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Clashing Symbols

The Status of Ethnic Tension and Conflict in Macedonia

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Disclaimer The views expressed herein are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the position of USAID/Macedonia or USAID/Washington.

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Executive Summary

To date, Macedonia has escaped the violence that has plagued Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo since the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation in 1991. Fears that violence could spread led to the UN Preventive Deployment in Macedonia in 1992. Despite this, ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians have grown, particularly over the past five years, and are now seen as threatening a new round of violence. I was asked to come to Macedonia to evaluate these tensions in light of how they are likely to affect implementation of the USAID/Macedonia program.

The current situation has two sets of actors, Macedonians and Albanians. Other ethnic groups are too small to enter into the equation. All of the current lines of tension lie between these two, and both sides feel that their existence as a people is at stake. The Albanians have sympathetic neighbors in Albania and Kosovo. This type of situation has the greatest possibility of deterioration into ethnic violence, as has been seen, for example, in Rwanda, Sri Lanka or between Israelis and Arabs. This makes awareness of the tensions a minimum prerequisite for any effective development programming.

The fundamental disagreement between the two groups is that Macedonians feel that Albanians are unwilling to become Macedonian, and actively threaten the existence of the state. Albanians feel that Macedonians are depriving them of rights they held under Yugoslavia, such as the right of education in their own language, access to jobs, and the right to use their flag. Feelings on each side have become very strong, and while there have been incidents where demonstrations have turned violent, the situation has not yet deteriorated into individual acts of ethnic hatred or terrorism.

Despite this, there is reason to hope that Macedonia can still escape violent conflict. Both the government and the Albanian parties have generally shown restraint, and some people have friendships going across ethnic lines. Several NGOs have done good work promoting conflict resolution and ethnic toleration. Business relationships also promote toleration.

The principle recommendations for USAID to address this as a cross cutting issue are:

1. Work with political parties to help them establish economic and social platforms and to help them establish constituent communication and services, thus weaning them from 'big man' and ethnic tension campaigns.
2. Follow the laws leading up to this fall's elections very closely, including the electoral districting laws. The mission should consider having one of its

elections cooperating agencies do an analysis of the body of these laws to estimate how Albanians and Macedonians will fare under the scenarios that are established. This can be used to predict any difficulties that might arise during the campaign, elections, or formation of a government following elections, and may be useful as an early warning system for increasing tensions.

- 3 Continue with a major focus on economic development. Ensure that all ED projects are developed to (1) increase inter-ethnic contact, (2) ensure that project managers are aware that conflict will occur in these settings, and (3) include mechanisms to deal with the conflict when it arises. The mission will also wish to carefully monitor access to economic benefits, to ensure that the perception of fairness across ethnic boundaries is maintained.
- 4 Establish teams of trained Macedonian/Albanian mediators who can be used to intervene in conflict situations. The basic concept would be that leaders, preferably those respected by both sides, would be trained to work together to help resolve tense situations both in the private and public sector. Hopefully, they could gain regional stature by being participants on international mediation teams, but this would take time and experience. Ultimately, these teams should be capable of providing mediation services at the highest level. This can probably best be accomplished through some of the NGOs currently active in Macedonia.
- 5 Use NGO and other contacts to informally monitor the situation, to ensure that the mission is aware of impending violence.
- 6 Continue NGO funding for ethnic tolerance, conflict resolution, impartial journalism, media programs, local NGO strengthening and NGO political involvement.
- 7 Given the current tension between ethnic groups and the cultural difficulties in resolving differences through meetings, the mission will probably not wish to sponsor workshops that directly address ethnic differences. Unless conditions are right, this type of workshop has not been shown to be particularly effective. Following the elections, the Mission may wish to reevaluate the situation to determine whether establishment of trained teams of mediators to intervene in specific situations, as described above, will probably be more effective.
- 8 The Mission will want to monitor involvement in decentralization very carefully. If it is done to strengthen municipality management, this will probably cause no problems and will directly address the concerns of the

mid-level elite Becoming involved in decentralization at a policy level will probably result in the Mission being seen as being pro-Albanian

Background

Macedonia is a small state that was formed out of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. The area of the present republic first became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1919, and then became one of the six republics of the Yugoslav Federation in 1945. Following the breakup of the Federation in 1991, Macedonia became an independent state. Macedonia is surrounded by Greece, Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria, all of whom have had designs on part or all of its territory at one time or another. These countries are known as the 'four fires' or 'four wolves' who are seen as lurking, waiting for their chance to strike. In part to establish Yugoslav and Macedonian claims to this territory, Marshall Tito directed that a Macedonian dictionary be developed in 1948, providing an argument against Bulgarian claims that Macedonian is simply a dialect of Bulgarian.

The 1994 census² reports that the total population of 2.1 million is divided into 1.4 million Macedonians (67%), 484,000 Albanians (23%), and some 24 other ethnic groups, of whom the most important are the Turks (4%), Slavs (2%), Roma (2%), Torbishi (Slavic Muslims) and Vlachs. The Albanians dispute these figures, claiming that they comprise 40% of the population. Many observers feel that a more accurate figure is around 30%. While the smaller ethnic groups are significant in terms of human rights issues and equal access to social and economic benefits, clearly the most important divide is between the Macedonians and the Albanians. Overall population growth has been slow, averaging about 1.4% per year. According to official calculations, the proportion of Albanians has increased slowly, from about 17% in 1971 to 20% in 1981 and 23% in 1994³. One of the reasons for the differences between the official and unofficial estimates of the numbers of Albanians may be that the 1994 population figures exclude persons with a residence permit who have been in the country less than one year and refugees. Many Albanians who have fled difficult circumstances in Kosovo and Albania have not taken out residence permits and therefore may be excluded from the census figures.

According to enrollment figures for 1995/6, 28% of elementary students and 11% of secondary students are taught in Albanian⁴. Officials estimate the percent of Albanians studying at the two state universities in Macedonia has increased from 4% in 1992 to 7.25% in 1997⁵. These figures document that Albanians are seriously under represented at the secondary and university level.

Recent History

Under the Ottoman empire and through the last few years of Yugoslavia, there was little or no overt tension between Macedonians and Albanians. The best metaphor I heard was that they were two peoples moving on parallel roads, until events of the mid eighties and nineties brought them, not so much into collision, but into a difficult merge onto a single highway.

Under the Republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo, the region with the largest Albanian population, was part of the Republic of Serbia, rather than being a separate republic like Macedonia.⁷ By 1968, there were new demands for a seventh republic, to be made up of the predominantly ethnic Albanian areas in Kosovo and Macedonia. To calm ethnic unrest that partly developed from divisions during World War II, Tito built the city of Pristina, including an Albanian university. In 1981, in response to increasingly strident demands for Albanian nationalism, Macedonian and Serbian authorities became more repressive. Albanian language instruction in the Skopje University was stopped in 1985 because of fears of Albanian separatism. Following extended rioting by the students, in 1991 Slobodan Milosovic closed the Pristina university and revoked Kosovo's autonomy. A 'parallel' university has continued to exist in Pristina in opposition to the Serbian authorities. At the end of March, 1998, an agreement re-opened Serbian Universities to Albanians.

In 1989, the republican constitution of Macedonia was amended. Macedonia was declared a 'nation-state' of the ethnic Macedonians, and previous references to Albanian and Turkish minorities was removed. With independence in 1991 a new constitution (see below) was written that emphasized Macedonian language and culture over that of Albanians and other minorities. In October, 1992, a new citizenship law stipulated a 15 year residency period, which disqualified many Albanians for citizenship. After the closure of the University of Pristina, in 1994, Albanian majority municipalities took up a collection to establish an Albanian language university in Tetovo, whose first building was destroyed in a Macedonian police action which killed one and wounded dozens of others. The university re-opened in Tetovo, and while tolerated, is still regarded as illegal by the Macedonian government, and neither its course-work nor its degrees are recognized. Currently it reports an enrollment of some 4,000 students, and is largely financed by remittances from Albanians living abroad.

To ease these tensions, the Government of Macedonia established a 10% quota system for minorities at the state universities, and increased this to 23% for 1996-7.⁹ Following ten years of strictly Macedonian language education at the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje, in January, 1997, parliament passed a law providing for an Albanian language university education within the pedagogical faculty to provide teachers for Albanian primary and secondary education. This

move was resisted by high school and university students with demonstrations in the center of Skopje, arguing that they were 'defending the constitution' Parts of this demonstration were extremely ugly, including posters demanding 'gas chambers for Albanians'

Another point that has become very problematic in the last few years concerns the flying the flag Under Yugoslavia, minority flags could be flown at municipal buildings as long as the Yugoslav flag and that of the respective republic was also flown After local elections in 1996, several Albanian majority municipalities voted to raise the Albanian flag at municipal buildings alongside the Macedonian flag Legal action by ethnic Macedonians resulted in constitutional court orders to remove the flags in Gostivar and Tetovo In July, 1997, parliament passed a law allowing the Albanian flag to be flown on state holidays only When this law was enforced, riots resulted, leaving three dead The mayors of the two cities were arrested, convicted and were awaiting incarceration in late March, 1998

The Serbian police actions in Kosovo in March, 1998, added to these tensions There was a large Albanian demonstration in Skopje, which generally passed peacefully, although there were some scuffles, the Macedonian flag was trampled by the crowd (not the organizers) and a Serbian flag was burned Most of the speeches were made in Albanian, although at one point during the demonstration one of the speakers used Macedonian, and was roundly booed by the crowd The sight of a sea of Albanian flags, the sound of the Albanian language, and booing the use of Macedonian in the streets of Skopje was profoundly disturbing to many Macedonians

The most recent parliamentary elections were held in 1994 At that time, the SDSM, a party based primarily in the previous communist regime, won a majority of 62 seats in the 120 seat assembly It formed a governing coalition with the Albanian PDP and a smaller party There are five Albanian ministers, although they are either without portfolio or hold relatively unimportant ministries The next elections are scheduled for the end of 1998 Because of increasing tensions, both the nationalistic Macedonian party VMRO and the nationalistic Albanian party PDA are expected to make significant gains A third party, Democratic Alternatives, has recently been announced by a popular politician from the Yugoslav era that has the intent to include all ethnic groups, and many hope this will provide an answer to the rising political and ethnic tensions

Legal and Constitutional Framework

One of the key issues between ethnic groups has to do with rights established under the constitution. The tension as to whether Macedonia should be a mono- or multi-ethnic state begins in the preamble.

Taking as the points of departure the historical, cultural, spiritual and statehood heritage of the Macedonian people and their struggle over centuries for national and social freedom as well as for the creation of their own state, Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanics and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia.

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Further articles attempt to maintain the tension between Macedonia as a state for Macedonians while providing rights to other 'nationalities'.

Article 7 The Macedonian language, written using its Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language in the Republic of Macedonia. In the units of local self-government where the majority of the inhabitants belong to a nationality, in addition to the Macedonian language and Cyrillic alphabet, their language and alphabet are also in official use, in a manner determined by law.

Article 48 Members of nationalities have a right freely to express, foster and develop their identity and national attributes.

The Republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of the nationalities.

Members of the nationalities have the right to establish institutions for culture and art, as well as scholarly and other associations for the expression, fostering and development of their identity.

Members of the nationalities have the right to instruction in their language in primary and secondary education, as determined by law. In schools where education is carried out in the language of a nationality, the Macedonian language is also studied.

One of the problematic issues is the phrase at the conclusion of Article 7 (and found widely in the constitution) 'in a manner determined by law'. In effect, this has made the interpretation of the constitution subject to the laws of the country, rather than vice versa. This situation has led the way for a variety of courts, including the constitutional court, to rule that the Macedonian is the sole language.

to be used in many public spheres, including, at one time, the University of Sts Cyril and Methodius, Skopje

The importance of the subjugation of the constitution to laws is shown in a survey, conducted in 1993. At that time, three quarters of Macedonians felt that Macedonian should be the only official language, rejecting the constitutional compromise”

What has developed over the intervening time is that most people surveyed (see below) thought that the constitution provided for Macedonian to be the only official language for Macedonia, with some allowances made for education through twelfth grade. The language issues, often framed in terms of “defending the constitution” has become one of the flash points in Macedonian society.

An important issue that is not immediately apparent is the use of the word ‘nationality’. This is a term taken from Yugoslav law, in which a ‘nationality’ *means* an ethnic group. Thus, at least in common use, Albanian nationals may be Macedonian citizens, but *cannot* become Macedonian *nationality* without abandoning their language and cultural identity.

Research Methodology and a Personal Note

Given the severe time constraints of two weeks to gather information and prepare a report, no in-depth research could be conducted. What is reported here is what was gathered from a variety of largely expatriate experts, as well as individual interviews and focus groups with Macedonians, Albanians and one Turk (see contact list). About half the interviews were conducted in English, and half in either Macedonian or Albanian using a translator. The interviews were semi-structured in that I had a list of topics that I wished to discuss, but allowed the conversation to develop naturally rather than forcing it into the structure of a formal question and answer session.

Of necessity, individuals who were interviewed or participated in focus groups were largely selected on the basis of their availability, on their knowing one or another of my contacts. I endeavored ensure balance between Macedonians and Albanians, and traveled outside Skopje to Gostivar, Tetovo and Radoviš to ensure that I was not merely getting the view from the capital.

Interestingly, I was unable to locate Macedonian ‘experts’ who could separate themselves sufficiently from the issues to give both sides of an issue. Most were so passionately involved with the subject that the discussion rapidly became more and more animated as participants mobilized more ‘facts’ that supported their views. Indeed, this was probably the most characteristic aspect of my interviews.

With only two exceptions, people were unable to step back from their positions to see a way of mediating a conflict. I was most impressed with this in my Radoviš focus group, where, with two lawyers participating, they could not fathom an analogy comparing the process of resolving a village dispute between two feuding families with seeking resolution of the current situation between Macedonians and Albanians.

Several of the people I talked to made this point. As one said, "In the Balkan peninsula, you can never agree to be different. Every conversation where there are differences never ends with a solution." I certainly experienced this, particularly as I failed to support the speaker's view of the situation, and even more so as I sought to seek a less demanding way to resolve the issues. I never attempted to get someone on one side of the issue to see the other side!

In many situations I was reminded of discussions that went on during the United States' civil rights turmoil of the seventies: 'they are less intelligent', 'they are lazy', 'they are responsible for all the crime'. More seriously, at times the hatred so vividly expressed reminded me of my conversations in Burundi in a time of genocide (1994). This has serious implications for the future of Macedonia, particularly since, by all accounts, tensions have increased over the past four years. Nonetheless, as described below, many people are very hopeful that the tensions will be resolved without a descent into chaos.

What is reported below are statements that were repeated by more than one person. Conversations I had were remarkably similar, and the statements made in Skopje were repeated in Tetovo and Radoviš.

The Macedonian Point of View

The primary Macedonian viewpoint is that Macedonia is for Macedonians, and that others must learn their place if they wish to live there. One of the reasons why there are difficulties with the Albanians, but not with other ethnic groups is that the others are seen as not making excessive demands to be different from Macedonians. The Turks, Serbs, Vlach and Roma have simply too few numbers to influence the situation. Albanians, with their demands for their own language, their own flag, their own university, are seen as a threat as they continue to refuse to become Macedonian.

Macedonians see themselves as inhabiting their own 'motherland'. All the other 'nationalities' have their own motherlands--Serbia, Albania, Greece--but Macedonia is the only land they have, and they will be orphaned if it is allowed to become a multi-ethnic state. Because of their origins, Macedonians are having difficulties developing a national identity--Clearly, Alexander Makedonski (Alexander the Great)

is a culture hero, as are the ninth century Sts Cyril and Methodius, who translated the Bible into Slavic, inventing a predecessor of the Cyrillic alphabet in the process. Tsar Samuil, who ruled greater Macedonia and western Bulgaria from the Lake Ohrid region around the year 1000 is important. More recently, Gotse Delchev started a rebellion against the Turks in 1903, but none of these can be specifically identified as 'Macedonian', and are also counted as being Bulgarian or Greek. I never heard mention of Mother Theresa, an Albanian born in Skopje.

The process of developing a cultural identity is long and complicated. While not necessary, it is helpful to have a language, a geographic area, a flag to identify one's self. Macedonians have these, but they have not had them for long, and they are having difficulty developing a distinguishing history that will set them apart from the nations around them. A feeling of inferiority seems to be a Balkan trait--the Serbs celebrate their defeat at the hands of the Turks in 1389¹² as one of their defining moments--and Macedonians still feel disadvantaged even in their own country. A 1993 survey shows that more than half of Macedonians feel that they are economically worse off than other ethnic groups¹³.

Certainly the external political environment is seen as having done great damage to Macedonia. For the first five years, they were strangled by the embargo against Serbia to the north in retaliation for the Bosnian war, and by the embargo by Greece to the south, who objected to its name. Since roads--and diplomatic relations--with Albania to the west and Bulgaria to the east were not in good repair, the country feels it lost hundreds of millions of dollars as a result of these blockades. In such a situation, it is easy to feel trapped by circumstances beyond one's control, despite the fact that current economists doubt that there was any impact at all.

From a political point of view, many feel that the ruling SDSM party was forced into a coalition with the Albanians because it did not have an electoral majority¹⁴, and therefore is granting far too many benefits to the Albanians. Five Ministerial portfolios, 23% quotas in the University, hiring quotas for government jobs, and so on. Because it is seen as being 'easy on Albanians', the SDSM is expected to lose a significant number of parliamentary seats to the more nationalistic VMRO in the fall elections.

One of the major moves this government has made is redistricting the original 31 municipalities inherited from the Yugoslavs into 123 municipalities (plus seven for Skopje) in an effort to decentralize. Rather than see the benefits of local government for themselves, most Macedonians I talked to viewed decentralization as a means to funnel resources directly to Albanian municipalities to allow them to secede.

As a group, Macedonians view Albanians--as a group--as criminals, a threat to their very existence. Despite this, every Macedonian I talked to told me of an Albanian acquaintance that 'isn't like that, but is a good person'. As a group, Albanians are accused of being responsible for all the drugs, prostitution and crime, both in Macedonia and in Western Europe. Albanians are blamed for Macedonian difficulties in getting visas to the West. "They've stereotyped Macedonia as a drug trafficking country, and now we can't go to Germany to get jobs." Albanians are seen as using their illicit gains to buy land and houses away from the Macedonians. Despite this, Albanians are also seen as being less intelligent, and constitutionally incapable of holding a professorship in medicine, for example. Albanians are seen as having a high birth rate, which will result in Macedonians being outnumbered in their own country in short order.

By their refusal to accept the Macedonian language, by their refusal to accept the Macedonian flag, by their demand to have a separate university, by the sometimes spoken, sometimes implicit threat to secede, Albanians are seen as a threat to the Macedonian motherland, to Macedonian identity--as a mortal threat to Macedonians' right to their own life in their own way in their own place.

The Albanian Point of View

Most of the specific incidents that color Albanians' attitude towards Macedonia were given in the section on 'recent history', above. In short, Albanians feel that they are being denied rights that they had as a 'constituent nationality' under Yugoslavia, and are concerned as to how far this erosion of rights will continue. Albanians feel that they are discriminated against, beginning with the preamble to the constitution, and continuing through language, education and employment opportunity. They feel they are denied basic human rights. They feel they make up 40% of the population of Macedonia, not the mere quarter that the census calculates, and that they should have proportionate recognition. They feel that the fifteen year residence requirement--which only begins to run when the person registers as a resident--is specifically aimed at preventing Albanians from exercising their rights as citizens. They feel that they are being denied educational opportunity, first in the very few Albanians being admitted to the University, and secondly in that the University of Tetova¹⁵ is regarded as illegal and its degrees and classes worthless. Even degrees from the University of Pristina are not acceptable in Macedonia.

While at one time there was a strong Albanian separatist movement, since the collapse of the Albanian economy in 1997, most Albanians feel that they have a better life in Macedonia, and don't want to secede and rejoin Albania. However, they feel very threatened by majority groups, particularly in light of Serbian violence against Albanians in Kosovo. There is a strong perception that

Macedonians control the state, including the courts, so that the state itself has become party to the conflict

Politically, Albanians have been part of the ruling coalition since 1994. However, most Albanians do not see this as having brought them benefits, and view the moderate party as being the 'lapdogs' of the ruling party. Albanian politics has become radicalized over the past four years, and the radical Albanian party is expected to do much better this time than its moderate parent.

Albanians see the Macedonians as wanting them to give up core parts of their culture and identity, and view themselves as being increasingly embattled. While there have been few violent incidents to date, with the exception of the protracted issue of flying the Albanian flag over municipal buildings, the leaders of the radical party wanted me to know that their youth were becoming 'hopeless', and increasingly uncontrollable. If they do not see a change soon, they said, they will have to fight for their rights, and the party leaders will support them¹⁶

Reasons for Hope

A resolution requires that grievances be transcended to achieve a lasting solution. Fortunately, there seems to be some time to address the problems. Skopje--at least on the surface--is a peaceful city. There is relatively little crime, and people talk and laugh with the policemen--a far cry from so many places. Even the serious confrontations listed above were generally managed with restraint on both sides. I have heard no reports of individual ethnic violence--people being lynched, or their houses being burned because they were from the wrong ethnic group. All people interviewed said that they personally knew of people from the other ethnic group that they liked and did business with. There is a basis for hope that all Macedonian citizens--Macedonian and Albanian alike--can resolve their differences.

Both the government and the opposition Albanian parties seem to be acting with restraint. In particular, the government only intervened in the issue of the Albanian flag very slowly and following a series of court decisions. While there was an eruption of violence after the final decision was announced, this was quickly stopped by both sides. Similarly, during the recent demonstrations in support of Albanians in Kosovo, the event passed with only a few fisticuffs, and riot police were neither in action nor in evidence. I believe that, despite hot tempers, both sides realize that both will lose if the situation degenerates into violence.

Unfortunately, there also does not appear to be any electoral benefit to a moderate position. Moderate parties elected in the past are expected to lose ground in the next election to more radical ones.

All my interviewees stated that they had no objection to particular individuals of the other group, indeed that some of their closest friends and business partners were from that group. It was simply the ethnicity as a whole that were bad. While less than a ringing endorsement, this does offer opportunities to develop programs that, in the long run, can make a difference.

For the last two years, Land O' Lakes¹⁷ has sent inter-ethnic teams of veterinarian field agents into villages to help improve livestock and dairy products. Their teams cover an impressive number of villages out of four regional centers. Since they only send out inter-ethnic teams, their experience is instructive. There have been very few incidents where teams have been rejected. In one case near Skopje, an entire village came to the Macedonian member following the initial lecture and requested that the Albanian team member not return to teach. With country coordinator backing, they both returned on the next trip, and explained his educational qualifications. After careful questioning, he was accepted, and the team has continued to work there up to the present. Interestingly, this area is said to be very ethnically confused, with people not sure whether they're Serbs or Macedonians.

In other incidents in Albanian villages, people have stood up to demand that the lecture be given in the local language. The rest of the listeners have demanded that the talk continue, since they aren't involved in politics. Generally, the rural people have been suspicious of the motives of educated city folk coming to their village, since usually only politicians come seeking votes. Once personal contact is established, and particularly after their advice is seen to be useful, there are no further problems. This project is an important example how using common goals can be used to reduce ethnic tensions and establish personal relationships.

A collaborative project between Search for Common **Ground/Washington** (SCG), and the Skopje University based Ethnic Conflict Resolution Project (ECRP) has been working in schools to teach fourth grade students 'conflict-resolution games'. These 'games' consist of weekly classroom sessions in which children are taught skills to prevent escalation of conflict into violence. Unfortunately, there are only two schools participating currently, and they will only be able to expand to four schools next year, meaning that this will be very slow in showing results on a broad scale. Unfortunately, when ECRP attempted to develop a university course on conflict resolution, they were not permitted to do so.

SCG and ECRP are also working on a variety of journalistic projects encouraging collaboration and unbiased reporting. SCG has also recently been awarded a grant to produce a television series aimed at older elementary students, again teaching ethnic tolerance and conflict resolution skills.

Delphi International's project, Strategies, Training and Advocacy for Reconciliation (STAR) works with non-nationalistic women's NGOs to increase their capacity to

advocate women's issues--including public education, raising public consciousness and lobbying local and national government bodies. An important part of this is to help women understand that their issues transcend ethnicity. A particular aspect of the work involves workshops with representatives from most of the former Yugoslav countries¹⁸ to be able to see their differences in a regional light. A meeting with regional representatives of NGOs from the three largest ethnic groups in Macedonia shows the possibilities. Their local workshops on issues concerning women—such as public health, drugs and AIDS--are always held with interpretation into both languages, which shows respect and acceptance of both sides. It gives the opportunity for women to develop friendships across ethnic boundaries, which otherwise would be very difficult. In almost all workshops, some sort of ethnic conflict arises. When this happens, the local coordinators--both Macedonian and Albanian--are prepared to jointly intervene and resolve the issue. The attention to non-violent communication provides an important forum in an environment where normal communications are aggressive, and people have rarely learned how to listen to each other. The ostensible topic of the meeting is usually far less important than the opportunity provided for a new kind of interaction.

Lessons from Experience in Post-conflict Situations

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. Indeed, the more a situation changes, the more likely conflict is to arise. All cultures and organizations develop means to deal with conflict in more or less effective ways. With the vast changes of the past decade--a shift from being part of a larger whole to being an independent state, a shift from communism to democracy, a shift from a centrally directed economy to a market economy--it's surprising that there is as little overt conflict as Macedonia currently experiences. This is particularly true since the two major ethnic communities have primarily existed in parallel rather than together, and are very much in the process of developing conflict resolution mechanisms as a pluralistic nation.

The Carnegie Commission has recently issued a report, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, that summarizes world experience in identifying, preventing, and recovering from conflict situations¹⁹. They comment:

While disputes between groups are common, the escalation of these disputes into lethal violence cannot be explained merely by reference to sectarian, ethnic or cultural background. Indeed, in the Commission's view, mass violence is never "inevitable." Violent conflict is not simply a tragic flaw in the cultural inheritance and history of certain groups.

Violent conflict results from choice--the choice of leaders and people--and is facilitated through the institutions that bind them. To say that violent clashes will inevitably occur and can only be managed, a view implicit in

much of the contemporary literature on mediation and conflict resolution, will not do. The factors that lead to the choice to pursue violence are numerous and complex²⁰

In the Commission's view, mass violence almost invariably results from the deliberately violent responses of determined leaders and their groups to a wide range of social, economic, and political conditions that provide the environment for violent conflict, but do not independently spawn violence. The interplay of these predisposing conditions and violence-prone leadership offers opportunities for prevention²¹

Looking at cases where mass violence might have been expected, the Commission identified three factors that seem to forestall violence

- *Leadership* Leaders on both sides of the conflict must be committed to a peaceful resolution of the issues, and to seeking early mediation as problems move towards violence. As has been shown above, both the actions and the rhetoric of the Government of Macedonia have been for peaceful resolution, but the Albanian PDA, while its actions to date have been peaceful, want international observers to know that it is prepared to take action. While I have not discussed issues at a high level, I believe that Albanians are more willing to enter into international mediation than are Macedonians.
- *Social Cohesion* This is defined as 'a robust civil society that offers a vibrant atmosphere for citizen interaction, or in accepted patterns of civil behavior able to absorb the shocks of rapid change'²². Clearly, given the 'parallel' cultures described above, Macedonia does not have a sufficiently strong cohesion to avoid difficulties. The primary elements of civil society that contribute to the prevention of violence are the NGOs, religious leaders and organizations, educational and scientific communities, and the media. Unfortunately, two of these, the religious and the educational and scientific communities divide rather than unite across ethnic boundaries. There is a basis for the development of a more resilient environment in business relationships, and in nascent NGO activities such as those of Land O' Lakes and Delphi, but much more effort needs to go into strengthening these relationships.
- *International Engagement* The international community has made a strong commitment to protecting Macedonia from violence in Kosovo and Serbia by the deployment of the UN Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) from 1992 to the present. While its purpose is primarily to prevent the spread of outside violence, it stands as a clear signal that the international community is concerned about what happens

within Macedonia. There is, however, no cause for complacency. The international community must remain aware of developments within Macedonia to ensure that they are prepared for appropriate preventive diplomacy should the need arise.

Policy: Ethnic Tensions as a Cross-Cutting Issue for USAID/Macedonia

From the discussion above, a Westerner would find it easy to side with Albanians. Unfortunately, this is probably not the right response. While couched in different terms--the Macedonians in rejecting Albanian Nationality, the Albanians in protecting human rights--in fact, both sides want the same thing, i.e., an uncontested right to full national expression. Unfortunately, neither see that it is possible to achieve this while sharing a common piece of land, and both believe that making any concessions to the other is tantamount to losing everything. Unfortunately, as has been seen in many other situations, the personal level of tolerance can be quickly swept away if national level outrage leads to mass violence. This was seen most vividly perhaps in Rwanda.

Furthermore, the tension is not concentrated at a single level--i.e., rural/urban, high/low educational status, one region vs. another. Approaches will ultimately have to address all levels at the same time. If, for example, Land O' Lakes is working in rural areas, and National Democratic Initiatives is working at the central political level, mid level authorities may see their own positions being eroded and may work to sabotage any effort to achieve reconciliation.

As I view the findings of my work here, I feel that there are several things that will affect ethnic tensions in Macedonia in the short, medium and long term. In the short term, I feel that the most important issues are:

A. Events in Kosovo. If tensions there settle down, and there is no further violence, tensions will lessen on this side of the border as well. If, however, there is escalating violence, particularly if it is accompanied by a surge of refugees into Macedonia, I feel the situation will deteriorate rapidly here.

B. Parliamentary elections in the fall of 1998. Currently, parties on both sides find it difficult to differentiate themselves from their opponents except on the bases of the personality of their leaders, and the extent to which they fan ethnic tensions. If these leaders refrain from escalating their rhetoric during the elections, there is a greater likelihood that the situation here will remain stable. However, election results are important, as well. It is important that Albanians feel that they have a significant role in the new government, and probably need to be represented in the ruling coalition. If a

coalition of Macedonian nationalistic parties is formed excluding Albanians, I feel that the situation will become less stable

In the intermediate term, the economic situation must improve, with equal access to economic benefits for both Albanians and Macedonians. The impact of increased local participation in governance is unclear to me at this point. If NGOs use increasing influence to make central and local government responsive to individual concerns, this will help reduce tensions. On the other hand, if decentralization continues to be one of the flashpoints for Macedonians, it could serve as a destabilizing influence.

Long term stability will depend on a growing recognition of the needs and contributions of both Macedonians and Albanians to the Macedonian state. Increasing business and social contacts between the groups, and teaching effective ethnic tolerance and conflict resolution through business, NGOs, the Media and the schools will play a major role.

Based on these conclusions and the presentation above, I feel that the USAID strategic plan should address the following cross-cutting elements:

- 1 Work with political parties to help them establish economic and social platforms and to help them establish constituent communication and services, thus weaning them from 'big man' and ethnic tension campaigns.
- 2 Follow the laws leading up to this fall's elections very closely, including the electoral districting laws. The mission should consider having one of its elections cooperating agencies do an analysis of the body of these laws to estimate how Albanians and Macedonians will fare under the scenarios that are established. This can be used to predict any difficulties that might arise during the campaign, elections, or formation of a government following elections, and may be useful as an early warning system for increasing tensions.
- 3 Continue with a major focus on economic development. Ensure that all ED projects are developed to (1) increase inter-ethnic contact, (2) ensure that project managers are aware that conflict will occur in these settings, and (3) include mechanisms to deal with the conflict when it arises. The mission will also wish to carefully monitor access to economic benefits, to ensure that the perception of fairness across ethnic boundaries is maintained.
- 4 Establish teams of trained Macedonian/Albanian mediators who can be used to intervene in conflict situations. The basic concept would be that leaders, preferably those respected by both sides, would be trained to work together to help resolve tense situations both in the private and public sector.

Hopefully, they could gain regional stature by being participants on international mediation teams, but this would take time and experience. Ultimately, these teams should be capable of providing mediation services at the highest level. This can probably best be accomplished through some of the NGOs currently active in Macedonia.

- 5 Use **NGO** and other contacts to informally monitor the situation, to ensure that the mission is aware of impending violence
- 6, Continue NGO funding for ethnic tolerance, conflict resolution, impartial journalism, media programs, local NGO strengthening and NGO political involvement
- 7 Given the current tension between ethnic groups and the cultural difficulties in resolving differences through meetings, the mission will probably not wish to sponsor workshops that directly address ethnic differences. Unless conditions are right, this type of workshop has not been shown to be particularly effective. Following the elections, the Mission may wish to reevaluate the situation to determine whether Establishment of trained teams of mediators to intervene in specific situations, as described above, will probably be more effective
- 8 The Mission will want to monitor involvement in decentralization very carefully. If it is done to strengthen municipality management, this will probably cause no problems and will directly address the concerns of the mid-level elite. Becoming involved in decentralization at a policy level will probably result in the Mission being seen as being pro-Albanian

Annex **Results** Measuring Program Impact

At a time when USAID is focussed on achieving 'results' from every activity, preferably on an annual basis, it is difficult to select verifiable results for issues in reducing ethnic tension. The goal is something that does not happen--violence--and, while it is easy to recognize failure, it is more difficult to measure success.

In these situations it is tempting to substitute something that is apparently easier to measure--an example given was that if a women's group started doing work on breast cancer, one should track whether the prevalence of breast cancer was changed as a result. In the first place, such a measure does not take into account the epidemiology of the disease--teaching self examination will increase the prevalence as undetected cases are found--but also the potential impact of a relatively small investment--it is unlikely that even intensive work among a few thousand women will have a measurable impact over a short time period.

In these cases, it is very important to look at what the organization is actually doing, and to choose results based on what is actually done. If an organization is holding inter-ethnic meetings and workshops, the number of participants or the number of people trained in conflict resolution *may be the desired result* in and of itself.

In different situations this will be different. Land O' Lakes will probably have an easier time developing indicators than Search for Common Ground, particularly in its television series. In the latter case, the best indicator would be market share, but I don't know whether this type of survey exists in Macedonia--and it would almost certainly not be cost effective to establish a viewing pattern survey simply to measure viewers of this series! Second might be viewer response, measured by letters or telephone calls. Finally, the mere accomplishment of completing the series might be the only result that can be tracked.

Endnotes

1 The term 'Macedonian' can be confusing. It can refer to a citizen of Macedonia, a member of the Macedonian ethnic group, or the Macedonian language. Unless the context is clear, in this paper I will use the term to refer to members of the ethnic group, and *not* to citizens of the state.

2 Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia. 1997 Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia. Skopje, December, 1997. p. 94.

3 *ibid*

4 *ibid*, pp. 595-7.

5 Cable 1997 Skopje 02304.

6 Kaplan, Robert D. *Balkan Ghosts: A journey through history*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

7 Lumsden, Malvern. *Peacebuilding in Macedonia*. International Peace Research Institute, Oslo report 2/97.

8 *ibid*, p. 24.

9 Skopje 02304, *op cit*.

10 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 1991. English version.

11 Najcevska, Mirjana and Natasha Gaber. *Survey results and Legal Background Regarding Ethnic Issues in the Republic of Macedonia*. Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research, Center for Ethnic Relations. Skopje, October, 1995.

12 As noted above, the party has a slender majority, and could govern without a coalition. The party apparently wishes to present this face, both to Macedonians and Albanians, as needing the coalition, and therefore being responsive to demands from both sides. Unfortunately, currently this is seen by both sides as 'giving in' to the other's demands, and is expected to weaken both in the next election.

In addition, there is a question as to how significant the Albanian membership is to the coalition. Apparently, when a decision was made to enforce the ban on flying the Albanian flag over public buildings in Gostivar and Tetovo, the Albanian party was not aware of it, and was taken by surprise by the police action.

13 Najcevska & Gaber, *op cit* p. 37. The exact percentage is not given, but Macedonians are put between the 75% of Albanians and 52% of Serbs that feel themselves relatively disadvantaged.

14 One of the fascinating pieces of lost history is that, contrary to tradition, the Serbs battled the Turks to a standstill, and the Turkish conquest of Serbia was delayed for several years! This is forgotten because it does not fit with Serbian's view of themselves

15 The spelling of Tetovo/a differs when spelled in Macedonian (Tetovo) or Albanian (Tetova) Since I am referring to an Albanian institution, I use the Albanian version here

16 I believe this was said more for my benefit as an advisor to the U S Embassy, rather than because this is their next choice of action

17 Mentioning a particular development partner in this section means that I endorse certain activities that seem to be important to reducing ethnic tensions A full endorsement of an implementing organization would mean that I would have to look more carefully at its on the ground capabilities and results than I have been able to do thus far Because of time limitations, I was unable to interview many of the other NGOs operating in Macedonia, and does not mean that I feel their work is of less value

18 Excluding Slavonia

19 Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict *Preventing Deadly Conflict* Carnegie Corporation New York 1997

20 ibid , p 25

21 ibid, p 29

22 ibid, p 30