

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

The **Project on Ethnic Relations (PER)** was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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R e p o r t

2009



SKOPJE, MACEDONIA

**PARTY AND ETHNIC
POLITICS IN MACEDONIA**

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FEBRUARY – OCTOBER 2009**

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PREFACE

Since 2000, PER has been engaged in a program of dialogue in Macedonia with the goal of encouraging consensus among ethnic groups and political parties on issues of national importance, such as interethnic relations and Euro-Atlantic integration. The 2009 program, titled “Macedonia 2020: Consensus for a Stable Future,” facilitated a dialogue of political parties, civil society, and academia aiming to strengthen interparty and interethnic consensus on national priorities. Program activities were held in 2009 in Skopje, Macedonia. The initiative was funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The program consisted of three major roundtable discussions for senior political party leaders and opinion-makers of Macedonia and a series of consultative meetings and joint discussions for smaller groups. The major topics addressed in the discussions were the Euro-Atlantic integration process, interethnic relations, name dispute with Greece, adoption and implementation of reforms, and interparty cooperation. The first roundtable served as the entry point into the program. Participants discussed the country's present condition and what is desirable for the future and the compromises the country has to make. The roundtable underlined a consensus among political actors on the national priorities for Macedonia, namely EU and NATO membership, political and economic reform, and improvement of interethnic relations through integration.

The second roundtable took place three months after the first and concentrated on the responsibility and accountability of each political actor for the resolution of outstanding problems. The participants outlined the responsibilities of each political actor in Macedonia, both the government and the opposition, for achieving the country's objectives. The potential consequences for the country of failing to achieve these objectives were also analyzed.

The third roundtable focused on the benefits of interparty cooperation for achieving national goals. The discussion examined the strategies of political parties on advancing European integration and recommended greater interparty cooperation on the reform process. There was broad agreement that the political programs and strategies of political parties in Macedonia lack specific action plans with clear objectives and timetables for adopting reforms and advancing the country's European integration process.

In addition to the three major roundtables, PER organized separate meetings with leaders of ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political parties. The purpose of these discussions was to promote an internal dialogue among political actors about the possibilities and limits that they face concerning the management of interethnic rivalry and to try to identify where the self-interest of each side might overlap with the other's. The participants also looked into the possible consequences of failure in reaching an interethnic accommodation and obtaining membership into EU and NATO. Despite pronounced differences, the discussions revealed substantial agreement among political parties and representatives of ethnic groups about the future of Macedonia.

Shpetim Gashi, PER Senior Program Officer, is the author of this report. PER is solely responsible for its content, which has not been reviewed by the participants. The report is expected to promote a public debate among political parties, civil society members, and academia on the issues that were discussed in the roundtables.

This program was the result of a process of consultations and discussions between PER staff, representatives of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and major stakeholders in Macedonia. The input of these individuals was crucial for the development and implementation of the initiative. We would like to thank the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for its generous funding of the program, and Claudia Moser and Armin Rieser for helping conceive, draft, and refine the program.

Livia B. Plaks, *President*
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Princeton, New Jersey
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EU AND NATO INTEGRATION: CONSENSUS AND COMPROMISE

Introduction

Macedonia has made significant progress in its quest for Euro-Atlantic integration. The European Union (EU) granted the country candidate status in 2005. NATO concluded at its April 2008 Summit in Bucharest that Macedonia had successfully completed the requisite political and military reforms to join the alliance and intended to extend a membership invitation. But Greece, a NATO member, blocked the invitation, arguing that the dispute over the name of Macedonia needs to be resolved first. The name dispute has been ongoing since Macedonia became an independent state in 1991, so few expected that Greece will block the membership invitation. After the Greek veto, the row between the two countries intensified, covering other sensitive issues like identity and language. Naming and renaming of roads and airports after historical figures such as Alexander the Great became interstate disputes.

NATO's 2008 Summit is a strong message that Macedonia has to agree to a compromise on the name dispute in order to become a NATO member. Despite this indication, according to various opinion polls, the majority of the population in Macedonia supports the official policy of preserving the constitutional name of the republic. But there are notable differences in the level of this support among political parties and especially between ethnic communities. While the conservative Macedonian parties maintain that the country should not change its name even if it means delaying the process of European integration indefinitely, the social democrats contend that a compromise should be found for the sake of the country's future. On the other hand, the ethnic Albanian community considers a compromise urgent and key to the political stability and good interethnic relations. This state of affairs suggests that a consensual agreement among all major political parties on the name dispute is needed.

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A public debate including political parties, civil society, and academia is useful in articulating a potential roadmap for the resolution of the name

issue. To facilitate such a debate and encourage interparty and interethnic consensus on national objectives, PER in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs conducted a one-year program on dialogue titled “Macedonia 2020: Consensus for a Stable Future.” The program began with a roundtable discussion for senior political party leaders and opinion-makers of Macedonia. The major topics addressed in the discussion were the name dispute with Greece, adoption and implementation of reforms, interparty cooperation, and inclusion of all ethnic communities in debates on issues of national interest. The meeting was held in February 2009 in Skopje.

Time to reorder national priorities

The discussion centered on the obstacles that lay on the road towards Macedonia’s Euro-Atlantic integration and on what the country’s institutions can do to overcome them. There was consensus among the participants that the EU and NATO membership should be the country’s top priorities, but there were notable differences on how far should the government go in making concessions and compromises over what are considered ‘identity’ issues. The discussion on the resolution of the name dispute, as a condition to move ahead with European integration, revealed deep divisions between political parties and ethnic communities. While the ethnic Macedonian opposition parties and ethnic Albanian parties supported a compromise, representatives of the Macedonian ruling party played down the urgency of a solution and the impact the dispute has on the country’s Euro-Atlantic prospects.

Government representatives and members of the main ruling party affirmed that the goal of the country is to get into NATO and EU, but not at all costs. Preserving the Macedonian identity and the country’s constitutional name were considered

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natural priorities. They asserted that setting the resolution of the name dispute as a condition for Euro-Atlantic integration is unfair to Macedonia and goes against the spirit of EU past enlargements. The last EU enlargement included countries like Cyprus, with such intricate problems that they make the Macedonian name dispute look miniscule. The opposition parties agreed with this assertion but maintained that membership in NATO and EU is so crucial for the future of the country that even a painful compromise is worth it.

Albanian opposition party representatives were particularly critical of the government’s position on the name dispute. They stated that if the country fails to become a NATO member soon and make substantial progress towards the EU membership, the Albanian community will consider itself a hostage to this Macedonian-Greek dispute and will begin to look for alternatives.

The Albanian community and its politicians have so far not been involved in the name dispute debate. But some Albanian politicians predicted that their indifference may come to an end soon. They said that the number one priority for the Albanian community is the EU and NATO membership. Dissatisfaction of the Albanian population with the government has been growing since the NATO summit in Bucharest. They are concerned that stagnation on the EU and NATO integration will harm the economy by discouraging foreign direct investment and international assistance. Some believe that the crisis will also increase interethnic tensions by strengthening the view of the Albanians that their fate depends solely on “the whim of one adventurous leader from a community other than their own.” Furthermore, the Albanian representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the pace of the adoption and implementation of reforms required for European integration.

Stagnation on the EU and NATO integration will harm the economy by discouraging foreign direct investment and international assistance.

Representatives of the coalition parties admitted that the integration process has stalled but suggested that the international community and the country’s neighbors are also part of the problem: the EU has not been clear about what the country should do to get a date for starting accession negotiations, and Macedonia’s southern neighbor, Greece, is creating unnecessary obstacles by questioning the country’s identity, language, and name. A participant said that the dispute with Greece serves only the radical forces in the region. He put forth a scenario: the radical forces in Serbia will promote the division of Macedonia between Macedonians and Albanians to strengthen their case for the division of Kosovo. It was recommended that interstate cooperation is crucial in containing and undermining the extremist forces in the region. But containing radical forces is not enough to move ahead with the European integration process. Solid interethnic relations and greater interparty

cooperation are needed to assure the voters that the institutions are serious about European integration and to revive their hope and enthusiasm about the future of the country.

Several opposition party representatives expressed their doubt about the government's commitment to the Euro-Atlantic integration process. They argued that the government has made more steps backward than forward: renaming of the Skopje airport and the main highway after Alexander the Great, putting 'antique' statues in front of the government building, and preparing to put a 29-meter statue of Alexander the Great in the center of Skopje have not only diverted the attention away from the real problems but have also strengthened Greece's position and alienated the international community, which increasingly sympathizes with the Greek position. "If we can not help the process, the least we can do is not to complicate it further by renaming airports and roads." Another speaker feared that the Macedonian government has gone too far with the name issue to be able to retreat honorably, and even small compromises will make it look a loser. He predicted that no solution will be found anytime soon. He dismissed the invitation of a previous speaker from a ruling party to work together in reviving the hope of the population: "what is needed is a policy change, not messages of hope." The speaker invited the ruling party representatives to either find a compromise with Greece or offer an alternative plan for NATO membership in case Greece continues to block the process.

Dismissing the relevance of arguments over 'ancient origins,' a speaker said that no concluding evidence about the identity of ancient figures in

In Macedonia, Alexander the Great is Macedonian; in Albania, he is Albanian; and in Greece, he is Greek.

question exists. There is also no agreement among countries about the identity of these figures: in Macedonia, Alexander the Great is Macedonian; in Albania, he is Albanian; and in Greece, he is Greek. Some opposition party representatives asserted that the identity debate of ancient figures is not only ridiculous but also harmful, putting further strain on interethnic relations at home and on relations with neighbors. "It's a pity that the presidential election campaign will be about the identity of Alexander the Great."

Macedonia's allocation of human and financial resources to promote its identity – such as a publicly funded expensive statue of Alexander the

Great and a Macedonian Orthodox church in the center of Skopje – were considered luxuries in times of economic crisis. "At a time when free and fair elections and interethnic relations are still issues, the identity debate is ridiculous." There was wide consensus that a reordering of national priorities elevating European integration over identity was necessary. The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), an Albanian party in the coalition government, was asked to take the leading role in this process of priority reordering by pressuring its coalition partner to move ahead on the issue of Euro-Atlantic integration. Government members of DUI have avoided their involvement in the debate and, according to several opposition party members, are indifferent on the European integration process. "The indifference of DUI is giving the largest ruling party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), a free hand in deciding about the future of the country. DUI is in a position to check and balance the prime minister." It was recommended that DUI should also play a more active role in the process of democratization such as police reform, media independence, and liberalization of the NGO sector.

Another suggestion was that identity and European integration do not have to be mutually exclusive. The identity debate could be depoliticized and conducted by cultural and civil society institutions while the government concentrates on the reform process. But members of the ruling party did not see the involvement of the government as a problem. They argued that renaming of roads or airports and building of statues is state monopoly. They considered Greece's reaction extreme, stating that it is up to countries to name roads and airports, and that people in many other countries claim to be descendents of some ancient people. "Greeks, Albanians, Serbs, they all claim ancient ancestry." No nation can claim monopoly on historical heritage.

No nation can claim monopoly on historical heritage.

There was consensus among participants that countries should not feel threatened by claims of others that they are descendents of one or another ancient people. "After all, being a descendent of an ancient people does not make you better." Some argued that Greece is not interested in resolving the name issue, presenting as evidence the proliferation

of the debate from the name issue into identity and language. Despite recent setbacks, the participants believed that a compromise with Greece is possible if the negotiations are centered on the name dispute only, leaving identity and language aside. The identity debate is also rife with conspiracy theories and paranoia. A speaker posited a theory that if Greece gets its way with the name issue, then Bulgaria will demand “Macedonians to be called Bulgarians.”

While admitting that more could be done, some government representatives asserted that the situation is not as bad as portrayed by the opposition, various media outlets, and analysts. They maintained that the government of Macedonia is often unfairly blamed for the insufficient progress on Euro-Atlantic integration. “NATO confirmed in the Bucharest summit that Macedonia had fulfilled all the requirements for NATO membership and was prepared to join the alliance.” They suggested that the government had done its job but as the summit showed “not all depends on Macedonia. The government should not be held accountable for the actions of external factors outside its control, such as “Athens’s irrational veto threat.”

The speaker also argued that too much importance is being put on the resolution of the name issue. “There is a long list of other issues equally important for NATO and EU membership.” The participants recommended launching an intensive and transparent public debate with the goal of providing inputs and recommendation for the implementation of the national goals. The role of civil society in launching such a debate was considered crucial. A participant suggested the following questions be part of the proposed debate: does the resolution of the name dispute depend on Macedonia only or also on uncontrolled external factors? Will improvement of relations with Kosovo and Serbia strengthen Macedonia’s position vis-à-vis Greece? Would an interparty and interethnic consensus improve the negotiating power of the country, and if yes, how to achieve such consensus? What is a reasonable price for Macedonia in exchange of good neighborly relations?

Macedonia is still suffering from the post-Bucharest syndrome. Macedonia’s society was dealt an unexpected blow in Bucharest. Many admitted that they had believed that Greece was bluffing or that it would give in to the US pressure not to veto the membership invitation to Macedonia. After the 2008 NATO Summit, identity, not name, has become the key issue for Macedonia. “I am not a FYROM-ian, I am a

Macedonian,” stated a participant. The Macedonian government contends that the ball is in Greece’s court. “When Greece confirms that it has no problem with the Macedonian identity, we can sit together and discuss the resolution of the name dispute.” A ruling party member called the name saga a “19th century battle that should be unthinkable in democratic societies.” But many suggested that the government of Macedonia is contributing to feeding this “19th century battle” by renaming roads and airports and rejecting internationally-proposed solutions. This has weakened Macedonia’s position in relations with Greece and alienated the international community, which increasingly sympathizes with the Greek position. A speaker drew similarities between Russian and Macedonian democracies and governments labeling them “illiberal” and ‘totalitarian.”

In a more optimistic note, a representative of an Albanian party said that the current discussion of Euro-Atlantic integration and not the possible division of the country, as was the case in 2001, is a sign of progress and of political maturity of the political forces. “Albanians in Macedonia no longer talk about greater Albania or greater Kosovo; they talk about Macedonia in NATO and EU.” He referred to the coalition government as “political coalition,” not “interethnic coalition.” The problems are no longer interethnic but rather intra-ethnic, which is normal in mature democracies. However, he stated that while a possible change of the country’s name takes into consideration the sensibility of the neighbors, it should also reflect the multiethnic character of Macedonia.

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Interparty cooperation and consensus is vital to resolving national sensitive issues. Participants agreed that there is an urgent need for the Macedonian political parties to agree on a compromise to the name problem. An international participant suggested that such an interparty debate could start with examining the responsibilities of political parties in the government and opposition. Another international participant said that any future consensus within Macedonia’s political elites on the name issue will receive stronger backing from the international community. He pointed to other difficult problems that the country resolved successfully, such as the resolution of the interethnic conflict in 2001.

Social issues have become a centerpiece of the government's public campaign. The prime minister himself has been engaged in introducing and promoting new social measures, such as paternal leave, that are considered important for human and social development. Emphasis has also been put in preserving traditional family values, strengthening the institution of marriage, and promoting religion. Members of the opposition parties, however, dismiss the prioritization of these social issues at a time when the country is facing major political and economic problems. They say this is a strictly short term strategy of the ruling party to mobilize voters.

Albanians' growing dilemma on the name dispute

There was broad agreement that more debate is needed on the country's priorities and that both local and international stakeholders should be included. The debate should examine the country's priorities and see if there is a need to reorder them according to their importance for the future of Macedonia. NATO and EU membership should top the list of priorities and the agenda of the state institutions. Delayed integration will not only worsen the social situation in the country but will also affect interethnic relations. An integration perspective will strengthen institutions and improve interethnic relations, concluded an international participant.

Albanian representatives suggested to their Macedonian colleagues that "Macedonians should swallow their pride and agree to a compromise with Greece." Albanians themselves had dilemmas about their political identity within Macedonia but "swallowed their pride" and agreed to a

Macedonians should swallow their pride and agree to a compromise with Greece.

Albanian participant said that Albanians faced a similar identity dilemma when they signed the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). But when things are done in partnership, both sides end up as winners, said an Albanian participant. The Macedonians were not involved in the debate about the Albanians' political identity in Macedonia. The Albanian dilemma now is how to get involved in the Macedonian identity debate since it affects the future of the Albanian population, too. The Albanian community agrees that Greece is playing a negative role. But at the same time, they believe the problem could be solved with the help of the international community.

"Name dispute is a battle we cannot win on our own; we need the help of our international friends. But in order for them to help us, we need to tell them how to help us." For ethnic Macedonians the name issue comes before NATO, for ethnic Albanians NATO comes before the name.

Some Albanian speakers said that there is a misrepresentation of the Greek position in Macedonia. "We blame the Greeks because we ourselves do not have a strategy." Kosovo was mentioned as an example that quietly changed its national symbols for the sake of its future, and some suggested that Macedonia follow a similar path regarding the name. The Albanian community supports Macedonians on the identity issue but this support should not be taken for granted if Macedonians show no willingness to find a solution soon. Renaming of the roads and building of monuments of a mono-ethnic character not only alienates the Greeks and the international community but also the Albanian community.

It was recommended that Euro-Atlantic integration, interethnic equality, and good neighborly relations be the country's three main priorities. Interparty cooperation on the name issues was considered vital. It was also concluded that Albanians should be involved in the name debate since they are affected by the delay of the NATO and EU integration, and that an eventual negotiation process between Macedonia and Greece should address only the name dispute, not identity or language.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Introduction

Macedonia's progress on institutional reform and the European integration process was subject of the second roundtable in the initiative on the political dialogue. The meeting was held in Skopje in June 2009. The roundtable gathered representatives of Macedonia's largest parliamentary political parties, prominent members of civil society, and senior diplomats accredited in Macedonia. Independence and efficiency of the judiciary, professional and depoliticized public administration, and a functioning system of checks and balances were considered the three top institutional instruments for the consolidation of democracy and for membership into European institutions. Though not included in the meeting agenda, the debate on the name dispute with Greece and on interethnic grievances once again turned out to be inevitable.

Macedonia gained EU candidate status in December 2005, but it has not received a date for the start of accession negotiations yet. Most participants argued that the delay has been because of the slow pace of reform since 2006. Opposition party representatives stated that setbacks in the judiciary, public administration, and control of the state institutions by the executive are reasons behind the European dissatisfaction with Macedonia. Appointments and dismissals of public servants are influenced by politics, reflected in large-scale changes in the public administration after the change of government. The ruling party representatives agreed with the opposition party members that a lot needs to be done to strengthen the institutions but refuted the claims that the government has tighten its control of the public institutions. They said that despite various shortcomings in the judiciary and public administration, these institutions are in better shape than under previous governments.

The name dispute with Greece remains one of the biggest policy challenges for the government. It has not only alienated some western governments but has also contributed to interparty and interethnic divisions within the country. Opposition parties maintain that the government is not doing enough to resolve the dispute and is using it to divert attention away from the real problems. Albanian party leaders are even more vocal. They recommended that the government find a compromise with Athens by the end of the year or they will "look for alternatives." One of

the two largest Albanian parties announced a new political platform on the relations between Macedonians and Albanians, proposing a federal arrangement for the Macedonian state. OFA was proclaimed dead by all the Albanian participants. Representatives of the Albanian party in the coalition government openly expressed dissatisfaction with their Macedonian coalition partner, claiming that the prime minister makes decisions without consulting with them. They are especially concerned with the handling of the name dispute which has blocked the NATO membership of Macedonia. "We believed that Albanians in Macedonia will be the first Albanians in the Balkans to be in NATO. This is no longer the case. Albania is already a NATO member."

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Some participants recommended that Macedonia's political parties increase their cooperation and agree on a common strategy for resolving the major issues that are obstructing the country's membership in NATO. Members of both ruling and opposition parties agreed that EU and NATO integration should be the country's priorities but disagreed on the order of priorities and actions that need to be taken. While top priorities for the opposition parties are EU and NATO, the issues related to the country's identity were considered 'untouchable' by the members of the ruling party. "We are for EU and NATO membership but not at the cost of compromising our identity." Representatives of the opposition parties asserted that the ruling party has absolute power and predicted that its list of priorities will dominate the political agenda in the coming years. An international diplomat called on the government and the political parties to concentrate less on ideology and more on finding workable solutions to the real problems.

Checks and balances

Although each branch of the government – executive, legislative, and judiciary – has powers that it can use to check and balance the operations and powers of the other branches, participants from the opposition parties and civil society argued that in Macedonia the executive controls the other two. "The prime minister makes decisions in the executive, sets

the agenda of the legislative, and controls the judiciary,” stated a speaker. Furthermore, the prime minister’s party has the majority in parliament

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and the president comes from the same party. It was argued that the parliament is simply a rubber stamp for the government. “It not only approves all the government decisions without debate, but it allows no discussion on EU criteria and benchmarks and economic crisis. This is an institutional failure.” A member of parliament from the ruling party refuted these claims. “The parliament is doing a good job: it holds regular sessions, organizes public hearings, invites government officials to report, and adopts laws in time.”

The response from the opposition camp was that reporting of ministers to the parliament is rare. They noted that despite multiple requests from members of parliament, the minister of transport and communications has never appeared in parliament and has not even taken part in the sessions of the parliamentary commission for transport, communications, and ecology in the past three years. It was claimed that Macedonia is probably the only country that has not held a single parliamentary session on the economic crisis. Members of the ruling party maintained that the political dialogue in Macedonia is satisfactory for a transitional democracy and that political actors have become more mature, accountable and responsible in their actions. “It takes time to strengthen the foundations of democratic institutions.” Ruling party representatives also assured their colleagues that the government always takes into account suggestions and recommendations coming from them. A member of the opposition asserted that the lack of debate limits the role of the opposition in the reform process. The ruling party representatives, however, stated that the opposition parties have not been active enough due to their internal problems and have a penchant to blame the government for everything. They asserted that various mechanisms to check the government are available to the opposition, including the right to ask for parliamentary debates with government’s ministers.

Judicial reform was another subject that was characterized by heated debate. There was agreement that swift reform in the judiciary is necessary to ensure the effectiveness and independence of the institution.

However, they disagreed about the present state of the institution. While the opposition representatives accused the government of control and patronage, members of the ruling party said that the institution is simply disorganized and is in a state of anarchy. The judicial reform started in 2005 but the progress has been slow. An analyst stated that it is a pity that the judiciary is politicized and inefficient despite substantial financial assistance provided by the international community. “The judiciary functions in the same way as it did under communism,” concluded the speaker. There was broad agreement that in its present state, the judiciary in Macedonia does not have the capacity to check and balance the government. As a result, some expected that the upcoming European Commission Progress Report on Macedonia will be negative.

In the absence of an adequate institutional check on the government, a senior official from a Macedonian opposition party recommended DUI play this role. “DUI could be a small but important check on the government.” Although VMRO-DPMNE has the majority in the parliament and could form the government without DUI, it was argued that a government without an Albanian party lacks its legitimacy and is a real threat to the political stability of the country, a fact that VMRO-DPMNE is aware of. Therefore, it was suggested that increased pressure

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by DUI on the government to move ahead with national issues will yield immediate results. Some participants, including those from DUI, stated that DUI is not pleased with its coalition partner and may modify its strategy after its November 2009 Party Congress. DUI’s approval ratings among Albanians have been steadily declining since it entered the coalition; in the last local elections, it lost some of its strongholds, including the city of Tetovo. Many analysts argue that this defeat was a result of DUI’s “constructive cooperation” with its larger coalition partner.

Albanian parties review their strategies

The Albanian political parties in Macedonia are going through a transitional period, with movements of political leaders from one party to another, formation of new parties, and unprecedented internal political debate. Despite these intra-ethnic debates and struggles, the Albanian

parties remain united in their assessment that OFA has not been fully implemented and therefore the political stability of Macedonia is at risk. Progress is lacking especially on the law on amnesty, the law on veterans, and the law on the usage of languages. The adopted law on usage of languages was not considered adequate. Several Albanian participants not only called for the full implementation of OFA but also for new interethnic arrangements that would increase the Albanians' role in the decision-making process. The Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) announced that it was working on a new proposal on the "coexistence of the Macedonian and Albanian communities." The Albanian parties have also launched an interparty debate on creating a common strategy for action by the end of the year 2009.

There was consensus among Albanians that the EU and NATO membership has no alternatives. However, they are becoming concerned that the main obstacle to this integration, the name dispute with Greece, may go on indefinitely. The Albanians have quietly supported the Macedonians on the name issue but this support, some said, is not indefinite and unconditional. In return, they expect the government to continue with the internal reform process, including the equitable employment of Albanians in the public administration and the full implementation of OFA.

A senior Albanian politician said that nobody benefits from discriminating against the Albanian population. Albanians comprise about a quarter of Macedonia's population, but only nine percent of employees in the public

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administration are Albanians, said the speaker. He added that the EU integration depends on the resolution of Albanian issues, and accused the government for trying to "close ethnic issues without resolving them." He illustrated his argument with the law on the usage of languages. "Hoping to close the language

issue, the parliament adopted an inadequate law on languages that does not allow for the use of the Albanian language in the government." The use of national symbols has also not been regulated. According to the present legal framework, the use of Albanian national symbols in public venues is "illegal and the state could take them out," said one of the

participants. He concluded that the inadequate solution for the law on usage of languages, the law on amnesty, and the law on the use of symbols, considered the main pillars of the OFA, presents a "permanent danger to the future stability of Macedonia." He stated that his party left the government because the government ignored the implementation of OFA.

The pressure to do more was on DUI. Both Albanian and Macedonian opposition parties suggested that DUI become more active and increase its pressure on the government. Some speculated that the reason behind DUI's compliance with VMRO-DPMNE is its fear that if they are too harsh on their coalition partner, the partner may break the coalition and form a new government with the newly created Albanian New Democracy party. Some even claimed that the New Democracy party was formed by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski to further divide the Albanian community. However, a representative of the New Democracy denied these allegations and affirmed that his party is not looking for ways to enter into a coalition with VMRO-DPMNE. A Macedonian speaker said that Prime Minister Gruevski's policy in relations with Albanians is "divide and conquer," a result of which is the "creation of new Albanian parties, the division of the Albanian political bloc, and ultimately the humiliation of the Albanian voters."

A senior representative of a Macedonian opposition party called on DUI to end its compliance with VMRO-DPMNE's policies and characterized DUI's leadership as hypocritical and servile. "I cannot comprehend why DUI is constructive and supportive

EU and NATO membership is glue for interethnic relations in Macedonia.

of the most arrogant government the country has ever had, a government that will be remembered for harming the national interests and manipulating people." He further noted that a comparison between DUI's current political behavior with the one when it was in opposition is tragicomic. He urged DUI to increase its pressure on the government and was certain that it will yield immediate results. "VMRO-DPMNE knows very well that a coalition government without an Albanian party cannot function, or that it leads to the federalization of Macedonia."

A representative of VMRO-DPMNE said that the expected visa liberalization for Macedonian citizens and the EU and NATO membership will inadvertently improve interethnic relations. "EU and NATO membership is glue for interethnic relations in Macedonia." However, an

Albanian analyst replied that EU and NATO memberships do not accommodate the demands of Albanians as laid out in OFA and that only its full implementation creates the conditions for good interethnic relations. “Interethnic relations can be stable only when equal and fair representation of Albanians in the decision making processes in Macedonia is achieved.”

Depoliticizing public administration and culture

Building a professional public administration is one of the requirements for EU integration. Similar to many transitional countries, Macedonia’s public administration suffers from political interference. Most of the participants confirmed that appointments and dismissals in the administration are politically influenced and that large-scale changes occur in the administration after the change of government.

A senior member of parliament said that when the VMRO-DPMNE-led government was formed, there was a change in the administration from

Short-term contracts are a widely-used mechanism to control the public administration and intimidate public servants.

top to bottom. Short-term contracts are a widely-used mechanism to control the public administration and intimidate public servants. A number of speakers alleged that in some cases, the public servants were told that they would lose their jobs

if they did not vote for the party their bosses told them to vote for.

An international diplomat argued that the politicization of administration and the use of intimidating mechanisms such as short-term contracts affect not only the efficiency of the administration and the overall reform process but also the EU itself. Various EU institutions provide financial support for trainings of public servants who are later fired by various mayors and politicians at the central level, rendering the EU financial support useless. On the other hand, representatives of the major ruling party refuted the claims that public administration is controlled by the government. They stated that no pressure is being made on the administration and employment is based on professional criteria. Expected visa liberalization for the Macedonian citizens was mentioned as a proof that the country has made significant progress in internal reform, including public administration.

The name dispute with Greece has escalated after the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest. Macedonian government has made funds available to build a number of cultural and religious statues and sites promoting Macedonia’s antiquity and Orthodoxy. These actions have had three implications: they exacerbated the relations with Greece, burdened the state budget, and complicated interethnic relations since the new cultural and religious sites do not reflect the multiethnic character of the country.

Greece was infuriated by the renaming of the highway and the Skopje airport after Alexander the Great. Many observers consider the building of the Alexander the Great statue and the construction of a church in Skopje as an unnecessary burden on the taxpayers. The politicization of culture has affected the interethnic relations as well. The Albanian representatives as well as some members of the opposition and the international community voiced concerns that the new statues and religious sites do not promote the multiethnic character of the society, favoring only the Macedonian community. Some argued that the statues are not only expensive and an unnecessary burden on the taxpayers of all ethnic communities, but they also contribute to the deepening of divisions within the society.

Members of the opposition Macedonian parties and the Albanian politicians were also blamed for contributing to the politicization of culture. A ruling party representative said that the Albanians also contributed to the politicization of culture by erecting more than twenty

memorials to the National Liberation Army members killed during the conflict in 2001 and to Albanian national heroes. He added that the Macedonians not only did not object to the construction of these memorials, but they were even present at the Skanderbeg memorial

Albanians also contributed to the politicization of culture by erecting more than twenty memorials to the National Liberation Army.

ceremony in Skopje. According to the speaker, the government has no preference for a certain religion, so claims that culture is being politicized and the secularization of the state is at risk do not stand. He claimed that the government is rebuilding only the churches that were destroyed by the communists. “The same was done in Poland or in Russia after the collapse of communism.” Macedonian opposition and Albanian party

members said that these explanations are only part of the story and advised the ruling party representatives to show greater sensitivity in the area of culture.

Civil society and media were also mentioned as being heavily politicized and in many cases controlled by the government. A participant stated that civil society organizations that do not support the government have been marginalized and newly formed and government-funded organizations have led to the polarization of the civil society. A member of the government responded that the fact that the number of media outlets and non-governmental organizations is increasing proves that "the country is on the right path." A number of opposition and ethnic Albanian politicians assessed that the media suffers from strong political interference and society lacks a dialogue. An SDSM member voiced his disbelief at the new president of Macedonia's invitation to the media and NGOs to start a dialogue while ignoring the opposition and the issue of interethnic relations. An international diplomat said that it is concerning that the president and government invite relatively unknown NGOs for dialogue while well-established and respected organizations are ignored.

Name dispute and its implications in the reform process

Macedonia is expected to receive an overall positive evaluation on the reform process in the EC progress report. The report is expected to recommend visa-free regime for Macedonian citizens. But many participants

emphasized that there are many policy areas where progress has been insufficient and feared that the EC report may not be as positive as the government officials expect. An international representative said that despite some setbacks, Macedonia has made considerable progress and it will be rewarded by a positive EC progress report. He however stated that the roadmap for the visa liberalization

has yet to be fulfilled. Reportedly, the report will propose that the visa restrictions be lifted for Macedonian citizens effective January

2010. The speaker concluded that the visa liberalization will not only make it easier for citizens of Macedonia to travel, but it will also symbolize a sense of belonging in Europe.

Participants agreed that the reform process is not moving as fast as needed. Progress is specifically lacking in the judiciary and public administration reform. The policy implementation in general was not considered satisfactory. An opposition party leader pointed out the lack of progress on decentralization. The speaker said that these reforms are necessary not only for accession into EU and NATO but also for internal political and economic development. "Even if EU and NATO were not there, Macedonia would need these reforms for its internal development." The parliament of Macedonia has adopted a considerable number of laws but many stated that they are not properly implemented. Opposition representatives accused the government for using the name dispute as a justification for its failure to implement laws in domestic areas.

There was consensus that the resolution of the name dispute does not depend entirely on the Macedonian side. A member of the ruling party said that all the current proposals make Greece a winner and that a compromise should be a win-win solution. He suggested to the Macedonian political forces not to blame each other, but instead take a firm and joint stand on the issue. "Internal disagreements will weaken our position." He cautioned that a solution may never be found; therefore, the country should be prepared for that scenario and be ready to continue the implementation of reforms even without the resolution of the name dispute. He refuted claims that VMRO-DPMNE won the last election by politicizing the name dispute. "We won the election not because of our stance on the name dispute but because of our political program that provides for successful implementation of reforms in the judiciary, healthcare, education, and in combating corruption."

Internal disagreements will weaken our position.

Many doubted that a formula to unblock the name dispute process will be found soon. An Albanian representative said that the argument on the name issue is wrong and that the Albanians have been put in a difficult position. She said that the use of ancient historic arguments does not help the process, and at the same time it affects relations between Macedonians and Albanians. She said that the country has limited time to

resolve this problem. "This issue could go on for a hundred years and the debate is fine but we need to find a solution for NATO and EU membership. We all want to be in EU and NATO, and we need more courage and efficiency to find a solution."

Another Albanian representative stated that Macedonia needs to have a consensus as a state; first a consensus among the Macedonian political parties, then an interethnic consensus between Macedonians and Albanians. He also noted that an intra-Albanian consensus on this issue is needed. The name dispute has consumed too much time and OFA has been forgotten and not implemented. The Albanian participants claimed that the state budget is directed towards ethnically Macedonian inhabited areas and the building of statues, while insufficient funds are being allocated for the Albanian areas and primarily institutions, such as the University of Tetovo. Such policies, they considered, will not only worsen the relations with Greece but also increase interethnic tensions. "Giving state land and funds to build churches undermines the secular character of the state, and this is risky since secularism is an important element to preserve stable interethnic relations."

INTERPARTY COOPERATION AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The one-year long initiative, titled "Macedonia 2020: Consensus for a Stable Future," was concluded with a third roundtable held in Skopje in October 2009 on the benefits of interparty cooperation for national goals. The roundtable aimed to examine the strategies of political parties on advancing European integration and to formulate recommendations for interparty cooperation on the reform process. Some thirty senior political leaders from Macedonia's entire political spectrum and civil society representatives participated.

There was broad agreement among the participants that the strategies of political parties lack specific action plans with clear objectives and timetables for adopting reforms and advancing the European integration process. These strategies do not provide a roadmap with specifics on how to resolve the name dispute with Greece and lack a comprehensive framework to adopt and implement internal political and economic reform. They also do not emphasize interparty cooperation and consensus as an important factor in resolving national problems. In addition to regular interparty disputes, setbacks in the realm of interethnic relations have further complicated relations between parties. A publication of a Macedonian encyclopedia using offensive language towards the Albanians has complicated the relations between the main coalition partners and between Albanian and Macedonian parties.

The strategies of political parties lack specific action plans with clear objectives and timetables for adopting reforms.

Interparty cooperation on national issues

Is interparty consensus necessary to advance the reform process and resolve major national problems? Not necessarily, but it helps. In countries with consolidated democratic institutions and functioning systems of checks and balances, consensus on major political issues is not crucial. But in transitional societies, such as Macedonia, where the institutions are weak and susceptible to political interference, interparty cooperation and consensus on national objectives is vital. It is unrealistic

to expect a compromise on the name dispute with Greece without an interparty consensus and a pledge that no party will use such a compromise against the other in an election campaign.

Participants agreed that absolute consensus does not exist, but underlined the imperative of broad consensus on making European integration a priority for the country and reaching a compromise with Greece. They also pointed out that the EU grades countries, not political parties. “There is no positive grade for some and negative for others. In the end all will get the same grade,” said a civil society participant. It was also stated that the process of European integration and resolution of identity

The EU grades countries, not political parties.

disputes can only take place in an environment where there is broad consensus. Representatives from the larger governing party maintained that parties, whether in government or in opposition, have equal responsibility in contributing to building consensus on core issues. The policy and ideological differences should not prevent parties from cooperating with one another, and political leaders understand criticism as a normal means in a democratic process.

However, some opposition members argued that even national issues can be resolved without a consensus. “The government is using the lack of consensus as an excuse not to do anything. OFA was reached without consensus. Being in power means taking responsibility for actions that may not be supported by everyone.”

Some participants stated that the current debate is dominated by trivial issues. “Debates dominated by trivial issues create a passive society,” stated a participant. People in Macedonia are no longer interested in “endless and useless debates on the greatness of the Macedonian nation.” Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was blamed by members of the opposition parties for setting the stage for and feeding this debate. He was also accused for undermining democracy with his absolute control of all branches of government. An opposition leader likened him to Vladimir Putin of Russia. “This type of governance creates passive citizens who accept whatever is served to them by the government and makes them believe they don’t have to think about themselves; that the government thinks for them, thus establishing a communist mentality.” A university professor asserted that “neither the governing nor the opposition parties have a clear vision for the country, unless we treat conspiracy theories as visions.”

The government was also accused of intentionally fueling interethnic divisions and ignoring the interests of the Albanian community. An opposition party participant pointed out that only seven percent of the government’s budget is controlled by the ministers representing the ethnic Albanian partner of the coalition. He also claimed that state universities serving largely Macedonian students receive three times more state funds than state universities serving Albanian students like the University of Tetovo. Some went so far as claiming that the leadership of VMRO-DPMNE has a dilemma whether a functional democracy is possible in a state with more than one ethnic group. A speaker said that they need to learn that it is possible, albeit with additional challenges. He also noted that the encyclopedia issue is a symptom of outstanding interethnic disputes that the society has failed to resolve so far.

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Progress on Euro-Atlantic issues was reported: Macedonia was to be given the green light for the visa-free travel agreement and the upcoming EC progress report is expected to recommend the starting of the accession talks with the EU. Representatives of VMRO-DPMNE accused the opposition of distorting the picture of the progress in the country by focusing only on negative examples, and so giving the perception of a “broken mirror.” They suggested that the opposition parties should also bring to the attention of their constituencies the positive results, and also claim credit for them, because “the opposition parties too contributed to achieving these results.” Members of the opposition parties, however, disagreed that significant progress has been achieved. They argued that laws have been passed without consensus and meaningful debate in the parliament and that it took the parliament three years to pass the four laws that the EC had been asking for four years. A participant from the largest opposition party asserted that the government has no plan for EU integration; it’s just a wish, the public funds are being spent without objectives in mind, and no cooperation with neighbors in the field of economy exists. He suggested that Macedonia should team up with Albania to invest in energy.

Some participants were optimistic that the upcoming EC progress report will overall be a positive one and recommend EU accession talks with

Macedonia. However, an analyst argued that Macedonia will get the positive report mostly because the international community wants to encourage further reform and narrow the ethnic divide. A member of the opposition said that the government spends its time on defining and redefining the issues but offers no solutions. He asked what the vision of the government for the resolution of the name dispute, European integration, and interethnic relations is. He considered the efforts to build interparty consensus as useless, since there is only one person deciding about everything in the present government, hinting at the prime minister. "For consensus you need more than one person." Another speaker said that even the president of the country is just "a spokesperson of the ruling party or a reporter of events." The opposition is not even provided with the information about the actions of the government on these issues, rendering the attempts to build consensus useless. He reported that the government or "the three people" inside of it took a decision to change the Coat of Arms of the country at 1:00 AM. "We need to put a moratorium on stupidity," concluded the speaker.

A university professor asserted that there are no differences among parties in Macedonia regarding EU and NATO integration, but there are various expectations from the people to respond to certain issues with different approaches. While conservative constituencies may expect their parties to withstand the pressure on the name dispute, the Albanian voters most likely have different expectations from their parties and leaders, making an interparty consensus impossible to reach. There has never existed a solid consensus among political parties in Macedonia, but as many participants rightly pointed out "things got done." The OFA agreement did not have absolute consensus but was adopted. Another speaker stated that political consensus is necessary but absolute consensus does not exist even within parties and let alone between parties.

The university professor suggested that more interparty cooperation is needed on interethnic relations. Interethnic relations are dynamic and they can enter turmoil. The trend of positive developments in the area of interethnic coexistence is never guaranteed, not even by membership in

The Basque case in Spain is a good example of persisting interethnic disputes long after countries join the Euro-Atlantic structures.

EU and NATO. There will always be arguments and disputes over the division of resources. The Basque case in Spain is a good example of persisting interethnic disputes long after countries join the Euro-Atlantic structures. A question was raised whether the case of the new Macedonian encyclopedia was a symptom of something else? Could it be bacteria with potential to destroy interethnic coexistence? Was it simply an unprofessional product of academics or a politically motivated issue? Many agreed that the encyclopedia issue is unfortunate, but no answers were provided to these questions.

An analyst asserted that consensus on interethnic relations is not possible unless something structural is changed: financial resources should be divided on the basis of needs and not on proportionality of the ethnic group. According to the need formula, Albanians and Roma would receive higher percentages of funds. He said this was also the spirit of OFA; it was about addressing needs, not about what is perceived to belong to them based on statistics. If parties agree on this concept of dividing resources based on need, a consensus on accommodating interethnic relations once and for all could be reached. He predicted that the current state of non-territorial federalization of the country will not last long. The present perception of financial discrimination and unequal distribution of the limited resources will translate into interethnic despire.

Encyclopedia sparks more trivial debate

"Macedonia is like a team of football players who argue about who entered the game first and what should be written on their jerseys instead of planning how to win the game," stated an international representative. The publication of the controversial encyclopedia has sparked more debate on "what should be written on the jerseys." The ensuing debate tested the sustainability of good relations between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians once again. The encyclopedia described the Albanian community as "mountain people" that descended in Macedonia together with the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. What outraged Albanians the most was that the publication of the encyclopedia was funded by the

Macedonia is like a team of football players who argue about who entered the game first and what should be written on their jerseys instead of planning how to win the game.

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government of Macedonia. The publication sparked a series of reactions from the Albanian community in Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo. DUI leadership announced that it will sue the Macedonian Academy. DPA went even further, stating that “Macedonians are playing with fire and they will burn themselves.”

The incident is a powerful illustration of the fragility of interethnic and interstate relations in the Western Balkans. Albania’s prime minister stated that the encyclopedia was “absurd and unacceptable,” while authorities in Kosovo said that the offensive language in the encyclopedia “undermines the efforts of coexistence between Albanian and Macedonian communities.” The Macedonian flag was burned in Pristina by a group of young soccer fans, causing strong reactions by the Macedonian institutions, and a Macedonian police patrol was fired at by unknown assailants at the Kosovo border. In contrast, Serbia’s leading newspaper gave its front page to the editor-in-chief of the Macedonian encyclopedia to air his unapologetic views. Delayed reactions came also from the opposition Macedonian parties and from the largest party in power and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski himself. Prime Minister Gruevski requested the correction of the sections on the Albanian community and on relations with the international community, which alleged that NATO and the CIA trained the former members of the National Liberation Army that waged a short armed insurgency against the Macedonian army in 2001.

The encyclopedia debate also illustrated that the nationalistic rhetoric in the Balkans is losing its appeal. Politicians aside, the public reactions were not as strong as many expected. Some speculated that the objective of the encyclopedia’s authors was to provoke a major interethnic strife between Macedonian and Albanian radical forces. Indeed, fringe radical elements on both sides issued strong statements and called for demonstrations but

The nationalistic rhetoric in the Balkans is losing its appeal.

the public response was negligent. An analyst said that such statements in 2001 would have led to violent conflict. Despite the tension, no incidents took place. And the debate did not go beyond who wanted to offend whom. A sign of political consolidation was that all the major political parties and the majority of civil society organizations condemned the publication. It was also argued that the content of the encyclopedia humiliated the Academy more than it offended the Albanians.

The participants agreed that such incidents divert the attention from the real issues. None of the communities or political parties benefited from the three-week debate on the encyclopedia just days before the EC progress report was to be made public. Although it was decided that the encyclopedia should be revised and the editorial board should resign, the debate persists: Who was responsible for the offensive language? Was it done by some rogue elements in the Academy? Was the government involved in its formulations? If not, why was it withdrawn only after the Prime Minister’s request? However, there was broad agreement that political parties as well as civil society should refrain from actions that raise interethnic tensions. Some governing party members alleged that the opposition has gone too far in using the encyclopedia as a pretext to criticize the government, even though, according to a speaker, it was clear from the beginning that the government had nothing to do with the publication. A member of parliament from a governing party said that the encyclopedia story is a reminder of how sensitive interethnic relations are: “An adventurous text authored by two or three people became a state problem and a threat to the multiethnicity in Macedonia.” Some Albanian politicians expected the continuation of the problem: “The revision process of encyclopedia will turn into an absurd science debate. Macedonian politicians will spend more time arguing who is wrong and who is right, instead of working on the reform process.”

Myths and history should be used to unify societies, not divide them.

The use of myths and history to divide ethnic groups should come to an end. “Myths and history should be used to unify societies, not divide them,” said an opposition leader. History is something we did not produce ourselves, we inherited it from the past, and we should use it to strengthen coexistence, argued other participants. They warned that the debate on myths and symbols could get out of control in fragile societies. Another speaker said that there are also good myths of coexistence and we should promote them instead. An Albanian speaker said that Albanian political parties have shown that they have no plan B regarding the future of the country; that they have decided to be part of Macedonia. It was suggested that EU and NATO are two issues that would bring political parties together.

Conclusion

The participants agreed that the political parties should formulate clear and consistent strategies for supporting European integration and consolidation of democratic institutions in Macedonia. This clear political party commitment to national goals is needed to reduce confrontational interparty and interethnic politics and to encourage greater assistance from the international community in achieving European standards. This commitment is also needed to foster a long-term coordinated interparty approach to speed up the reform process and avoid diversion of political efforts from the implementation of national objectives.

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