Conflict Studies Research Centre
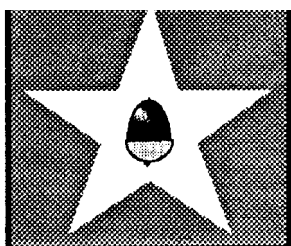
James Pettifer

FYROM - After
the Concordia Mission

January 2004

G129

FYROM - After The Concordia Mission

James Pettifer

Contents

James Pettifer

FYROM - After the Concordia Mission

Introduction

In the two and a half years since the Ochrid Accords were signed that ended the spring-summer 2001 armed conflict, there has been general agreement that Former Yugoslav Macedonia (FYROM) has made some progress, that aspects of the August Ochrid Accords have been implemented and some of the internal reform programme embodied in the deal put into practice. There has also been fairly general agreement that the overall political and security situation remains fragile, with intermittent violence in some localities, and the possibility of social breakdown and renewed conflict if various tensions and difficulties are not resolved. The purpose of this paper is to assess progress on Ochrid implementation, and to evaluate the position of the FYROM state in relation to internal threats of destabilisation and possible wider regional instability, both as regards internal political forces and also the activities of external political and economic actors, mainly Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Serbia and Albania.[1]

Public Attitudes To The Ochrid Agreements

There has been little change in public attitudes to the Ochrid Agreements in the last months, with the vast majority of ethnic Albanians in favour (over 90% in most opinion surveys), and only small numbers of Slav-Macedonians actively in favour of implementation, and many people still opposed to the principle of the changes in the Accords. As in many other situations in post-transition Balkan countries, it is always possible for the IC to manipulate the political elite in a desired direction for a period, but local public opinion is much more conservative and bound by nationalist traditions. There is no sign that most Slav-Macedonians want a multiethnic society where Albanian is regarded as an equal language and culture to their own and as Slav-Macedonians still control the state bureaucracy at middle and local level in most places outside the western, Albanian dominated regions, the progress of reforms is likely to be slow.

Most public opinion polls taken by Macedonian newspapers in the last year show the Slavophone majority as unwilling to implement Ochrid, and key provisions, such as the use of Albanian in public life as a recognised second official language hardly take place at all outside Skopje and the west. The quasi-official publishing houses continue to promote material about the history and identity that excludes all minorities in the country, and reinforces the 'official' view of history where the foundation of ASNOM, the anti-fascist resistance movement under communist control in 1943 is seen as the birth of modern Macedonia.[2] The name issue with Greece remains unresolved. In terms of the mass media, Albanian access has improved as a result of Ochrid, and slightly less confrontational and heated language is used in the press to describe different ethnic groups. Separation of the two main groups in the population continues, with property sales patterns and business development records indicating a declining number of Slav-Macedonians in the west of the country, although refugee return figures post-2001 have been much better than after the Croatian, Bosnian or Kosova conflicts.

After the elections of 2002, and the departure of Llupco Georgievski's VMRO_DPMNE and Arben Xhaferi's DPA from power, the new coalition dominated

by the Social Democrats of Branko Cervenkovski took power, in alliance with Ali Ahmeti's Party of Albanian Unity.[3] This coalition was essentially a product of the 2001 wartime period, and on the Albanian side embodied the political supremacy of Ahmeti as the architect of the 2001 conflict.[4] Popular views of the Ochrid Accords remain very divisive.[5]

The Economic Context: Money, Jobs & Land

The post-Ochrid period has seen little real economic recovery from the immediate post-war period, with the currency only maintained in relative stability by large infusions of aid from the international financial institutions. GDP is only about 75% of what it was five years ago. Unemployment remains very high, with the official 32% figure in 2002 concealing a good deal of hidden unemployment. A figure of 36% has been declared recently. Emigration remains high from all ethnic communities, with the largest number coming from young Slav-Macedonians. Privatisation of some state assets has proceeded satisfactorily, such as some food and drink businesses. The main Skopje hotels have been purchased by international investors, often under franchise agreements with diaspora Macedonian businessmen. The privatisations made under the IMRO government between 1998 and 2002 have in the main been respected, despite widespread allegations of corruption. This has meant that, given the number of rustbucket loss-making industries which have proved impossible to privatise since the early 1990s, the capacity of the state to raise money through asset sales has more or less been exhausted. Corruption has been identified as a major problem in all businesses, threatening what recovery there has been so far.[6] The International Monetary Fund has laid down a recovery programme that has reduced interest rates and inflation and fixed an acceptable level for the public deficit.[7]

The only possible exception to the end of revenue from asset sales would be if a genuine free market in land was in existence. FYROM has very large areas of under-used land, with rural depopulation and stagnation and high emigration rates, linked to water shortages in eastern FYROM, all contributing to a wasting national asset. A very large proportion of the land still belongs to the state, in the form of forests and scrub uplands which are in practice commonland and are used for pastoral agriculture, if at all. Most fertile land is in east and central FYROM, where large ex-communist state farms or cooperatives have often been privatised in name only, with new companies seizing the old state assets where communist-period managers work with outside investors. The question of land is highly politically sensitive, as land transactions are deeply bound into changing definitions of 'Macedonian' citizenship. In practice citizenship has been defined so as to make it impossible for pre-communist restitution to take place on any scale, unlike in most of central Europe and countries in the Balkans like Croatia and Albania.[8] The central fact to bear in mind is that land can in practice only be restituted to those with Macedonian citizenship as defined in the original post-communist VMRO government constitution, with its much criticised view of citizenship designed to promote Slavophone interests and exclude national minorities.

The primary Titoist concept of FYROM as an agricultural area supplying food to the more industrially developed northern republics of Yugoslavia is still important in understanding the problems of FYROM today. Until 1990, over two thirds of FYROM exports were to the rest of Yugoslavia. This is a measure of the transition that has had to take place. FYROM is still dominated by ex-Titoist patterns of land ownership and control, which was an important and often little understood reason

James Pettifer

for the support of the ethnic Albanians in the west for the war option in 2001. Before 1945, FYROM did not exist, even as the first Titoist state unit of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within ex-Yugoslavia.

Earlier in the twentieth century, the Serb Orthodox church, the Bulgarian Orthodox church and the Greek Orthodox church, and mosques and tekkes had large estates which for political reasons it would nowadays be difficult to restore, even in part, to the legal owners from the pre-communist period. Even small scale restitution would be an indication of growing foreign control of FYROM, and of what would be seen in Skopje as destructive and negative influences from the past which increase foreign influence in the country.

One of the advantages that the Albanians possess in the FYROM land issue, which has often been unnoticed in the international community, is that apart from a few tekkes, they do not in the main have religious institutions within their culture, which could or do sponsor restitution land claims, and so the Skopje government is unable to stop Albanian land acquisition by these administrative or legislative methods. This is not the case with the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek churches' pre-1939 land. The continuation of communist land ownership structures, if under a social market guise, has important social and political implications, and reinforces the dominance of the particular section of the Slav Macedonian elite formed under communism, and a particular notion of the Slavophone Macedonian identity. Many of the best businesses in FYROM are in the food, drink and agribusiness sector and depend in many cases on cheap raw materials from ex-communist cooperatives or estates in central and eastern FYROM. Elements of religion, nationality and ethnicity thus collide over the land issue, in a typically 'Balkan' way. Thus, for example, although exceptionally, much of the land above Tetovo originally occupied by the NLA insurgents in February-March 2001 was the property of the Sipkovica tekke, or free pastureland, before it was seized without compensation by the Titoist state under communism to build the ski resort. This was unknown to outsiders, but to older inhabitants of Tetovo who could remember the pre-communist world, the insurgents were not only demanding reforms, but also taking possession of something the Titoist communist state had forcibly removed from the Tetovo majority ethnic and religious community. The Albanian shepherds who were some of the strongest supporters of the insurgency were increasingly impoverished under communism as their land was taken for state sponsored projects under outside control.

Citizenship, Demography & The 2002 Census

The results of the 2002 census were at last announced, after long delay, in mid-December 2003, in a carefully stage-managed presentation by the Skopje government and the international community. They showed that FYROM is believed to have a population of 2,022,547 people, made up of 64.18% ethnic Macedonians and 25.17% ethnic Albanians, with 3.85% Turks, 2.66% Roma and 1.78% ethnic Serbs. This is an increase of 2.42% in the Albanian content of the population since the 1994 census. There are also 20,000 'Others', presumably people seeing themselves as Greeks, Croats, Muslims and Bulgarians. In general the political leaders of the two main communities have accepted the results, but there appear to be a number of serious shortcomings, reflecting the inheritance of the widespread criticisms that were made of the 1994 census.[9] Although the international community tried to improve the registration system so that it is less discriminatory against ethnic Albanians who are resident permanently in FYROM

but do not have full citizenship, problems remain for many people, something the disruption of the post-2001 period did not assist. The most important of these is that the census underestimates the number of Albanians actually living in FYROM, as a result of passport and residence requirements, and overestimates the number of Slav-Macedonians, owing to the favourable registration requirements that de facto allow people who are normally resident most of the time in diaspora centres such as Australia and the US to take part.[10] All FYROM censuses are affected by the VMRO 1992 Constitution citizenship law.[11] It is impossible to estimate exactly how much this is the case but the ethnic Albanian permanently resident population is probably understated by as much as 5%. It is also noteworthy that the census shows a rapidly ageing population, and that it has been estimated that the number of ethnic Albanian children in FYROM schools is over a third of the total number, a sign for the future.[12] If these factors are taken into account, with the age profile of the Slavophone population, there is no reason to revise the view that an ethnic Albanian majority in FYROM might emerge in about twenty to twenty five years time, if current demographic and emigration patterns continue.

The census result presentation was carefully organised so that no Greek or Bulgarian minority was shown, even though it is known that at least 10,000 people in FYROM now use Bulgarian passports. This is an example of subtle Greek influence over US official thinking, so that the current phase of the Macedonian Question is defined only as an issue of Albanian human rights. By the same method, the Serbian minority was kept a factor in the picture, although only just. A little known influence on US policy during the Bush administration has been the emergence as investors and participants in FYROM of the US-Slav-Macedonian diaspora, many of whom are adherents of pro-Bulgarian organisations, in the tradition of the Macedonian People's Organisation, with support mainly in the mid-West. This has caused alarm in some US émigré Greek 'Macedonian' circles, who fear that if these groups acquire political leverage in FYROM, the nationalist radicalism of the diaspora will work in a similar way to the effect of the US Albanian diaspora in Kosova.[13] The position of the Bulgarian government remains that there is no 'Bulgarian minority' in FYROM but that all Slavophone 'Macedonians' are of underlying Bulgarian ethnicity.

An unfortunate consequence of this PR-inspired decision is thus likely to be the extension of the pro-Bulgarian underground in FYROM.[14] There is still widespread discrimination against Bulgarian cultural and media material in FYROM, and as a result pro-Bulgarian identity activists are driven into the political twilight, with a strong likelihood of association with organised crime there. This is an unhealthy prospect for the future. It is a product of the attempts exemplified by the census presentation to prevent the emergence of a Bulgarian factor in FYROM politics, and given the legitimate role of Bulgaria in the region and the progress it is making towards the EU, and the financial factor in both legal and illegal trade, almost bound to fail.

Given these shortcomings, the census is unlikely to be a factor producing community reconciliation. As one of the most important regional underground/organised crime arms trading relationships is between FYROM and Bulgaria, the pro-Bulgarian political underground will add to the difficulties of the police and security authorities.

Education & Culture

One of the few facts agreed by participants on all sides of the political fence is that education and culture were at the heart of the 2001 war, and that a substantial part of the Ochrid Accords document addresses these issues. There has been substantial progress in introducing Albanian textbooks to schools in the west with an Albanian majority of pupils, and after protracted delays, the long sought ethnic Albanian and Albanian language higher education institution of Tetovo University has begun to take shape. It received legal approval in Parliament in late January 2004. The old tobacco factory in Tetovo has been taken over as a headquarters building, and it is hoped to open the new university by October 2004 in the refurbished building. This is a major achievement for the post-Ochrid period, as the lack of higher education in Albanian had been a driving force of ethnic Albanian radicalism since 1990 and the foundation of the FYROM state. The South East Europe University, south of Tetovo, is also functioning successfully - the so-called 'Van der Stoel' university, after its Dutch founding father - with the great majority of students ethnic Albanian and using dual language Albanian-Macedonian tuition. This operates on a greenfield campus, receiving most of its funding from either the European Union or latterly the United States.[15]

On the Slav-Macedonian side, this progress has been viewed with some concern, as the previously heterogenous Slavophone elite is likely to be challenged by the Albanophone student and postgraduate output of these new institutions. Slav Macedonian students dislike having to learn what they regard as a version of Albanian nationalist history if they are in a minority position within a majority Albanian school. It is also technically difficult to implement, so that pupils are supposed to learn the history of both communities in their education, but in practice often do not because of the shortages of teachers and resources. There is also a major problem with graduate employment opportunity, and anecdotal evidence suggests many students will have to find work abroad on graduation. It remains to be seen if the same will apply to the new Tetovo university.

Military Reform Issues

The period 2002-2003 has seen a continuation of the steady reduction in international community commitment to FYROM that has been taking place since the end of the NATO 'Operation Harvest' arms collection and National Liberation Army demobilisation after August 2001. The European Union 'Concordia' peacekeeping force is in the process of being withdrawn, and a police mission, 'Proxima' will take its place. NATO bases and installations remain at various locations, mostly connected to the KFOR force. Under Partnership for Peace schemes and other training programmes NATO has continued to assist the FYROM army reform process. This has, in the main, prioritised the following issues:

1. The removal of extremist and undisciplined elements from the army and Interior Ministry, principally the 'Lions' and 'Tigers' paramilitary units which caused havoc in some conflict zones in the 2001 conflict.

2. The introduction of concepts of modern peacekeeping and counter-insurgency that do not involve state terrorist actions against the local population, particularly minorities.

3. Removal of unnecessary top heavy officer strata and improving organisational capacity.

4. Improving equipment and basic logistics.

5. Modernisation of the civilian side in the Ministry of Defence.

6. Introduction of ethnic balance in the army, particularly from the Albanian minority.

7. Participation in international coalitions in the war against terror, such as the Iraq conflict.[16]

It is generally agreed that among major areas of concern to the international community the sphere of military reform is where there has been least effective progress. This is particularly remarkable when compared to the concrete progress in multiethnic policing and local and border security, education and culture. The main argument used on the Slav side to explain lack of progress is the difficult constitutional position of the army, where the framework within which it operates embodies many communist/Titoist period factors.[17] When the key demobilisation of the paramilitary 'Lions' and 'Tigers' extremists was attempted by the government, the paramilitaries openly protested and organised disruptive demonstrations. The government was forced to withdraw the original demobilisation proposals and allow the members of the paramilitary units to be integrated within the mainstream security apparatus. Although this has the advantage that they are, in theory, under central command and control, in practice there is every reason to believe the units have retained some internal coherence and in a crisis would no doubt become active again.

The whole episode inevitably raised the question as to how far, in extremis, the Interior Ministry and army would be actually under either civilian control or under the effective control of its senior officers. The FYROM army since independence has been a battleground between the Bulgarian and Serbian military intelligence services, and although there has been some move since 2001 in the direction of a more pro-western outlook, these organisations are still a factor, with the addition of the Greek influence and some important military training agreements with Athens. There is also some active sympathy for Russia and communist Yugoslavia among a few older military leaders. A substantial undercurrent of illegal arms and ammunition trading has always existed in FYROM, linked to these interests, and interfacing with other organised crime. International advisers have made some progress but in the dire economic situation in FYROM have few effective levers to restrict these old relationships. The response to the arms collection programmes initiated by the international community has been limited. The fact that a detachment of the FYROM army is in the US-led coalition in Iraq, for instance, does not necessarily indicate a fundamental reorientation of the army as a whole at all levels, any more, for instance, than the fact that some US investments have been made indicates a basic change in the economic outlook.

In terms of ethnic balance, an Albanian general has been appointed, but the number of officers and NCOs falls far below what is stipulated in the Ochrid agreement, and some foreign military advisers have expressed frustration with the slow rate of progress. There has been a certain amount of progress in reducing the numbers of the armed forces overall and dismantling structures left from the communist models of the Yugoslav People's Army, but in general senior military

circles are a stronghold of Slav-Macedonian social and political conservatism, with all that implies. The civilian officials have also proved slow to reform the Defence Ministry. On the positive side, it is generally agreed that the repressive 'peacekeeping' doctrine and methods inherited from the Yugoslav period that caused such damage in the 2001 conflict have been abandoned, and there is less danger now of some new conflict starting as a result of clumsy and violent state repression after a minor incident.

The problem for the international community is that in the view of the Slavophone majority, the armed forces are the last institution which really deeply represents and defends the traditional national identity and national values, against a reform process which they see as gradually demolishing the nature of their state and allowing the ethnic Albanian minority effective veto rights over all important political questions. In this respect, the armed forces closely resemble the army of the second Yugoslavia as a guardian of national values, which is not surprising given the common origins of the two institutions after the foundation of ASNOM in the Partisan tradition. There is also some resemblance to the problems of the Turkish military in dealing with EU-inspired social and political reform programmes in contemporary Turkey. Armies of this type, where the army was central to the state foundation (or salvation, in the case of Ataturk's forces) find it hard to live with modern multiculturalism that demands the abandonment of coercive monocultural educational and cultural structures.

There are also problems for the military in dealing with international demands in doctrinal and theoretical terms. Slav-Macedonians generally believe that Albanians and other minorities have little real commitment to 'Macedonia' and would make poor soldiers at a practical level. There are two competing perspectives at work here. Some of the most important aspects of the international community and NATO reform programme do not really deal with the issue of national defence at all, but are much more concerned about the potential of the army as an internal counter-insurgency and peacekeeping force. In the philosophy of the international community, countries like Greece, Bulgaria and even Albania are friends and partners in the region.[18] This is not how they are seen at all in the private mindset of the average FYROM soldier, particularly of the older generation.

For any Macedonian educated before 1990, Greece was regarded as one of the main enemies of his country, and Bulgaria as the brutal occupier during World War II and the betrayer of the Macedonian nation. It is perhaps significant that one of the few military works to have been produced in FYROM in recent years with genuine scholarly content is concerned with border definition and defence.[19]

Organised Crime & Corruption

There has been little change in the available indicators in the last two years, with substantial corruption within the state, theft and fraud of foreign aid funds and privatisation proceeds, and a widespread presence of transnational crime involving people and drug trafficking.[20] The high price of cigarettes in EU countries continues to give rise to a 'prohibition effect' and massive profit margins on smuggled cigarettes.[21] There has, though, been a much stronger and more open commitment from the post-2002 coalition to crack down on corruption and organised crime, and it may be that over time the situation will change for the better, particularly if the new international police mission is effective.

Policing, Law & Order & Albanian Paramilitary Organisations

The Ochrid reforms have been quite extensively implemented in the field of policing and law and order, to the surprise of some critics of the original agreement. Police training has been improved and multiethnic patrols are normal in many FYROM towns and cities. The numbers of policemen drawn from ethnic minority communities has risen considerably.[22] Nevertheless many problems remain, and in response to concerns about security an EU-run police mission is being introduced into FYROM to assist the fight against organised crime. At the heart of the issue is the problem of state and police capacity, where most members of the ethnic Albanian minority are instinctively suspicious of the Interior Ministry, and there is a very large rural and forested area in western FYROM which is very difficult to police in any circumstances. As a result, there have been hundreds of violent incidents since the Ochrid agreement was signed, of varying seriousness but indicative of the social tensions that still remain within the FYROM communities.[23] These include kidnappings, bombings, road blocks by groups of angry villagers, driveby shootings and attacks on police stations. The most serious security crisis was in early September 2003 when a series of violent incidents followed the kidnapping of two people by an alleged Albanian criminal, one Avdi Jakupi (Commander 'Cakalla'), after which a bomb was placed on the main Skopje-Belgrade railway line. During two succeeding police operations to try to find and arrest Jakupi, Albanians fled from the village of Vaksince near Kumanovo and a shootout in the village of Brest followed a few days later that killed at least two young men.[24]

It has been alleged in the Slav-Macedonian community that the responsibility for this tension and violence lies with self styled 'Albanian National Army' (AKSH), a successor organisation to the National Liberation Army (NLA) of Ali Ahmeti that was the Albanian force in the 2001 conflict and was demobilised in late 2001 by NATO in the 'Operation Harvest' arms collection operation. There is no consensus among experts as to what, if anything, the AKSH represents. The view of organised crime experts in 2002 was that it was essentially a quasi-criminal organisation based in and around Kumanovo with about 200 members. In Albania various alleged leaders such as Swiss-based Gafur Adili have been arrested.[25] In reality it is most probably an umbrella name for a relatively decentralised small movement of militants who did not agree with the limits of the Ochrid Accords, financed in the main by smuggling interests. The International Crisis Group believes 'that if the Albanian National Army exists, it is not large and does not have a clear central command'.[26] Those arrested so far and alleged to be part of the (a?) leadership group are young men who do not appear to have played any significant part in either the Kosova wartime period, the Preshevo fighting or the 2001 FYROM conflict. Whatever the truth of the allegations, it would seem highly improbable that so many different incidents could be secretly orchestrated by an underground group when the causes for them are very random and obvious within the localities themselves.

The command and control system of the police remains heavily centralised, in common with most other Skopje government activity, and this tends to mean that in the capital and in large centres the police function best, but there is a steady and in some cases rapid deterioration in rural and remote areas where, as in any other police force, resource constraints play a part.[27] The senior ranks of the police remain almost totally dominated by Slav-Macedonians, often of strongly conservative and nationalist views and there is little intelligence sharing with the ethnic Albanians in the police, who claim they are distrusted and will not be eligible

for promotion to responsible positions. This in turn is a symbol of the reservations towards FYROM state authority many ethnic Albanians still hold.   In civil law issues, very high percentages of ethnic Albanians do not pay taxes, or even fuel bills. Although Ochrid has removed the previously monolithic and ex-communist culture at the periphery of the police, the re-employment of the paramilitary 'Lions' in the Interior Ministry special police and security apparatus world is a major setback to reform. The challenge for the EU 'Proxima' police mission will be to kick start the stalled process of reform within the police and to develop an integrated security and police strategy that overcomes the instinctive suspicion of the ethnic Albanians for non-NATO controlled initiatives. Although most Albanian leaders do not appear concerned that operation 'Concordia' is ending, there is little instinctive enthusiasm for EU initiatives, and a sense that with the two main FYROM communities leading increasingly separate lives outside Skopje, the international community may have reached the limits of its capacity to affect events. A key issue is likely to be border control, where some elements in the international community want to keep a main military component to the system, claiming that the danger of proximity to Kosova means that a police force is not capable of controlling the situation, and the EU concept, where a border police force is believed to be adequate.

Ethnic Albanian Political Perspectives - The Cantonisation Issue

2002-2003 has seen a marked decline in the popularity of Ali Ahmeti and the DUI party in the government coalition, coupled with a strong revival in the popularity of Arben Xhaferi and his DPA party.   In terms of party organisation and administration, Ahmeti's party is still in process of development.   The lack of capacity of the government to deliver on its promises and the often uneasy and complex relationships between the coalition partners and the several different international organisations in Skopje have left an impression of government incapacity which has damaged Ahmeti's standing in the Albanian community. Many Albanians were unhappy at the compromises in the Ochrid Accords and the poor and deteriorating economic situation has produced a revival of political radicalism. Xhaferi and other ethnic Albanian leaders have called for Ochrid to be superseded and for the country to be 'cantonised'.[28] The Slav-Macedonian majority and some people in the international community see this as a precursor to a so-called 'greater Albania', where in time the western part of FYROM would become part of Albania.[29] In reality this is a simplistic perspective. Western FYROM's Albanian majority areas are already rapidly forming closer links with Albania and Kosova, but this has nothing to do with post-2001 political change in FYROM, or the Ochrid Accords.   It is a product of natural trading patterns reasserting themselves in the new Albanian space that has been created by the end of communist-period closed borders, the end of planned economies and the development of free markets. The Ochrid Accords have made little difference to this process. Most of the key changes, such as border post openings, took place under the early 1990s Gligorov government. The Slav-Macedonians have always had a central problem in defining their objectives, in that most of their political objectives could only be fulfilled by the use of communist-period methods involving social coercion.   The negative side of this new space is the growth of smuggling; the positive side is the trade in legal commodities and human and cultural exchanges. It is, in any case, a largely irresistible process.

There is no clear agreement in the Albanian community as to what a cantonal solution would mean. If cultural cantonisation on the Swiss model were the ideal, much of that has already in practice been achieved by the Ochrid Accords and demographic factors working on the Albanians' behalf are likely to achieve the rest within a short period. The model of nations like Belgium is not attractive to them.[30] Some thought has been given to the Bosnian model, but that has inevitably brought major opposition from the international community, conscious of the Bosnian political logjam. In practice the issue is likely to remain unresolved, whoever is in power in Skopje, because it is not in the general Albanian interest to seek fundamental political change in FYROM while events for the Albanians in Kosova are moving in a generally positive direction towards independence in the near future. If Kosova were to be denied independence, FYROM could rapidly become destabilised, as unresolved Albanian criticisms of the status quo spilled over into a demand for an effective split of the FYROM state.

In the meantime, there is likely to be active campaigning for decentralisation, based on the positive exchanges in the Association of Municipalities that have taken place in 2002-2003. Both Slav-Macedonian and ethnic Albanian mayors are strongly in favour of the devolution of much more government power to localities, and reform of the grossly over-centralised Skopje government system. These demands have generally been supported internationally and by the Skopje diplomatic community, and have been seen as a safety valve where inter-ethnic cooperation over state reform could be an example for cooperation in other spheres. The possibilities of reform in this direction should not be overestimated, though. The history of the state since 1945 has been intimately bound up with building Skopje as a credible and viable capital, and in the period of semi-reform under ex-President Kiro Gligorov and the dramatic changes arising from the 2001 conflict and Ochrid, there has been a major loss of Skopje authority and practical power. In the security, policing and military fields, many in the international community feel that the state is incapable already of discharging many functions it is supposed to perform, and devolution of power to localities may not improve this. There is an inherent tension between the security perspectives and the demands of reducing centralisation in Skopje. The importance of decentralisation was nevertheless recognised in the Ochrid Accords, and if the new law on local government had not been passed in 2002 an important donors conference would not have been held.

Slav-Macedonian Political Perspectives

In general little has changed since the Ochrid Accords in terms of the basic orientation and outlook of the Slav-Macedonian majority. The recent history of the state has been one of crisis and decline, in terms of the expectations of 1990 and following years. Nostalgia for the pre-1990 Yugoslav past is still a strong emotion, particularly among working class voters.[31] There is a sense of a culture under siege, as well as an uncertain future for the nation. In these circumstances, multiethnic community initiatives often fall upon stony ground, although it is always possible for the international community to produce a political elite that says more or less what is required in terms of social reform at any particular time. There is a fairly equal division of opinion, according to most polls. Depending on the exact nature of the questions asked about the future, about half of the Slav-Macedonians are willing to try to continue in some sort of ethnic coexistence with the 25% Albanians. A similar number are not, and would support either a formal division of the state, or some sort of extreme cantonisation. As on the Albanian side of the fence, these arguments often founder on the problem of what would happen

to Skopje in a cantonal division. Skopje completely dominates the rest of the country in demography, culture and in terms of the formal economy. The politician most identified with this option, Llupco Georgievski, has in the formal sense no political role at the moment, but there is no doubt that his extreme views calling for a new FYROM state without Albanians have considerable private support at grass roots level in all Slavophone parties. From the perspective of this opinion constituency, much the best course is a split in FYROM and then a close and evolving relationship with Bulgaria. The role of external actors may become more important in forming Slavophone opinion if the crisis in the state does not ameliorate, with Bulgaria the obvious focus for a significant constituency of opinion. A FYROM reduced in size after cantonisation could easily form a 'Republika Serbska' relationship with Bulgaria. It would be very unlikely to do so with Greece, and there is virtually no prospect of a closer relationship with Belgrade given the government and social and economic crisis in Serbia. The 'packaged' census results have disguised the fact that a Bulgarophile minority is beginning to emerge, albeit fairly small at the moment, which is a new development and something that has caused considerable private concern in some quarters in Greece.[32] About 10,000 Bulgarian passports are said to have been issued to FYROM citizens since 2000. Traditionalists may jump to the conclusion that this means more Russian influence in the region, but it is probably a mistaken perspective. There have been many positive changes in Bulgaria in the last five years, including significant US investment. The 'pipeline politics' of the new TransBalkan oil pipeline from Burgas on the Black Sea coast to Durres in Albania are a major factor. From the organised crime point of view, there is a significant presence of Russian and other former USSR activity in both Greece and Bulgaria.

Non-Albanian Minorities

The last period has seen a continuation of the status quo for most small minorities, such as the Serbs, Turks and Roma. The fate of the 20,000 strong Serbian community in Skopje and Kumanovo is now almost entirely tied up with the wider issue of the Slav-Macedonians, although some old links may be reactivated with the ascendancy of the Radical party in the recent elections in Serbia-Montenegro. Vojislav Seselj took some personal interest in the area when he was leader of the party, and in the mid-1990s supported efforts of the Serb Orthodox church to start opening churches in FYROM. Kumanovo, the main Serb centre, is a key strategic town, and suffered considerably in the 2001 conflict in terms of social cohesion, although open conflict in the town was avoided. There is still endemic small scale violence in some communities nearby, and also issues connected with refugee return, some from the Preshevo conflict. The local economy is depressed to the point of near dereliction.

The Roma minority is centred on Skopje where normal economic crisis conditions prevail, with inhabitants of the big Sutka Roma quarter having some of the lowest measurable income levels in mainland Europe. International aid is the only barrier between many people and destitution, although official income levels do not record the large Roma participation in the informal economy.

The Turkish minority has suffered a series of cultural setbacks since 2001, largely as a result of the success of the Greek government in excluding any Turkish participation in the Ochrid negotiations. Turkish language and history teaching are having a continually reduced presence in FYROM culture. Turkic rural minorities

such as the few hundred Yoruks of eastern FYROM are abandoning their old villages and moving to Turkey or Bulgaria.

External Actors

The recent period has seen an increase in the direct influence of the United States in FYROM, with significant new business and investment links, and a reduction in the status of the main EU partner in the region, Greece. The EU itself has increased its profile through new involvements in security and peacekeeping. American investors, mainly linked to the Slav Macedonian diaspora in the US, have bought significant assets under the privatisation process, such as Skopje hotels.[33] This is a new development, and US policymakers clearly hope the Slav-Macedonian diaspora in the USA will play an energising role in the development of a market economy as has occurred with the US Albanian diaspora in Albania and Kosova.[34] The importance of Greece has declined, and some Greek investors in privatisations under the VMRO government have been linked to corruption enquiries, and there have also been press allegations of money laundering and organised crime links, some with Russia. Bulgaria has been active in providing passports to FYROM citizens with Bulgarian blood. Given Bulgaria's position in the EU accession process, a Bulgarian passport brings travel advantages in Europe and elsewhere compared to a FYROM passport. The internal problems and government crisis in Serbia-Montenegro have meant that Belgrade has had little direct political influence on the Skopje government, although the Social Democrats who dominate it have many Serbian links in cultural-political tradition terms.

The key strategic priority for both Greece and Serbia is to prevent a renewal of the Preshevo valley conflict with its potential for cutting the main motorway and rail links between the two countries.[35] In any future cantonisation or split of FYROM it is widely believed that the Athens government's 'bottom line' will be a clear non-Albanian corridor in this area.

Conclusion

There is an intimate link between the political development of Kosova and the internal stability of FYROM. As long as Kosova is on the path to independence in a year or two, Albanian leaders in FYROM from all parties have every incentive to restrain those in their own communities who may be tempted to return to paramilitary activity. This is a particular issue for Ahmeti, who has a strong minority in his party who are critical of Ochrid and could favour a reopening of the paramilitary option in some circumstances. Another war or major insurgency in FYROM could, in some circumstances, put Kosova independence on hold, and delay the decision on political status that is widely expected to come in summer 2005. This gives the international community a window of opportunity to make the FYROM elite put Ochrid into practice, and effectively save the future of the state in its present form. It also puts a burden of responsibility on the international community and all Skopje agencies concerned with security, as Slav extremists in both FYROM and Serbia itself may be emboldened by recent political changes in Serbia to try to disrupt the Kosova independence process by increasing tension in FYROM. The general realisation in the region that Kosova independence is coming gives all parties an opportunity to assess the future in a new light.[36]

James Pettifer

ENDNOTES

[1]   For general background on the issues, see James Pettifer, *The New Macedonian Question*, Macmillan, London and New York, 2000; Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?*, C Hurst & Co, London 1998. On the 2001 conflict and post-conflict, see papers by James Pettifer on www.csrc.ac.uk: G98, *Former Yugoslav Macedonia - The Shades of Night?*, July 2001, and G106, *FYROM after Ochrid*, March 2002. There is a fairly objective account of many issues and events in 'Crisis in Macedonia', Ethnobarometer, ed Balavoska, Stil & Zucconi, Rome 2002 and John Philips, *Macedonia: Warlords & Rebels in the Balkans*, I B Tauris, London, forthcoming.
For an illuminating analysis of the summer 2003 situation see International Crisis Group paper, *Macedonia - no room for complacency*, 23 October 2003, Europe Report No 149, www.crisisweb.org.

[2]   See, for instance, *Macedonia Times*, Skopje, *'1903-2003'*, No.112, September 2003.

[3]   For analysis of the 2002 election, see 'Stabilisation of the Party System?', by Ivica Bocevski, *Macedonian Affairs*, Skopje, Vol IV, No 4, 2002.

[4]   See CSRC paper by James Pettifer, OB92, *Ali Ahmeti and the new political party in FYROM*, July 2002.

[5]   Over half of the Slav-Macedonian community do not support the Accords at all, while over a third of ethnic Albanians support a complete split of the FYROM state and independence for western FYROM under Albanian control (IRI survey June 2003). Perhaps the most important finding of this poll was that over two thirds of people in both communities expect future widespread violence in FYROM.

[6]   See International Crisis Group report, op cit.

[7]   For earlier background, see *Preventing War The United Nations and Macedonia* by Abiodun Williams, Lanham, 2000. The roots of the current economic decline lie in decisions taken (or not taken) by the Gligorov government in the early 1990s.

[8]   For a very perceptive wider discussion of the citizenship and migration issues, see Istanbul University, unpublished PhD thesis by Nurcan Ozgur-Baklacioglu, *Devletlerin dis politikalari acisindan goc olgusu: Balkanlar'dan Turkiye'ye Arnaut Gocleri* (1920-1990), Istanbul, 2003.

[9]   See *South East European Times*, Skopje, 15 December 2003.

[10]   This relates to the wider citizenship issues that affect landholdings.

[11]   On October 21 2003 it was reported that after government proposals were aired in early October 'the long delayed reform' of the citizenship law might take place. This was, of course, far too late to affect the 2002 census.

[12]   For an Albanian view of the population controversy, see *Shtrirja gjeografike dhe levizja e numrit te popullsisi shqiptare ne maqedoni* by Rahmi Veliu, Tetovo, 2002.

[13]   For background, see issues of the US Greek diaspora newspaper *National Herald*.

[14]   See, for instance, websites such as 'Bitolski Orel', and the growth of pre-Bulgarian splinter groups from VMRO. VMRO also has organisation in northern Greece, focussed on Thessaloniki (Solun), Florina (Lerin) and Edessa (Vodena).

[15]   See SEE University Foundation Zurich, Annual Report 2001, Zurich, Switzerland.

[16]   NATO requires the government to reduce the numbers in the forces from about 60,000 (which includes 45,000 reservists) to about 6,500. There is a target for 14% ethnic Albanian representation in the army. It is currently 4.5%. Albanians claim this is an underestimate due to the census registration criteria. This means that even if the FYROM Defence Ministry achieved its Ochrid targets for ethnic Albanian representation, they would still be very under-represented in the army compared to the population as a whole.

[17]   See 'Army reforms entail Coonstitutional changes', MIC, Skopje, 19 September 2003. Under the old Constitution, there was no specific provision for the army to assist the police in internal security operations in FYROM, but this topic is a priority for the international community.

[18]   An alliance has been mooted between FYROM, Albania and Greece. See report of Defence Ministers meeting, 13 November 2003, *Macedonia Daily News*, Skopje.

[19]   See *The Borders of the Republic of Macedonia* by J D Talevski, Bitola, 1998.

[20]   See ICG report, August 2002, *Macedonia's Public Secret - how corruption drags the country down*.

21   See CSRC paper by James Pettifer, *Albania, Kosova and FYROM - evolving states and the European Union*, G116, October 2002 and forthcoming ICG report on Panalbanianism, due for publication in February 2004.

22   Over 1,000 cadets have graduated from the reformed police academy and officials there believe the Ochrid targets will be achieved by August 2004. In Tetovo over a quarter of the police are now ethnic Albanian. Interior Minister Kostov has expressed concern at the quality of some of the recruits and has stated that he requires improvement in their performance. See also 'Police to be divided into central and local police', MIC, Skopje, 23 September 2003.

23   See 'Chronology of Major Security Incidents', ICG Report, No 149, p32.

24   See 'Makedoniens Sicherheitskrafte starten eine Offensive gegen bewaffnete Gruppen', *Albanian-mk Digest*, No 594, 20 September 2003, also IWPR Balkan Crisis Report, No 461, 25 September 2003.

25   In March 2002.

26   ICG Europe Report, No 149, 23 October 2003. There have been allegations that some of the violence has been instigated by Serbian interests who believe that Serbia's position in Kosova would be aided by renewed violence in FYROM. See *FORUM* magazine, Skopje, 12 September 2003.

27   The OSCE officials working with the police have stated that excessive force remains a problem in FYROM police culture. See ICG Report, No 149, op cit, p5.

28   See 'International Community rejects DPA's Platform', MIC, Skopje, 17 July 2003.

29   See *Macedonian Times*, Skopje, No 109, August 2003, 'Albanian aspirations for a Greater State - the masks have slipped and will slip further still'.

30   Interview with Arben Xhaferi, 14 November 2003.

31   Note, for instance, the victorious Social Democrat election posters for the 2002 election. Also, *FAKTI* newspaper poll, Skopje, 4 November 2003, which showed that over 80% of inhabitants thought life was better under Yugoslavia than it is in 2003.

32   It is likely that the landmark decision of the PASOK government in summer 2003 to allow up to 60,000 previously banned Greek Civil War émigrés from the 1943-1949 conflict to revisit Greece is linked to this factor. At the time of writing, in January 2004, it has been reported that they will soon be able to receive Greek passports. A significant proportion of these people live in FYROM, and are of Macedonian identity. Many have land claims in Greece. They could in future receive back the Greek citizenship they and their families lost after 1949, and become a de facto 'Greek' minority in FYROM, although a rational and fair settlement of their land claims would be very difficult. In the Florina (Macedonian 'Lerin') area where many come from, their old land has been given by the Greek government to ex-Royalist soldiers and Vlach herdsmen.

For general background on the wider issues, see *Greece, European Cooperation and the Macedonian Question* by Aristotle Tziampiris, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000. The VMRO government in its most pro-Greek period between 1998 and 2000 was widely believed to have made an informal deal with PASOK in Athens that in exchange for Greece not pressing the case of language and human rights for people of Greek descent in FYROM, the issue of these émigrés' rights would not be pushed by the government in Skopje.

33   For background, see *Free Market Rules*, published by the American Chamber of Commerce in Macedonia, May-June 2003.

34   For historical background, see *The United States of America and Macedonia 1834-1945* by Trendafil Milev, Sofia, 1999.

35   See CSRC papers by Bob Churcher on this subject on www.csrc.ac.uk.

36   See, for instance, USIP publication *Simulating Kosova Lessons for the Final Status Negotiations*, www.usip.org, Report 95, November 2002.