

Roundtable Report

MACEDONIA: ETHNIC AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Washington, DC, April 27, 1995

INTRODUCTION

As the bloody conflict in Bosnia Hercegovina has continued to run its course, the Republic of Macedonia has remained an island of relative calm in the stormy Balkan sea. Surrounded by neighbors who harbor historical designs on its territory and made up of diverse ethnic groups with a complex history of interaction, this tiny, landlocked country has thus far successfully preserved the peace. In order to examine Macedonia's domestic and international circumstances, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) invited specialists with expertise in the region to share their views at a roundtable, held at the US Department of State on April 27, 1995. The roundtable was made possible by the State Department's Title VIII program. The round table featured three presentations on Macedonia:

- Loring Danforth, professor of anthropology at Bates College, discussed the cultural and political conflict between Macedonians and Greeks;
- Victor Friedman, professor of Slavic and Balkan linguistics at the University of Chicago, reviewed the background and conduct of the 1994 census in Macedonia; and
- Vladimir Ortakovski, an IREX scholar on leave from his position as deputy minister of science for the Republic of Macedonia, described his country's nationalities policy and emphasized the importance of international support.

This roundtable report presents excerpts from each of the three presentations and incorporates some of the major points raised in the subsequent discussion with invited audience members.* [*Large portions of Danforth's presentation have been excerpted and adapted from: Loring M. Danforth, "Claims to Macedonian Identity: The Macedonian Question and the Breakup of Yugoslavia,": Anthropology Today 9, no.4 (August 1993): 3-10.

Large portions of Friedman's presentation have been excerpted and adapted from his Woodrow Wilson Center East European Studies Lecture entitled "Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia: New Balkan Powder Keg?" (March 1995). The full revised text of the lecture will be published by the Woodrow Wilson Center in its Occasional Papers series.]

The audience included policy specialists and government officials with expertise in the Balkans. The views contained in this report represent a blend of the presenters' views and those of the audience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Conflict Between Greeks and Macedonians

The status of Macedonia has been a central question in Balkan history dating back to the Ottoman period. Both during and after Ottoman rule, Macedonia's neighbors--Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia (later Yugoslavia)--denied the existence of a Macedonian nation and claimed large portions of Macedonia. Josip Broz Tito's establishment of the People's Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia served to negate Greece's and Bulgaria's claims and allowed the Macedonians to attain a significant degree of cultural autonomy.

The present conflict between Macedonians and Greeks revolves around three issues: international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, potential territorial claims across internationally recognized borders, and minority group rights. Since Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Greek opposition has centered on its name and national symbols--which Greece claims as exclusively Greek--as well as language in the Macedonian constitution that Greece interpreted as a threat to Greek sovereignty. Greece has attempted to block Macedonia's entry into international bodies or has forced compromises under which the republic is called "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and is forbidden to fly its flag at international institutions. At the same time, Greece has continued to deny the existence and cultural rights of its own Macedonian-speaking citizens, some of whom consider themselves Greeks and some of whom do not. Meanwhile, in 1992 Macedonia amended its constitution to make explicit its recognition of its international borders. Ultimately, the only possible solution to the Greek-Macedonian conflict is one that recognizes both peoples' rights to their shared cultural property. From a perspective in which symbols can have more than one meaning and names more than one referent, there can be two kinds of Macedonians--Macedonians who are Greeks and Macedonians who are not Greeks. Similarly, there can be a Macedonia which is an independent country and a Macedonia which is a region in another country. While such a solution may create some confusion, it is preferable to a solution which denies Macedonians who are not Greeks the right to identify themselves as Macedonians.

Censuses in Macedonia

States have historically used conflicting censuses to support territorial claims. The political importance of censuses has continued into the present in Macedonia, as Macedonia's Albanian community boycotted a 1991 census that it claimed was discriminatory. An internationally backed 1994 recount came about in part as the result of Albanian pressure, because the Albanian community hoped that a census would back up its demands for special status within the Macedonian state. The European Union also pushed publicly for the new census in the hope that revised numbers would ease political and ethnic tensions, while the United States lobbied behind the scenes for a new census.

Census figures have been subject to easy manipulation in Macedonia partly because national identity is so labile among the republic's numerous ethnic groups. Multilingual families in Macedonia often made varying decisions about national identity when called upon to declare their nationalities for past censuses. Also, religious identity has often taken precedence over evident linguistic ties, with Muslim Macedonian speakers identifying themselves as Albanian or Turkish, for example, or Christian Albanian speakers calling themselves Macedonian.

Though there was a political impetus for the 1994 census, the International Census Observation Mission (ICOM), sponsored by the Council of Europe and the European Union, characterized it as nothing more than a statistical exercise. ICOM's work in Macedonia was hampered by its lack of understanding of the country. The census met international standards (and largely verified the 1991 results), but its results were disavowed by the Albanians. Also, portions of the census law that might have been used to authorize subsequent minority-language use at the federal level were ruled unconstitutional by the Macedonian constitutional court. In fact, the census may have served to exacerbate ethnic conflict by internationalizing the Albanians' claims. It also lent credence to an erroneous Western view that Macedonia's troubles grow out of deep-rooted ethnic animosity among its constituent peoples, when in fact meddling by outside powers is largely to blame.

Macedonia's Nationalities Policy and the Need for International Support

One of the reasons why the Republic of Macedonia has thus far remained at peace is its relative success in promoting coexistence among its nationalities. Macedonia's policies, which recognize both individual and group rights, codify equal protection under the law while allowing minorities to preserve their cultural identities and traditions. At the same time, Macedonia takes care that minority groups do not escalate demands for special rights to the point that the integrity of the state is threatened.

Ample educational opportunities exist in minority languages at the primary and secondary level, but the

question of university education is more complicated. The Albanian community is seeking to obtain education in Albanian within Macedonia, even though the Macedonian constitution does not explicitly guarantee such a right. The Albanian-language university recently established in Tetovo is considered to be illegal by the Macedonian government and represents a serious challenge to the present delicate balance within Macedonia's political and social structures.

Macedonia's continued peaceful development depends on its continued functioning as a "citizens' state," where everyone is accorded equal rights. Strengthening and broadening the process of European integration by including the Central and Eastern European countries will also make an important contribution to peace in the entire region. Finally, the United States should take steps to shore up Macedonia's international position. It can do this by serving as a conduit for negotiations with Greece and by easing Greek concerns over perceived threats to its sovereignty.

I. CLAIMS TO MACEDONIAN IDENTITY: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN GREEKS AND MACEDONIANS

Macedonia has historically been a major source of conflict and instability in the Balkans. It is currently at the center of a debate between Greeks and Macedonians over which group has the right to identify itself as Macedonians. The current phase of the "Macedonian Question" involves three major issues: international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, potential territorial claims across internationally recognized borders, and minority group rights. While the conflict has thus far been confined to the arenas of international diplomacy and public relations, the potential for violence is real: the conflict between the Greeks and the Macedonians is an expression of the same forces of ethnic nationalism and irredentism that lie at the heart of the more violent conflict that rages now between the Serbs, the Croats, and the Bosnian Muslims.

Background to the Macedonian Question

The Macedonian Question has dominated Balkan history and politics for over a hundred years. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the region's numerous ethnic groups (including Slavic- and Greek-speaking Christians, Turkish- and Albanian-speaking Muslims, Vlachs, Jews, Gypsies, and more) increasingly were being defined from various external nationalist perspectives in terms of national categories such as Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, and Turks. By the 1890s Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia were supporting guerrilla movements and conducting propaganda campaigns aimed at gaining control of Macedonia.

None of these three Balkan powers acknowledged the existence of a Macedonian nation until 1944, when Josip Broz Tito established the People's Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia. In following decades the Macedonian language was standardized and an autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church was established. In this way Macedonians achieved a significant degree of cultural autonomy, even if they failed to achieve complete national independence. The latter was achieved in September 1991, when Macedonia held a national referendum that affirmed its sovereignty and independence.

Competing Claims to Macedonian Identity

This fledgling state of Macedonia has faced a difficult struggle for international recognition because of the unresolved dispute with Greece over what the latter claims to be a name that is incontrovertibly Greek. The Greek position holds that since Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians were essentially Greeks, and because ancient and modern Greece are bound in an unbroken line of racial and cultural continuity, it is the Greeks who have the principal right to identify themselves as Macedonians, not the Slavs of southern Yugoslavia.

This negation of Macedonian identity includes denying the existence of a Macedonian nation, a Macedonian language, and a Macedonian minority in Greece. A Greek perspective holds that there cannot be a Macedonian nation since there has never been an independent Macedonian state. The Macedonian nation is seen as an artificial creation, an invention of Tito, who--in an effort to bolster potential territorial

claims against Greece--baptized a "mosaic of nationalities" with the Greek name "Macedonians."

Similarly, because the language spoken by the ancient Macedonians was Greek, the Slavic language spoken by the "Skopjans" (as most Greeks refer to the Macedonians) cannot be called "the Macedonian language." Greek sources generally refer to it as a dialect of Bulgarian. Finally, the Greek government denies the existence of a Macedonian minority in northern Greece, claiming that there exists only a small group of "Slavophone Hellenes" or "bilingual Greeks," who speak Greek and "a local Slavic dialect" but have a "Greek national consciousness." An extreme Greek nationalist perspective holds that the use of the "Macedonian" by the "Slavs of Skopje" constitutes plagiarism against the Greek people, embezzlement of Greek cultural heritage, and falsification of Greek history.

Macedonians, on the other hand, are committed to affirming their existence as a people with a unique history, culture, and identity, and to gaining recognition of this fact internationally. In asserting what they some times refer to as their "ethnospecificity," Macedonians insist they are not Serbs, Yugoslavs, Bulgarians, or Greeks. Extreme Macedonian nationalists, who are concerned with demonstrating the continuity between ancient and modern Macedonians, deny that they are Slavs and claim to be the direct descendants of Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians. The more moderate Macedonian position, generally adopted by better-educated Macedonians and the international scholarly community (and publicly endorsed by Macedonian president Kiro Gligorov), is that modern Macedonians are not related to Alexander the Great, but are a Slavic people whose ancestors arrived in Macedonia in the sixth century AD. Proponents of both the extreme and the moderate Macedonian position stress that the ancient Macedonians were a distinct non-Greek people. In addition to affirming the existence of the Macedonian nation, Macedonians are concerned with affirming the existence of a unique Macedonian language as well.

The goal of more extreme Macedonian nationalists is to create a "free, united, and independent Macedonia" by "liberating" the parts of Macedonia "temporarily occupied" by Bulgaria and Greece. More moderate Macedonian nationalists recognize the inviolability of the Bulgarian and Greek borders and explicitly renounce any territorial claims against the two countries. They do, however, demand that Bulgaria and Greece recognize the existence of Macedonian minorities in their countries and grant them basic human and minority rights.

The Construction of Macedonian Identity

From an anthropological perspective, the Macedonian Question in its current form can be seen as a conflict between two opposing nationalist ideologies, both of which reify nations, national cultures, and national identities; project them far back into the past; and treat them as eternal, natural, and immutable essences. The construction of a Macedonian national identity began in the middle of the nineteenth century with the first expressions of Macedonian ethnic nationalism on the part of a small number of intellectuals. At this time, however, the vast majority of the Slavic-speaking inhabitants of Macedonia were illiterate peasants with no clearly developed sense of national identity at all. According to most outside observers, any expression of national identity that was encountered among the Macedonian peasantry was very superficial and could be attributed to educational and religious propaganda or simply to terrorism.

By the end of World War II the Slavic-speaking inhabitants of Macedonia seem to have arrived at a stage in their national development where identification with either the Serbs or Bulgarians was no longer possible. Nevertheless, the political motivation for the recognition of a separate Macedonian nation and the creation of the People's Republic of Macedonia by Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia should not be underestimated. It was an effective way for Tito to integrate Macedonia into Yugoslavia since it served to delegitimize both Serbian and Bulgarian claims to the area. (This approach is similar to the way that Tito handled Bosnia vis-a-vis Serbia and Croatia. It also dovetailed nicely with Tito's ambition to create a Balkan communist federation encompassing Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece.)

The relatively recent creation of a Macedonian state and construction of a Macedonian nation--in comparison to other Balkan cases--does not mean, as Greek nationalists claim, that the Macedonian nation is "artificial," while the Greek nation is "genuine." Nor does it mean that Macedonian national identity is only "imagined," while Greek national identity is "real." Both Macedonian national identity and Greek national identity are equally valid.

Similarly, the Greek claim that there is no linguistic evidence to support the view that Macedonian is a distinct language and not just a dialect of Bulgarian ignores the widely accepted sociolinguistic insight that the decision as to whether a particular variety of speech constitutes a language or dialect is always based on political rather than linguistic criteria. The existence of the Macedonian language is accepted by linguists worldwide. Only those Balkan actors who have a political interest in denying the existence of the Macedonian nation deny the existence of the language.

Current Points of Contention--Recognition and Territorial Claims

Ever since the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence in 1991, the international conflict between Greeks and Macedonians has focused primarily on the Republic's attempts to gain international recognition first from the European Community and then from the United Nations. On December 16, 1991, the Council of Ministers of the European Community (EC) announced the conditions under which the EC would recognize the former Yugoslav republics that had declared their independence. In addition to requiring that these republics commit themselves to protecting the human rights of the ethnic minorities living within their borders, the EC also required each republic to guarantee that it had no territorial claims against any neighboring EC state and that it would not engage in hostile acts against any such state, including the use of a name which implied territorial claims. This requirement, which was included at the insistence of Greece, clearly applies only to Macedonia, since Macedonia is the only former Yugoslav republic that shares a border with an EC state.

One of Greece's objections to international recognition of Macedonia centered on language in the Macedonian constitution implying that the Republic of Macedonia had a responsibility to protect Macedonians outside of its border, which Greece perceived as a threat to its territory. (Ironically, the Greek constitution contains a very similar article stating that Greece "shall care for Greeks residing abroad.") In 1992, however, Macedonia amended its constitution, providing new guarantees that it would respect the inviolability of all international borders and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other states. At this point, an EC Arbitration Commission found that, of the four former Yugoslav republics seeking recognition, only Slovenia and Macedonia fulfilled all of the stated conditions. In addition, it specifically stated that the use of the name "Macedonia" did not imply territorial claims toward a neighboring state. In spite of this, however, on January 15, 1992 the EC announced that it would recognize Slovenia and Croatia (and Bosnia Hercegovina was recognized three months later), but Macedonia was not recognized.

In May 1992 the EC agreed to recognize the Republic of Macedonia, but only under a name that was acceptable to all parties concerned. Most observers agree that the EC states supported Greece on the Macedonian issue not because of the merits of the Greek case, which had been publicly rejected and ridiculed by officials from several member states, but because the EC Council of Ministers recognized the right of member states to exercise an unofficial veto on issues that affect their national interests. Furthermore, in exchange for EC support on the Macedonian issue, Greece promised to ratify the Maastricht treaty, participate in sanctions against its traditional ally Serbia, and ratify an EC financial protocol with Turkey.

Finally, on April 7, 1993 the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to admit "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" as a member of the United Nations. At Greece's insistence, however, the Republic is not allowed to fly its flag (the 16-ray sun or star of Vergina) at United Nations headquarters because the Greeks hold that this was the emblem of the ancient Macedonians and is therefore a Greek symbol. It is interesting to note that this symbol was not even discovered until 1977, but by the late 1980s both Macedonians and Greeks had claimed it as their own, putting it on stamps, coins,

and flags and designating it as their own link with antiquity.

Current Points of Contention--The Macedonian Minority in Greece

According to the US State Department's 1990 human rights report, there are between 20,000 and 50,000 Slavic speakers in northern Greece, many of whom live in the relatively underdeveloped area along the border between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia. Although a majority of these people have a Greek national identity (that is, they identify themselves as Greeks and as Macedonians, or as Greek-Macedonians), a significant number of them have a Macedonian national identity (that is, they identify themselves as Macedonians and not as Greeks). Since the mid-1980s a small number of these Macedonians have become politically active and begun to demand human rights for the Macedonian minority in Greece.

Among the goals of these activists is the repeal of several specific laws which discriminate against Macedonians. Two laws (passed in 1982 and 1985) explicitly exclude Macedonians from the general amnesty under which political refugees who left Greece after the civil war were allowed to return to Greece and reclaim their property only if they were "Greek by birth." Another law (passed in 1982) ceased to recognize university degrees obtained in the Republic of Macedonia on the grounds that Macedonian was not an internationally recognized language.

More generally, these Macedonian human rights activists seek recognition by the Greek government of the existence of a Macedonian minority in Greece. They are working to end discrimination against Macedonians in Greece in the fields of education and employment, as well as in other areas of social, cultural, and political life. They want Macedonians in Greece to have the right to attend church services in Macedonian, to receive their primary and secondary education in Macedonian, and to publish newspapers and broadcast radio and television programs in Macedonian. They also want the right to establish Macedonian cultural organizations. Finally, these groups have protested against police interference with village festivals where Macedonian folk songs and dances are performed, as well as against the harassment and persecution of Macedonian human rights activists, some of whom have been dismissed from their jobs, denied entry into Greece, and deprived of their Greek citizenship.

A Dispute Over Cultural Property

The dispute between Greeks and Macedonians over which group has the right to identify itself as Macedonian is a dispute between the proponents of two nationalist ideologies over the possession of national identities, histories, and cultures, all of which from a nationalist perspective are considered to be the property of the nation. It is a dispute over the ownership of cultural property in which each of two nations has attempted to place a copyright or trademark on what it considers to be its own name, its own national emblems, and its own famous ancestors. Since a nation's culture is as much its possession as its territory, the appropriation of this culture by another nation is seen as a threat to territorial integrity.

From an anthropological perspective, however, it is evident that in this dispute between Greeks and Macedonians, two different national identities and cultures are being constructed from the same raw materials, from the same set of powerful national symbols. While territory must be the mutually exclusive possession of one state or another--a particular village can only be located in Greece or in the Republic of Macedonia--not only can two cultures coexist in one place, but two different peoples with two different nationalities can share the same name. From a perspective in which symbols can have more than one meaning and names more than one referent, there can be two kinds of Macedonians--Macedonians who are Greeks and Macedonians who are not Greeks. Similarly, there can be a Macedonia which is an independent country and a Macedonia which is a region in another country.

While such a solution may create some confusion, it is preferable to a solution which denies Macedonians who are not Greeks the right to identify themselves as Macedonians. It is preferable to a solution which not only denies the existence of a nation and a minority, but also tries to destroy the identity, language, and culture of this minority. Such an approach is an expression of the same kind of ethnic nationalism that in times of economic chaos and political collapse can all too easily lead to the kind of ethnic cleansing

now taking place in other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

II. CENSUSES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MACEDONIA

Rival census claims have historically been employed by Macedonia's neighbors to support their overlapping territorial ambitions. The political importance of censuses continues to be evident in Macedonia, as demonstrated by the Albanians in Macedonia boycotting a 1991 census, with the claim that it was biased against them. Partly in response to Albanian pressure and partly at the urging of the European Union (in public) and the United States (behind the scenes), an extraordinary internationally backed census was conducted in 1994. The 1994 census may well have been a statistical success, meeting international standards and largely confirming the results of the 1991 population count. It did not alleviate political and ethnic tensions within Macedonia, however. Not only did it fail in this regard, but it may have served to exacerbate societal fault lines, which--contrary to commonly held Western beliefs--do not have deep roots in Macedonian history.

Lability and Manipulation of National Identity

Early twentieth-century census figures for Macedonia used by Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian sources differed from each other drastically, with each utilizing definitional criteria that supported its own claims. While Greeks defined national identity based on historical factors (religion and/or schooling, for example), Serbs and Bulgarians chose dialect boundaries, based on detailed linguistic features, to justify ethnic, and therefore territorial, claims. Depending on the particular linguistic features chosen, either Serbian or Bulgarian claims to large swaths of Macedonia could be bolstered. Also, Bulgarian figures assumed that virtually any Slav in Macedonia was Bulgarian, and increased the numbers by assuming higher fertility and incidence of extended families for Slavs than for other groups. Thus, for example, if a given village had 50 Albanian houses and 40 Slavic houses, by counting five members per Albanian household and seven members per Slavic household, the Bulgarians could end up with a Slavic majority (280 to 250) despite the smaller number of houses.

Notably absent from any of these censuses were figures representing the views of Macedonians themselves. The suppression of Macedonian ethnic identity in all its manifestations was not only in the interest of all the small powers that laid claim to the territory, but also in the interest of their great power backers. In certain respects that situation is being replicated today, and population figures are again being used to bolster conflicting claims ranging from minority rights to irredentism.

Census manipulation for political purposes is made possible by the utter complexity of Macedonia's ethnic patchwork and the lability of national identity. The oldest generation from Western Macedonia, for example, remembers when Christians and Muslims would live under the same roof as part of the same extended family. It was not uncommon for one brother in a Christian family to convert to Islam in order to be in a position to protect the entire family. Also, marriages have always been freely contracted across linguistic lines. The children of such mixed marriages would all grow up multilingual. When faced with the necessity of declaring a nationality, choices might follow gender, i.e., if a Turkish man married an Albanian woman, the sons might be Turks and the daughters Albanian, while in other families the choice could be for one son to be Albanian and one to be Turkish.

Many inhabitants of Macedonia have also based their national identity on their religion, disregarding evident linguistic ties. For example, Macedonian-speaking Muslims have been especially vulnerable to "identity-manipulation" by Albanian and Turkish politicians, who have convinced some of them that they are Slavicized Albanians or Turks rather than Islamicized Slavs, and that their economic and cultural interests will thus be best served by Turkish or Albanian political parties. The emphasis of Macedonian nationalist politicians on the connection between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Macedonian national identity has further alienated some Macedonian Muslims, as did the outlawing of the veil in the 1950s. The result has been a conscious language shift based on religion. Examples include: (1) censuses in Macedonian-speaking Muslim villages where monolingual Macedonian Muslim families demanded a bilingual Albanian or Turkish form with an interpreter and then had to have the Albanian or Turkish

translated into Macedonian; and (2) the monolingual Macedonian Muslim village of Bachishte, where parents demanded an Albanian-language school for their children, even though they did not speak Albanian. Christians have also shifted their nationality based on their religion, with some Albanian-speaking Christians identifying themselves as Macedonians because of their equation of Orthodox Christianity with Macedonian ethnicity. The Western European concept of nationality, equating ethnicity with language with state, does not correspond to the complex mosaic of Macedonia, and a focusing on "nationality" to the exclusion of other categories produces such seemingly irrational incidents.

Prelude to 1994

The politicization of censuses in Macedonia is demonstrated by the republic's experience with the last Yugoslav census in 1991. Led by the two largest Albanian-identified political parties, the majority of Albanians in Macedonia (and elsewhere) boycotted the census, claiming that they would be undercounted. The Bureau of Statistics then estimated the data for Albanians in the boycotting communes by means of statistical projections. Before the preliminary figures for the 1991 census were published, Albanian political actors began an international media campaign declaring not merely that they had been miscounted, but that in fact Albanians constituted 40 percent of the population of Macedonia (the census eventually came up with a figure of about 22 percent). Other groups, including the Serbs, Turks, Roma, Greeks, Gjupci (Macedonian-speaking Muslims), Bulgarians, and Vlachs also cited inflated population figures. Together, the total surpassed Macedonia's entire population--without even counting ethnic Macedonians. The point of the census claims was clearly not one of statistical accuracy, but instead had to do with claims to political power and dominance.

The Albanian community's push for higher census numbers has to do with the basic structure of the Macedonian state. If the Albanians can prove that they constitute a high enough proportion of Macedonia's citizens, they will be justified in calling for a binational state and/or some kind of a federal structure. Such issues as teacher training and establishment of educational institutions at primary, secondary, and university levels are also at stake in determining demographic figures. Ethnic Macedonians, meanwhile, have an interest in minimizing the numbers of Albanians.

Pressure for a new count arose soon after the last Yugoslav census was complete. A year after the publication of the 1991 census's preliminary results, Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, head of the Working Group for Human Rights and Minorities within the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia, called for an extraordinary census in Macedonia to be supervised and funded by the international community. Ahrens's announcement was followed by 19 months of uninterrupted dispute. First there was an intense controversy over whether or not to hold the census, then prolonged wrangling over the wording of the census law, and finally, just as the census was actually beginning, there were serious behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Albanian members of parliament, who threatened to call for a boycott, despite the presence of the International Census Observation Mission (ICOM) observers. Conduct of the 1994 Census The 1994 census was clearly tied to a political goal, namely the legitimization of claims by both Albanian and Macedonian politicians about the right (or lack thereof) of Albanians to special (nonminority) status within Macedonia based on their large numbers. ICOM and its sponsors, the Council of Europe (CE) and the European Union (EU), however, characterized the census as nothing more than a statistical exercise.

One of the problems with this claim of objectivity on the part of the ICOM team, whose overseers were known as the "Group of Experts," was that their expertise did not extend to Macedonian issues. The supervisors were, in fact, Western European statisticians and bureaucrats who were quite surprised when they discovered that they were embroiled in highly charged political issues. For example, ICOM observers were unaware of the difference between Serbo-Croatian and Macedonian when they arrived to observe the census. When they finally grasped that the difference between the two is linguistic, they concluded that language must therefore be the basis of nationality, which (as has been shown) is not always the case in Macedonia.

The other problem with the objectivity claim was its questionable validity: the EU's and CE's policies

vis-a-vis Macedonia have been constrained by Greece, with the CE still refusing Macedonia admission. Furthermore, the only members of the Group of Experts who did have an understanding of Macedonia were two Greek historians, who advocated Greek views throughout the process. According to another member of the Group of Experts, these two Greeks were assigned to the mission by a Greek vice bureau chief in Brussels, who made the assignment while the bureau chief was out of town.

ICOM's lack of area expertise--coupled with its tendency to view the Macedonian government with distrust--made it prey to manipulation. At one point, for example, ICOM members claimed that the government was discriminating against Muslims by not listing them as Bosniacs or by not listing their language as Serbo-Croatian. Apparently, they had been in contact with Bosnian political activists who had tried to convince them that all Slavic Muslims in Macedonia are Serbo-Croatian-speaking and/or Bosniacs. When informed that there are a number of Macedonian-speaking Muslims, the ICOM reaction was a combination of surprise and skepticism. In the end the census observers came to understand the situation, but the very fact that such a misunderstanding could arise is a measure of both the ignorance and the distrust with which the European "experts" approached the census. It also indicates the extent of prevarication by some ethnopolitical actors.

Statistical Success, Political Failure

By attempting to impose a Western European construct equating language with nationality (and nationality with statehood), ICOM had a pernicious impact in Macedonia, helping to force on people the kind of choices that have led to the present situation, while internationalizing the Albanians claims. As might be expected, some Western officials have maintained that the CE's and ICOM's roles have been beneficial. They hold that that the CE's agreement to fund the census immediately led the Albanians to drop their claims from 40 percent to 30 percent. While Albanian politicians did indeed lower their claims, even citing a 25 percent figure during subsequent negotiations as a being the minimum below which they would claim falsification, this "progress" was short-lived, since after the first census results were published in 1994 the 40 percent figure again began being cited.

The role of the European mediators in the continued conflict may be perceived as adding to the general destabilization--in part by contributing to the erroneous Western view that "ancient hatreds" and a "distant tribal past" account for current Balkan conflicts, when in fact meddling by outside powers is largely to blame. The widespread use of the term Balkanism in the West to denote "politically and ethnically fragmented" manifests this view. In fact, there is a very widely accepted meaning of Balkanism that is precisely the opposite of fragmented. In linguistics, a Balkanism is a feature shared among the unrelated or only distantly related languages of the Balkans. Balkanisms attest to centuries of multilingualism and interethnic contact at the most intimate levels.

In spite of this history, one Western official was quoted in a recent editorial in the Macedonian weekly Puls as claiming that "there never was a true coexistence" between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, but that nationalities in Macedonia "have always led parallel lives." Also, this official is said to have the impression that nationalities had aversions to one another and to have supported this contention by claiming that there are no mixed marriages and that there are ethnic tensions in both public and private communication, especially between Macedonians and Albanians. Such a view promotes a version of the history of Macedonia that is not only at variance with concrete evidence but serves to deepen modern ethnic conflicts.

The events leading up to the boycott of the 1991 census, the imposition of the 1994 census, and the current developments show a pattern of manipulation and fragmentation of ethnic and linguistic identities utilizing legitimate grievances to benefit certain types of political elites. Also, the statistical validity of the census has been called into question by the decline of Macedonia's population by over two hundred thousand from the 1991 figures. Albanians and other minority groups claim that these missing people are minorities who have been purposely overlooked in the census or who have not been allowed to register for Macedonian citizenship and residence. Officials at the Republic Bureau of Statistics insist that the difference is due to the fact that citizens living abroad for more than one year were included in the 1991

census, whereas in the 1994 census--in accordance with international norms--only those citizens living abroad for one year or less were counted. In any case, the "missing" population and other concerns have led the Albanian political leaders who helped bring about the census to disavow it. In addition, the Macedonian constitutional court ruled in January 1995 that the article of the census law that had authorized the use of bilingual census forms was unconstitutional--and therefore did not justify the use of minority languages at federal level--since the constitution only guarantees the use of minority languages at the local level.

Although the 1994 census legitimated some of the basic statistics of the 1991 census, it did nothing to resolve the issues of political power and access to resources that continue to plague Macedonia. Instead, it helped to deepen a conflict whose historical roots in Macedonian history are not as deep as some political actors would maintain. In seeking to impose an oversimplified vision of nationality that does not correspond to Macedonia's complex cultural context and in refusing to take the necessary concrete steps to integrate Macedonia fully into the mechanisms of international politics and economy, Western Europe reproduces its vision of Balkan "otherness" in Macedonia and leaves it open to further destabilization.

III. AVOIDING WAR IN MACEDONIA: COEXISTENCE OF NATIONALITIES AND THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

One of the reasons why the Republic of Macedonia has thus far stayed out of the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia is the relative success of its government and political leaders in promoting peaceful coexistence among its many nationalities. Macedonia's approach to minority rights consists of a policy of nondiscrimination, as well as the granting of special rights. Individual members of minority groups benefit from nondiscrimination, which includes equal recognition and protection under the law, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Special minority rights, which benefit the groups as a whole, make it possible for minorities to preserve their cultural identities and traditions, and are just as important in achieving equality of treatment as nondiscrimination. Only when minorities are able to use their own languages, run their own schools, benefit from other services they manage themselves, as well as take part in the political and economic life of the state, can they begin to achieve the status that majorities take for granted. But a fine line has to be tread between meeting legitimate needs of minorities and acceding to an escalating series of demands that jeopardize the integrity of the state. The case of the Sudeten Germans should prove cautionary in this regard.

Education and Minority Rights

Although ample educational opportunities in nationalities' languages exist at the primary and secondary level in Macedonia (including schools where the language of instruction is Albanian, Serbian, or Turkish), the question of university-level education is more complicated. Before the breakup of Yugoslavia, about 1,800 students from Macedonia attended Yugoslav universities outside of Macedonia, including more than 1,200 Albanians who attended Prishtina University for instruction in Albanian. Because Prishtina University now offers instruction exclusively in Serbian, Albanians in Macedonia are displaying increasing interest in attending universities in the Republic of Macedonia (and some have also been studying in Albania).

Relaxed admission requirements and quotas make enrollment in Macedonian universities easier for the republic's minority ethnic groups, resulting in an increase in recent years in the percentage of minorities attending Macedonian universities. From 1991 to 1994, the percentage of Albanians increased from 2.4 percent to 5.2 percent, while the percentage of Macedonians decreased from 93.8 percent to 90.0 percent. Most observers agree on the need for major reform of admission standards and practices and that the admission of students from minority groups must be given higher priority. This process could be accelerated by the hiring of more professors from minority groups and by offering a more diverse curriculum.

The Macedonian constitution does not make provision for education in minority languages at the

university level, however. Very few countries provide even primary and secondary educational opportunities for their minorities in their mother tongues, let alone university education. With this in mind, the Albanian-language Tetovo University is considered to be illegal by the Macedonian authorities. Its opening at this delicate period of Macedonian-Albanian relations has proven to be provocative and has contributed to a general worsening of interethnic relations by escalating nationalist passions on both sides.

This Albanian movement fits the pattern of nationalism on the part of aggrieved groups that is the bane of the entire region. The drive for an Albanian university follows the radicalization of some Albanian and Macedonian leaders and parties in Macedonia. It comes at a time when tensions have already been heightened by Macedonian accusations that Albanian extremists are planning for armed resistance and are seeking to create a so-called "autonomous area." These tensions have been exacerbated by the actions and statements of neighboring governments, particularly that of Sali Berisha in Albania. Government and party officials in that country have at times actively encouraged and supported the demands of Albanian nationalists in Macedonia and the Berisha government has also made unhelpful comments denying the existence of a Macedonian minority in Albania. These acts have undermined the generally positive and constructive stand of Albania toward Macedonia that has helped to preserve stability and peace in the region.

Macedonia's success in maintaining its status as a "citizens' state"--where all citizens have equal rights (as opposed to a state where rights depend on ethnicity)--is the prerequisite for avoiding a new Balkan war. This success depends on keeping nationalists in check, not only among minority communities, but among ethnic Macedonians. Fortunately, the more extreme Macedonian nationalist political parties have largely alienated average Macedonians who have witnessed the outcome of unchecked nationalism in neighboring Bosnia. Although they have achieved little electoral success, they still pose a significant threat to the country's stability by generating fear in minority groups through chauvinistic rhetoric and sloganeering.

Strengthening and broadening the process of European integration by including the Central and Eastern European countries can make a contribution to diffusing nationalist conflicts by improving economic conditions. A more unified Europe would also necessarily lead to greater mobility and interethnic mixing among Europeans. The resulting multicultural society would not imply leveling and assimilation, but rather a conscious cohabitation of different peoples in a spirit of mutual respect, understanding, and enrichment.

The United Nations peacekeeping contingent in Macedonia--including 550 American troops--expresses the international community's support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Macedonia as a bulwark of stability in the region. The Republic of Macedonia, for its part, must be prepared to play a constructive role for peace. Despite its contribution to the UN contingent, the US role has thus far been too circumspect, based on a misplaced fear of touching off an explosion. While the United States should tread cautiously in regard to the region's internal conflicts, it can shore up peace and stability in the region by putting pressure on various actors to relax their nationalist lines and by mediating an acceptable settlement to both parties in the Greek/Macedonian dispute. Greece should be encouraged to end its economic embargo, while Macedonia is encouraged to strengthen its commitment to respect existing borders and to alleviate other Greek concerns. The establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United States and Macedonia is a necessary step in the normalization of relations in the region.

PRESENTERS Loring Danforth Professor of Anthropology, Bates College (Lewiston, Maine)

Victor Friedman Professor of Slavic and Balkan Linguistics, University of Chicago

Vladimir Ortakovski Deputy Minister of Science, Republic of Macedonia

US DEPARTMENT OF STATE STAFF

Kenneth E. Roberts Director, External Research Staff, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Susan H. Nelson Program Officer, External Research Staff, Bureau of Intelligence and Research

IREX STAFF

Beate Dafelecker Senior Program Officer, Central and Eastern Europe Division

Obrad Kesic Program Officer, Central and Eastern Europe Division

Tamara Dunbar Program Assistant, Central and Eastern Europe Division

RAPPORTEUR

Keith Berner Public Information Officer, IREX

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