paramilitary organization was established in “neighboring” south Serbia. And it is the *Black Shadow*.

Risk Assessment of Macedonia’s Perspectives for Interethnic Stability

What are Macedonia’s domestic interethnic perspectives, viewed from outside? While current situation in Macedonia looks calm outer threats must not be overlooked. Three regionalized- conflict -scenario exist. One of them already bears on Macedonia’s domestic stability. According to this scenario, parts of Macedonia, especially her zones of non-existent borders with Kosovo, turn into what the Macedonian analysts Frckovski called “a grave zone dominated by organized crime that can lead the region into chaos”^{xxix}. Indeed, Kosovo and Macedonia are inseparably tied through arms smuggling

routes, which go from Oresevo, Vitina and Globocica, via Lojane, Tanusevci, Brest, Radusa and Jazine, all the way down to the Struga villages, where huge arsenals of weapons are stored^{xxx}. Since two years now the Macedonian government prepares itself to “raid” Kondovo, one of the places over which it does not have control^{xxxii}. However raids of these places have not yet been initiated.

The second scenario may occur in the event that Kosovo become independent. This could stir up separatist movements among ethnic Albanian minorities in other parts of the Balkans. This scenario emerged after ANA announced its political goals, which - as indicated, - favor unity of all Albanian ethnic communities in the Balkans, - i.e. the ethnic Albanians in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, south Serbia and Montenegro, - if needed through war^{xxxiii}. To counter attempts at domino separatism the Macedonian Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski recommended that all Kosovo politicians, President Rugova included, sign a declaration that would exclude any possible unification of territories with majority Albanian population in the region^{xxxiii}. While dangerous this scenario looks less likely as ethnic Albanian politicians themselves have denounced ANA demands, vowing instead support for Kosovo independence.

The third regionalized -conflict - scenario could occur in the event that Kosovo is being parted along ethnic lines. This is the most dangerous scenario. In that case Kosovo’s division will be compensated with some parts of Macedonia. It is reported that terrorist groups from Kosovo already enter Macedonia illegally. According to local sources the number of criminal – terrorist groups operating in the north-western part of the country varies between 10 and 14. They transfer arms from Albania and Kosovo, train warriors and prepare for a controlled destabilization of Macedonia^{xxxiv}.

In sum, Kosovo status talks can spark spillover crisis in Macedonia. At minimum, they can lead to a terrorist wave in Macedonia. The status issue is very complicated. It is likely to include multiple parties bargaining, using south Serbia and Macedonia as bargaining chips.

Kosovo at present has more powerful military units that used to exist in the past. Some analysts say that the *Army for the Albanian Liberation and Unification* is in fact a disguise for the emergence of far more serious military units, - something like Armed Forces of Independent Kosovo^{xxxv}. Moreover, in early August 2005 the Kosovo government has set up its own intelligence service. It has a powerful intelligence network in the Balkans and it is most elaborate in Macedonia^{xxxvi}. Clearly, the Kosovo factor must not be undermined in Macedonia. Politicians and civil society must be alert of that and take preemptive measures. A first step would be a speedily elaboration of alternative political, diplomatic and even military strategies aimed at countering import of conflict from abroad.

NOTES:

- ⁱ Causidis, Tamara. Macedonia: Is Road to Brussels Blocked?, Balkan Insight. 30 October, 2005.
- ⁱⁱ RFL/RL Balkan Report Vol.9, N 26, 23 September 2005.
- ⁱⁱⁱ RFE/RL Balkan Report, Vol 9, N 28, 14 October 2005.
- ^{iv} Malic, Nebojsa. Toward the Kosovo “Negotiations”. Once More, With Feelings. November 2, 2005.
- ^v The Washington Post, 12 April, 2001.
- ^{vi} The Los Angeles Times: 19 April, 2001.
- ^{vii} Inter-Press-Service, 25 October, 2005.
- ^{viii} Wright, . (1999). :17.
- ^{ix} BBC, 3 November, 2005.
- ^x Hedges, . (1999). :28.
- ^{xi} Hedges, . (1999). : 28.
- ^{xii} Cordesman, .(1999). :6.
- ^{xiii} Pettifer, James. (1999). :26.
- ^{xiv} Pettifer, James. (1999). : 29.
- ^{xv} Hedges, . (1999). :40.
- ^{xvi} North, . (1998). : 50).
- ^{xvii} The Financial Times, 21 December, 2000.
- ^{xviii} The Daily Telegraph, 28 February, 2001.
- ^{xix} The Daily Telegraph, 6 March, 2001.
- ^{xx} The Scotsman, 18 February, 2001
- ^{xxi} The Financial Times, 2 March, 2001.
- ^{xxii} The Washington Post, 10 March 2001.
- ^{xxiii} The Scotsman, 19 February 2001.
- ^{xxiv} BBC, 3 November, 2005.
- ^{xxv} BBC, 8 September, 2005.
- ^{xxvi} BBC, 8 September, 2005.
- ^{xxvii} Reuters, 29 October, 2005.
- ^{xxviii} Malic, Nebojsa. Toward the Kosovo “Negotiations”. Once More, With Feelings. November 2, 2005.
- ^{xxix} Agence France Presse, 18 November, 2005.
- ^{xxx} BBC, 11 August, 2005.
- ^{xxxi} BBC, 18 July, 2005.
- ^{xxxii} Agence France Presse, 18 November, 2005.
- ^{xxxiii} Agence France Presse, 18 November, 2005.
- ^{xxxiv} BBC, 18 July, 2005.
- ^{xxxv} BBC, 3 Nov, 2005.
- ^{xxxvi} BBC, Dnevnik, Skopje, 22 August, 2005.