



THEME 4: Regional Conflicts

Collection of material

Tf 402 Macedonia – a country with an uncertain future?

The following article appeared on 13.08.2002 in the “Badische Zeitung”, a German regional newspaper (author: NORBERT MAPPES-NIEDIEK)

Tf 402/1 One huge piece of play-acting

One year on: the “ethnic war” in Macedonia was all about sinecures*

“One year after the Ohrid Peace Agreement, which on 13th August 2001 put an end to six months of conflict, the world looks completely different in Macedonia. But it’s not the existing circumstances that have changed – only the way of looking at them.

All over the Balkans, including Macedonia, it is no longer a matter of dividing territory among states of the post-Yugoslavian era. It is now all about personal power and the influence of organised crime.

Just over a year ago the eyes of the world saw a suppressed Albanian minority and a crushing Macedonian majority. Within the Albanian minority there were 'radicals' and 'moderates'. The international community became involved in the conflict, this time through the actions of the EU, and brought about a compromise. Macedonia is still not having an easy time of it, according to the picture today. Hatred is just as great, but at least they’ve stopped shooting at each other.

But when you look at the picture more carefully, you find that almost none of this is true. The 'moderate' Albanian party of Arben Xhaferi does not look very much like a political organisation. It is now a system that serves clients, demanding its own taxes, handing out licences and monopolies, and in the areas that are settled by Albanians more or less deciding who gets all the positions. The dispute is not carried out between Albanians and Macedonians: the governing parties of both peoples have neatly divided up their respective zones of influence and rule unchallenged in their majority areas. As in no other country in the Balkans the species of local potentate has established itself in Macedonia, controlling the administration, economy and police, living off the illegal trafficking of women and drugs and playing politician only when the public eye is looking.

In contrast to this, the 'extremists' are not as sinister as one might expect. In fact, a number of them openly protested about the scandalous way that resources were divided up among collaborating national gangs. Nevertheless, the UCK can’t be put in among the ‘good guys’. Among their leaders were a number of local barons with connections to the smuggling and drugs scene.

Anyway, the ‘war’ in Macedonia was largely one huge piece of play-acting. Two corrupt and criminal elites were eager to secure their hold on power over their ‘own’ population, so they put on a show of 'ethnic strife' to achieve this purpose – that was at the centre of the war. And Ohrid has achieved practically nothing to change the real circumstances in Macedonia.

In the Ohrid Agreement the most important provision was the obligation to hold fresh elections; the governing parties have delayed this unanimously for a year. Now time is up: on 15th September voting will take place. The danger is not high: the ruling parties own the places of employment, the newspapers, radio and television stations.”

*sinecure = a job that you are paid for even though it involves little or no work

Tf 402/2 Not only a question of loyalty

The Albanian minority has never regarded the Macedonian state as its own

from: “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” on 4.11.2004 (author: MICHAEL MARTENS)

“[Slav Macedonian nationalists].....accuse their Albanian fellow citizens, among other things, of disloyalty to the Macedonian state. The interests of the Albanian minority, they hold against them, are focused on unification with Kosovo and not on the welfare of the Macedonian state.

It is true that Albanian loyalty to this former constituent state of Yugoslavia, which declared its independence in September 1991, is indeed not great. But it is also true that for decades the majority of the population has prevented the Albanian inhabitants of Macedonia from holding any important positions of influence in the country. Macedonia's Albanians did not have to suffer the sort of systematic and violent persecution that the Albanian majority in Kosovo had to face; and Albanians were always involved in the democratically elected governments of the country. But when the country became independent, both sections of the population had long been living in different worlds, with some interests that completely collided.

The Austrian specialist on southeast European affairs, Robert Pichler of the Karl Franzens University Graz, has examined this phenomenon and speaks of 'ethnically divergent paths of development'. The beginnings of these can be traced back to the socialist phase of modernisation in Macedonia, which took account of the Slav-Macedonian majority, but not of the minority. Under such circumstances, an Albanian-Macedonian patriotism could never develop.

Arben Xhaferi, who along with Ahmeti is the most respected Albanian leader in the country, does not deny that his voters lack enthusiasm for the Macedonian state: „When you ask Albanians whether they feel greater loyalty towards their ethnic group or to the state, all of them will answer that their racial group is more important to them“, says Xhaferi. But he too points to historical reasons for the Albanian lack of interest in the Macedonian state; this goes back at least to the period between the World Wars when Belgrade put a number of harsh measures in place to encourage the Muslim population of Macedonia to leave the country.

After the Second World War the communist leadership tried hard to overcome the economic backwardness of southern Yugoslavia. As part of the modernisation programme for Macedonia, where illiteracy levels were almost 70%, agriculture was placed on a collective basis and industrialisation was pushed ahead. A huge administrative system came into being; towns grew rapidly in size. However, hardly any Albanians found employment in the new factories and administrative offices, hospitals and universities. That had something to do with their lower educational background, their way of thinking in clan structures, and the unwillingness of Albanian males, especially in the countryside, to allow women to enter the world of work. But these were not the only reasons. It was more that the Macedonian majority created a state for themselves in which Albanians were only tolerated as guests.

In the light of the historical Greek-Bulgarian-Serb struggle for the region of Macedon, Tito promoted the creation of a national consciousness in Yugoslavia that was specifically Slav-Macedonian. This meant that - in the Macedonian Writers' Association that was set up as a result; at the University of Skopje; even in the Macedonian autocephalous church, which was founded with the support of the Communist Party - Muslim Albanians had no part to play. In the Party and administration it was Slav Macedonians who almost without exception got the chances, and this carried over into the state companies and was still affecting people generations later.

In the end, however, there was one advantage for the Albanians that resulted from their exclusion: when the socialist economic system collapsed, they were less badly hit because they had hardly played a role in it anyway. In their need, the Albanians had long before found other ways to earn a living. After the agreement between Belgrade and Bonn was signed in 1968 to regulate the employment of Yugoslavian guest workers, far more Albanians than Slav Macedonians had left for jobs in Germany. As a consequence, they not only supported their families but also the places they lived in by financing roads, schools, or medical facilities.

In the 1990s, it was the Albanian guerrilla armies in Kosovo and in Macedonia who then profited from the money sent from the north. Even today, if now to a lesser degree, it is the money transfers of the Albanians who live abroad - especially in Germany, Switzerland and Austria - which make many of the Albanian villages in Macedonia appear more prosperous than the Slav dominated districts in eastern Macedonia which are under-populated and at an economic standstill. The much quoted 'ethnic rift' also runs through the economy.

It is true that, since the framework agreement, minorities and the majority of the population now share formal equal rights in their state; the proportion of Albanians who work in state administration is also being increased step by step. However, what was agreed at Ohrid possibly came a few decades too late to turn the Albanians into Macedonian patriots.”

Tf 402/3 Struga, where everything may end

Macedonia is again under threat. Slav nationalists have forced through a referendum that puts the future of the country at risk.

from: "Die Zeit" on 4.11.2004 (author: ULRICH LADURNER)

"Struga is small, pretty; and what happens here next Sunday will determine whether the town will enter Macedonian history books as a place of shame. For in Struga the bells could ring to announce the end of Macedonia as a nation state. The town itself cannot really be held responsible. It is just that here the disharmony between Albanians and Macedonians is at a critical level that will reach a temporary climax on 7th November in a referendum.

Struga has 37,000 inhabitants, of whom 48 per cent are Macedonians and 42 per cent Albanians. In the future this will change. For the government in Skopje has decided that municipal boundaries should be newly drawn. In the new boundaries Struga will have 63,000 inhabitants, 57 per cent Albanians, then only 32 per cent Macedonians and 6 per cent Turks. This prospect has brought a nationalist association that calls itself the Macedonian World Congress on to the scene. It collected 180,000 signatures to prevent changes in Macedonia's municipal boundaries. In doing so it forced the calling of the referendum. If the Congress is successful, the government will be thrown into a deep crisis, which would possibly lead to its downfall.

At first sight the whole affair seems like provincial theatre. After all, the new boundaries in Struga would at most mean that the Macedonian mayor would give way to an Albanian mayor. But such provincial theatre in the Balkans has the nasty tendency to soon turn dangerous, sometimes even causing bloodshed.

A civil war nearly broke out in Macedonia in the summer of 2001 because Albanian extremists intended to use their guns to win more rights for the Albanian minority. It was only through joint, massive action on the part of NATO and the EU that Macedonia was prevented from falling into total chaos. The EU forced the battling parties to accept the so-called Ohrid Agreement, which gave more rights to the Albanians. At the heart of these reforms lies the drawing up of new community boundaries. And Struga is its most prominent example.

After the government, a coalition of social democrats and Albanian parties, published its plans in August, violence broke out in Struga. 14 policemen and 15 civilians were injured. This was the worst breakdown of public order since 2001.

Even three years after civil war was prevented at the last minute, trust between the two sections of the population has not grown. In fact it has lessened. The Macedonians suspect that Albanian politicians intend to partition the country and create a Greater Albanian state that would also include Kosovo and Albania. Through double talk, political leaders of the Albanians have added flames to the fear. A division would not only mean the end for the state of Macedonia. It would also throw the Macedonians as a 'people' into a crisis of survival – for none of its neighbouring states really recognises them as such.

If the referendum succeeds, and the heart is ripped out of the Ohrid Agreement, that will be far more than just a defeat for the EU. Macedonia is the only crisis area that Europe is solely 'responsible for'."

Tf 402/4 Black hole at the outer edge of Europe

A commission of experts warns: the EU is not doing enough to save the Balkans

from: „Die Zeit“ on 28.04.2005 (author: THEO SOMMER)

"The eyes of the world are on Iraq; a North Korea addicted to nuclear weapons; and the tensions in Chinese-Japanese relations. Europeans are no exception. In this, they overlook the dangers gathering on the outermost boundaries of the EU: in the 'black hole on the periphery of Europe' that is developing in Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo und Bosnia.

These are the solemn findings just published by the Italian ex-premier Giuliano Amato's International Commission on the Balkans – a high-calibre group of which the former German President Richard von Weizsäcker was also once a member. Ten years after Srebrenica and Dayton, five years after the overthrow of the Milošević regime, the commission describes the region as being 'closer to failure than to success'. It is, the experts conclude, a patchwork carpet of weak states, without economic growth, with 60 per cent unemployment, corruption penetrating into every corner of life and a population lacking confidence and trust in the democratic institutions which are being set up: 'At present the wars are over, but the smell of violence hangs heavily in the air.'

The European Union has invested dearly in its protectorates in the Balkans: thousands of millions of Euros, thousands of troops (half of all available armed forces!), a legion of administrators, developers and regulators. But the Union is slowly allowing things to get out of its control. It's afraid to reach any firm and final solutions. The result, according to the report: 'The future of Macedonia is uncertain, the future of Serbia is unclear. There is the risk of an exploding Kosovo, an imploding Serbia and fresh breaches in the foundations of Bosnia and Macedonia.'

What can be done to prevent this? The Commission recommends: 'All signs point to the necessity of bringing the region into the EU.' To do this, it proposes a succession of political stages - beginning with an international Balkan Conference in 2006 and ending in 2014 with the entry of the western Balkan states into the Brussels' Community. In these eight years, prosperity and civil society in the region are to be propelled forward. The signing of European Agreements, financial aid programmes and a restructuring of institutions are intended to help in the process.

The real problem, according to the Commission, lies in Kosovo. A multi-ethnic Kosovo, the report argues, only exists in bureaucratic assessments from international authorities. If clarification of the ultimate status of the province is delayed much longer, the next disaster is imminent. The Commission wishes to take Kosovo in four stages towards independence: the status quo; 'independence without full sovereignty', whereby the European Community will reserve the right to monitor observance of human and minority rights; 'guided sovereignty', when the Kosovars negotiate entry to the EU and create the requirements for doing so; finally 'shared sovereignty' under the broader context of the European Union.

For some, the prospect of yet more expansion may seem horrifying. However, Europeans should take to heart the warning voiced by the Commission in a report that deserves serious consideration: letting matters drift aimlessly in the Balkans would be disastrous. And making 2014 the year for final integration could provide extra stimulus. The Balkans, at peace within the family of European nations, exactly one hundred years after the fatal shots were fired at Sarajevo: this could signal – here the report must be given full approval – the advent of a new century in Europe.”

See also the map of Macedonia Cf 402

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