

MACEDONIA 2002: INDEPENDENCE, R.I.P.?

BHHRG representatives visited Macedonia in June 2001 as the low intensity war against ethnic Albanian rebels was in progress. Since then a peace deal has been signed, the country's constitution changed and NATO and the OSCE installed. But, does this mean that things have changed for the better or could fighting break out again?

Introduction

BHHRG's visit to Macedonia in February 2002 was the first made by the Group since hostilities between the Macedonian security forces and Albanian rebels in the National Liberation Army (NLA) ceased in August, 2001 when an agreement was signed at Ohrid to give the country's Albanian minority more rights. In September 2001, NATO launched Operation Essential Harvest which collected c. 4000 weapons from Albanian insurgents, handed over on a voluntary basis. A small NATO stabilization force named Operation Amber Fox has since been installed to oversee a truce and an OSCE mission is on the ground to monitor the situation.

The constitution has been changed, a new law on local government is now in the pipeline and, on 7th March 2002, former Albanian rebels were amnestied by parliament as demanded by the international community. In other words, the Macedonian government has bowed to all the rebels' demands and, in return, awaits the disbursement of funds promised by the EU and other donors for its 'good behaviour'. On 12th March, \$515m. was pledged to Macedonia at a donors' conference in Brussels but the cynics are already at work. According to a Radio Free Europe reporter "it remains to be seen, however, how quickly the pledges will materialize"¹

Political developments: The Parties

Since independence, Macedonia has been ruled by coalition governments led by one or other of its two main political parties – the Social Democrats (SDSM) and Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO). Each party has also governed in partnership with one or other of the Albanian parties – Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP). There are also smaller Macedonian parties – the Liberals and the Democratic Alternative who have at one time or another played a part in different governments. A cross-party coalition government was put in place when hostilities broke out in 2001 which will (presumably) continue to govern until parliamentary elections are held sometime this year.

BHHRG did not meet any Macedonians (or Albanians, for that matter) who put any faith in the leading political parties. Much of the disenchantment is connected with each party's perceived inability to improve the economic situation in the republic as well as a firm belief that they are all corrupt. The pendulum which has swung from right to left, to and fro, since independence may stop moving altogether – there is apprehension that many people (certainly Macedonians) will not turn out to vote in significant numbers at any future election. This could have profound implications for the country's future.

The political elite's response to the recent violence has merely served to reinforce people's disillusionment. VMRO, in whose ranks belong President Boris Trajkovski and the prime minister Ljubco Georgievski is widely portrayed as 'nationalist'. But, in many people's eyes, the party never seems to put Macedonia first. Trajkovski's loyalties were compromised from the start: he came to power in 1999 in a blatantly rigged election and was obviously the

¹ Generous Donors for Macedonia, Radio Free Europe, 13.3.02

candidate favoured by the international community. However much noise VMRO's leaders make, they have always capitulated to the demands made on the country by NATO and the EU both up to and since the signing of the Ohrid Agreement.

Interior Minister, Ljube Boskovski, is portrayed in the Western media as a "hard-line nationalist" with "a tough no-nonsense attitude to Albanian extremism"² However, he is a member of a government that has accepted every concession demanded by the West, including amnesties for NLA members with violent records. In November 2001, Boskovski boasted about employing hundreds of special forces around unruly villages near Tetovo. Yet an "anonymous police officer" simultaneously reported that the Interior Ministry was actually **reducing** the number of police there on the instructions of NATO.³ Although Boskovski is said to be popular, BHHRG representatives didn't find any enthusiasm for him during their visit to Macedonia in February 2002.

The Social Democrats, on the other hand, are portrayed as being more "realistic" and less "nationalistic". Branko Crvenkovski, the party's leader, has said that "waging war with the whole world will not save Macedonia ..our priority must be gaining international support".⁴ The party has been consistently enthusiastic for Western involvement in the republic and is in the forefront when it comes to caving in to the rebel's demands in the parliament. The SDSM's easy acceptance of aid and assistance from the very people (NATO and the EU) who prevented their candidate, Tito Petkovski, from winning the presidential election in 1999 and who turned a blind eye to fraud in local elections a year later, reveals the shallow roots of political parties in the Balkans. Presumably, Western envoys indicated that they would look favourably on the party in upcoming parliamentary elections. There is also the possibility that bribes or other sweeteners will have changed hands. Even if none of these things happened and the SDSM hierarchy is merely guilty of bad judgement, it has still forfeited any respect it previously had among the population of Macedonia.

The one politician who seemed to hesitate over endorsing the Ohrid Agreement and was criticized as impeding its progress through parliament on several occasions was Stojan Andov, the veteran leader of the Liberal Party. But, even here Macedonians were not impressed as, despite some filibustering over this or that part, everything has been passed.

As for the Albanian political parties, BHHRG was told that politicians like Arben Xhaferi and Ali Ahmeti were "demagogues" who were "passive" and only interested in their own business activities.

Ohrid and after

Since independence in 1991, Macedonia has been applauded for its inclusive policies towards its ethnic minorities, the large Albanian population, in particular. To quote an article from last year's *Guardian*: "Parties representing ethnic minorities sat in parliament. Albanian parties were coalition partners in all governments. Today six out of 17 government ministers are ethnic Albanians, the parliamentary vice-president is Albanian and so are several ambassadors. There are primary and secondary schools and colleges teaching in Albanian; an Albanian university is about to open. There are Albanian TV stations, theatres, newspapers."⁵

Although the outbreak of hostilities in Macedonia was unexpected there had always been some rumblings of discontent, for example, the preamble to the country's constitution which described Macedonia as a country 'of Macedonians' was challenged from the outset by many Albanians. There is also the problem of the socialist mind set which leads many Albanians to say they are discriminated against by not having equal access to state jobs which they regard as superior to private initiative, as BHHRG found when interviewing young Albanian

² Interview with Ljube Boskovski by Christopher Deliso, < www.antiwar.com 24.1.02>

³ Radio Free Europe, 13/11/01

⁴ "A Bitter View of Macedonia" Patrick Moore, RFE, 27/7/01

⁵ See "Nato gave us this ethnic cleansing" by Milcho Manchevski in *The Guardian*, 15/8/01

students in Tetovo in 2001. The Group thought it odd that people who exhibit strong entrepreneurial skills still yearn for a dingy office complete with wilting pot plant and a poor salary. When the NLA began its activities in February 2001, ostensibly to improve their rights, most Albanians said they supported them. It is impossible to know whether this support is properly thought through. Albanian communities in the Balkans have strong clan and family loyalties and tend to respond to situations as members of a group within which internal dissent is rare. Such social cohesion is admirable, but it also means that Albanian communities are easily manipulated. BHHRG has repeatedly seen this herd mentality at work in elections when Albanian women are directed to the polling stations and shown how to vote by male family members.

The Ohrid Agreement was signed on 13th August 2001 under strong pressure from the EU and NATO. Not only did it impose changes to the Macedonian constitution and offer the Albanian minority more opportunities for self-government, it also paved the way for NATO to enter the country as a 'stabilizing' force.⁶ A new law of local self government is envisaged (§ 3.1); local boundaries are to be revised after a new census is completed (§3.2); there will be equitable representation in public administration and police force (§3.3,§4.2) and there will be positive discrimination in state universities; Albanian becomes an official language alongside Macedonian, and "with respect to languages spoken by less than 20% of the population of the municipality, the local authorities will decide democratically on their use in public bodies" (§6.6); communities with a 20% plus minority population can display their own symbols [§7.1). There are also several annexes to the Agreement which flesh out its main points. Annex B (8) says that representatives in parliament may address plenary sessions and working bodies in their own languages. Translation services must be provided when required, for example, in court proceedings.

The thrust of this document severely compromises Macedonia's existence as an independent entity. Future problems are likely to arise – for instance, with the anticipated increase in the use of the Albanian language in public life. Under the Ohrid Agreement, Macedonian could cease to be used at all in places where Albanians control the local administration and where Macedonians comprise less than 20% of the population, namely, in the Tetovo and Gostivar regions. Also, extended use of Albanian in public administration as well as for parliamentary sessions will vastly complicate and lengthen the business in hand. Providing translation services alone will hugely increase the state budget.

The truth is that few Macedonians speak Albanian and show little inclination to do so. A Swiss citizen moving effortlessly from German to Italian and back into French or an American in southern California who learns Spanish are using languages with widespread use. As one Macedonian in Tetovo told BHHRG "if I am going to study another language it will be English, French or German - why should I learn Albanian?". The Macedonian language which is closely related to Serbo-Croat and by extension to other languages in the Slav family - such as Russian, Czech and Polish - opens up wider horizons, whereas Albanian is a difficult, almost unique, language which is only spoken in a small region in the Balkans. For the international community to insist on its increased use in the country's affairs will only further marginalize and alienate Macedonians. This is happening already. For example, BHHRG was told that EU, NATO and OSCE personnel working in Macedonia hire interpreters who speak both Albanian and Macedonian. This effectively rules out Macedonian applicants. Albanians, on the other hand, have learnt Macedonian at school – up to now. Most are bilingual and therefore most of these (prized, well paid) jobs are awarded to them

Census and Future Elections

The real consequences of the Ohrid Agreement will only be properly appreciated after a new census has been conducted and parliamentary elections take place. Both eventualities were anticipated in the document – in fact, according to its Annex C the census should have taken place last year.⁷ Many Macedonians fear that the number of Albanians living in the country will be inflated in the final tally. They argue that there are far fewer resident Albanians than

⁶ The text of the Ohrid Agreement can be read at www.president.gov.mk

⁷ See Ohrid Agreement (ibid)

suggested by the 23% figure produced in the 1994 census and that numbers are likely to be manipulated by including a floating population of *Gastarbeiter* who mainly reside in Europe and people from Kosovo. There is also the vexed question of refugees. BHHRG was told by an official from UNHCR that most Albanian IDPs and refugees had returned home when the fighting in Kosovo ceased in June, 1999. But large numbers are still officially given out for the numbers of refugees and displaced Albanians. Unscrupulous officials could use bogus refugees to add extra names to the total. As the census will be supervised by the EU and Council of Europe it is possible that many of these considerations will be overlooked.

A new election law is part of the package of agreements with the international community and that, too, promises to pose further problems for the Macedonian majority. A draft of the new election law was presented to parliament in September, 2001 and commented on at length by the OSCE in a document released on 20th November 2001.⁸ The draft discusses the rules and conduct of the parliamentary elections in Macedonia noting, *en passant* that the OSCE has found previous elections to be generally acceptable, something that BHHRG's monitors would hotly dispute⁹ The report advocates replacing the mixed voting system which operates now with 85 MPs elected by single mandate and 35 by proportional representation with a universal system of proportional representation. It also recommends that the country be treated in the future as a single election district. The OSCE anyway anticipates the changing of election boundaries after the census is conducted. On 13th March 2001, the 4 main political parties accepted the PR formula but have, as yet, not decided on treating the country as one constituency. They will probably go along with this part of the OSCE report too.

These changes have also to be seen in the light of other suggestions in the OSCE report, namely, that the law should be changed to allow absentee and refugee voting, now prohibited¹⁰ Although the OSCE fails to say so, absentee voting will mainly benefit the Albanian community which includes large numbers of people who work abroad in countries like Switzerland and Germany. It is also common knowledge that many Albanians drift between Kosovo and Macedonia on an impermanent basis. In other words, this provision will enfranchise a large new constituency of Albanians without adding many more Macedonians to the rolls – most Macedonians living abroad have taken up citizenship in their adopted countries like Australia and the US. Others, probably living illegally in Western Europe, will be unwilling to draw attention to themselves by going to the Macedonian embassy in, say, London or Berlin, to vote.

In its report the OSCE acknowledges that there have been repeated abuses of the poll organized by members of the Albanian community - in the elections of 1999 and 2000, in particular – with widespread multiple voting and intimidation of local Albanians by their political leadership. However, they conclude that formalizing absentee voting will prevent irregularities like personation and multiple voting. BHHRG would disagree. In places like Bosnia and Kosovo legalized absentee voting has led to widespread fraud, administrative chaos as well as arbitrary decisions on voters' identity. What is to stop large numbers of Albanians appearing from Kosovo, claiming to be refugees and demanding the right to vote? Election rolls will probably be supplemented by additional voter lists which are likely to be allowed in regions where there have been population shifts. As areas with an Albanian majority will soon be wholly controlled by ethnic Albanians there will be no sanctions on unreliable officials who inflate the voter rolls at their whim.

All this has led many Macedonians to fear that the country could end up ruled *in its entirety* by the ethnic Albanian political parties. As pointed out, people are alienated from the country's leading politicians and it is widely predicted that the turn-out in Macedonian areas at the next national elections will be low – as little as 30%, according to many people. When hostilities were at their height last year, the SDSM called for immediate elections but their enthusiasm for an early poll faded as the public made plain its loss of faith in the party after Ohrid. Whether from stronger commitment to democratic principles or a tradition of

⁸ “Comments on the Draft Law for the election of members of parliament” www.osce.org/odihr. 20nov01

⁹ see BHHRG election reports on Macedonia, 1999,2000 www.bhhr.org

¹⁰ OSCE report, *ibid*, Section IV,C

obedience to their leadership, Macedonia's Albanian population has always voted in large numbers (including early and often). There is no reason to believe things would be any different in any future elections. As for the timing of the next parliamentary election, it was reported on 20th March that the leading parties had agreed to hold the next election on the 15th September.

Military Situation

At the moment the military situation in Macedonia is quiet but far from stable. On 1st January 2002 the Associated Press received a communiqué from the main group of Albanian fighters, the NLA demanding more rights and saying it was "reorganizing and reactivating".¹¹ But statements made since by Ali Ahmeti, the NLA leader seem to contradict the possibility of a resurgence of NLA activity as he has said that "there is no reason to start a new war"¹² But although Ahmeti himself has taken off his fatigues, put on a suit and entered mainstream politics by creating an umbrella group to include all the Albanian parties, there are persistent rumours in Macedonia that a 'splinter' organization, the Albanian National Army (ANA) is regrouping in the mountains behind Tetovo.

But there are other areas of unease: in early March 2002, Kfor US general, Keith Huber, suggested that a border agreement made under the auspices of the UN in 2001 between Macedonia and Yugoslavia was unsatisfactory as it prevented farmers in Kosovo from reaching their fields. On 6th March, Kosovo's new prime minister Bajram Rexhepi also refused to recognize the border. So far, the UN and US have stuck to the original deal but if they were to change their minds, it would not be the first time that a shift in policy has been mooted, denied and finally put in place.

Leaving aside the possibility of armed formations regrouping and launching attacks, there are regular reports of small-scale violence in and around Tetovo as well as south east of Skopje where so much fighting took place in 2001. Daily shootings are reported and several people have been killed. The main targets in these fatalities seem to be men who either acted as police reservists or who are related to the police and armed forces. On 10th February Aco Stojanovski, aged 36, was killed and another man seriously injured by a bomb which exploded in the predominantly Albanian village of Aracinovo. The explosion occurred as they opened a padlocked door at an empty house owned by a policeman who was Stojanovski's brother.¹³ On 10th March A police reservist, Vanco Ristovski, who had been recently demobilised, was shot dead on a road near his home in the village of Volkovije, 31 miles west of the capital Skopje.

What is never openly acknowledged is that the much-touted weapons collection last year was a sham. Even insiders have occasionally hinted as much. In December 2001, Klaus Vollers, NATO ambassador to Macedonia, said it would be a "good idea to have a second collection of weapons. We hear shots every night. There are too many weapons around".¹⁴ And, while the Albanian rebels are ultimately to blame for the insurrection, the behaviour of the Macedonian forces has been less than opaque. It has even been suggested that Military Professional Resources (MPRI) described as "a mercenary outfit contracted to the Pentagon" is active in the country. MPRI, under its director General Richard Griffiths, is responsible for channelling US military aid to the Macedonian army.¹⁵ In August 2001 The *Financial Times* reported that there were "NATO personnel advising the Macedonian government" who had been "in the republic for several years"¹⁶

As the Macedonian army has remained largely supine during the conflict (presumably under Western orders) counter-insurgency has been in the hands of the police and units from the

¹¹ "Rebels Displeased by Macedonia" by Ermina Mehmeti, AP, 11/1/02,

¹² "Macedonian ex-rebel dismisses talk of new war" by Ana Petrusseva, Reuters, 1/3/02

¹³ "Bomb kills man in Macedonian flashpoint villages", Reuters, 10/2/02

¹⁴ RFE, 20/12/01

¹⁵ See "Macedonia: Washington's Military-Intelligence Ploy" by Michel Chossodovsky, 17/6/01, www.emperors-clothes.com

¹⁶ See "NATO fears over plan to collect rebel arms" by Judy Dempsey in *Financial Times*, 13/8/01

Ministry of the Interior. Allegations have been made about the brutal behaviour of some of these groups with names like "Lions, "Tigers" and "Scorpions", reminiscent of Serbian paramilitary forces active during the early 1990s. But even here the evidence of brutality is mixed – some Macedonians told BHHRG that units of the Tigers had helped protect their communities from attack. However, one (scathing) report hinted that a special unit called the Scorpions was rather less ferocious and had "overslept" the crisis by "frequently calling in sick".¹⁷

Mujahideen fighters

A new ingredient has entered the equation with allegations that Islamic, mujahideen terrorists are active in Macedonia. On 2nd March Macedonian police near Butel, a suburb of Skopje, shot dead 7 men they claimed to be from Islamic countries with experience of fighting in Afghanistan. They had NLA uniforms with them. Officials were quick to link the incident to the February arrest of 2 Jordanians and 2 Bosnians carrying compact discs which contained "10,00 pages of documents on various operations in the region, already or to be carried out"

Inconsistencies in the police's version of events soon emerged: at first the Macedonian authorities said the men were on foot then they said they were emerging from a vehicle. Although they were ambushed and there was, allegedly, a shoot out no member of the Macedonian forces was wounded.

More ominously, the claim by the Ministry of the Interior that there was evidence that the men were planning to attack the embassy of the US, and the joint UK and Germany embassy in Skopje has been met with surprise by their spokesmen. They say they had not received any threats and if the Macedonian government knew of any they should have been warned in advance. Suggestions have been made that the whole incident is being used to discredit the Albanian fighters who have laid down their arms. *The Washington Post* reported that "recent revelations in Skopje about reputed Islamic terrorists dovetail too neatly with [what some observers] call a desire by some parts of the Macedonian government to demonise the country's ethnic Albanian minority"¹⁸ An EU spokeswoman remarked that "there is still a lot of inconsistency surrounding this case".¹⁹

A certain amount of secrecy also surrounds the identity of the men. Were they really from countries like Jordan and Iraq? The Macedonian government says 2 of the men were Pakistanis and diplomats who have seen some of the bodies say they looked Middle Eastern. But they could, for example, have been illegal immigrants somehow entrapped by the police. It has been suggested that they might have been Kurdish asylum seekers who struck unlucky.

BHHRG has been told by people in Macedonia, including journalists who have worked in neighbouring Albania and Kosovo, that they have seen documents indicating that Islamic rebels, including Chechens, have been active in the region for some time now. The Macedonian government may have thought that apprehending such people in the highly charged atmosphere that followed the terrorist attacks in New York would earn them gratitude from the international community. But, like the farmer who proudly presents his boss with a clutch of rabbits and ends up accused of being a poacher, they were not impressed.

Could the Macedonian government have been led into a trap or did they think that their fortunes would improve in the eyes of the EU and other international organizations operating in the country by making their own contribution to the 'war against terrorism'? It may be a combination of both. As this report is written more opprobrium is being heaped on to the Interior Ministry and calls are increasing for an 'investigation'. A visit from Carla del Ponte may not be far off. As for the seriousness of the threat from Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the Balkans, BHHRG remains sceptical. As the group pointed out in a recent report

¹⁷ RFE 18/12/01

¹⁸ RFE 6/3/02

¹⁹ RFE 6/3/02

on the arrest of 3 aid workers in Kosovo, there is little interest in Islam there - even in its mildest form. The same goes for Macedonia. And, why should Islamic rebels whose hatred of America led them to bomb the World Trade Centre work alongside the allies of the US which the KLA – and its surrogate, the NLA - are acknowledged to be?

Many of those most preoccupied with Islamic extremism in the Balkans (whether it be in Bosnia, Kosovo or Macedonia) are Serb supporters who claimed that President Izetbegovic was planning to create a Muslim state in Bosnia during the 1992-5 war. This has not happened. In fact, Bosnia is now ruled by former young Communists, like many places in the former Yugoslavia. Muslim fundamentalism was also supposed to take hold in Novi Pazar in southern Serbia. Again, this has not happened. Kosovo is a totally secular society, despite President Milosevic's allegations (cited from US sources) at his trial in the Hague that Al Qaeda was operating there. If there are freelance fighters from the Middle East in the Balkans they are more likely connected with drugs and weapons smuggling than spreading Islam. As many people have pointed out since 11th September, Middle Eastern terrorists are as likely to be hiding out in the US and Western Europe as anywhere else.

The violence and its aftermath

The events of the past year have had a profound effect on ordinary Macedonians. Many people are still in some kind of shock having been catapulted from the status of good guys in the Balkan melting pot, praised for their exemplary record in protecting minority rights, to ethnic cleansers almost resembling the evil, Milosevic-era Serbs. Some people accuse human rights organizations, like Human Rights Watch of criticizing the (lawful) authorities' handling of the violence more than its original perpetrators. Macedonians themselves blame the international community for their plight while the Albanian insurgents are seen as very much playing a supporting role.

George Robertson and Javier Solana seem to attract particular expressions of vitriol. People remember Lord Robertson calling the Albanian rebels "terrorists" when the uprising began - before giving in to them on every count. Robertson's behaviour is similar to that of US Balkan envoy, Richard Gelbard, who labelled the KLA as a "terrorist organization" in 1998. A year later NATO bombed Yugoslavia on its behalf. In each case, the NATO representatives seemed to fuel a counter-terrorist operation before pulling the rug from underneath the police forces. Just as NATO egged Serbia on against the KLA in Kosovo before rounding on the Milosevic government as a genocidal regime, so in 2001 the NATO Secretary-General, Lord Robertson used unequivocal rhetoric – "murderers," etc. – to denigrate the NLA rebels before suddenly turning on the Skopje government and demanding it concede the rebels' demands or else face NATO's irresistible displeasure.

It remains a potent question as to how more than 40,000 troops from the most powerful military alliance in world history stationed on Macedonia's border with Kosovo could not prevent a ragbag collection of guerrillas from turning the country upside down? On their journey through southern Kosovo towards the Macedonian border in February 2002, BHHRG representatives saw large numbers of Kfor troops conducting some kind of manoeuvre near the village of Strpce, including Americans seemingly operating outside their designated zone in the province. Black Hawk helicopters flew overhead. To innocent eyes there seemed to be enough hardware to intercept a few Albanian gunrunners – especially as the terrain is not thickly forested. But less innocent observers might also conclude that these troops could easily assist rebel activities if only by providing cover from both the ground and the air.

BHHRG's observers never heard a satisfactory answer to these questions and the possibility remains that Albanian 'rights' have provided a convenient excuse to provoke intervention by the international community for commercial and strategic reasons. The economic effects of the fighting have been deleterious to the local economy and tourism has collapsed. Many Macedonians, like people in other countries in the former Yugoslavia, are now forced to look to the international community for employment. But, without connections to one or other of the local parties such jobs are near impossible to land. No one spoken to by BHHRG had any faith in their politicians – all are tarred for bowing to the demands of the Europeans and NATO. So alienated were they by August 2001 that "the US government

planned to finance an intense campaign [to ensure passage of the peace deal] and “to restore the domestic standing of Mr. Trajkovski ..whose approval rates have plummeted”²⁰ However, the prospect of success was acknowledged as being dim. As one Western diplomat put it “the parties here are corrupt, self-seeking and utterly indifferent to public opinion”²¹

It comes as no surprise to learn that the number of applications to emigrate has soared. In February 2002, BHHRG representatives listened as Macedonians quizzed them about how to get work in Europe and how much money is needed to legally enter countries like the UK. Western Europe cannot really complain about an influx of asylum seekers when their policies in places like Macedonia give rise to just such a state of affairs.

Almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy, journalists have mulled over the possibility that fighting will resume in the Spring and newspapers report this or that discovery of weapons caches and armed formations of Albanians regrouping in the borderlands with neighbouring Kosovo, waiting to strike. However, the situation should be improving as police have gradually been returning to villages they were obliged to leave (by the Macedonian government on the instructions of NATO officials) last summer. By mid-March 2002, it was reported that the police had returned to 60 out of 120 villages.²² In villages with mixed populations joint patrols of Albanian and Macedonian policemen have commenced work. But, there are still problems in the Tetovo and Gostivar regions where several villages have been blockaded to prevent the police from returning and the effectiveness of these patrols is severely compromised by their mandates. BHHRG was told that the police were not allowed to carry arms any more and were only able to patrol in a carefully specified area. From what BHHRG could see, their effectiveness looks unpromising. In early February 2002, a group of the new, mixed police force was spotted outside the village of Matejce lolling around, by the side of the road, smoking while a large Albanian flag fluttered overhead.

BHHRG witnessed a legacy of destruction from last year’s violence as they travelled around Skopje and its environs. Aracinovo, the scene of a fierce stand-off between Albanian rebels and the Macedonian army in June, 2002 and where the rebels were observed being spirited away by American operatives, is now ‘cleansed’ of most of its Macedonian inhabitants, other than those too old to move. The Macedonian school has ceased to operate. Houses stand abandoned and burnt-out adding to the ghostly atmosphere.

However, Aracinovo has not suffered as much damage as villages like Otlja and Matejce north of Kumanovo where a combination of burning and looting, house to house fighting and, finally, shelling by the Macedonian forces has left a scene of devastation as bad as anywhere in the Balkans. Matejce was a large, mixed village but it is noticeable that some buildings remain intact – namely, the large, well-appointed Albanian ‘compounds’. The mosque lies in ruins – the Macedonians accused the rebels of using it for their attacks. More Albanian houses were destroyed during the Macedonian army’s offensive in neighbouring Otlja.

IDP Centre Kumanovo

According to statistics 70,000 people were uprooted by the fighting last year and UNHCR say that there are still thousands of internally displaced people in Macedonia, 5045 in the Kumanovo region alone. However, most Albanians dislocated in last year’s fighting have returned home or found accommodation with family or friends.

BHHRG visited a centre for Macedonian IDPs in Kumanovo where over 400 refugees from the surrounding villages are cared for. The Hotel Crystal is one of several holding centres in the town, typical of many such places visited by BHHRG during the past 10 years from Georgia to Serbia. At the time of the group’s visit there were 161 people living in the Crystal who had been there since 5th July – they had stayed with relatives and friends after fleeing the villages of Matejce and Otlja on 3rd May, 2001.

²⁰ See Peter Finn, “US Media Blitz Set for Macedonia” in *International Herald Tribune*, 17/8/01

²¹ *ibid*

²² RFE 14.3.02

The refugees' representatives, Slatan Ilieski and Sanja Stanjokovic, said that all their houses were burnt or destroyed. Asked why they had left they said that they had fled at the same time as the local Macedonian police forces were pulled out. Q. "Who pulled the police out? A. "The Macedonian government on the instructions of NATO and the EU".

The refugees produced documents drawn up by the OSCE showing pictures of their houses, all of which had suffered some form of destruction – burning, shelling etc. The EU agencies are already beginning the process of reconstruction – BHHRG saw a multitude of placards with the familiar gold stars on a blue background in and around the villages in question. However, one woman said that her recently, EU-restored house had already been put to the torch by local Albanians.

It is hard to confirm such allegations as these people will not return to the villages unless they have some kind of protection. But, it is obvious that any previous interethnic harmony has been destroyed, possibly for ever. One woman said that on a recently 'supervised' visit to her village she recognized some of the Albanian fighters, now returned to civilian life, as their former neighbour and they alleged that one UCK leader was the director of a local primary school. This is the kind of allegation many Serbs in Kosovo have made to BHHRG in the past.

Everyone wants to return home. Many said that generations of their families had farmed the land around these villages. However they said that the only people who were allowed back were those whose relatives had not joined the police reserves during the fighting. In Matejce 40 young men had been members of such reserves. Such fear is not unfounded as demonstrated by the recent killings in Aracinovo and Matejce.

The IDPs are fed in the centre but they receive no money from the state or any humanitarian organization. Their quarters are clean and the building is superior to many such places visited by BHHRG – although the spotless conditions of the rooms is due to the good housekeeping of the refugees rather than any outside assistance. Nevertheless, all the rooms are small – approximately 12'x 6' – and can house up to 5 people, often accommodating family members from babies to the very old. A 15 year-old boy was having lunch during the Group's visit. One wonders what his future can be in a town with high unemployment and with no prospect of a home of his own.

The refugees are bitter about the behaviour of their government and say that President Trajkovski has "sold Macedonia to the West". However, the most virulent remarks were directed against NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson and the EU's Foreign Policy Chief, Javier Solana. It is impossible to repeat the colourful language used to describe them in this report.

Tetovo

Although tension in the town has lowered since last year's ceasefire there is fear that violence could recur. The local Macedonian population is frightened and incidents of house burning and expulsions are commonplace. There are only 3 streets in Tetovo where they feel safe: Tito, Boris Kidovic and Blavoje Toska . The police have returned to some villages but, as in the Kumanovo region, they are unarmed and only patrol for 2-3 hours per day; locals say that trouble starts again after they leave. Anyway, according to local observers, the mixed police forces don't work well together and, 70-80% of the Albanian officers are former members of the NLA. Only the Macedonian Lions helped the local villagers when the serious fighting took place.

Zlate Todorovski, chief editor of Kiss TV which broadcasts mainly to the Macedonian population in the Tetovo region, told BHHRG of his kidnapping by armed NLA fighters on the 12th November last year. He was travelling in a convey for protection with other Macedonians, including women and children when they were taken and held in a small room in a village near the town. One man was beaten before they were eventually released. Todorovski said he knew the kidnappers "I wouldn't have thought they would do this" he said " I owned a shop in the village for 5 years and my mother was born there"

He said that the OSCE mission “does nothing” for them but “everything for the Albanians. “When the Albanians ask for humanitarian aid they get everything they want”. He also said that weapons, cigarettes and prostitutes are regularly smuggled over the border supposedly guarded by Turkish Kfor troops stationed at the crossing at Raduša.

Tomislav Stojanovski is the leader of the Democratic Party of Macedonia which is based in Tetovo. Although the party has no seats in parliament he tries to look after the interests of the local Macedonian population. Stojanovski (known by his nickname ‘Bombay’) claims that most parties are Skopje-based and do nothing for them He is “disappointed by NATO’s mission” and says the alliance “allows the offensive to operate from Kosovo. They could bring peace to Macedonia in 24 hours if they wanted to”. He also criticized the OSCE mission “they tell me that there are many places in the world where the situation is worse” he says.

Albanians in Tetovo

There is an ongoing debate about just how many Albanians live in Macedonia. The 1994 census, approved by the Council of Europe, concluded that they made up c.23% of the population. However, local Albanians say it is much more, closer to over 30%. Although some commentators talk as though Macedonia’s Albanian minority was a seething cauldron waiting to explode, the truth is somewhat different. There were incidents of irredentism during the 1990s but they were few and far between. The most serious occurred in the town of Gostivar in 1997 following an attempt to fly the Albanian flag on a public building. Otherwise, a dispute over the functioning of the Albanian language university in nearby Tetovo led to violence in the same year. It would be fair to say that despite differences of religion and mores and a certain amount of grumbling from more extreme political quarters, Albanians and Macedonians coexisted in harmony that is, until the Kosovo crisis and its aftermath.

The Kosovo crisis caused 350,000 refugees to flee to Macedonia. The routing of the Serbs also led to a looser border regime now controlled by NATO and the UN who are accused (not without evidence) of casting a blind eye at increased traffic in weapons and drugs from the province and its southern neighbour. Although the Albanian areas of Macedonia were always more affluent than presented (many young men working in countries like Germany and Switzerland sent remittances home to their families) the increase in construction of both houses – large – and commercial property has sky-rocketed in the last 21/2 years.

The two universities

This increasing affluence may have contributed towards the costs of constructing a proper building to house the University of Tetovo which was founded in 1994 by the present rector, Fadil Sulejmani and Arben Xhaferi, leader of the DPA party, to provide further education to Macedonia’s Albanians in their own language. The two other universities in the country – in Skopje and Bitola – teach exclusively in the Macedonian language.

From the university’s early years when it operated from houses in a nearby village, Tetovo University courted controversy. The Macedonian state consistently refused to recognize the institution, despite pleas from Albanian politicians and local supporters. In 1997 fighting broke out resulting in one person being killed and the rector Dr. Sulejmani was imprisoned. However, although there has always been a strong lobby among human rights activists supporting ethnic Albanian grievances, there was caution when it came to the subject of Tetovo University. For example, the philanthropist George Soros, who invested heavily in Macedonia’s institutions in the early days of the country’s independence told TV A1 in 1995 “I do not support that initiative”. In 1997 a delegation from the Vienna-based International Helsinki Federation complained (somewhat pompously) that teachers and lecturers at the university were “unable to produce their diplomas for inspection” casting doubt on their academic credentials. And, Max van der Stoep the OSCE commissioner for minority rights said (in March 2001) that there were close links between Sulejmani and the new party that backs the rebels

However, albeit unrecognised by the Macedonian state, Tetovo University continued to operate offering more courses. Despite the lack of enthusiasm from abroad, local Albanians

supported the institution and their politicians regularly put it high on their agendas when demanding improved conditions for the Albanian community in Macedonia. And, in June 2001 BHHRG was told by its students that recognition of the university was a key issue for the NLA fighters.

By late 2001 the situation had changed dramatically with the opening of the South East European University on the outskirts of Tetovo. Citing concern about the lack of standards at Tetovo University and the need for a serious institution to address the educational need of Macedonia's Albanians, the OSCE and USAID funded and set up SEEU. The first students arrived in October, 2001. The university is named after Max van der Stoep who is its honorary president. Arben Xhaferi is now a member of the governing body.

The university has been in the planning for several years now but only finally got the green light in 2001 when the Macedonian parliament passed a law allowing private educational establishments. At the same time, the government donated land on the outskirts of Tetovo for the new campus while the EU, Netherlands and Soros are listed among the donors. In November 2001 it also gained the possibility of receiving state funds. BHHRG representatives saw the building work in progress in June 2001 and visited the SEEU in February 2002.

The South East Europe University

The first thing that strikes the visitor to the SEEU is the tight security apparatus guarding entry to the campus. As Tetovo is overwhelmingly lived in and run by Albanians it is difficult to see why such controls are necessary – particularly at an institution of higher learning. Also, these security guards are neither ordinary working class Albanians nor the traditional bouncer type. BHHRG representatives were escorted by a charming, English-speaking gentleman with a diploma in Albanian studies from Skopje university. The preponderance of security details suggests the importance of the SEEU to those running it, while the employment of highly qualified people as 'gatekeepers' indicates that salaries are high for (normally) low level jobs.

The emphasis on control was evident during BHHRG's meeting with two American officials, SEEU's chief Academic Planning Officer, Paul Foster and a colleague who introduced himself simply as "Robert". Both men were seconded from Indiana University which is in partnership with the university to provide administrative back-up. Unlike most officials interviewed by BHHRG the two men declined to be filmed for the group's video archive. Asked if they could look round the campus facilities and talk to the students Foster called in a security officer telling him in Macedonian not to "let them walk around alone".

The university offers a 3 year course in English (the main subject for the first year of study) and computing. Further courses in subjects like law and business studies will follow. IT skills appear to be the main focus of academic activity and there are already 150 computer centres with satellite access to the internet which will please Ali Ahmeti who doesn't want children to "learn about kalashnikovs but computers". At present, there are 850 students although the aim is to have, eventually, 3200. The costs of tuition are high for the region: 1400 DM per annum although there are a range of scholarships and assistance schemes. Still, the costs of studying at SEEU are likely to attract well-heeled young people in the main as demonstrated by the large number of top-of-the-range cars including BMWs and Audis parked outside.

The curriculum at SEEU is in Albanian, although there are courses in Macedonian. However, it is unlikely that many Macedonians will be able to study there as there is a requirement that each community should know the other's language "to a reasonable level". While all Albanians speak Macedonian few of the latter speak Albanian. Paul Foster said there were about 10 Macedonians studying there at present although some local Macedonians doubted that and claimed that there were none.

Paul Foster and "Robert" affected a studied lack of interest in the 'other' university saying that they had "heard ugly reports about it" but it is no secret that the intention is to see Tetovo university closed. "They want to destroy our school," says Fadil Sulejmani "to open one school in order to shut another." ... "Alajdin Abazi, the rival rector, doesn't deny that this is

exactly what he is trying to do".²³ For example, some students and staff have been lured away from the 'other place' and there are rumours that SEEU has set its sights on expanding the campus to take in a nearby agricultural school which would (presumably) lead to its closure.

The idea that all the young Albanians who graduate from SEEU are going to use their expensive education to further the interests of the Macedonian state is probably an illusion. BHHRG was told by some students they met on the university's campus that they hoped to get well-paid jobs (translating etc.) with the various international bodies in the region – particularly in Kosovo. Others will probably use their skills, bolstered by a knowledge of English, to go abroad. However, others will remain and provide the future *cadres* for the international community's new Balkan regional structures. SEEU, with its secretive atmosphere and emphasis on creating a new administrative class, reminded BHHRG's visitors of the former Soviet Union's 'party schools' described so chillingly in many published memoirs.²⁴

Tetovo University

After visiting SEEU the Group's representatives called on Tetovo University and talked to the Pro-rector, Dr. Nexhbedin Beadini and the Rector, Dr. Sulejmani about SEEU and how it might affect them.

According to the figures, 13,000 students study at Tetovo. There are 7 faculties including law, philosophy, economy, science and medicine. So far, 400 students have graduated. Unlike SEEU, the university provides useful courses in subjects like medicine and dentistry but the problem is, and always has been, lack of recognition (or funding) by the Macedonian state. This means that Tetovo University's diplomas are also unrecognised. The costs of studying there are considerably cheaper than in the new college: 100 DM per seminar.

The staff at Tetovo are fully aware that the point of SEEU is to close their university. They call it a 'private school' and say it only educates the elite. However, they have no objections to it being there while pointing out that it has few genuine faculties of learning - it is an administrative school whose purpose, according to... is "political" .. "to 'create a technical class". Dr. Sulejmani was scornful about the involvement of Albanian politicians in SEEU. Despite his alleged association with the NLA he described Alia Ahmeti as 'passive' - the same as Xhaferi. "They are working for their own private interests".

Allegations have been consistently made that Tetovo University is somehow involved with Albanian terrorists in the NLA – young students there told BHHRG last summer that they supported the rebels. However, history may judge that its contribution to the 2001 uprising was a great deal less significant than the countries that support SEEU. It seems to be a senseless waste of US and EU taxpayers' money to build a new campus outside Tetovo when there is a modern, purpose-built university in the town already. Surely, compromise could have been reached with the staff at Tetovo, including Dr. Sulejmani, about course structure, qualifications and other areas of concern? The international community is happy to impose amnesty for terrorists and demand 'reconciliation' with those it calls 'extremists'. Why not here?

The problem could come back to haunt the sponsors of SEEU. Dr. Sulejmani said that local Albanians support his university which, due to lack of state funding, they had helped finance since 1994. Education at SEEU is also beyond the means of ordinary Albanians. If Dr. Sulejmani's negative views about Macedonia's Albanian political class are also reflected in the local community, tensions between those Albanians who have benefited from foreign largesse and those left behind could escalate and result in a new wave of violence.

Prospects

²³ "College Rivalry in Macedonian City Divides Ethnic Albanians" Richard Boudreaux, *Los Angeles Times*, 7/4/01

²⁴ See, for example, "Child of the Revolution" by Wolfgang Leonhard, Collins, London, 1957

The situation in Macedonia is still dangerously fluid and the possibility of future conflict remains, despite Ali Ahmeti's claim that the country's Albanian minority has achieved what it set out to with the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. As BHHRG has pointed out, all sorts of issues remain unresolved, including the return of Macedonian IDPs to their homes, continuing, albeit low-level, violence and kidnappings and unrestrained criminality in the border areas with Kosovo. There is also the question of what may happen after the next parliamentary elections. Will Albanian parties garner sufficient votes to effectively run the country? Could this lead to more ethnic cleansing of Macedonians living in Albanian populated areas? Could the country be partitioned? Will the Macedonians just pack up their bags and go?

As everyone knows, the answers to these questions lie in the hands of the international community for, as many people realise, Macedonia is fundamentally a protectorate now. People clutch at straws: perhaps the new EU envoy (Alain le Roy) will be more sympathetic to their cause than his predecessor; if only the country could join NATO then they would be on equal terms with the very people who are dictating their future. The more realistic among them want all 'internationals' to leave.

But that is not going to happen. It is revealing to consult the 'experts' for their views. One month into the rebellion, influential players and journalists in the Balkans were calling for outside intervention. George Soros (echoing General Wesley Clark) wrote that "the Alliance is the only institution that can move the conflict from the battlefield to the political arena...NATO must do whatever is necessary to stabilize Macedonia"²⁵ "To date Europe and the NATO's diplomats have been doing well" enthused Tim Judah.²⁶ "NATO's active presence is necessary"²⁷ added Gareth Evans of the influential International Crisis Group. Of course, all these people urged NATO not only to stay but also to enlarge its mission in order to bring "stability".

The fear among Macedonians is that the country will be split in two. If this was to happen the Albanians would not only control some of its best parts, including the only real tourist destination, Lake Ohrid, but also the water supply for the Skopje area which comes from the Tetovo region. In other words, a truncated Macedonia would be unviable. It would also be difficult to draw a clear line dividing the two populations as there are significant Albanian minorities in the capital Skopje and the country's second biggest town, Kumanovo. This could point to more ethnic cleansing.

However, there are indications that rearranging borders may be in the air. The international community may not want to create a greater Albania but that does not mean it would not favour a greater Kosovo. There are straws in the wind: propaganda films shown on (state run) Macedonian TV's Albanian channel last year displayed maps with north western Macedonia and Kosovo as part of the same entity. Remarks about revoking the 2001 border agreement with Yugoslavia have been denied, but it would not be the first time for a seemingly bad idea to be floated, denied and then revived again later.

Despite low-levels of dissatisfaction, Macedonians and Albanians lived harmoniously together before 2001. It is difficult to see how trust between the two communities can be revived, especially in formerly mixed regions of the country. While Albanians (as in Kosovo) may seem to have reaped most of the benefits from the West's Balkan adventures the prognosis for their future is equally bleak as their communities are prey to rampant criminality. BHHRG found much disillusion in neighbouring Kosovo where many Albanians say they want to leave the province after nearly 3 years as an international protectorate.

²⁵ See "Macedonian Violence, letter from George Soros in *IHT*, 28/3/01

²⁶ See "The West must keep the pressure on Macedonia or face a bloodbath" by Tim Judah in *The Independent*, 22/6/01

²⁷ See "NATO's Plan for Macedonia is Not Sufficient" by Gareth Evans in *The Wall Street Journal*, 16/8/01

Since 1991, Tito's Yugoslavia has broken up into six new republics. Whereas in other republics of the former Yugoslavia there are political parties who have attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to defend the national interest, all major parties in Macedonia have united in accepting the "international community" as the dominant force in determining the fate of their country. In effect, they have sold out not only Macedonia's sovereignty but also the country's democracy. Since the Ohrid Agreement, ordinary Macedonian voters of all ethnic groups have been disenfranchised since deals by the politicians at the top and international mediators determine their fate. Frustration and potentially explosive resentments are the result.

The international community must shoulder the bulk of the blame for encouraging the NLA rebellion in Macedonia and certainly failing to stop it by deploying the full power available to NATO in Kosovo and Macedonia to interdict the rebels' supply lines and to suppress their bases.

A long term source of destabilisation is the lingering suspicion that the 2001 NLA uprising served the West's strategic interests and the possibility that Macedonian resentments will be directed at Western peacekeepers and representatives. Many Macedonians believe that the NATO facilitated the NLA rebellion to provide an excuse for its own intervention to secure the region as a transit corridor for Caspian energy supplies. Behind the rhetoric of minority rights proclaimed by NATO and the OSCE lies a stark probability that it will be the Macedonian people's human rights as well as their infant democracy which lose out as result of Western intervention. Passive acceptance by the Macedonians of their fate may satisfy Western policymakers, but the risk remains that the Macedonian political class will be rejected en bloc and that resentment against NATO could boil over when the political reality of the Macedonia's death as an independent state becomes undeniable.