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PREFACE

(Author's Note)

This analysis is the product of a joint project implemented by ACCESS Association and the Centre for Liberal Strategies (CLS), and financed by the Open Society Fund.

The project was implemented in two stages.

In stage one, a team of Bulgarian experts joined the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission as short-term observers of the first round of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Macedonia in October 1998. The team analyzed the election campaign, the role of the media, the new voting system and the course of the elections. The Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights also took part in the observation mission and analysis.

In stage two, the Open Society Fund commissioned, in line with the Board of Directors' new pro-active policy, a theoretical survey of the political situation in present-day Macedonia. In the course of the analysis it became obvious that starting with a "policy paper," where the priority is on recommendations, would not be the best approach. The appropriate first step would be to examine "the Macedonian issue" in its specific local, regional and international context, to describe the specific features of "Macedonia as a problem situation," and to formulate the specific questions relevant to "the Macedonian case." Hence this paper is intended as an introduction to an operational political analysis that will help politicians in decision-making.

I would like to thank Mr Eugene Daynov in his capacity as Chairman of the Open Society Fund Board of Directors, of which I am a member too, and Mr Georgi Genchev, Executive Director of the Fund, for the understanding which they showed for a project whose relevance at the present moment cannot be overstated. I am also especially grateful to my colleagues from the Centre for Liberal Strategies for their help in the course of the extensive rewriting and editing of this text. All who know the CLS will know that this analysis is the product of team work, even though the liability for any omissions and faults is mine alone.

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INTRODUCTION

Subject and theses

The subject of this political analysis is present-day Macedonia. The point of reference is the 1998 parliamentary elections. The commentary sets out to formulate the following theses:

The crisis in the Balkans cannot be surmounted unless a solution to the notorious "Macedonian Question" is found. This is the question of whether there is a Macedonian nation-state at all. By tradition, it has been answered by a conflict of perspectives, but in the absence of Macedonia and its own perspective. Hence the reason for the stubborn persistence of this question. If Macedonia were to be involved in its resolution, it would become obvious that "the question" is no longer relevant. It would simply be forgotten. And that would be its genuine solution. The alternatives are Doomsday scenarios - a final solution to the "Macedonian Question" without Macedonia's participation would mean disintegration of Macedonian statehood.

The elections in Macedonia were undoubtedly one of the 1998 highlights in the turbulent Balkan region. Yet they only marked a beginning. In 1999, Macedonia will break out of isolation, and this will raise a new range of political issues in the Balkan region. The issue of regional security will acquire a new dimension. In a political context "Macedonia" - and this is this writer's position, as well as his motive for writing this paper - will be among the most frequently used names in the Balkans. This change provides a wide range of new opportunities for the settlement of disputes over Macedonia. A prudent but bold and imaginative foreign policy should not miss the chances that will be offered in 1999.

Methodological note

This analysis applies a dual perspective. On the one hand, it describes facts and events in Macedonia itself. On the other, "the Macedonian phenomenon" is approached as an intersection of different types of perspectives - local, regional, international, popular, etc. The specificity of "the Macedonian phenomenon" cannot be understood unless this duality is taken into account: the reality behind the name "Macedonia" is in the interplay of these two levels, the level of facts and the level of perspectives.

1. THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION: THE LEGITIMATE PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Rational discourse and/or century-long emotion

In its immediate geo-cultural and political context, "Macedonia" designates a tangle of emotions. In this context, there is little if any rational and pragmatic discourse on Macedonia. The so-called "Macedonian Question" owes its existence largely to this circumstance.

This conclusion confronts us with a problem. We observers from the immediate neighbourhood admit a major shortcoming: that in talking about Macedonia, we are incapable of using a rational and universally acceptable language. We also admit that our attitude to Macedonia is hard to understand for the rational observer - presumably the Western liberal democratic perspective.

Admitting this handicap, we will proceed with the following question: Which perspective on the Macedonian Question and what type of language are internationally legitimate and therefore rational? We will answer this question indirectly, by commenting on a popular historical text. In the course of this commentary we will (a) introduce certain parameters of the internationally legitimate discourse on Macedonia, and (b) formulate certain general theses about Macedonia and the Balkans.

Here is how a contemporary Western textbook describes the Macedonian case some 100 or 120 years ago:

"The population of less than two million within a 25,000 square-mile area was divided into nine distinct groups: Turks, Bulgars, Greeks, Serbs, Macedonians, Albanians, Vlachs or Kutzo-Vlachs, Jews, and Gypsies. Since the population was intermixed, a clear line could not be drawn separating the nationalities. The cities usually had strong Turkish, Greek and Jewish elements. In the villages and rural areas different nationalities existed side by side. Nor was it possible to determine accurately the precise numerical strength of any of the groups. Census reports were almost meaningless because the results usually reflected the interest of the census-taker. There were school, language and religious censuses, but any of these could be misleading. [...]

When the struggle over Macedonia became more heated after the Congress of Berlin, anthropologists, linguists, and physiologists from the Balkan countries all used their specialty to claim the area for their own particular nationality. The Bulgarians used linguistic arguments to demonstrate that the Macedonian Slavs were indeed their brothers. [...] Serbian anthropologists argued that their slava festival, found also among the Macedonians, made them Serbs. The Greeks sought to demonstrate that anyone in Macedonia under the authority of the ecumenical patriarch was Greek. Thus, each nation used every

conceivable argument to back its claims, and each could be effectively challenged.

The real significance of the region, the geographic-strategic, involved both the Balkan states and the great powers. Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia all wished to acquire Macedonia or a major portion of it for three main reasons. First, it would enlarge the state and incorporate more nationals within it. Second, the acquisition of the Vardar and Struma river valleys and the railroads through them would have great economic advantages. Third, and perhaps most significant, whoever controlled Macedonia would be the strongest power on the peninsula. For the great powers this last concern was certainly the most important." */N-1

This excerpt is useful and edifying for politicians and political analysts in two ways: on the one hand, for the cited facts, and, on the other, for the actual attitude to the subject.

We will discuss those two aspects separately. Their rationalization and comprehension will largely determine whether Bulgarian policy would gain full-fledged international legitimacy or, on the contrary, would remain isolated, incomprehensible in a typical "Balkan way" and, hence, suspicious to the Western observer.

1.2. Two ages and their perspectives

(a) Change at the factual level

Macedonia has been claimed by its neighbour countries both in the age to which the aforementioned excerpt refers to and at present. Those claims are not necessarily formulated in the respective official national doctrine. Yet whatever form they might come in, the cravings for Macedonia are strong enough to imbue the notion of this *topos*, this land, with portentous meaning.

In the past age, sentimental attitudes to Macedonia were a manifestation of nationalism and nationalist self-complacence on the part of fledgling nation-states. All three neighbour countries had claims on Macedonia, since they all wanted to expand, to win geo-economic advantages and to become the strongest power on the Balkan Peninsula. This state of affairs will neither surprise nor baffle the contemporary analyst of nationalist movements from the late 19th century to, and shortly after, World War I. Aggression is understandable in this case, as the very period of nation-state formation has been studied extensively. The language of research on national movements is not only elaborate, but also popular beyond academia proper. Territorial and other claims may be overt and brutal, yet they

may also be covert - for instance, lurking behind the smokescreen of folklore or in ridiculous arguments proffered by physiologists and sociologists. This does not change the heart of the matter in any way. Both the form and the real motive are understandable and explicable. Observers will approach them in a "scientific," i.e. rational and impartial manner, the way we treat facts from a past age or from a historical narrative that does not immediately concern us.

The present state of affairs is so different that the complications over the so-called "Macedonian Question" are very confusing for Western politicians and analysts. Nationalist movements and nation-state formation In Europe are now history.

With few exceptions, the central zones of European civilization have shaken free of primitive nationalist drives and emotions. Even if they should flare up somewhere, Western societies have built systems of preventive measures and buffer mechanisms absorbing the nationalist energy before it could become a leading motive in foreign policy. Intentions to redraw borders, to stake claims to nations and states, to their by now naturalized identity, sound anachronistic, dangerous, to some extent even incomprehensible. Whereas political thinking and projection in terms of former geopolitical models breeds suspicion.

It is for those and similar reasons that Western observers of events in the Balkans and in Macedonia, in particular, find it hard to understand exactly what is going on in this part of the world. Let us examine the change and its significance in several consecutive stages. *Prima facie*, the change could be described, for instance, as follows:

On the one hand, (1) there is no ground to presume that Macedonia has kept its former strategic importance, that it offers exceptional geopolitical advantages and that control over Macedonia means control over the entire peninsula; (2) today recognition of internationally acknowledged territorial-political entities has become the norm, and any departure from that norm is considered an encroachment on the order codified in international law.

Yet on the other hand, significant aspects of the attitude to Macedonia are still reminiscent of the three neighbour countries' attitudes decades ago: sentimentality, nationalist romanticism, quasi-scientific fabrications and absurd arguments are still very much in circulation. Today they are used to deny the reality of the Macedonian nation, language and culture, which are just as real for the traditional Western observer as the Macedonian public and political elite want them to be. The state

is sovereign and has been recognized as such, so those realities are even vested in a Constitution and international law. Since there is no other measure of existence for the Western type of rationality, the latter cannot understand this attitude to Macedonia. Nor can it make head or tail of the notorious Macedonian Question.

From an objective rational perspective, the difference between the picture of the past and the present age appears to be the following:

While aggression in the earlier age is attributed to the nature of the nationalist movements typical of the period, present attitudes to Macedonia as a limb severed from a neighbour country's national body look irrational, inexplicable and very, very suspicious.

(b) Change in a regional context

This state of affairs is not typical of other cases on the Balkan Peninsula, in which nationalities without a state of their own have claimed one and the same territory. Let us consider this thesis in greater detail.

First, most civil and military conflicts in crumbling Yugoslavia have been overtly nationalist in character. The belligerents in them have virtually seized territory. The ethnic resources have been activated for the conquest of living space, and national myths have been blown up into the most aggressive form possible. They have been used for direct identification of the national community's enemies - as in the drastic case of the Serbian myth about Kosovo or the deliberately propagated threat of Islamization on the territory of Bosnia. Ethnic cleansing has not been covert. It has been conducted consistently, in the plain sight of the so-called international community, in some cases even with the latter's tacit consent.

Second, those cases of conflict and civil war have had a beginning and an end, perhaps a surprising and unpredictable beginning and a difficult end. By rule, however, the warring parties have had limited resources to prolong the conflict, and the tasks of surmounting or freezing the latter may be formulated and resolved by means of mediation. This was the case in Bosnia, where a rather artificial agreement has survived for four years now. This might also be the case in Kosovo, where the interests are distinguishable, and even if the Albanians were to continue fighting for full independence, the conflict and its stages would remain predictable, with the scenarios described long before the conflict actually flared up.

The Macedonian case is quite different from those

commonplace forms of conflict on the periphery of Europe. The first concrete reminder of the differences comes from the century-long relevance of the Macedonian Question, which has been accompanied by confusion about exactly what this question is supposed to be. Over the years, this lack of clarity has intensified rather than subsided: the brutal but nonetheless clear territorial claims have been replaced by claims to symbols and intellectual products. This situation has not taken the form of a political process headed in a particular direction. This is wholly due to the fact that for one reason or another, it has not been used for attaining political objectives. Yet it has a high risk potential, since it can be controlled by political means - as developments on the Balkans have shown all too clearly in the past decade - and may develop in an unpredictable direction. The passions aroused by Macedonia have not translated into explicit claims to Macedonian territory. Non-recognition of the Macedonian national symbols, language, nation, etc. is not a manifestation of an overt policy of aggression. However, those passions have an enormous mobilizing potential.

(c) Change in the language of debate

Let us try to approach the specific Macedonian case in the light of the above thesis with due consideration for the issue of the language used in the local, regional and international debate on the "Macedonian Question."

Let us assume that Macedonia is a vertical structure built from different components arranged in ascending layers. Territory is at the ground level - but since it is detached from the other layers, it is confined to geographic and physical characteristics. Next come population, history, language, mythology, culture, economy, juridical relations, nationalities, their symbols, political relations, nascent forms of state self-organization, etc. - all the way up to the Constitution and the State. Those numerous layers sandwiched between territory and state have been claimed by neighbour countries. The nature of those claims has varied from one age to another.

In the early age of nation-state formation, Macedonia's neighbours staked claims to the bottom and top layers - to territory and state. They either did not bother to justify those claims or cited different intermediate layers as proof of their entitlement to Macedonia. The prime interest was in Macedonia's territory, while arguments about the language, history, culture, ethnicity, etc. were secondary. Those who succeeded in acquiring the Macedonian territory would be entitled to the Macedonian state; hence the other claim was to the right to build a state on

this territory. Thus the outcome of fulfilled claims to Macedonian territory and rule over it is clear in the early age of nation-state formation - the history of Macedonia is actually a history of fulfilled, half-fulfilled and unfulfilled claims to its territory.

In the later age, today, the claims have been virtually upended. The neighbour countries have recognized the Macedonian state and territory and have no claims to them. However, they are now claiming the intermediate layers of the structure: the nation, culture, language, history, etc. Yet what form would a possible fulfillment of those claims take? It is hard to say. If they were to be fulfilled, we would have to assume that the structure had a territory and state institutions - and nothing else in between. That it had no language, culture, history, nation, etc. This assumption is simply impossible - it is absurd.

The claims have been upended, with the priority now shifted on to what used to be of secondary importance in the earlier age. Since such a picture of the Macedonian case and of fulfilled claims to Macedonia is inconceivable, the Western observer's natural reaction would be to wonder what does it actually hide, what is behind it, what is the real claim and objective. Thus the issue of Macedonia will inevitably become a political issue par excellence, which it essentially is anyway.

The language of present-day contacts with Macedonia is problematic for Western observers. They are forced to interpret it and to be wary of implicit meanings and implications. This interpretation logically prompts them to conclude that the claims to spiritual and intellectual structures are only latent forms of possible large-scale aggression which is certainly not without precedent in the history of Macedonia.

1.3 Science and folklore: political use

The excerpt from a Western history textbook quoted above is also interesting for the very style of thinking and approach to "the subject," to the political history of Macedonia.

First, it provides the impartial, aloof perspective that is not to be found in the Balkan region yet is a sine qua non for objectivity. The perspective in the immediate regional context is burdened with emotional memories. More importantly, however, this perspective is inseparable from the political desires typical of the age of nation-state formation.

Second, the quoted excerpt discusses Macedonia in a way that is quite unconventional for people in Bulgaria, as well as for Bulgarian historians and commentators. The popular feelings of Bulgarians would not allow them to use this impartial academic

style and to list the nine nationalities that populated Macedonia's territory before the retreat of the Turks. Nor to discuss the general history of Macedonia in a neutral tone and with emotional non-commitment.

Third, and this is particularly relevant to the current situation, this perspective is consistent with contemporary Western policy towards the Balkans and Macedonia. On the one hand, contemporary political decisions rest on hard facts, with distinctly prevailing positivistic attitudes to realities; emotions do not nor are allowed to play a role in decision-making. On the other hand, however, the political significance of this positivistic orientation is in the acknowledgement of existing realities and dismissal of hazy concepts such as collective memory, community of descent, blood, kinship, nationality, etc.

The present aggression towards Macedonia has the best parallel in the folklore of Macedonia's neighbour countries. This is precisely where positivist observers become confused and can no longer identify what is behind the folkloric form. In this form of experience, Macedonia is "cherished," it is a place extolled in songs, lost at some point in Bulgaria's tragic history. Yet without Macedonia - and this is the political aspect of the folkloric situation - Bulgaria's own history is doomed to remain a work in progress. That is where the Bulgarian national awakening started, and it is somewhere in that much suffered for land that something of the Bulgarian sensitivity has remained; that is where the suffering and aspirations of contemporary Bulgarians and their ancestors are rooted. And so on and so forth.

So how could Bulgarians be expected to take an "objective" approach to Macedonia? And what does "objective" mean anyway? Could we talk of being "objective" when our own destiny has evolved away from us, stranded on the other side of an artificially drawn border? This is the type of questions raised simply by the conclusion that the Bulgarian attitude to Macedonia is shaped by a vast range of mass sentiments. Their answer, however, raises another range of issues and questions.

The problem is that "objectivity" in any human science, but especially in the rational argumentation of political positions, has typical dimensions. It also has a paradoxical potential that is not obvious from the everyday perspective. In the case of the Macedonian Question, this potential is manifested in an unquestionable and unambiguous way. The paradox is that precisely science, the realm of objectivity, has proven to be the most

strongly ideologized, prejudiced and politicized. The mechanism that demonstrates this handicap is publicly known and frequently applied. Both in the past and today, scientists from different fields have been capable of accumulating all sorts of arguments in favour of theses such as "the Macedonian language is Bulgarian," "there is no Macedonian nation," "Macedonia does not have a national history of its own," etc. Those assertions are proved in a way that is traditional in science - on the basis of factual observation and advance of the most probable hypotheses. They are subsequently taken in ready form by politicians and applied in the pursuit of a particular cause or policy. This mechanism is apparently scientific, but is in fact deeply flawed.

The paradox of scientific objectivity is that it ignores the mandatory distance that should be kept when analyzing facts from the living environment and human communication. In Macedonia's case, the genuinely objective perspective may only be that which coincides with the perspective of the national community's self-determination, self-organization and self-government.

Assigning "the question of Macedonia" to scientists - historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, linguists - is a political ruse similar to the Third Reich's racial doctrines or Lysenko's theory of the dialectical transitions in Nature. Whether it will take a tragic form or yield ridiculous results is another matter.

Tampering with scientific evidence is absurd, and only causes Western observers in the region to raise an eyebrow.

The romantic laments for the lost land, as well as the quasi-scientific theories about the essence of its public life, have found forms in which to survive and replicate. Their sustainability has been demonstrated clearly over more than a century. The existence of sustainable mechanisms proves that nationalist appetites themselves have not been sated, but are merely dormant. Western observers who regard them as a resource of open nationalist aggression on Macedonia - just like Serbian public sentiments about Kosovo were a ready resource of political manipulation - have good reason to be alarmed. It is only a matter of conjecture when, how and what will activate this resource. Yet as long as that resource is there and has not been neutralized, the situation in the Balkans will remain volatile - and will not be considered stabilized - even if all other conflicts were to be frozen.

That is why contrary to those who think that the Balkan crisis has started and will end in Kosovo, the line of reasoning in this paper suggests the following theses:
The Balkan crisis has numerous intertwining storylines. One

of the main storylines starts with the so-called Macedonian Question more than a century ago. This question has been raised and topicalized by the regional context, and is relevant to the whole region. The Balkans will not attain guaranteed political stability unless the problems with Macedonia are resolved.

1.4. The language dispute in an international context

As noted above, keeping the status quo is the political *raison d'être* of the Western positivistic attitude. This is

important and should be realized by decision-makers in foreign policy towards Macedonia in both Bulgaria and, say, Greece. It is not only the language dispute between Bulgaria and Macedonia that is incomprehensible to Western observers. The general disposition

that could make such an issue a problem is just as incomprehensible and alarming. It is as impossible to understand as a Muslim fundamentalist position or a consistent terrorist strategy: Western observers will take both into account and develop instruments of preventive policy but nonetheless continue regarding them as barbaric and primitive. Positions based on such dispositions are not reliable partners. There is little if any confidence in them. Their usual context is qualified as risky with a varying degree of intensity.

That is why regardless of the particular issues that will be discussed in this paper, there is one point that should be understood clearly: if it wants to be intelligible for the

international community, to acquire international legitimacy and to be acknowledged not only as a rational but also as a feasible

policy of partnership, Bulgarian foreign policy should be articulated in the positivistic style of the excerpt from the history textbook quoted at the beginning of this paper; its factual evidence should be distinctly positivistic; its stance on regional problems should be based on the idea of maximum adherence to the status quo, and its intentions and long-term goals should reflect this principled conservatism. Any attempt to

call political realities into question provided that stabilization of the status quo is both possible and desirable, will be frowned upon as inappropriate and suspicious. And any attempt to advance theses that really boil down to partial or

full non-recognition of the Macedonian nation, culture, tradition, language, etc., will be regarded as, mildly speaking, odd and extremist.

Hence the prime concern of Bulgarian foreign policy should not be the if's, or the pros and cons of recognition. Bulgarian foreign policy should focus on other issues.

First, not if but how to break out of the vicious circles of

those dilemmas and to avoid being pressured by generally insoluble issues such as those of national identity and entitlement to the language;

Second, not if but how Bulgarian foreign policy could take the lead and become obviously resolute in this respect, ruling out suspicions that it might be making concessions under foreign pressure or coercion;

Third, how to make the language of Bulgarian foreign policy articulate and wholly credible, purging it of all emotional, folkloric or quasi-scientific jargon.

This brings us to the following thesis:

Any attempt to settle the dispute over the Macedonian language and nation inconclusively, by means of ambiguous formulas, as well as any attempt to use this dispute for political pressure, will breed reservations and suspicions about Bulgaria's positions. Those disputes should be ended resolutely, with the terms set minimized in line with international law and practice.

1.5. Disagreement with the Western perspective

The presumption in this paper is that the type of position typical of the Western observer, analyst, scientist and politician is the only legitimate position in international affairs. This is presumed to be the rational perspective. That is why precisely this perspective is representative of the stance of the so-called international community. By "international community" we mean the community of Western liberal democratic societies. Needless to say, this presumption is value- rather than science-related, but it ensues from the objectives of this text - to provide the framework of a future policy paper on a particular aspect of Bulgaria's policy of integration into the Euro-Atlantic club, rather than to promote a scientific product.

Still, while this typological position and its perspective are above questioning, a distinction needs to be made. For the purpose, let us take the case of former Yugoslavia.

As long as the Yugoslav federation seemed possible to preserve, the West ruled out the idea of a break-up. That is why it proved unprepared to grasp the essence of the process. Hence the absence of a solid position and preventive action upon the secession of the first republics.

Confidence in the status quo also prevailed in the assessment of the situation in Bosnia. As a result, the West was caught unawares once again. It sat back doing nothing for three years before it ultimately proceeded to intervene, even though the intervention option was discussed as early as 1992.

The Dayton peace accord was based on the idea of preserving a temporary status quo. As a result, today's map of Bosnia-Herzegovina is quite artificial. This has made observers skeptical about the extent to which Bosnia's eccentric map is capable of guaranteeing the desired stability of state institutions.

In the case of Kosovo, the West again favours a moderate solution - restoring the autonomy which the province had until 1989-1991 - and has formally refused to discuss the idea of full independence. Yet ignoring the issue of full independence will not resolve it; this could only lead to loss of control.

In regard to Yugoslavia and its disintegration, the traditional Western perspective was mostly positivistic. It prioritized acknowledgement, respect and preservation of the status quo, of the facts and realities at the different stages of the crisis. This, however, shows an overconfidence in the possibility of freezing the status quo and terminating the conflict at an arbitrary stage. The motives are undoubtedly humane, but the intention is not feasible. In fact the Utopian aspect of the positivistic attitude comes from the belief that a particular stage of a process may apparently be separated from the general process and conceived as a stable and permanent state. The development of the conflict, however, does not comply with those intentions, and hopes for containing the crisis are dashed as it proceeds to deteriorate even further in the next stage.

The crisis in the Balkans may thus be described as a crisis of dashed hopes that the process might freeze at some intermediate stage. Our stance is that Macedonia is no exception: in this case the West is again concerned with keeping the status quo, stabilizing the institutions and preserving the borders.

On the one hand, this analysis likewise assumes that preservation of Macedonia's territorial integrity and stabilization of its institutional system are aspects of a prudent policy. And that keeping the present order and status quo will be both fair and beneficial for regional security.

On the other, however, we disagree with the style, ways and means which the West has been employing in an effort to settle regional issues in the context of stabilization and preservation of the status quo. To attain those objectives - and this is the implication of this analysis - the international community must think in far broader terms than those of the visible status quo, and must apply by far more larger-scale, non-traditional and flexible schemes.

This conclusion is also associated with the idea promoted in this paper that "the Macedonian case" should be described in literal, factual and objectivistic terms, as well as in terms of an intersection, interaction or conflict of perspectives.

2. CONTEXT

2.1. The elections from 1990 to 1996

The November 1990 parliamentary elections were held before Macedonia's declaration of independence and recognition by the international community. The electoral system was based on majority rule. The small parties failed to win any seats in Parliament. The more moderate, as well as the ethnic parties, lobbied for a mixed system, while the larger parties - understandably - supported the effective election law. The election results were not contested, although the Albanian ethnic parties lodged complaints about deliberate irregularities.

Following the elections, VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM and PDP formed a coalition. VMRO-DPMNE and the Albanian MPs frequently boycotted Parliament. In quite a few cases, there was no quorum. The legislative process was impeded. Parliament failed to tackle the main issues which it had been arguably elected to resolve: constitutional reform, electoral system, privatization, public administration. The government proved quite ineffective and was forced to resign after a no-confidence vote in 1992. VMRO-DPMNE left the ruling coalition and went into opposition. The new government was unstable and was formed for the sole purpose of coping with the crisis. In the next six years, the country was ruled by SDSM, President Kiro Gligorov and prime minister Branko Crvenkovski.

This is the political background to the next parliamentary elections in October 1994, which coincided with the presidential elections. They were conducted under the old Yugoslav laws, and with the same constituencies. More than 1,700 candidates ran for 120 seats in Parliament. They were from 37 parties, plus 284 independents. The 1994 elections were a repeat of those in 1990 in several ways. This fact was indicative of the type of transformation which the country underwent in the early 90s. The elections made the international headlines for large-scale fraud and gross irregularities; today they are proverbial as a political event that is wholly inadmissible on the European continent. Nevertheless, the CSCE representatives testified in favour of their validity. VMRO-DPMNE, the most significant force, boycotted the second round of voting - a mistake that is all too

familiar from the Bulgarian experience, and that has enormous consequences in all spheres of public life. Petar Goshev's LDP likewise boycotted the second round and had no seats in the second Macedonian Parliament. As a result of the VMRO-DPMNE boycott, a coalition between SDSM and SPM - "Social Democratic Alliance for Macedonia" - won 95 out of 120 seats. Kiro Gligorov won a second term in office with a 52.4% vote in the presidential elections.

The first local elections were held in November 1996. SDSM won 500 of 1,902 seats in municipal councils and 52 of 124 mayor's offices, but lost the elections in the big cities - Skopje, Prilep, Ohrid. Despite numerous complaints, the parties in Macedonia acknowledged the validity of the local elections. In the areas populated by the Albanian minority - Western Macedonia - the ethnic Albanian parties won a majority in the elections for mayors and municipal councils. In fact the ethnic element is probably the only permanent feature of Macedonia's indefinite electoral profile - which makes developments difficult to predict.

2.2. Political parties

A large number of small parties were formed in Macedonia prior to the October 1998 elections. They were established either on an ethnic basis or around a popular figure. This diversity was partly due to the VMRO-DPMNE boycott of the second round of voting in 1994. Parties often splintered - the Albanian ethnic parties are a case in point. Despite this general characteristic, the parliamentary parties pursued a policy line that was comparatively stable and consistent for a country in transition, at that with unclear national political priorities.

From a macro-political perspective, the party scene in independent Macedonia is quite familiar to Bulgarians. The two most powerful formations are the renamed ex-communists from the League of Communists of Macedonia - SDSM - and VMRO-DPMNE. The ethnic Albanian parties are the third powerful component. Next come numerous small parties across a broad political spectrum, which owe their viability to the overall immaturity of the political sphere; in all likelihood, they will be eventually assimilated, with the first three elements remaining dominant.

SDSM is an ultra-opportunistic formation and a seasoned player in politics. It has repeatedly proved that it will stop at nothing in the effort to achieve its political objectives - the anti-Bulgarian part of its elections campaign was a case in point. The SDSM government conducted large-scale clandestine privatization similar to that conducted under the Lyuben Berov

cabinet in Bulgaria. In this period, power in Macedonia was practically shared out among "groupings," or what The Economist calls "shady conglomerates", that tended to be more like regional clans. That is why the regional feudal lords were more stable than their Bulgarian counterparts. Nevertheless, the Crvenkovski government had the potential to cope with them if it had really wanted to break up the clan-like economic-political structure.

Another typical feature of the SDSM rule was the political integration of the Albanian minority through the participation of Albanian parties in the government. This feature was highly appreciated - even exaggerated - by Western observers.

VMRO-DPMNE in both the beginning of the 90s and today is reminiscent of Bulgaria's early Union of Democratic Forces (UDF).

Frequent boycotts of Parliament until 1994, withdrawal from coalitions, naive public gestures (whose only result was loss of power) and boycott of the 1994 elections are just some of the moves typical of the reformist movement. Its social base has remained unclear too. Its positive features are unidentified. In general, VMRO-DPMNE has a serious problem with its political identity, which it will have to resolve while it is in power.

This problem is intensified by the fact that precisely because of its blurred political profile, public expectations for this formation are excessive and are not articulated in terms of an asserted set of values (as would have been the case if, for instance, VMRO-DPMNE had had a Christian Democratic or other traditional orientation). So far VMRO-DPMNE has been seen foremost as Macedonia's saviour from the corrupt SDSM government.

The Albanian minority is consolidated and has strong political representation (a very important difference from Bulgaria, whose Turkish minority is scattered across the country's territory and does not have a political life of its own). The bond between the minority (about 23% of Macedonia's population, according to a census conducted in 1994 with assistance from the European Union) [CF. OSCE BRIEFING PAPER, 18

OCTOBER 1998, P. 7] and its political representatives is unquestionable - the Albanian parties have a hard-core ethnic electorate that is unlikely to split as a result of political infighting. Tolerance for the minority is far greater than conceivable in Bulgaria - especially as regards the collective minority rights which the Albanians have succeeded in winning.

Yet the protection of minority rights is not up to Western standards in either constitutional or strictly political terms.

This is evident especially in the dispute over the Tetovo University, the attempts to abridge universal suffrage on the

basis of technicalities, etc. This is the obvious prerequisite for tensions and conflicts. Macedonia, however, has a good and well-deserved reputation for keeping ethnic peace, as a result of which the former government is in the good books of international observers.

2.3 Constitutional reform

Macedonia's new Constitution was adopted in November 1991.

It identifies the republic as "a sovereign, independent, democratic and social state" (Article 1).

(a) The Macedonian Constitution provides a model of statehood similar to that in Bulgaria, whose Constitution was adopted a few months earlier. Macedonia is a parliamentary republic. Power is shared among the president, parliament, government, judiciary and constitutional court. The Parliament (Assembly) of the Republic of Macedonia, called "Sobranie," has 120 to 140 seats. The Parliament establishes a Council for Inter-Ethnic Relations, chaired by the President (Speaker) of Parliament (Article 78). Parliament "is obliged to take into consideration the appraisals and proposals of the Council and to make decisions regarding them" (Article 78). Contrary to Bulgaria, there is no form of a Grand National Assembly. Notably, unlike other recently adopted constitutions in Eastern Europe, the procedure for amending the Macedonian Constitution is quite simple. It has not been misused to date, but this fact is far from desirable at times of instability and sociopolitical transformation. The Constitution has already been amended twice without any particular procedural difficulties.

By nominal constitutional definition, the Macedonian President has somewhat greater powers than his or her Bulgarian counterpart. Above all, s/he chairs the Security Council of the Republic of Macedonia (Article 86). Contrary to Bulgaria, in Macedonia this function is vested with real power rather than being confined to a consultative-intermediary role. The Council is made up of members of the executive - the defence, foreign and interior ministers. The Macedonian President's powers are not only broader but more concentrated and integral than his or her Bulgarian counterpart's. Second, the Macedonian President has greater foreign policy powers, even though this issue remains rather vague in constitutional practice since the Constitutional Court has seldom been petitioned and there have seldom been conflicts over the issue.

At the constitutional-political level, the Macedonian President has the same informal authority as the top public figure, as the Bulgarian President. The Macedonian President's

reputation has been improved by the fact that so far the country's President, Parliament and Government have represented identical interests and political tendencies. Still, Kiro Gligorov is closer to a French President in terms of both political behaviour and aspirations, as well as by constitutional definition. Yet due to his country's limited resources and scale, his ambitions - especially in the spheres of defence policy and security - do not stand a particular chance. The future President - the next presidential elections are in 1999 - will probably be more like the Bulgarian President and will take the selfsame moderate position. However, the parallel with the French President might go further. A potential conflict between President and Government or between President and parliamentary majority is vested in the Macedonian constitutional model. This scenario is likely, albeit for a short period of time, in the few months until the 1999 presidential elections. This potential conflict has not been consummated to date. Unlike Bulgaria, Macedonia has not been through the political ordeals resulting from a conflict between President, Parliament and Government. This is yet another condition for the higher confidence in the Macedonian President and his greater informal influence.

(b) Political interpretation

The Republic of Macedonia's Constitution is a highly revealing political document. Similar to, but to a far greater extent than Bulgaria's latest Constitution, it reflects typical aspects of the context in which it was adopted. Sizeable portions of the Macedonian Constitution read like political statements rather than legal provisions. Of course, these are political orientations, tendencies and, in particular, fears codified in the organic law of the land. Macedonia has tried to respond to the dominant security fears at the level of constitutional provisions. Those fundamental fears are about the preservation and integrity of the state in a foreign policy perspective and in the perspective of the ethnic issue. As a result, the Macedonian Constitution is a product of obvious ethno-constitutional thinking in the two-century-long tradition dating back to Johann Gottlieb Fichte. The Preamble of the Constitution stipulates that "Macedonia is constituted as a nation-state of the Macedonian people," which practically means that the Macedonians are the only "constituent people" of the country. The other nationalities are guaranteed "full equality as citizens and permanent coexistence with the Macedonian people." This sort of constitutional provision openly stipulates that the system of public institutions is based on something more primordial, on the

living national body, the national organism of the Macedonian people. Thus the otherwise modern Constitution has entire passages which either articulate controversial and irrational assertions, or tend to be wishful thinking and do not have an actual "constituent" function.

In the first place, this is the Preamble to the Constitution, in which Macedonia identifies through events that directly refute the neighbours' claims to the country: the struggle of the Macedonian people over the centuries, centuries-long state tradition, distinct historical and constitutional continuity, centuries-long republican tradition, etc.

The general provisions abound in phrases whose meaning is implied by the very fact that there is a Constitution, and therefore do not need to be articulated in an express provision: the Republic of Macedonia is "sovereign" and "independent," its sovereignty is "indivisible" and "nontransferable" (Article 1).

Those formulations sound rather like an incantation, strictly speaking - as if the "inviolability" of "the existing borders" depended on whether there was a constitutional provision to this effect. The first amendment to the Constitution applies precisely to this provision.

Apart from those innocuous and amusing phrases, however, the general provisions could pose more serious problems if the Constitution were to be interpreted literally. The assertion that the Republic of Macedonia's sovereignty is "nontransferable" is in direct contravention of integration policy - precisely "transfer" is one of the terms for the constitutional process within the European Union. The nation-states in the EU are not giving up, but "transferring" portions of their sovereignty to the community, to the union.

Further on, Article 8 proclaims the free expression of "national identity" a "fundamental value," while Article 36 awards casualties of the fight for "the separate identity of the Macedonian people" special status and privileges. An express article, 56, stipulates that the Republic shall guarantee the protection, promotion and enhancement of the historical and artistic heritage of "the Macedonian people."

There are more examples of the sort.

On the constitutional level, they are indicative of a tendency that runs counter to the protection of minority rights - an issue discussed extensively in the organic law of the land, as well as of a tendency towards "ethno-national-centrism" which is typical of the Balkan region but sounds anachronistic in the

context of integration.

On the political level, those claims seldom have normative value but reflect the fears of a fledgling state, its insecurity and concern about its own existence - for all above-mentioned examples have a direct bearing on the very existence of the nation-state.

From a foreign policy perspective, the most interesting and controversial article is the notorious Article 49, which originally stated that "[t]he Republic cares for the status and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighbouring countries [...]." After Greece protested vehemently, Parliament passed a second amendment to the Constitution in 1992, which states that "in the exercise of this care the Republic of Macedonia shall not interfere in the sovereign rights and internal affairs of other states."

Nevertheless, Article 49 has remained the most controversial provision in the Macedonian Constitution. If the claims to language, culture, minorities, etc. have serious grounds, they may be identified in this constitutional provision. And, of course, in the overall ethno-constitutional spirit of the law of the land. Article 49 and others of its kind may be amended, supplemented or revoked. The problem is not in the text itself, but in the Macedonian claims which it articulates. That is why a policy of intense confrontation with Macedonia on the part of Greece and Bulgaria might be due to the desire for adding feasible and reliable protective mechanisms that would anticipate and undermine any possible future claims to minorities and, hence, to territory.

On the foreign policy level, however, both the implicit and explicit implications of Article 49 will remain a problem for Macedonia.

(c) General assessment

Macedonia has succeeded in effecting a genuine rather than would-be constitutional reform. Regardless of its ethno-political leanings and certain details, the Macedonian Constitution is a good deterrent, preventive mechanism against extreme developments. On the other hand, without special consideration for its adequacy to the specific postcommunist and post-federal situation, the Constitution has proven quite suitable as an organic normative corpus for the fledgling state. Perhaps the most important aspects of the Constitution are that Macedonia:

- * has not developed authoritarian presidential dictatorship
- or a semi-dictatorial regime such as those in Serbia, Croatia or other countries in the region - and has generally avoided,

albeit to a lesser extent than Bulgaria, the extremes of presidential rule;

* has kept an equilibrium and comparatively normal relations with the national minorities and, in particular, with the Albanian minority which populates the entire Western part of the country, even though the Albanians have made demands which in many other countries would be inconceivable;

* has a brief constitutional history which shows that the system of public institutions is vested with stability and continuity, and that the risks which it faces neither ensue from nor are associated with the constitutional model itself;

* is not immune to value-ideological bias which does not have constituent power and is anachronistic, making sense only in a political perspective and in the perspective of fears about the very existence of Macedonia as a nation-state.

3. THE 1998 ELECTIONS: POLITICAL ASPECTS

3.1 Electoral coalitions

The most surprising development in the run-up to the elections was the formation of a pre-electoral coalition between Ljubcho Georgievski's VMRO-DPMNE and Vasil Tupurkovski's Democratic Alternative (DA). VMRO-DPMNE is a grass-roots party typical of a transition period, whereas DA has a limited electorate but considerable experience in affairs of state.

DA is a new party, formed in March 1998. Tupurkovski's idea was to create a multi-ethnic party. His intentions, however, failed due to suspicions on the part of the Albanians and other reasons - for instance, Tupurkovski's negative attitude to the Tetovo University. DA is centred rallied around the figure of its charismatic leader, who is considered the most popular politician in Macedonia. DA has advanced the idea of a Plan on the Reconstruction and Development of Macedonia. The party's keynote document sounds pragmatic and free of ideological bias. It proposes an extensive project on reform in the country.

VMRO-DPMNE marginalized itself from 1992 to 1998. Its comeback on the official political scene got a tangible impetus from the victory in the 1996 local elections. The party has a diverse electorate, but it is supported mainly by more radicalized circles - young people, anti-communists, etc. - as was the case of the UDF in Bulgaria.

Even before the elections, both the parties in the coalition and observers noted that VMRO-DPMNE was expected to rally large-scale electoral support, whereas DA would provide the grass-roots party with guarantees for expertise in affairs of state and administration, the necessary minimum of political

continuity, etc. The coalition does not have a basic unifying ideological component. On the contrary, it is tactical in character, even though for the time being there are conditions for its stabilization. Its tactical character is also evidenced by the fact that before coalescing with DA, VMRO-DPMNE discussed a coalition with LDP leaders Petar Goshev and Stojan Andov.

According to unconfirmed reports, the LDP had frustrated the talks by demanding the prime minister's portfolio - an apparently strange move considering that VMRO-DPMNE was expected to rally the crucial popular support.

Branko Crvenkovski's SDSM did not form an electoral coalition. The strategy of the ruling party and its leader and then prime minister was typical of an ex-communist party in power after 1990. SDSM conducted a well-organized and generously financed election campaign supported by the local administration. The party did not expect to win a majority, but a large number of votes on the basis of which it would head a post-electoral coalition. SDSM strategists intended to leave open various coalition options, which would have been limited if the party had formed a coalition before the elections. Besides, there were other reasons for this political campaign decision: a pre-electoral coalition with an Albanian party would not have changed the outcome of the elections for SDSM, but could have put off nationalist-minded Macedonian voters; on the other hand, the achievements promoted in the course of the campaign were ascribed to SDSM anyway; besides, SDSM did not need and essentially did not have coalition-forming principles - on the contrary, the party would coalesce with anybody and would take a most opportunistic course of action. There were other options in the same vein. SDSM practically left open opportunities for coalescing with the LDP and the Albanian parties, whose votes would have been enough for a future parliamentary majority.

There are three Albanian ethnic minority parties: PDP and PDPA/NDP. They formed a pre-electoral coalition which prioritized the interests of the consolidated minority. The coalition's strategy was based on the idea that active participation is a winning card, whereas attempts at ethnic confrontation would doom the ethnic cause. So far the Albanian minority's political representatives have rallied around this idea, namely that the minority should win - gradually, but by taking resolute and persistent steps - collective civil rights such as equal treatment of ethnic Albanians, education in the Albanian language at all levels, including higher education at the currently illegitimate Tetovo University, wider use of the Albanian

language in national and local public administration, proportional representation of Albanians in the institutions, economy, business financial centres, etc., release of Albanian political prisoners, strong decentralization of government. Those key demands in the Albanian minority's ethno-political strategy have been permanent and sustainable, and are unlikely to change on an ad hoc basis. Actually it will not be an overstatement to say that the Albanian political parties represent a collective interest articulated in the most unambiguous, unquestionable and clear way. The two mass Macedonian parties, which are raising slogans about universal prosperity and progress for the country, do not deal with concrete issues in their platforms, or deal with them in uniform and trite way. By contrast, the Albanian ethnic parties have concrete programme intents with guaranteed legitimacy among their electorate and long-lasting value. This cause has made the Albanian parties a force to be reckoned with and, almost inevitably, to be invited to participate in government.

The LDP-DPM formation is not a genuine coalition since the LDP is wholly dominant. The DPM is not a political party but a club rallied around a single person. Petar Goshev's LDP refused to coalesce with VMRO-DPMNE because of wrong forecasts about the outcome of the elections. The LDP intended to form a coalition with SDSM after the elections, and to join the parliamentary majority.

3.2 Election results and post-electoral coalitions
This is what the Republic of Macedonia's new Parliament looks like:

VMRO-DPMNE = 49
DA = 13
SDSM = 27
PDP = 14
DPA = 11
LDP = 4
SPM = 1
SRM = 1

VMRO-DPMNE and DA have 62 seats in all, i.e. an absolute majority. The new Government was elected with the votes of VMRO-DPMNE, DA and the LDP. So far LDP's support for the winning coalition has been more of a goodwill gesture, but with its four seats in Parliament the LDP could be expected to tap opportunities for a closer alliance with the ruling coalition; all the more so, considering that there are no principled differences between them, whereas LDP support would certainly

come in handy in the 1999 presidential elections. Arben Xhaferi's DPA, however, is also in the new parliamentary-governmental coalition. Thus VMRO-DPMNE has 13 ministers in the new Cabinet, DA eight, and DPA five. This allocation of portfolios suggests the following:

(a) For the time being, VMRO-DPMNE wants to pursue a real rather than would-be coalition policy. This is obvious from the allocation of the top positions in the Council of Ministers. Each one of the three parties in the coalition holds a deputy prime minister's portfolio. Bedredin Ibraimi, the Deputy Prime Minister from the DPA, is also Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, a particularly sensitive position considering that unemployment in Macedonia averages 40% at the national level and up to 50% in certain regions. The coalition partners are equal at this senior level.

(b) The allocation of portfolios also suggests that VMRO-DPMNE is quite moderate and inclined to uphold equality on the level of the entire executive. Still, the main portfolios on that level are held by VMRO-DPMNE and DA.

(c) The allocation of the so-called power portfolios indicates that VMRO-DPMNE counts on and is openly relying on DA's expertise. The foreign and interior, as well as the justice portfolios, have gone to DA. The allocation of portfolios on that level shows that even though it may have been formed recently and might have come as a surprise to domestic and international observers, VMRO-DPMNE/DA is at present a genuine coalition rather than an electoral tactical stratagem. It is hard to say how, under what circumstances and how long this balance will last, but so far it has not been imperilled by any jockeying for position.

(d) Vasil Tupurkovski was expected to become Speaker of Parliament, a highly prestigious position. This institutional function offers the greatest opportunities for consensual policies, which the DA leader can pursue without any particular problems. The position was considered important for Tupurkovski since it is a springboard for the presidency, which Tupurkovski openly hopes to win in 1999. Yet despite those expectations and advantages, the DA leader was appointed Director of the newly established Directorate for Management and Development of Macedonia. This agency, which is not part of the Council of Ministers by Constitution and which is similar to several Bulgarian independent agencies in the period of transition, will coordinate economic reform and its social effects. It will probably have substantial powers and influence. In the transition period, this type of institutional structures tend to double as

executive power. Tupurkovski's Directorate will hardly be an exception. On the contrary, it is likelier to have powers which in Bulgaria are delegated to several agencies. Observers watching Tupurkovski's Directorate will have quite a reliable source of information about relations within the VMRO-DPMNE/DA coalition.

4. DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES ON THE MACEDONIAN CASE

4.1 Internal Macedonian perspectives during the election campaign

The internal perspectives on the Republic of Macedonia's problems and issues in 1998 are entirely comprehensible to the outside observer. The perspectives are quite close to reality and empirical developments in the social sphere. The focus in the public sphere has not disintegrated into two or more schizoid parts. The country has not suffered from mass psychosis. On the contrary, the average Macedonian tends to be realistic, and his or her perspective gravitates towards that of common sense. At present, the Macedonian public has not fallen prey to mythical visions. There are no mass psychoses or fears that normally lead to the emergence of "hard-line electorates" - groups of voters voting unconditional, entirely unquestionable and uncritical support for a particular party. There are heated debates during election campaigns in Macedonia, but there is a free and fearless exchange of opinion. The arguments are not blurred by illusions and hallucinatory political visions. On the contrary, they are normally centred around tangible issues and crises affecting people's everyday life - the state of government, the economy, unemployment, agriculture, the minority issue, corruption, etc.

Analysts should take this type of distinctive features into account since they have been and will remain relevant to developments in the country. Of course, Macedonia's stability in the last decade is not due to those mass psychological dispositions only. Yet they are quite an important factor for the preservation of peace, stability and understanding, especially in the small population centres and the countryside. The preventive role of this factor could be diminished, especially by consistent policies undermining confidence and instilling fear. The cultivation of mass hostile dispositions similar to those in Bosnia, Herzegovina or Serbia (to the Albanians in Kosovo), however, is an unlikely political project. Most Western observers of the 1998 election campaign saw VMRO-DPMNE as a party with an ill-hidden nationalist programme. But they were wrong. Even if such sentiments were to develop, instigation of permanent

hostility requires a special long-term programme for which the political forces do not have the necessary resources at present.

Nevertheless, it is in Macedonia's interest to resolutely thwart any attempt at the firing of nationalist sentiments and hostility.

This state of the public sphere prompted the following developments during the election campaign:

(a) Due to the lack of sizeable financial resources, on the one hand, and consensus on the main issues in the country, on the other, the parties could not campaign for alternative programmes.

All set out to prove that they were capable of settling one and the same issues. It was thus very hard to identify any contrasts.

This made campaigning for a rational programme hard for all candidates, but even harder for those from VMRO-DPMNE and DA. In this context, SDSM upheld the status quo, whereas the opposition coalition responded by criticizing the selfsame status quo. Thus

the two main parties' election campaigns were distinctly negative. This confused voters and forced them to look for points of reference beyond the messages delivered by the contenders themselves. Ultimately, this sort of situation strips campaigns, campaign commercials and messages of all meaning, and voters revert to a state of primary confidence in one party or another, to acceptance or rejection of the status quo independent of all campaign platforms. In Macedonia's case, this worked out to the benefit of change and VMRO-DPMNE/DA. Similar to Bulgaria two years ago, the situation itself, rather than the actors and the design of their campaigns, brought the former opposition to power at that - and this is especially important - the former extraparliamentary opposition.

(b) The anti-Bulgarian campaign, which was conducted by SDSM deliberately and consistently, was likewise rooted in this unification of perspectives on the main issues in Macedonia. SDSM was forced if not to extoll the status quo, at least to provide vivid scenarios of its deterioration to the point where national unity was threatened. This was a demonstration in reverse perspective, a photographic negative, of the assets claimed by the SDSM government - namely, preservation of inter-ethnic peace and, hence, of national security and consolidation of the state.

To enhance its image as saviour or defender of the national-political body, SDSM fabricated a picture of the opposite situation during the election campaign - namely, alleged treason that imperilled the very existence of Macedonia - and blamed it on the opposition. This situation has had precedents in

Bulgaria too - in its election campaigns, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) has constantly promoted some modification or other of the idea of saving the nation, articulated as national consensus. The difference is that the enemy of Bulgarian national consensus was supposed to be an internal political one only, whereas the traitors in Macedonia allegedly had an external ally. This message was tactically justified but quite distorted and, in certain ways, wholly absurd, considering that Macedonia has a consolidated Albanian minority which could divide the country from within. Yet SDSM not only refrained from mounting an attack on the Albanian minority - such campaign tactics would have backfired - but, being well-disposed towards the Albanian minority and its political representatives, fabricated and promoted via the media the image of the Bulgarian enemy that had a political fifth column in Macedonia itself, and this was allegedly none other than the VMRO-DPMNE leader himself.

The above conclusions may be summed up as follows: The negative campaign and deficit of ideas and visions of a political future in the campaign of the ruling SDSM are symptomatic of a general political emasculation similar to that of Bulgaria's BSP in 1996. Under the circumstances, it is not programmes and campaigns, but the situation itself that gets the future ruling force "elected." In all likelihood, this is a permanent tendency and SDSM will not return to power.

4.2 Bulgarian perspectives

The cluster of perspectives surrounding Macedonia in its regional context will be discussed at greater length in another section of this commentary. Here we will only note certain different Bulgarian perspectives on Macedonia's internal situation, elections and participants in them.

Predictably, two different perspectives on the contenders in the Macedonian elections have emerged in Bulgaria.

(a) The ruling coalition United Democratic Forces (UtDF) has given full and unconditional support to the now former opposition - for two different reasons which, in turn, have produced two different perspectives.

The first position is traditional and typical of the nationalist-minded politicians in the UtDF, who are certainly not few and far apart in the coalition. The activity of Bulgaria's VMRO intensified palpably, and there was open enthusiasm about the Macedonian opposition. A number of demonstrations on the occasion suggest an attitude that is not entirely in harmony with Macedonia's acknowledged independence. In these political and social circles, however, Macedonia tends to be a sentiment -

sometimes rather primitive and uncontrolled - rather than an object of rational policy. Insofar as it becomes a policy, i.e. insofar as there are signs of political rationality or action programmes in the activities of pro-Macedonian politicians in Bulgaria, they are secondary civilized forms of the more primary nationalist urge. This behaviour added grist to the mill of SDSM's anti-Bulgarian campaign. It should be expressly noted, however, that the Bulgarian VMRO, which is in the UtDF coalition, is acting in a balanced way and is trying to find rational arguments. Either way, even if it has aggressive intentions, VMRO has been keeping them in check and has not been creating problems for the ruling coalition - at least this has been the state of affairs to date.

The other position, which is pro-VMRO-DPMNE/DA, is upheld by pragmatic politicians, especially by the top echelons of the executive. This group of politicians already know and value the pragmatic attitude in foreign political relations. They are also aware of the price that has to be paid for venting nationalist sentiments for the purpose of drawing political dividends. In these circles, the sympathy for the fledgling coalition in Macedonia stems from the hope that the latter would reject the policy of nationalist isolation and hostility pursued by Gligorov and Crvenkovski. This might consequently expand the range of pragmatic political interaction, from which both Bulgaria and Macedonia would stand to gain. This perspective is popular among political scientists, analysts, journalists, nongovernmental organizations, etc.

(b) Just as in the case of many other issues, there was confusion and inconsistency among the Bulgarian opposition, within the BSP in particular, on this issue too. The BSP rallied around the perspective of vitriolic and pointless nationalism. The BSP had its sights set not so much on Macedonia as on certain political actors in Bulgaria, pondering whether they might be betraying some fictional national cause. It pounced on the slightest chance to attack the UtDF about any government action that might - only just - be interpreted as recognition of the Macedonian nation. This shows that the BSP does not have a concept of its own about the Macedonian case, just as it has no concept on a number of other important issues. Needless to say, Socialist supporters are on the side of the losers in Macedonia, whereas the outcome of the elections has simply disqualified the BSP as a potential solo political player in decision-making on Bulgarian-Macedonian relations. At this level of foreign policy, the BSP has been delegitimized - at that, for an indefinite

period of time.

(c) Just as in other Balkan countries but especially in Bulgaria, there is a popular and rather strong perspective that does not wholly overlap with the politically articulated and representative positions. In regard to Macedonia, there is a powerful folkloric position with numerous variants in Bulgaria. The term "position" is an overstatement, of course: it is used for the sake of convenience, even though in this case it refers to a cloud of notions, a massif of emotions, pictures, stories, memories, legends, etc. What all variants have in common - the invariant - is a sentiment and nationalist attitude ranging from the innocuous romantic to the militant. This mass state does not have a distinct social and political profile. All sorts of sociopolitical orientations may be identified in it. It is typical of people with very different views on other matters.

There is no unifying factor within this mass, and that is why it has not been promoted to a political platform or organization.

Yet it is a particularly dangerous latent resource precisely because it is so inarticulate and dispersed. At present there is no clearly identifiable ground to presume that this resource would be activated by some sort of political manipulation - which has been the rule in the Balkans. It is even less probable that it would activate itself, since it does not have a political organizing principle and objectives of its own. Either way, however, this resource exists in its sentimental-primitive form and should be taken into account. This folkloric disposition sides with VMRO-DPMNE. One reason is historical nostalgia, and another - the accusation that SDSM is a pro-Serbian and therefore traitor party; while VMRO-DPMNE is pro-Bulgarian. This motive does not have too much to do with the actual political process, and is bound to be confused as the new Macedonian Government takes inevitable measures in defence of Macedonia's national sovereignty. */N-2

In sum, the following is typical of the Bulgarian perspective on Macedonia:

Bulgaria has at least four different perspectives on Macedonia and the Macedonian Question, three of them political and one mass-folkloric. The future clear policy towards Macedonia will be based on the political perspective that, first, gains the upper hand and, second, succeeds in overturning and winning over the popular sentiment.

4.3 Perspective of the so-called international community

The strangest perspective on Macedonia and the 1998 elections is that of Western leaders, experts and organizations.

Contrary to the West's positions on other Balkan issues, its stance on Macedonia is not elaborate enough and is therefore comparatively uniform. The following is typical of prevalent attitudes to Macedonia in the West.

The West sees Macedonia mainly in the context of the regional conflicts and civil wars from the last decade. That is why the Western perspectives on Macedonia are not diverse. On the contrary, Western observers judge Macedonia from the perspective of a single question: to what extent is Macedonia, similar to other parts of the region, a potential arena of civil and military conflict? Is Macedonia a potential Bosnia or Kosovo? This main question, however, is accompanied by a hidden and rather specific interpretation which has two basic dimensions.

First, the issue of Macedonia's security and stability outweighs all other issues. For instance, the severe problems of unemployment, the country's clan-based division that is parallel to the already conducted privatization, the state of the media, the state of civil rights and liberties, etc. - all those issues are raised and tackled in the context of the main problem, the stability of public institutions and security issues.

Second, the security issue itself is treated in a narrow-minded and superficial way. Macedonia and the Macedonian government are judged in the manner in which the West treats the Balkan region in general - as a positivist who ignores the powerful underlying processes, who is concerned with the formal state of peace (in the Dayton style, i.e. on the presumption that peace is nothing but freezing the conflict at an arbitrary stage of its development) and regards long-term visions as academic speculation.

Proceeding from this presumption, the West has a rather inarticulate view of Macedonia. Confined to this biased, a priori and critically non-rationalized perspective, the Western observer does not subject the situation in Macedonia to serious analysis. By and large, the West regards the status quo as the best-case scenario that could be desired of Macedonia. There is something naive in this perspective on Macedonia, but there is also a hidden providential prejudice: as if providence had established some sort of stable order which was not creating extra problems nor complicating the equation of peace in the Balkans by introducing new unknown quantities, and this order had better be preserved from now on. This is the first step in the attitude to Macedonia.

In a second step, the typical Western view sees the President and SDSM as the political factor for the preservation

of peace in Macedonia. Since the ex-communist and now Social Democrats have never been ousted from power, of course it is they who are the factors for stability and peace. First and foremost President Kiro Gligorov, with SDSM coming next. This sympathy has never been hidden. On the contrary, it has been manifested not only in passive, but also in active, aggressive-evaluative forms. Bulgaria was the object of the selfsame naive and inadequate conservative attitude to the political process during the 1996-1997 crisis. */N-3 The confusion about Macedonia is even greater as it concerns foreign policy, security, regional relations, etc. The situation is complicated by the fact that Macedonia is a former Yugoslav republic, whereas Bulgaria is not stigmatized by such birthmarks.

As a result of those basic presumptions, not only individual politicians or governments, but even international organizations which presumably have a more objective and serious perspective on the political processes, proved to be under a number of general but also entirely specific delusions. The OSCE Election Observation Mission made mistakes both in its judgements and specific organization of the mission. The mission leaders, some of whom were supposed to study the situation in the field and in depth, and had a network of long-term observers and campaign watchers for the purpose, were also under the influence of a series of illusions and overt misjudgments. In general, the misjudgments followed the aforementioned steps:

- * first, there is order and stability in Macedonia;
- * second, Macedonia is neutral in the regional conflicts;
- * third, the credit for that goes to the President and the Government;
- * ergo, those stabilizing factors should be vouchsafed support.

Those factors should not only be vouchsafed support, but - presumably - they have no serious alternative. The political formation that is challenging them is actually challenging the stability of Macedonia and the region, and the peaceful... stagnation. This was the attitude of the OSCE and OSCE political and electoral experts - a positivistic attitude which is described as typical and dominant among the Western political elite in the chapter on the Western perspective on Macedonia. The West misjudged VMRO-DPMNE more than anybody and anything else. There is hardly a magazine, bulletin of an international organization or a specially prepared briefing paper, as that of the OSCE Election Observation Mission, that does not describe the party in the harshest possible terms: VMRO-DPMNE is "right-wing

extremist," "rightist-conservative nationalist," "conservative-extremist," etc. The virtually universal definition is "nationalist," usually modified by some traditional marker borrowed from Western practice such as "right-wing" and "conservative." An amazing fact - amazing at least for the Bulgarian observers in the OSCE mission, was the observer briefing prior to deployment in the first round. Observers were told in so many words that the main contenders from the opposition were right-wing extremists, that it was not accidental that their organization was called "internal revolutionary," and that the observers should watch out particularly for action typical precisely of a revolutionary organization. Despite the unfortunate experience from the 1994 elections, the popularity of this stance - negative to the opposition and tolerant of the former communists - had not waned but, on the contrary, was advanced even more confidently - so much so, that it became part of the OSCE Mission's official briefing.

Branko Crvenkovski's anti-Bulgarian campaign was likewise misinterpreted by Western observers. It was seen as objective, albeit perhaps somewhat exaggerated, establishment and explicit articulation of facts by SDSM. Instead of interpreting the wave of anti-Bulgarian allegations simply as the product of a deficit of positive messages in the campaign, it was presumed to be worth of serious consideration. Things seemed quite convincing when you add objective factors such as the language dispute which is, to say the least, quite strange for the Western observer, as well as the fact that Bulgaria had ousted the former communists from power by that time, and was not too friendly to the Macedonian government for purely ideological reasons. The big mistake of Western analysts who took the anti-Bulgarian allegations at face value, came from something quite simple, really: from their failure to test those allegations for their potential to mobilize voters; and, even simpler, for the average Macedonian's receptivity and susceptibility to fall for such allegations. Had the issue been considered from that perspective, it would have been established that - unlike other Balkan countries, including Bulgaria to some extent - the Macedonian citizen cannot be brought to a state of mass psychosis nor easily manipulated by highly speculative foreign political allegations; nor, on the other hand, do party politics in Macedonia have the appropriate resources to control mass electoral dispositions by means of fabricated claims.

Still, those dimensions of a long-lasting misjudgment may be summarized in a single formula that more or less covers them all

and may serve as a basis for their future development:
The dominant Western perception of Macedonia overestimates
the visible stability, misjudges the reasons for this stability
and ignores the underlying risk factors for national security.
This misjudgment intensifies when Macedonia is seen in the
perspective of past and current conflicts in the Balkan region,
since this blurs the vision of the specificity of the Macedonian
case.

4.4 Regional perceptions

The levels of risk, conflict potential and chaos are so high
in the Balkans that talking about stabilized, rationalized,
prepared for variants, consistently upheld and suchlike attitudes
and foreign policy stands would be nothing short of an
overstatement. This fact, however, is quite curious from another
perspective - namely, that Macedonia is a place in which the
interests of the neighbour and certain other Balkan countries
intersect. Let us mark the main dispositions.

(a) Serbia stood to gain a lot from SDSM's, and successors
to the ex-communists' in general, remaining in power. For a
number of reasons. First, the Kiro Gligorov regime in combination
with the Branko Crvenkovski government was - be it overtly or
covertly - pro-Serbian. This was due both to the current
situation and the priority on preserving the status quo inherited
from disintegrated Yugoslavia, and to genetic kinship and
understanding, as well as to a typical common style of a
postcommunist regime with elements of stronger presidential
authority. Second, the ouster of the ex-communists from power is
simply part of the general retreat of the presidential
postcommunist regimes in former Yugoslavia and, as such, is bound
to affect other countries in the region. Third, in the event of a
change of the regime in Macedonia, Greece is quite likely, be it
on its own initiative or under EU and NATO pressure, to start
reconsidering its hard-line policy towards Macedonia - which
would only isolate Serbia even further. Fourth, a policy line
that distances Macedonia from Serbia and, besides, is inevitably
tolerated by the West, would probably influence Montenegro, where
secessionist sentiments have been intensifying anyway. */N-4
Fifth, if the new government opts for more consistent and closer
cooperation with international organizations and security forces,
border controls between Serbia and Macedonia will inevitably
tighten. There are other reasons too. Still, the most important
ones are associated with Macedonia's exit from the company of
post-federal presidential regimes and the end of hopes - which
Serbia undoubtedly nursed - that Macedonia would develop in a way

that was close to and to the advantage of Serbia.

(b) Greece's stand was not distinctly articulated, and Greek-Macedonian relations were strained because of the conflict over the national symbols. Greece has an ambiguous attitude to Serbia too, with which it has had traditionally good relations, but is constrained at least by its EU and NATO membership. This passive hostility notwithstanding, Greece cannot have failed to realize that it could stand to gain from the change of government in Macedonia. First, Greece has been finding it hard to negotiate with the Macedonian President and SDSM. Even though the disputes seem absurd to Western politicians and analysts, all options for their settlement under the same circumstances are probably presumed to have been tried and failed; to say the least, they have been locked in the same old vicious circle for years. Once VMRO-DPMNE/DA come to power, the chances that those issues will be raised in a new way improve. Second, Greece stands to gain from sprucing up its relations with Macedonia due to the important links in the Northwest, which are under Macedonian control. In this respect, Macedonia and Greece could be partners in EU-funded joint projects. Third, even though it is a member of the EU and NATO, Greece has weak positions as their regional representative in the Balkans. Under different circumstances, it would be far likelier to play an active intermediary role not so much out of principled considerations but, rather, for the sake of winning greater confidence and polishing its image as a reliable power in the Balkans by playing mediator. A change of regime in Macedonia would improve the odds for this, since the rule of the Socialists and the incumbent President has been openly isolationist.

Those arguments notwithstanding, Greece is concerned foremost with the issue of national symbols and implications about the existence of a Macedonian minority on its territory. Greece has not advanced a special, positive strategic vision on Macedonia to date; nor does it necessarily need to have one at this particular moment.

(c) Albania is in a varying but nonetheless permanent state of chaos, and is therefore preoccupied with domestic concerns.

First, the elections in Macedonia were of any interest to it insofar as Albanians officially comprise 23% of Macedonia's population, to say nothing of the many illegal immigrants in that country. Second, Albania stands to gain from greater isolation of Serbia to the South and a tighter embargo, which the new Macedonian Government could be expected to impose. Third, Albania is incapable of settling the Kosovo crisis by its own resources

and wants greater involvement by international organizations, which could likewise be expected in the event of a change of regime in Macedonia. However, it is hard to identify any strategic interest - not because there isn't nor could there be one, but because the extreme volatility and unpredictability of the situation in Albania makes the very articulation of an interest almost impossible.

In sum, the following is typical of the regional perceptions of the issue of Macedonia, the Macedonian elections and change of government:

The attitude of Macedonia's neighbours to the 1998 elections and the political process in the country is identical to that taken by inertia to date - without a special vision, as if Macedonia intended to remain self-isolated. However, this tacit judgement or projection is wrong. The winning regional position would be the position that formulates a clear, pragmatic policy towards Macedonia and pursues it in a resolute, active and far-ranging manner.

5. TWO VISIONS ON THE MACEDONIAN CASE

We have hitherto outlined the variety of perspectives on the issues associated with Macedonia - local, regional, Euro-Atlantic - and have defined the internationally legitimate perspective. Having collected a larger empirical corpus - assessments of the elections and their outcome - we will introduce another typological distinction between perspectives on the issue of Macedonia, i.e. between normal and radical interpretation, or vision, of Macedonia. This distinction does not overlap with any of those made so far, applies foremost to the perspective of political attitudes to Macedonia and, finally, is distinctly oriented towards the future, towards the political projects that are yet to be initiated.

5.1 "Normal" interpretation and list of issues

The "normal" stance on Macedonia cites Macedonia's problems in 1998 in a way that makes it possible:
first, to arrange them in a list and to classify them depending on the difficulty of their solution;
second, to draw up an exhaustive list, since the problems are presumably sufficiently clear and foreseeable;
third, to have on this list problems that are resolvable as long as there is so-called "political will."

Thus the normal description of the situation in Macedonia in 1998 will cover topics from a traditional classification: economy, unemployment, social issues, democratic institutions, corruption, foreign investment, etc. Of course, the issue of the

Albanian minority is somewhat more complicated, but it figures in the normal view just as any other issue listed above.

In the normal description, the picture looks more or less as follows:

In 1991, Macedonia seceded from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and became independent. In the next two years it was governed by a volatile and controversial coalition. There was no real reform. The authorities were preoccupied with partisan machinations. The 1994 elections were boycotted by the opposition. The former communists remained in power. In the next four years, the country deliberately pursued a self-isolationist policy. It engaged in disputes over the national name, language and symbols with neighbour countries. Macedonia failed to achieve anything. The internal situation deteriorated. Reforms were postponed. The political elite was deeply corrupt. Privatization turned into plundering on a political basis. The level of unemployment was the highest in Europe. There were no foreign investments. Inflationary pressures increased. The country was among the poorest in Europe. It had problems with the Albanian minorities which are yet to be resolved. And so on and so forth. The new government must tackle those issues by their priority...

Any of the above assertions may be expounded in the respective direction, providing more information. Yet the addition of diverse empirical material will not change the style of the analysis and type of perspectives substantially. This type of description of the situation entails a series of recommendations which have been made to most countries from the ex-Soviet bloc since 1989. In brief:

There is nothing specific in this picture. It is not clear whether it refers to Macedonia or to another country in transition. The issues specific precisely to Macedonia have been omitted. This description serves as the basis for universal recommendations for social, economic and political policies. Yet those recommendations will inevitably be implausible and Utopian.

This perspective on Macedonia was elaborated in Bulgaria by journalists, politicians and political scientists. It prevailed in the Bulgarian media in the run-up to the elections. Statements and comments were more cautious, since no one expected that the elections would bring a staggering defeat for the ex-communists and an absolute majority for the coalition "For Change." The same interpretation was reproduced and drowned the media after the elections. At face value, there is even something strange about that: Macedonia was a top story, and this is obvious from the press review of that period. At the same time, the promotion of

an entirely unoriginal view on Macedonia logically begs the question: if that was really the case, why all the talk and comments? The answer is not in the singularity of "the Macedonian situation," for that is not obvious in the commentaries. As noted at the beginning of this paper, the answer is in the singularity of "the Macedonian emotion," which subsequently takes the form of an apparently rational, analytic commentary.

The review of the Bulgarian press shows that the normal stance has not been elaborated in a comprehensive, consistent form. First, the issue is not content-related but constructive.

In general, all problems facing Macedonia may have been identified. Yet only a constructively more consistent approach would bring them together in a single picture rather than in fragmentary presentations. This will highlight the links and bonds between them, providing more information. Here are examples of such links and dependencies that remain hidden when the issues are tackled on a case-by-case basis:

- * The issue of the Albanian minority and its strong claims, on the one hand and, on the other, the issue of crime and smuggling in the Northwest, are interrelated and cannot be resolved separately.

- * Unemployment and privatization have direct political meaning in the sense that privatization has been conducted in practice, but on the basis of distinct political preferences.

- * The attraction of foreign investments - one of the most concrete issues in Vasil Tuporkovski's programme of economic renewal (insofar as it even cites a figure of investments in the next few months, US\$1,000 million) - is also relevant to the clan-communist change of ownership.

- * An improvement in relations with Albania depends on the attitude to demands made by the Albanian coalition partner which few countries in the world would accept.

And so on and so forth.

Those shortcomings of the normal stance tend to be formal, at face value - the picture simply remains fragmented, the relations between the different ranges of issues remain unclear, and their functional dependence remains non-transparent. However, more substantial shortcomings may be discerned behind this purely formal weakness. Bringing together all fragmentary issues in a single picture proves to be quite hard and introduces new unknown quantities - as the identification of links and relations in the previous paragraphs shows.

Here is a sample scenario:

Let us imagine that the first priority of Macedonian foreign

policy was improvement and development of relations with Albania and the province of Kosovo (needless to say, in the event of autonomy). In this case, the first domestic political reflection, the first consequence within the country, ought to be meeting the demands of the Albanian minority and its political representatives, in this case the DPA. Macedonia would have to revoke the constitutional provision whereby the Macedonians are the only "constituent people" of the country. The minorities would also become "constituent." Macedonia would have to launch a large-scale campaign of the affirmative-action type in order to guarantee the Albanian minority political representation in all public institutions. Furthermore, Macedonia would have to grant the Albanian language equal status in all spheres of public life - apart from schools, this means the administration, justice, etc. If it pursued such a policy, Macedonia would de facto, and perhaps even de jure, become a two-nation state. In that case, however, it would be hard, if not impossible, for Macedonia to keep control over its border with Albania, on the one hand, and with Kosovo, on the other. As regards Kosovo, Macedonia would even be obliged to act as a patron state of a national minority in Yugoslavia. If Kosovo were to have the status of an autonomous province, a two-nation Macedonia would inevitably establish closer relations with the province than Serbia. Ultimately, a deterioration in relations with Serbia seems inevitable. However, at stake in a conflict with Serbia would be the very existence of the Macedonia that would have developed along such lines.

We could imagine other scenarios too. The objective of this paper, however, is analytical (by contrast, scenarios are synthetic, constructive figments of the imagination), therefore we will limit ourselves to the above example only. What it has in common with other possible developments is that their outcome is the collapse of the Macedonian state itself and, more generally, of Macedonian statehood. Yet this development is not obvious when the issues are addressed on a case-by case-basis and in the paradigm of the normal vision. That is why the more concrete weakness of this type of perspective may be formulated as follows:

Substantial relations and dependencies, on which the very existence of Macedonia's integral political body depends, remain hidden in the case-by-case analysis of separate, particular issues. Those very relations between the particular issues are the vehicle of the high degree of unpredictability in the overall situation.

In other words, our disagreement with and lack of confidence

in the normal paradigm are not accidental, but ensue from an important methodological weakness of the latter.

5.2 Radical interpretation and risk factors

(a) Introductory methodological note

The radical interpretation is openly and directly associated with concern with a simple yet fundamental issue - the issue of the very existence of Macedonia and the Macedonian statehood.

This issue - the issue of security in general - is naturally a fundamental issue for any country. Not only all other issues, but also the feasibility of tackling more concrete issues depend on it. No state can afford not to consider it a priority. In the

countries with a stable political system - for example, the countries from the Euro-Atlantic zone - the issue of security and

the existence of the state itself is doubtless a fundamental issue too. Typically, however, those political systems approach the security issue from a long-term preventive perspective. The security issue is (1) handled by special institutions and (2) has a special strategic status. In any case, particular aspects of government are considered in the perspective of the security issue only when dealing with long-term strategic matters. In countries with stabilized public institutions and a stable social system, national security is not an issue in everyday politics.

Everyday policy-making is not parallel to constant preoccupation with security issues - that would be abnormal and paranoiac, which is certainly not typical of Western political systems.

The Macedonian case is different precisely at this level. In the interpretation which we have called radical, the security issue, in its extreme form, is the issue of present-day

Macedonia. The form is "extreme" because there are factors - risk factors - with a direct bearing on the very existence of Macedonian statehood. We believe that this specific difference ought to be understood well, in their range and depth.

The risk factors themselves are neither mysterious nor hidden for the observer. That is why the important thing is not so much to identify them but to carefully consider their consequences and, hence, to formulate a preventive policy limiting the probability of their destructive effect.

(b) An outside view: the occupational ring

The direct comparison between Israel and Macedonia will probably cause raised eyebrows or sniffs of disapproval. Yet this reaction would be precipitate. The two countries have one, perhaps critical, thing in common: both are locked in an

occupational ring, both have ended up in an occupational situation. Of course, we are aware that this comparison is oversimplified in many ways. Above all, Israel is in an occupational situation that is distinctly military-political in character. The ring around Israel is clear and is all too often manifested in a militaristic way.

Macedonia's case is more complicated, but this does not make it either less dangerous or easier for preventive manipulation. In a sense, on the contrary. On the one hand, the occupational ring around Macedonia does not boil down to a factor or two; in regard to Macedonia, there are numerous risk factors and some of them are mutually controversial, complicating the situation even further. On the other hand, Macedonia is not backed by any great power; Macedonia had simply slipped into ill-fated oblivion for decades, eventually attracting the attention of politicians and analysts - at that, in the context of other crises in the Balkans - in the past few years only.

Macedonia is in an occupational environment due to the fact that cravings, claims, aggressions, nationalist urges, romantic-memoir passions with dubious political implications, etc. of all neighbour countries with no exception, meet and intersect in the peculiar place called "Macedonia."

Greece, the Southern neighbour, denies Macedonia's very international legal existence. As far as Greece is concerned, there is simply no such state, since the latter's name and main national symbols are illegitimate. For Greece, Macedonia is the holy land where the Greek national symbols have their roots. Greece has no open claims to Macedonia's territory. Yet Greece's non-recognition of the Macedonian state because of the form in which it is manifested entails consequences reminiscent of the construction known as "cold war." In a more practical aspect, the

Greek hostility and siege to the South are levers of open extortion against Macedonia. For as a result of this siege Greece can, on the one hand, raise obstacles to talks between Macedonia and the EU and NATO and, on the other, extort the country on various concrete occasions. Either way, the balance between the two countries is unilateral and drastically upset because of an extremely irrational nationalist appetite from the South.

Bulgaria has remained at the freezing point where it was locked by its act of recognition of the Republic of Macedonia in early 1992. Bulgaria regards the Macedonian state as "valid," but stubbornly insists that its language is "invalid." The position on the language, of course, applies to other features of the nation-state - culture, education, etc. Since language is a

fundamental characteristic, the consequence - be it articulated or passed over in silence and postponed indefinitely - is that the entire construction of Macedonian statehood is null and void, built with the help of borrowed or stolen material. Yet the issue has a hidden side too. This is the aforementioned latent resource of popular nationalism and the mass perception of Macedonia as a severed limb of the authentic Bulgarian cultural and national body. Macedonia is thus permanently tucked away in the layers of the Bulgarian folkloric consciousness as an element of the typical Bulgarian heroic table songs. It would hardly be an overstatement to say that if the mass - "folkloric" - Bulgarian were to realize once and for all that Macedonia was not Bulgarian, s/he would feel invalidated in some "national-existential" sense. Macedonia's problem with Bulgaria cannot be "defined" very clearly, because "definitions" presuppose a degree of external form, of expression, of manifestation of their subjects by definition, so to speak. By contrast, in this case the risk factor comes from the mass psychological resource that could be mobilized by a carefully planned political manipulation. In a mass psychological sense, Serbian sentiments about Kosovo are identical:

The political use of the Kosovo myth as "the heart of Serbia" has consolidated all Serbia, leaving the country without any opposition. The myth of Macedonia as a severed limb from the Bulgarian national body is not immune to such use and should therefore be taken into account as a risk factor at the level of regional security.

To the North Macedonia had an until recently good - albeit in objective strategic terms, most unfortunate - neighbour. Thanks to its pro-Serbian government, Macedonia did not have any critical problems with the regime in Serbia. Yet following the latest elections, it could expect a general aggravation, as well as resumption of disputes over issues inherited from former Yugoslavia - for instance, the border issue. In fact, generally speaking, as long as Milosevic is in power, there is no reason why and no way in which relations with Serbia could improve. The prospect is either a stalemate until the situation in Serbia changes radically, or deterioration to an extent that is impossible to predict at present. Serbia is a source of all kinds of threats to Macedonia, aggressive military developments included. Those potential threats worried even the pro-Serbian elite in Macedonian politics, who invited a UN preventive deployment force (UNPREDEP) back in 1992. The situation in Kosovo is apparently impossible to control by applying the Dayton

formula */N-5 - freezing the conflict at an arbitrary stage of its development, peace-keeping operations and eventual transformation of international supervision into domestic self-government. If this strategy is applied, the chances that Richard Holbrooke or somebody from the same school of thought might resolve the conflict are simply negligible (we are aware that this stance is extreme and needs greater argumentation, but unfortunately we can only mention it here).

The situation with Albania is even more alarming because of the Albanian minority - officially 23% of Macedonia's population in 1994, but probably 30% by now. The border between Macedonia and Kosovo has practically been dismantled. The situation on the border with Albania is similar. What direction will the "osmotic pressure" take is a matter of circumstances. Right now the war in Kosovo and the chaos in Albania have started an exodus of refugees to Macedonia. In the longer term - in the event of, say, internal political stabilization in Albania - the direction might change. Yet either way, to claim that Macedonia has a border in these zones is a gross overstatement. To the West, Albania, Macedonia borders on chaos and unpredictability that do not tend to have distinct boundaries and may spill over by force of their own internal potential only. Thus if fighting in Kosovo resumes on a large scale, it is bound to spill over into Macedonia in one form or another. Or if the collapse of the state and the emergence of quasi-state forms of government in Albania get a fresh impetus for some reason, the sphere of chaos will expand to the East, invading Macedonia. To prevent such developments by ordinary, conventional measures - for instance, deployment of troops or implementation of a border defence programme - is impossible, and proposing them would be ridiculous; the force of chaos in those zones is simply overwhelming.

This sketch of the quadrangle that locks Macedonia may be summarized in the following formula:

Macedonia is an extraordinary place in the Balkan region. This place is the target of expansive appetites and destructive forces from all directions. Macedonia is the actual centre of the Balkan space precisely as their intersection. As long as Macedonia remains locked by this ring, the possibility of the collapse of Macedonian statehood remains open.

(c) An inside view: "equidistance" from problems

Being in a state of cultural-political occupation, so far Macedonia has not developed significant mass psychological deviations, manias or - and this would be entirely understandable - mass paranoia. On the contrary, the country appears to be

enjoying enviable health at the mass psychological level. Needless to say, this thesis is not professional. However, it could be translated into stricter informative and scientifically legitimate terms if it is substantiated by facts - peace and calm during the elections, low level of street crime, safe streets in the cities, etc.

The fact that contrary to countries such as Israel - and even Bulgaria, which has likewise suffered from mass psychoses as, for instance, the tense expectations of the notorious "state of emergency" in 1996 - Macedonia has not developed a reactive behaviour at the level of the general public and the whole country, is quite unusual. In Macedonia, there is no mass occupational complex shaping general public attitudes, triggering a sequence of events, or driving large groups of people to one irrational extreme or another. On the contrary, the dominant attitudes are quite moderate and balanced. Mass consciousness is free of a sense of hostile encirclement and of a specific form of occupational ring.

Curiously, however, at the level of political planning and conscious decision-making this attitude is repeated - needless to say, in a paradoxical way. Ever since Macedonia's secession from former Yugoslavia, Macedonian foreign policy has been based on the postulate of the so-called "equidistance" (from all neighbour countries), advanced by President Gligorov. This doctrine has not been changed to date, but the new Macedonian government has pledged its intention of abandoning it. In fact "equidistance" has been the Macedonian foreign policy formula for an entire decade. In a Bulgarian variant, this thesis would have been more popularly known as "neutrality." Still, there is a difference, for Macedonia's foreign policy is a policy of consistent self-distancing and self-isolation, rather than simple neutrality. It is precisely when examined from this perspective that it becomes obvious that the repetition of mass dispositions at the political level is as real as it is paradoxical - for "equidistance" is simply a deliberate, decreed ignorance of the country's geo-cultural and geo-strategic coordinates. By pursuing a policy of isolation, Macedonia has deliberately opted to remain passive and, furthermore, to disregard the context in which it is situated. Such a position is dangerous and myopic in principle. In Macedonia's case, the deliberate policy of amnesia in regard to the regional environment is highly risky. Even though there have not been any fatal and irreversible sequences of events to date, isolation remains a high-risk factor: should an actual conflict flare up over any of the more controversial issues, it

is not clear whether there are any barriers or resources for its containment; actually there are no internal resources accumulated as a result of a definite policy line.

The absence of mass fears about the fate of the country, the absence of mass awareness about the risks of the environment is a useful - and even pragmatic and healthy - acceptance of facts; mass psychology cannot change the latter anyway. This is a function of the top-level political position, that of state government. Foreign policy, however, repeats the mass disposition and even articulates it as a political programme. Hence the paradox of the parallel dispositions, the mass psychological and the political disposition:

The doctrine of "equidistance" is a renunciation of foreign policy-making. Since this renunciation is illusory, the doctrine is a self-confession of helplessness. This is a form in which the Macedonian government admits that it neither does nor wants to understand the parameters of its own context and environment.

(d) Mutual intensification of the "outside" and "inside" perceptions

The cultural-political aggression that places Macedonia in a state of external occupation and the internal dogma of "equidistance" complement and even intensify one other.

The outside views that intersect in this peculiar place are up against tacit, passive inside resistance. By 1998, Macedonia had not made any serious attempts to break out of its cultural-political siege. It actually responded to the external hostility by sulking, voicing indignation in its own media, turning its back on the perpetrators, etc. - but did not engage in active cooperation in an attempt to settle issues with its neighbours. The siege has thus persisted, turning into a permanent state to which the actors on the international scene are becoming used.

This policy of passive resistance is nothing new - on the contrary, it has had a number of precedents, from Gandhi in India to Rugova in Kosovo.

Yet the state of peaceful resistance in, Kosovo, for instance, first, cannot be judged unambiguously and has been the subject of even polar interpretations and second, if it has a justifiable reason this is foremost the fact that the Albanian minority is up against a powerful military machine that makes active resistance futile. Rugova's hope is that the international community would not allow genocide - and in a sense, to some extent, this hope is adequate to the situation.

However, such a strategy is inappropriate for Macedonia.

Macedonia's problem is neither a potential genocide nor a military offensive. Macedonia is not threatened by Iraq or by the Serbian army, the way Kosovo has been threatened for a whole decade. Had this been the case, the problem would have been clear and visible from any distance. The problem of/with Macedonia, however, is entirely different.

First, Macedonia lacks substantiality, visibility on the scene of international interaction. It was first noticed in 1993, when the UN deployed a small contingent along the Northern border. Macedonia's visibility has now been enhanced by the deployment of an international force to evacuate observers in Kosovo in an emergency. Yet this is far from enough to draw attention to Macedonia itself and to have its own peculiar situation problematized at the international level. This sort of anonymity is all too familiar to Bulgaria, which is in a similar situation without having Macedonia's problems. The situation has another dimension too - neither Bulgaria nor Macedonia have influential lobbies abroad, unlike Serbia, Albania, not mention Greece.

Second, Macedonia's problem stems from the overlapping, intertwining and clash of visions, perceptions, perspectives, attitudes. The non-trivial is in the type of constitution, in which perspectives play a leading role. [NE MI E YASNO IZRECHENIETO - KATERINA] Should these perceptions become a reality - should Greece strip the country of its national symbols and international legitimacy, should Bulgaria "recover" the nation and the language, should Serbia take away everything associated with Tito's contribution to the establishment of the former Yugoslav republic, and should Albania shelter its national minority - should those perceptions materialize, the Macedonian state would be dismantled. And even the memory of the country would eventually fade - precisely because there are claims to its memories and history too.

The "equidistance" programme is pernicious because it consciously deprives Macedonia of the ability to promote its own initiatives as a result of which the country could achieve a multiple effect: it could force neighbour countries to comply with its interests and make the so-called international community realize that apart from a spot on the map, Macedonia is the centre of the regional field of forces and interactions, and therefore merits special attention. And, most importantly, it could make its own neighbours perceive it, albeit partly, by its own measure and concept of national interest. Today the idea of a "Macedonian national interest" seems absurd simply because the

very existence of a Macedonian nationality has not been recognized. "Equidistance" is tantamount to tacit resignation to this absurd attitude. This thesis may be summarized as follows:

The interaction between the external cultural-political occupation and the internal policy of "equidistance" intensifies

Macedonia's isolation. In its turn, isolation intensifies the effect of Macedonia's "international invisibility." This makes Macedonia even more vulnerable, since its "invisibility" on the international scene intensifies the international community's

"indifference" to the fate of Macedonia.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 A look back

Both the general idea and case studies in this analysis have focused on the following distinctive feature of "the Macedonian case": the duality of facts and perspectives, of events and processes, and their perception. We have also tried to demonstrate the extent to which the pole of perspectives dominates and, in turn, generates events and processes. Thus Macedonia is presented mainly as an interplay of perspectives and the images which they produce. This interplay of perspectives is inevitable and could be identified in any sphere of human communication. Yet Macedonia is an extreme case. So much so, in fact, that "Macedonia as a reality" could be absorbed by the complex of images of Macedonia. From this perspective, Macedonia proves to be a name of somebody else's vision, part of another people's soul, a period in someone else's history, someone else's experience - which is often in contradiction with another experience - someone's Utopia, someone else's project, the object of a neighbour's desire, a lustful-sentimental hallucination in someone's nationalist dream, part of a neighbour country's history, a product of the Communist International's political aesthetics, a piece of Tito's geopolitical puzzle, which, to top it all, has now brazenly usurped somebody else's national symbols, or borrowed somebody else's language and nation, etc.

Overburdened by projections and perspectives, Macedonia seems to be losing its status of a sovereign political actor. It is proving to be what someone else thinks about it. At that, to a far greater extent than what a sovereign and viable organism could - normally - be in the interplay of powers on the international scene. Macedonia is coming to resemble those portraits of communist leaders that were produced by the intersection of powerful beams of light high up in the skies. This overburdening with projections is increasing the distance between Macedonia's image and Macedonia itself, as a result of

which the country is being replaced by its portrait. The picture of Macedonia, rather than its own voice and position, is coming to outweigh Macedonia itself in the sphere of international relations.

This has also made the discourse on and with Macedonia problematic: it tends to impede rather than serve communication.

When the issue of the "Macedonian question" is raised in Bulgaria, few people can understand what it's all about. And those who do, have serious grounds to claim that there simply seems to be no such question. When Greece insists that Macedonia is a Greek district and a name of an Ancient Greek kingdom and that there is simply no such state today, Greece's NATO or EU allies themselves probably find it hard to make sense of this position. When someone in Bulgaria screams blue murder that signing an agreement "in Bulgarian and Macedonian" is tantamount to treason, the chance that they will be taken seriously and understood in the West is negligible. The Macedonian claim that there are Macedonian national minorities in neighbour countries would be far more comprehensible - albeit unacceptable for the neighbour countries - for international forces and organizations, as it is simply intelligible, its meaning is clear. Claims to the nation, language, history, symbols, etc., are articulated in a language that is doomed to remain unintelligible or misunderstood.

6.2. A look forward

This paper tends to be critical and analytical in character.

In this sense it is only the first part of a political analysis of the issue: a specific form of description and analysis and, hence, a specific approach to, definition and concept of the issue. A second part should outline more accurate parameters of the positive alternative. Such a second part would constitute a "policy paper" to which this analysis is only an introduction. Resolution of the issues of regional security demands a strategy that goes beyond the interplay of projected images, perspectives and psychological jargon. Effective policy at the operational level would be impossible without due consideration for the pragmatic sphere. Here we will merely mark certain recommendations in this vein

All parties [COUNTRIES????] seriously involved in the local and regional problem situation should elaborate special mechanisms bringing Macedonia out of its self-isolation - national and regional - and find effective forms of internationalizing the "Macedonian issue," the "Macedonian case" itself. This range of issues should be the subject of an

extensive expert study which would outline both the resource for attaining such an objective and a feasible timetable.

Neighbour countries in the region, just as Macedonia's own political elite, should make an effort to limit and, in the long term, stop using an archaic language that is a mixture of nationalist poetics and legalese. The language of communication in the region should follow the style and meet the standards of the language of norms and institutions used in the West. Of course, we realize that the word "effort" is naive in this context. What is really needed is a powerful range of mechanisms compelling users to change their language.

The debate on Macedonia should allow multiple language use which, however, is based on the presumption that there is a difference and there are different levels - political, institutional, legal, cultural, etc. The different languages should be separated and used by the respective communities - politicians, international lawyers, historians, linguists, etc.

The separation of the languages of the different communities is a slow process; it would not be feasible to expect a rapid change. Still, the public debate in which experts, political analysts and politicians have a leading role may be activated and implement such a recommendation. The first issue on which the parties concerned should reach consensus is the need for changing the very language of debate, expert knowledge, political action, negotiations. The mechanisms that could be activated to this end are the subject of another study.

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*/N-1. Charles and Barbara Jelavich. The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920. A History of East Central Europe, vol. VIII. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977, p. 207-208.

*/N-2. The folkloric disposition has taken institutional forms too - for instance, in presumably official historical doctrines or in history textbooks.

*/N-3. The embassies of the great powers bided their time in silent and, in particular, skeptical expectation of the outcome of the crisis. The International Monetary Fund did not object to introducing a currency board under the Socialist Zhan Videnov cabinet. Most ambassadors voiced regret that there were such alarming developments and preferred to remain aloof from the milestone events. Some declared openly that the West would not tolerate a forced - which actually proved constitutional - removal of the BSP from power, the BSP's rejection of the mandate to form a second government and early parliamentary elections.

*/N-4. The electorate in Montenegro voted for Milosevic's rival Milo Djukanovic in the 1997 presidential, and for the latter's party circle in the 1998 parliamentary elections. This turn of the tide has been a major setback for Milosevic. However, its effects are not unambiguous. If Djukanovic decides that Montenegro will secede from the federation, this might well spark the next war in the Balkans. Serbia will not easily lose its only outlet on a sea. On the other hand, Montenegro does not have an army of its own - the army is federal and takes its orders from Milosevic. That is why the elections in Macedonia have been of exceptional importance to Djukanovic: he now has a new foreign political partner, and this partner is certainly not accidental, considering the deployment of military contingents in Macedonia. And finally, no one could stop Djukanovic and Georgievski from developing relations between their two countries in their own, albeit longer-term interest, without complying with Milosevic. That is how the elections in Macedonia are a factor intensifying the disintegration tendency within the federation.

*/N-5. As noted above, Macedonia is seen and judged by the West from the perspective of the Kosovo crisis due to both fears that it could be a repeat of Kosovo and the misconception that the end of the crisis in Kosovo would put an end to the crisis in the Balkans in general. However, attitudes to the Serbian province itself are similar - namely, from the perspective of the Bosnian case. This use of past crises as a point of reference impedes the resolution of new ones. It is typical of the positivistic disposition, in which the first step and first consideration is in the direction of precedents rather than possibilities. The scenario approach, which has become popular in the past few years, is an attempt to cope with the shortcomings of the positivistic position in the sphere of political analysis and to approach issues from a broader perspective, from that of the possible.

END.

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