

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

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

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R e p o r t

MAY 10-11, 2003



MAVROVO, MACEDONIA

**MACEDONIA'S INTERETHNIC
COALITION: THE FIRST
SIX MONTHS**

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PREFACE

The idea of hosting a meeting among members of the Macedonian governing coalition (the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia [SDSM], the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the opposition and representatives of the international community just six months after the formation of the new government, originated in Lucerne, Switzerland. There, during the third in a series of regional dialogues devoted to the issue of “Albanians and Their Neighbors,” representatives of Macedonia’s new coalition government asked the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) to hold this meeting. Intended in part as an evaluation of the coalition’s progress and as a vehicle for honest and open communication among all parliamentary parties, the meeting could perhaps not have come at a more interesting time in recent Macedonian politics.

Just weeks before the meeting – made possible by the generous support and cooperation of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Embassy in Macedonia—former Prime Minister and leader of the largest ethnic Macedonian opposition party, Ljubco Georgievski publicly disavowed the Ohrid Framework Agreement—an internationally brokered truce that in 2001 helped to bring peace to a country on the brink of civil war. (Georgievski was a signatory to the Framework Agreement.) Days later, Arben Xhaferi, leader of the largest Albanian opposition party, threatened to resign, issuing a moratorium on behalf of his party. Also a signatory to the agreement, Xhaferi said his party was taking a “time-out” in opposition to the government’s failure to adequately implement the agreement.



Left to right: Livia Plaks, Radmila Sekerinska, Allen Kassof, and Stephan Nellen.

These developments, as well as others, not only enlivened the debate, but also underscored the urgency of this dialogue.

The weekend's discussions featured participants from the senior-most levels of the Macedonian government and opposition as well as senior representatives of the international community. Their exchanges are documented in this report.

Macedonia's problems, while technically unique, are emblematic of a broader question facing the world today, in regions as diverse as the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa: can we as a people develop the institutional means so that our many groups can live side by side in peace? PER's purpose in organizing meetings such as this one, is to provide a forum wherein difficult and contentious issues can be discussed in a neutral space free of political pressures.

We express our deepest appreciation to the participants for their stimulating discussions and for their frank analysis of Macedonia's future. PER is grateful to the Swiss Embassy in Macedonia and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA), especially to Federal Councilor Micheline Calmy-Rey, Ambassador Stephan Nellen, Alexander Hoffett, Roland Salvisberg, Matthias Siegfried and Natascha Zupan, for their support in making this event possible. PER also thanks U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Butler and Deputy Chief of Mission Eleanor Nagy for their indispensable assistance.

Alex N. Grigor'ev, PER Program Officer, was responsible for organizing the meeting on the PER side. Barbara Feinstein, PER Associate, who was also a conference participant, is the author of this report, which was edited by PER staff. Except as otherwise noted, participants' statements are without attribution, following PER's practice of encouraging frank and open discussion.

The participants have not had the opportunity to review the text of this report, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey
July 2003

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this report, the spelling of the name "Kosovo" is used (rather than "Kosova," the spelling preferred by Albanians, or "Kosovo and Metohija" or "Kosmet" preferred by Serbs) because that is the spelling most commonly used in the English-speaking world. For the sake of simplicity, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is referred to as "Macedonia." Except as otherwise noted, the term "Albanian" is used to refer to ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia.



Left to right: Jovan Manasievski, Jani Makraduli, Ivan Stoiljkovic, Teuta Arifi.



Left to right: Roland Salvisberg, Ali Ahmeti, Agron Buxhaku.



Ilinka Mitreva

INTRODUCTION

PER's roundtable meeting, "Macedonia's Interethnic Coalition: The First Six Months," was held in Mavrovo, Macedonia on May 10-11, 2003. Attended by some of the country's most senior politicians, both in the government and opposition, as well as members of the international community, including the Swiss Ambassador, United States Ambassador, EU Special Representative in Macedonia, Head of the EU delegation in Macedonia, and representatives of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Council of Europe, the agenda centered on the following questions:

- How do members of the coalition evaluate its performance? Are they satisfied with their partners? Do they foresee stability? What is required to promote such stability?
- How do the opposition parties view their role in improving interethnic cooperation? How do they rate the coalition's performance? Would they do anything different if in power?
- What influence, if any, is exerted by events in nearby countries? Is there a consensus concerning relations with neighbors?
- How do all the political parties view Macedonia's prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration? What do they expect from the West? What does the West expect from Macedonia?

In many ways, the meeting was a more focused continuation of a roundtable discussion PER held in Lucerne, Switzerland in November, entitled "Albanians and Their Neighbors: Is the Status Quo Acceptable?" (The report is available at www.per-usa.org.) The Lucerne roundtable, the third in a regional series devoted to the issue of "Albanians and Their Neighbors," brought together the top Albanian politicians in the Balkans with their counterparts from Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as prominent officials from the international community. While the focus of the roundtable was regional, a substantial portion of the discussion in Lucerne was devoted to relations between Macedonia's two major ethnic communities. Given the richness of this discussion, it soon became clear to participants and organizers alike that an independent meeting was indeed appropriate.

In hosting the Mavrovo roundtable, PER, in collaboration with the Swiss Government, has launched the first in a series of meetings to be known, in the words of Swiss Ambassador Stephan Nellen, as "the Mavrovo

process." Indeed, in a communiqué issued upon the meeting's conclusion, the participants affirmed their willingness to continue this dialogue in the future. What follows is a characterization of their exchanges at this, the first meeting in this "process."

MACEDONIA: A "COUNTRY OF WILL?"

Opening the meeting in absentia, Swiss Federal Councilor Micheline Calmy-Rey, head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, stressed in her written statement that the Swiss remain committed to Macedonia's "stabilization process." Given that close to 60,000 Macedonian citizens currently reside in Switzerland, the country cannot "remain indifferent" to developments within Macedonia, she said. Indeed, since 1996, she added, the Swiss have committed almost 65 million Swiss Francs to technical and financial assistance programs in Macedonia.

Switzerland and Macedonia share many "similarities," noted Ambassador Stephan Nellen, which enable these countries to "learn from one another." Calling Switzerland a "country of will," the Ambassador stressed that more than just geography and history have allowed this "multiethnic, multilingual and multireligious" nation to flourish. Indeed, he continued, these factors alone cannot account for the desire of all groups to "remain united." Instead, they must share a "common interest" in doing so. "Only if the gains of staying together are shared amongst all groups in a fair and just way," declared the Ambassador, "will the different groups have an interest to be and remain united." In order for such a model to succeed, he added, groups must demonstrate "confidence" and trust in one another as well as a tradition of "shared responsibility" that respects the needs and rights of minority groups.

Setting the stage for the weekend's discussions, PER President Allen Kassof reminded participants that Macedonia is by no means alone in trying to find the key to resolving interethnic tensions. Indeed, despite more than ten years of efforts, proclamations and standards set forth by the international community, he said, "solutions" to the Balkans' interethnic problems remain fleeting. Moreover, unlike its neighbors, Macedonia has enjoyed "generally peaceful relations throughout the 1990s," he added, noting in particular the country's tradition of interethnic governing coalitions. Stressing that Macedonia remains a critical element in the region's overall development, Kassof concluded by inviting the participants to consider "what kind of history" they and their competitors would like to make.

ASSESSING THE COALITION GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE

Coalition Views

Assessments of the government's performance differed sharply depending on participants' party affiliations and status within the political scene. Among coalition members, the assessment was largely positive. According to one member of the coalition, the government can take credit for "opening and closing" two key issues—the use of the Albanian language in travel documents and parliamentary procedure; and the consistent implementation of the amnesty law. Referring to the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), this participant declared the coalition as markedly different from its predecessors, in that it is comprised in part of political parties that hadn't participated in previous governments.

In the opinion of another coalition member, one of the government's greatest successes has been its stabilization of the country, including the implementation of the amnesty law for former insurgents and the integration of more Albanian citizens within public life, including the police

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force. The government's number one priority, said this official, is to achieve greater "integration"—both within the country among Macedonians and Albanians, and in transatlantic structures such as the EU and NATO. Like his colleagues in the coalition, this participant counseled patience as the government endeavors to tackle issues such as achieving equitable representation of ethnic communities in public life

and the decentralization process. Also like his colleagues, this participant underscored the government's commitment to implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement, calling it "a good tool to achieve stability in Macedonia" and to pave the way for EU and NATO integration.

According to an ethnic Macedonian member of the coalition, one can see many signs of progress in the country today. Whereas one year ago, the idea of amending the constitution was unfathomable to most ethnic Macedonians, he said, today the majority accepts this as a necessary fact.

They have also accepted the expansion of the official use of the Albanian language, he said, adding that a year ago, the notion of decentralization was controversial among ethnic Macedonians, particularly for majority Albanian areas. Today, he noted, the government is taking serious steps to make decentralization a reality. Just one year ago, the idea of an ethnic Albanian Minister of Education was similarly unimaginable, he argued, and yet today, this is the reality. The concept of amnesty for former guerrilla fighters, he asserted, once anathema to the majority of ethnic Macedonians, has been accepted by the public as a first step toward reconciliation. Most people believe the country is moving in the right direction, said this participant; trust in institutions is higher now than under the previous government. Indeed, according to another member of the coalition, the current government has "changed the political rhetoric" in the country. Unlike the previous administration, he added, this one is not rocked by scandal or corruption.

Opposition Views

Much of the criticism voiced by members of the opposition concerned the coalition's handling of issues related to ethnic Albanian rights under the Framework Agreement. According to a senior member of the Albanian opposition, a number of myths or "simplifications" require clarification. First, he declared, it is often said that the war in Macedonia took place "because Albanians did not have any rights." The argument follows, he said, that the Ohrid Framework Agreement has given Albanians those rights, and so peace is bound to follow. Such characterizations are groundless and simplistic, said this participant, maintaining that the position of Albanians in society improved markedly under the stewardship of the former government. One need only look to Tetovo during the former administration, said this official, to see that Albanians held many of the most senior positions there, including that of the chief of police.

The second simplification, added this politician, is the notion that now that the use of the Albanian language has been expanded in parliamentary procedure and other documents, everything will be "all right." This is not the case, said this participant. The use of the Albanian language should be "automatic." The present government, he declared, lacks the "political will" to treat Albanian as an "official" language. Instead, the issue is addressed on a case-by-case basis. This official made his point by referencing the Law on Passports, stressing that the state will only issue a passport in both the Macedonian and Albanian languages at the specific

request of citizens. This is akin to the situation of Serbs in the Vukovar region of Croatia, he argued, where a similar service is made available but “not one Serb” has taken advantage of it for fear of retribution by the authorities. Use of the language “needs to be mandatory” if it is to be truly official, he said. Otherwise, these rights are unusable, he declared. The situation is similar to that of a person “without two feet” being told he can “participate in the Olympic Games,” he chided.

As to the law on amnesty, this participant rejected his counterparts’ assessment that it is “respected” adding that those who have been released from prison have faced even greater dangers in having to “defend themselves outside of prison.” Finally, this official voiced his discontent with respect to the current government’s “fight against corruption,” arguing that such efforts should be focused on the present, not on “looking for it in the previous period.”

DPA MORATORIUM: A “TIME-OUT” FOR PEACE?

Much of the weekend’s discussion centered on a then-recent decision by the Democratic Party for Albanians (DPA)—the largest ethnic Albanian opposition group—to declare a “moratorium” on their participation in government and on party leader Arben Xhaferi’s offer to resign from parliament. Criticized by members of the coalition for seeking to “softly distance themselves from the Framework Agreement,” DPA members sought to clarify their stance. The moratorium is “a red alert for the government” and others that “things aren’t going as they should be,” said one DPA member. “More than 40 percent of the work is not going at all,” continued this participant, adding that despite coalition claims of enlarging the number of ethnic Albanians in the police force, “not one chief of police is Albanian.”

“This time-out for ... peace is a continuity of a peaceful policy that the DPA has led ever since its inception,” declared this participant, adding that the party is not backing away from the Framework Agreement. On the contrary, he said, it is important to note that the DPA was a signatory to the Ohrid Agreement from the Albanian side.

Still, members of the coalition remained skeptical of the DPA’s intentions. “We are always going to go around in circles if we say that now we’re in the opposition, we can move away from the Framework Agreement,” declared one coalition member. Asked another coalition par-

ticipant rhetorically: “Is this a time-out between two wars or is the time-out about something else?”

GEORGIEVSKI’S VIEWS: INDEPENDENTLY HELD OR A SHIFT FOR HIS PARTY?

Criticism by coalition members was also leveled against members of VMRO-DPMNE—the largest ethnic Macedonian opposition party—whose leader, former Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski, had recently published an opinion piece in the Macedonian press calling for an end to the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the partition of Macedonia along ethnic lines. Participants sought to understand whether these views were shared by members of VMRO-DPMNE or whether they were Mr. Georgievski’s alone. On the whole, participants from VMRO-DPMNE sought to distance themselves from Georgievski’s statements, reiterating their party’s support for the implementation of the Framework Agreement. Said one participant, “it is a hallmark of democracy for individuals speaking for themselves to express their views.” Nevertheless, commented one member of the coalition government, referring to both Xhaferi and Georgievski, when statements are made by “two leaders of two important parties,” those are “not unimportant even if they are given as personal statements.”

COALITION FOOT-DRAGGING OR GENUINE POLITICAL OBSTACLES?

Responding to allegations by the opposition of foot-dragging, one member of the coalition asked, “Are we slow?” “Yes, we are,” she said, but that is only because working through the political process takes time. This participant disputed the allegation by a member of the opposition that the coalition has missed deadlines for implementation of the Framework Agreement. Aside from “sensitive areas” such as defense and police reform, where deadlines were set and have been met, the framers of the agreement purposely resisted imposing deadlines for the implementation of the remaining elements, she argued.

The slowness of the process is “not due to the lack of political will,” said another coalition member. Nevertheless, she conceded, the “level of sensitivity” that the ethnic Albanian members of the coalition display regarding certain issues, is “higher than the sensitivity of our ethnic Macedonian

partners.” This puts ethnic Albanian members of the coalition “in a position of pushing the process forward,” she continued, particularly with reference to the issue of equitable representation. At the same time, acknowledged this participant, there are very real “administrative procedures” that make the process slower than many would prefer. Such procedures notwithstanding, she cautioned that the government must achieve “results” and publicize those results. If not, she warned, there will be “a loss of trust in the population who elected us.”

The government is “obviously ... buying time” countered a member of the opposition. This is a trend, he said, that started in Macedonia in 1991 under SDSM and “is continuing today.”

ACHIEVING “EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION”

Of the remaining Framework Agreement-related issues to be resolved, “equitable representation” and decentralization figured as the most contentious and oft-cited issues among participants. According to one ethnic Macedonian member of the coalition, the government faces a virtually impossible dilemma—that of “reduc[ing] public administration” while still “implement[ing] equitable representation” as called for by the Framework Agreement. The former government, he charged, “left us with a public administration of about 90,000 people”—a workforce he deemed “non-productive” and an unjustifiable “burden” on the country and its economy.

Responding to this charge, a participant from the opposition countered that this increase in hiring was due to the Macedonian government’s history of party patronage and discrimination in state employment. Maintaining that those not aligned with the ruling government have always been prevented from obtaining state jobs, this official asserted that once his government took power, there was an “immense buildup of pressure” to hire those who had previously been denied employment. In order to “streamline” the public sector, said this official, “fair criteria” must be adopted by the government to avoid targeting people “associated with a particular party.” Moreover, cautioned the former coalition participant, state hiring should not be done solely along ethnic lines. “We should not kick Macedonians out to take Albanians in,” he said.

“It’s true that the administration is cumbersome,” countered an ethnic Albanian member of the coalition, but ethnic Albanians “must not be the victim of this process.” Conceding that both equitable representation and decentralization are “not easy topics that can simply be passed,” this participant

noted that this was a point he intended to stress to the international community, particularly the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has called for Macedonia to cut its government workforce. A member of the ethnic Albanian opposition, however, warned his coalition counterparts not to use delaying tactics that may unnecessarily lengthen the process.

Not only is the government not using delaying tactics, argued one member of the coalition, it has taken it upon itself to set targets for increasing equitable representation. By the end of 2003, continued another coalition member, the government aims to have increased the percentage of ethnic Albanians in public administration from 11.2 percent to 14 percent. In January 2004, he said, the public will have the opportunity to review whether these goals were met. Nevertheless, conceded this participant, the government faces significant obstacles in achieving this goal—namely, the lack of highly educated ethnic Albanians. Currently, only a small percentage of ethnic Albanians have university degrees, he noted, more than 50 percent of which are teachers. The government must invest in building human capital, he argued, in order to enable more young people to be absorbed into the government.

DECENTRALIZATION: A PRIORITY?

With respect to decentralization, one coalition member called the process “very complex,” declaring that the government finds itself in a “crossfire” of contradictory views from members of the international community. While on the one hand, members of the EU and other factions within the international community have been receptive to the idea, the World Bank and the IMF on the other hand, are concerned, he said, that if realized too quickly, fiscal decentralization could lead to “huge distortions” in the government’s monetary policy.

Macedonia will “need assistance from experts in the international community,” said another coalition member, on issues ranging from the size of municipalities to territorial division to tax revenue collection, to infrastructure. “Today we have some municipalities with 500 people,” he said, adding that this was ultimately unsustainable.

“Why did we ask for decentralization?” suggested one member of the ethnic Albanian opposition. Because “decentralization was a cure against federalization,” he answered. “Unless we have appropriate decentralization,” he warned, “a number of other options are going to arise.” This participant noted the present lack of readiness for the devolution of power to the

local level as well as the “unavoidable problems with respect to financing municipalities.” Solving these issues, he asserted, must be a priority of the government.

The government should adopt a pilot project, suggested one member of the coalition, in order to learn by example “where the obstacles lie.” “If we approach this together,” she continued, “there aren’t problems that can’t be solved.” Adding that it is not the government’s intention to “trick” anyone, she stated that “the burden of implementation is on our shoulders.” “We’re prepared to withstand that burden,” she continued, “but need honest support” from both the ethnic Albanian and Macedonian opposition.

ETHNIC ALBANIANS IN GOVERNMENT: LEGITIMATE PARTNERS OR MERE SHOWPIECES?

Substantial discussion was devoted to the question of ethnic Albanians in government as well as their role in present and past governing coalitions. One member of the ethnic Macedonian opposition took issue with the title of the roundtable—“Macedonia’s Interethnic Coalition: The First Six Months”—because he said that it suggested that the present government was “a novelty in terms of interethnic politics.” In fact, said this participant, Macedonia has enjoyed a tradition of interethnic governance since its independence. SDSM’s and LDP’s invitation to DUI to join the coalition, he noted, was no different from VRMO-DPMNE’s and LP’s invitation to DPA to join them in 1998.

This view was not shared, however, by one ethnic Albanian member of the current government. “Our partnership is working on different grounds now,” he said. “We are understanding each other.” Addressing the VMRO-DPMNE/DPA coalition, he asked, “how can such a coalition function” when the VMRO-DPMNE also refused to “listen to the Albanian language” and when “they still call members of my party terrorists?” At the same time, this participant rebuked his current coalition partners for failing to include more ethnic Albanian members in official foreign delegations—a demand, he said, that should be made by members of the international community.

According to a member of the ethnic Albanian, non-DPA opposition, however, all ethnic Albanian coalition partners, both past and present, are puppets of their Macedonian “partners.” It is “an inevitable fact,” he said, that Macedonians do not “take Albanians as a partner to rule together,” but rather

as a partner to “help them in governing.” Indeed, he added, “I have the impression that ... a great number of Macedonian politicians are occupied with the wish for domination”—a charge that was roundly denied by one member of the ethnic Macedonian coalition. This official also rejected the notion that the ethnic Macedonian parties in the coalition are intent on making DUI “irrelevant.” “Having an Albanian partner in government,” she said, “is only important if that partner has legitimacy ... and credibility.”

ETHNIC INTEGRATION: PIPEDREAM OR NECESSITY?

“Legal integration does not mean social integration,” said one member of the coalition. Politicians, whether in government or in the opposition, have one primary job, he said—to “create a new atmosphere for relations between Albanians and Macedonians.” Unless and until the gains of the Framework Agreement can be translated into the behavior of ordinary people, he added, “something will be missing.” Concurring with this assessment, another participant argued that the greatest problem “infecting the future of Macedonia” is the “ethno-isolation” of ethnic Albanian and Macedonian children. “If we don’t solve this problem now,” he warned, “we will be repeating history.”

In spite of the Framework Agreement, added this participant, identity is “still understood ethnically or tribally, not civically.” Moreover, he continued, “we have never built a consensus” among ethnic Macedonians or ethnic Albanians in support of the Framework Agreement. “Part of the Macedonian intellectual elite never accepted” the Framework Agreement, argued this participant, because they considered it “treason.” At the same time, he said, part of the “extremist Albanian bloc” similarly failed to accept the agreement as an adequate solution. Among ethnic Macedonians, said one member of the coalition, there was a “fear” that in fact the Framework Agreement was not the “goal” of ethnic Albanians, but rather one of “the stages of solution to the country.”

Ethnic Macedonians feel a “pressure to withdraw” from regions where ethnic Albanians make up a majority, she added. The former “tend to migrate from rural to urban areas,” continued this participant, adding that this trend has been offset by “an Albanian population that is younger and oriented toward agriculture.” The “high birth rate” among ethnic Albanians, said one ethnic Albanian member of the government, is what ethnic Macedonians “consider the greatest threat.”

Among ethnic Albanian participants, “assimilation” was cited as one of the community’s more prevalent fears. “If common institutions are identified with only one ethnicity,” said one ethnic Albanian participant, then, as an ethnic group you feel that you’re “not represented enough and can be lost.” Indeed, added another ethnic Albanian participant, in the Balkans, Albanians are “the only nation with no ethnic ‘cousins.’” Citing a gradual deterioration and shrinking through time of “the Albanian space,” this participant suggested that Albanians can “be a stabilizing or destabilizing factor.” “Albanians can be a cohesive element in integration into a Europe without borders,” he said. However, if there is “no democracy in states where they live,” added this participant, “I’m afraid they can become a destabilizing factor.” The solution, he said, was to ensure greater opportunities and integration for ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. “If Albanians consider themselves integrated into the country,” he said, “there will be no doubt about their loyalty.” Integration is a “two-way process,” he noted; in exchange for declaring their loyalty to Macedonia, Albanians should “be accepted as loyal citizens of Macedonia.”

Citing a recent poll in a weekly newspaper, this participant alleged that most ethnic Macedonians would prefer to live in the country as it was “before 1991.” Asked whether life would be better if Macedonians were only one ethnicity, he said that more than 80 percent of ethnic Macedonians said “yes,” whereas only 16 percent of ethnic Albanians agreed. The country’s problems should be looked at on a regional level, he argued, adding that Macedonia’s identity is “rejected by the Bulgarians,” its name “not accepted by the Greeks,” and its church unrecognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

According to one member of the coalition, speaking on behalf of the Romani (Gypsy) community in Macedonia, the government should work toward integration of all communities, not just ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. The Roma, like all ethnic minorities, he said, deserve “equal representation” under the new Constitution. Their integration and the acceptance of “all communities as equal citizens” is critical to the country’s identity as a multiethnic state. An ethnic Serb participant agreed with this point of view.

“The only way to escape devastating conflict,” counseled one participant, is by “deemphasizing ethnic cleavages in economic prosperity.” Economic prosperity, said this participant, will move Macedonia “toward what binds us together rather than what makes us different.”

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN MACEDONIA

In the words of one U.S. participant, the international community’s responsibilities vis-à-vis Macedonia are threefold—to share its vision, its optimism and its values. The West’s primary obligation, he said, is to create and sustain “an enabling environment.” Indeed, this role was evident when both this participant and his European colleague were called upon during the first day of the meeting to resolve a dispute in Vejce, a village near Tetovo, where local ethnic Albanians had erected a roadblock to prevent ethnic Macedonians from honoring the two-year anniversary of the killing of their relatives.

Underscoring the critical role played by the international community in facilitating communication between the governing majority and the opposition, one coalition member urged members of the international community to continue to organize conferences such as this one—at least in the short-term, until the coalition and opposition “acquire the competency” to effectively communicate with one another without outside help.

Above all, participants stressed the importance of the international community’s continuing engagement in Macedonia. Said one government official, “for a long time, people in the Balkans complained that the influences of big forces tended to make things more complicated... I believe the true danger [today] is not the engagement of the international community but its disengagement.” Such engagement, argued another coalition member, should include technical cooperation as well as financial assistance which will enable people to reconstruct their homes and strengthen “economic capacity” in multiethnic areas so that internally displaced persons (IDPs) can return home. Technical assistance should continue to be provided to the government, said another official, particularly in the contentious and complex areas of “territorial organization,” “decentralization,” “infrastructure” and “tax collection.”

The international community should help broker the dispute over what “official use” of the Albanian language means in reality, argued a member of the opposition. Experts from the international community, he said, should advise as to what preparations are necessary to put the Albanian language into official use.

In the opinion of a member of the government, the international community should act as a “witness” to Macedonia’s faithful implementation of the

Framework Agreement. Insofar as the government meets the guidelines set out in the Agreement, it should be rewarded by the international community, he said. For example, the Schengen visa regime should be abolished for Macedonia. Such rewards, he argued, would enhance the stature of the Agreement in the eyes of both ethnic Macedonians and Albanians.

THE ISSUE OF MACEDONIA'S NAME

Part of the discussion was devoted to the West's treatment of Macedonia's constitutional name. Participants largely agreed about the importance of gaining recognition under the constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia," or simply "Macedonia" as opposed to the country's UN-recognized name, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

In the eyes of one government official, the recent signing of the Adriatic Charter (signed in the spring of 2003 in Tirana by Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and the United States) signified that the issue of the name "has been closed." The fact that U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell signed a "strategic document" where the name "Macedonia," rather than the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was used, represented an important victory for the state. Indeed, said another government official, while Greece's insistence on using the name "FYROM" is "frustrating," everyday practice highlights the sheer "absurdity" of this reference.

Another member of the government, however, disagreed with this assessment. In signing the Framework Agreement, and consenting to a multiethnic concept of the Macedonian state, he said, ethnic Macedonians feared that their identity was at risk. Such fears could have been assuaged, he argued, had the international community rewarded this decision with an unequivocal acceptance of the country's name—the Republic of Macedonia. Failure to do so has only increased the sentiment among ethnic Macedonians that the agreement was forced upon them by the international community.

RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORS: THE IMPACT OF KOSOVO'S "FINAL STATUS"

The participants differed with regard to their assessment of the impact of an independent Kosovo, if this is the outcome of resolving the province's final status, on Macedonia's present and future. "The elite should not a priori fear an independent Kosovo," said one government official. He

cautioned, however, that until this issue is dealt with, Macedonia's own development will be on hold. If not solved in the next few years, he argued, the country will experience negative repercussions in its bid for NATO and EU accession. As such, Macedonia cannot afford to "remain on the sidelines," he warned. Policymakers should start seriously thinking about what is in the country's national interest as well as "what types of guarantees [they] would want to see for [Macedonia's] security." Such dialogue would be welcomed by the international community, said one diplomat, predicting that "the final status of Kosovo may be on the agenda ... as early as next year." This participant urged the Macedonian government to "be ready and involved when it comes to resolving that issue."

A number of participants voiced their contentment with recent statements made by senior politicians in Kosovo and Albania that they support both the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the preservation of Macedonia's territorial integrity. One member of the ethnic Macedonian opposition, however, criticized Kosovar leaders for "their views on border crossings." Disputes arising between Macedonia and Kosovo "should not be tied" to the issue of border crossings, he warned. This critical and sensitive issue "should be finalized soon."

Protecting the right to self-determination for Kosovo protects Macedonia, said one ethnic Albanian member of the opposition. It is in the state's interest, he argued, to "guard" the idea of self-determination in the aftermath of Yugoslavia's breakup. Supporting the idea of sovereignty for Kosovo is consistent with that ideal. Indeed, added another participant, the Macedonian leadership has nothing to fear from Kosovar ambitions. Kosovo is not interested in Macedonia's territorial borders, he said. Instead, counseled this participant, government officials from Macedonia should remain focused on creating a "will to stay in Macedonia." Such thinking was echoed by a U.S. participant who urged policymakers to stop "worrying about what's going on outside of your borders." Kosovo's status "will be resolved," he said, but it is unlikely that Macedonia will be directly affected. More importantly, said this participant, the country should continue to engage in "productive regional dynamics."

MACEDONIA'S BID FOR EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

The key to Macedonia's prosperity and security, suggested a number of participants, is its accession to Euro-Atlantic institutions such as the

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Indeed, by adopting the Adriatic Charter, declared one government official, Macedonia was “half-way to full membership” in NATO. Nevertheless, cautioned a representative of NATO, members of the government and opposition must realize that they possess a “joint ticket” to Euro-Atlantic integration. By bickering among themselves and thereby delaying implementation of the Framework Agreement, he said, the country risks “being left behind.” In seeking to gain accession to both the EU and NATO, he advised, Macedonia should move toward a policy of open, albeit secure borders, greater regional cooperation and strengthened economic development.

In order to bolster its chances of getting into NATO, said one coalition member, Macedonia must be fully in control of its own security. As such, it is critical, he said, that the EU Concordia mission leave “by the end of the year.” “It’s going to be bad for Macedonia if it has troops on its territory”

There could be no foreign investment without political stability.

after January 1, 2004, said this participant, adding that this presence will render the Atlantic Charter “useless.” To have “foreign powers in your country” two to three years after signing the Framework Agreement,

he continued, is potentially “problematic” because it gives a perception of “security dependency.” Citing the recent incident in Vejce, this participant urged against the tendency to “call people on the phone” to come “help solve” the country’s problems. “Regardless of how many times Vejce-like incidents happen,” he added, “we need to ensure our own security.”

While a U.S. participant did not dispute the need for Macedonia to guarantee its own security, he rejected the claim that Concordia’s continued presence would jeopardize the country’s NATO membership. “We still have 100,000 troops in Germany,” said this participant. “Let’s not assume that’s a factor in joining NATO.” “The door to NATO is open,” he insisted, insofar as the country continues to increase regional cooperation and meet the other criteria for candidacy.

As for foreign investment, one international diplomat stressed that there could be “no foreign investment without political stability.” Posing a rhetorical question, he asked “how can I convince ... [foreign] investors to come here when not even people in this country have confidence in the future?”

MAVROVO COMMUNIQUÉ

The following “communiqué” was adopted by the participants upon conclusion of the Mavrovo meeting. The participants also agreed informally to reconvene under PER auspices in six months.

“The participants at the roundtable, Macedonia’s Interethnic Coalition: The First Six Months, organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations and the Swiss Embassy in Macedonia on May 10-11, 2003 in Mavrovo, Macedonia affirm that:

In light of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, they found the meeting both useful and helpful for strengthening interethnic cooperation in Macedonia and as a tool for furthering Macedonia’s path toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

The participants would be willing to continue their dialogue through this format in the future. The participants thank PER and the Swiss Embassy in Macedonia for their efforts.”



Left to right: Arben Xhaferi and Menduh Thaci.



Left to right: Den Doncevi, Ganka Samuilova-Cvetanovska, and Stevo Pendarovski.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(English alphabetical order)

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Arben Xhaferi, President

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Ivan Stoiljkovic, President

Democratic Union for Integration

Ali Ahmeti, President
Teuta Arifi, Vice President
Agron Buxhaku, Vice President, Parliament of Macedonia

Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity

Den Doncevi, Member, Executive Committee
Ganka Samuilova-Cvetanovska, Member, Parliament of Macedonia

Liberal Party

Stojan Andov, President

Liberal Democratic Party

Jovan Manasievski, Minister of Labor and Social Policy of Macedonia

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