

Macedonia and European policy

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By Amina Šiljak-Jesenković

Orijentalni Institut u Sarajevu,
Sarajevo, 2003
(in Bosnian)

This study is an attempt to compare
Turkish and Bosnian phrasicons in
the light of their linguistically most
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Introduction

On February 26, Macedonia had officially planned to submit an application for EU membership. This decision was discussed in depth and at length in the country and was long overdue as the project enjoyed broad consensus and stood the chance of uniting all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or political background. However, this step was delayed until March because of the tragic death of President Boris Trajkovski, who had signed the application only days before, in a helicopter crash in late February.

Macedonia is one of the weakest countries in south-east Europe despite, on the other hand, having signed the first Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in April 2001 and having held since June 2003 the promise of a 'European perspective' as a full EU member, so it is worthwhile to look more deeply into the internal problems of the country and into the support of the international community and the Stability Pact in overcoming them.

Thirteen years of independence

What sort of a state is it where its name is claimed by one neighbouring country and the church by a second, and the language evaluated by a third as a dialect? What is left of such a nation? What is there that remains on which a state can be built? What sort of state is it where intellectuals actually quarrel about the flag, the coat of arms and the anthem? At least, Macedonia is the only country in the world where the Macedonian language is the official language of the country, while it does possess borders, laws and a government. Even so, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, forced on the country from the outside, changed even the first of these as the Albanian language is now allowed in parliament and in many regions of the country as the second official language. In the meantime, the unresolved status of Kosovo and the unclear future of UN Declaration 1244 are a permanent threat to security as the Kosovo parliament is not willing to accept the internationally-recognised border between Macedonia and Kosovo. Ohrid forced the government and the parliament into changes in the constitution and other regulations. Is this a country that is really independent?

Kiro Gligorov, Macedonia's first president, declared independence from Yugoslavia in August 1991 and formed a sovereign country without bloodshed: a historic victory, since no other region of the former Yugoslavia seceded more peacefully. Multiculturalism was not envisaged, but there was always an Albanian party in the government and rights for the Albanian minority were, albeit slowly, granted. Macedonia managed, therefore, despite only around two-thirds of the inhabitants being Macedonian (one-quarter are of Albanian origin while other ethnic minorities include Roma, Vlachs, Serbs and Turks), to stay out of all the wars in the region. UN blue helmets, UNPREDEP, were stationed in Macedonia until 1999 to safeguard the borders with

former Yugoslavia. However, this mission ended subsequent to the intervention of China after the full recognition of Taiwan by the Macedonian government.

During the Kosovo crisis in 1999, Macedonia accepted 290 000 refugees from Kosovo and offered an additional 160 000 the opportunity to transit via Macedonia to other countries worldwide. The person then in charge was the later-elected president, Boris Trajkovski, who earned a high reputation in the country and amongst the international community due to his actions and oversight. UNHCR and many NGOs supported and cared for the refugees. International military units received permission to be stationed in Macedonia, to use its airspace and to prepare for the intervention in Kosovo. A NATO HQ is still in Macedonia, as are some KFOR support bases. From September 2001 until 15 December 2003, an additional international military presence was necessary to control the fragile peace between the Albanian rebels and the Macedonian security forces. An EU police support mission, named Proxima, officially replaced what, in the end, had been the first EU military mission.

What happened in 2001 to bring Macedonia very close to civil war? The Kosovo crisis ignited the latent conflict between Macedonians and Albanians as, ultimately, the international community compelled Macedonia into accepting refugees without knowing for how long they would be there and without assessing the risk to the country and its own ethnic tensions. The Macedonian majority developed immediate fears that this would lead to an immigration of Albanians into their country and that this would change the relationships between ethnic groups. This fear intensified nationalist and radical approaches to Albanians and, thus, supported the open conflict that was brought into Macedonia in 2001 by the armed fighters from Kosovo. In the end, the National Liberation Army (NLA) managed, with the help of some 1 500 fighters, to ensure that the Macedonian security forces lost control in the northern and north-western parts of the country. The international community reacted extremely late and in a surprising way by accepting the NLA as a negotiation partner with NATO, in this phase, having permanent contact with their political leaders. Thus, the former 'murderous thugs' (Lord Robertson) gained credit and were eventually converted into a ruling partner in the government after the last elections.

It is obvious that the international community lacked a consistent strategy to deal with the Balkans as a whole and was not even sufficiently prepared to prevent crisis; even though experiences in Kosovo clearly indicated that suddenly all other minorities in a mostly Albanian environment were in danger. Or, in short: neither the UN nor NATO had, after more than ten years of experience in the Balkans, developed any plans for crisis-management to protect human rights including, in this case, the sovereignty of Macedonia. Thus, the Ohrid Framework Agreement became the solution and had to be accepted. No more bloodshed and avert all-out civil war was the line; no-one gave thought to the other risk factors that have been a factor in other crisis areas in the Balkans as well.

This was the negative signal to the world in 2001: if you arm and fight against the sovereignty of a country you can change a constitution. Underlining this success of the NLA, an agreement was forced on Macedonia through international moderation which had the effect of minimising all internal efforts towards further, albeit slow,

changes and damaged the country-building process. Macedonia is, after thirteen years of existence, no longer an independent country, even though officially it is sovereign. The centrepiece of external influence is the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement

The Ohrid Framework Agreement ended, from 13 August 2001, the open hostilities between armed Albanians demanding more rights for the Albanian minority and their fight against the security forces of the country. Within days, this agreement was named a peace accord. A peace accord needs a winner and a loser. A political compromise – and this is Ohrid – usually has neither winners nor losers and to end a fight with a compromise does not include such a category of definition. In the Balkans, compromise is always evaluated as a defeat, as no side has attained their goals. If one still insists on talking about winners, this might be the international community, which forced all the party leaders in the Macedonian parliament to accept the agreement, and the people of Macedonia who could now develop the hope that armed, open hostilities were over.

Ohrid, as a start into a new future, was nevertheless deeply problematic: the agreement was dictated by foreign politicians, especially Javier Solana for the EU and Lord Robertson for NATO. Diplomats and foreign politicians were convinced they had brought lasting peace to the country and thus named it a peace accord. However, the tensions were never minimised or overcome, and the almost daily murders and arsons are proof, not to mention the refugees that still cannot move back into their homes three years after the Agreement. The international community forced all parties into a coalition government and was then surprised that the population and the members of the parliament did not immediately accept the envisaged changes. Whenever the process of implementation stopped, Robertson and/or Solana travelled to Skopje, hastily developed a new, intermediate solution that was officially accepted by the government but which was rarely implemented by the parliament or accepted by the public. There was never any attempt to get back around the negotiation table and to discuss changes to the Ohrid accord as this would have meant a confession that the results were not perfect. Thus, public opinion could not change for the better and the Macedonian majority more frequently raised the question of the sovereignty of Macedonia, while ethnic tension also rose.

Changes to the law, the content of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, were forced on a constitution that was positively approved by Europe ten years previously: one of the members of the Badinter Commission which checked the constitution, and especially the conditions for minorities, was Roman Herzog, the former President of Germany. The Macedonian constitution was praised at that time as the best in the western Balkans and an example for other countries. All this was no longer relevant after armed Albanians – at first from outside the country – decided to fight the security forces and call it liberation. Ohrid is not a peace accord, it is an international dictate which transformed Macedonia partially into a protectorate with foreign soldiers visibly looking after security.

Nevertheless, the Ohrid Framework Agreement brought immediate results as, one day after the signing in Ohrid, on August 14, the NLA agreed with NATO on how to disarm and the conditions under which it would disband. A discernible result was that, some weeks later, the NLA put down its weapons, handed some over to NATO and ceased to exist as an armed formation. However, the structures still exist today, and command and control can easily be restored through the permanently-used lines of communication – as has recently been proven in the Kumanovo area, where former NLA Brigade 113 informed the population of certain incidents in areas that the security forces still do not control, even though they have officially returned, with ethnically-mixed police patrols. These police officers were trained by US and OSCE specialists, but meet no international standards.

International involvement to resolve this conflict was dominated by the preference for ethno-federalist constitutional arrangements which Ohrid turns out to be. The questions, however, remain: should the international community get involved in the internal affairs of independent states and, by their moderation, force solutions on the people and the politicians? Can Agreements like Ohrid be included among the factors for state failure, by taking decisions away from the responsibility of elected members of parliament?

The lack of sustainability in European terms

The results of Ohrid are not, up to now, positive and, in the long run, will weaken Macedonia even more. Here is just one example of the lack of sustainability in European terms: Annex B of Ohrid states, among other legislative modifications:

3. Law on Municipal Boundaries

The Assembly shall adopt by the end of 2002 a revised law on municipal boundaries, taking into account the results of the census and the relevant guidelines set forth in the Law on Local self-government.

A clear guideline and a clear timeframe set by the international community. The phrasing gives some room for manoeuvre, but not too much. However, what has happened up to now is that, even though the law on local self-government has passed through Parliament, it cannot be effective because the laws on local self-financing are still missing, as is the revised law on municipal boundaries. The results of the delayed census were publicised at the end of 2003, but have still not been properly evaluated.

This example alone proves that the international community did not develop sufficient follow-up activities to make sure that Ohrid became a reality. The Stability Pact, originating from the Kosovo crisis and NATO intervention, has the goal of stabilising the region and supporting integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, primarily in the EU. In all its local terms and arrangements, the Stability Pact depends on the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the OSCE. The OSCE and the World Bank are deeply involved and try to achieve acceptable results, but this work in the local field is dominated by one idea: human rights for everyone will make things work

automatically. In contrast, the political will to put pressure on governments to stick to common, set schedules can nowhere be found.

There is one basic mistake of the international community that also exists in other countries: Ohrid re-organises Macedonia but its single-minded concentration on the issue of minority protection is to the detriment of a proper consideration of the issue of state consolidation and, thus, sustainability, reliability and endurance. This should have been the task of the international community, but it was left to inexperienced Macedonian politicians and their dilatory approaches. President Trajkovski was about the only politician to realise that, without changes and reforms, the country would slide into the next crisis. In spite of being a nationalist, he worked hard to keep Macedonia as a sovereign country and to avoid separation: the decisions had to be made in parliament, not in the President's office. Therefore, it is not surprising that no deadlines have been met, although Ohrid recognises the crucial importance of the decentralisation of power. Visible, immediate success was more important for the international community than real efforts to resolve problems of an independent country. Therefore, the international community still insists that Ohrid has to be implemented as it is.

European aims and values

If Europe claims to follow values, its policies should prove it everywhere. The involvement to stop the struggle in Macedonia does not set a positive example, even though Europe is proud that a fully-fledged civil war was avoided. The question remains at what costs and risks to its own basics; including the espousal of a communal-ity of values.

- human rights and human dignity

All the inhabitants of a country deserve such rights. This includes respecting the constitution, the rights of all the legislative bodies and, in this case, the rights of Macedonians as an ethnic group.

- freedom, democracy, rule of law

The international community managed to stop the armed skirmishes and come up with an Agreement but peace was not restored, just the absence of armed struggle. EU values were neglected simply to restore a partially-secure environment and to demonstrate the success of preventing Macedonia from being immediately divided. Neglecting or ignoring its own values at a time when the EU is accepting new members sets neither a good nor a reliable example.

What are the aims and objectives of the international community? What are the basic goals and, at the same time, the restrictions caused by EU politics?

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the international community has forced people in the Balkans to live in multi-ethnic states. There is not one state in the Balkans that has just one ethnicity, so this means that ethnic groups have to find ways and means to arrange and create a society that will accept all differences, including language and religion, and which guarantees the same human rights for everyone. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, as results of the Dayton Accord, were not the best start as these now-defined regions ended up with artificial borderlines and clear

majorities of one ethnic group. It seems that the lesson learned after Dayton was: no more changes to borders in the Balkans. This is common European opinion and, after the USA reduced its influence and concentrated on other regions in the world, it is now up to European politicians to fight efforts to change these messages. This includes, as a task for the EU, to support all legislative changes that, theoretically, may lead to better co-operation between ethnic groups in countries like Macedonia. In pursuing such an objective in Macedonia, the OSCE developed the law on local self-government and deserves great respect for its work on the necessary law on self-financing that still has to follow. The new law on municipalities is solemnly in Macedonian hands but discussions within the country are living proof that the struggle between ethnic groups remains predominant, not the will to find a solution.

Politicians in Macedonia had a huge need for advisors in all fields, but this need has been neglected. There was never any follow-up analysis and, thus, no timescales were ever met. Macedonian politicians always state that they seek to implement Ohrid to the letter – the best sign that they are not willing to fulfil Ohrid in its sense, or by any common understanding. The 2002 elections did not change anything in this respect. There remain the same promises to implement Ohrid to the letter and, with the former NLA leaders now as DUI politicians, with no background or experience in politics, the situation has grown even worse.

The Special Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany for Macedonia had already recommended during the refugee crisis in 1999 that counsellors be provided for the government of Macedonia. However, there was never any reaction. Instead of support from experienced advisers or available elder statesmen, the international community sent soldiers: NATO first, followed by the first EU military mission, Concordia. The mission was to contribute further to a stable, secure environment to allow the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. That was all, not even one word about the political will needed to make Ohrid become a reality. Due to EU resources, the mission was a success as it demonstrated quality, referring only to an evaluation of the command and control system, not real success according to the task facing the mission. In contrast, the security environment was never properly evaluated. Security was just a statement in speeches and declarations, in accordance with the Macedonian government that wanted no foreign soldiers in the country in order to avoid the feeling of being an occupied country. Military support was visible, as was the EU police operation, Proxima, but the political support to implement in full the Ohrid Framework Agreement was missing. Soldiers, as external actors, can only contain the hate and the violence, but can not enforce stability. Soldiers and police officers are all that is left of European aims and objectives: no politicians, no counsellors and no real involvement to resolve the important questions. It seems again that all that counted for the international community were immediate success and positive headlines.

There is new hope since the tragic death of President Trajkovski. Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, promised during a moment of mourning that Macedonia would have more support from then on to come closer to the EU, and that all measures would be undertaken to speed up the process of full membership. If

this happens, the late Boris Trajkovski would have helped his country positively into a better future.

Ethnic groups

The Ohrid Framework Agreement constituted changes for all ethnicities and religions across Macedonia. There are now specific rights for ethnicities with more than 20% of the population, both in regions and all across the country, but, as only Albanians meet this requirement, this limits the concentration just to these two ethnicities. The terms 'Macedonians' and 'Albanians' are used to describe these two major ethnicities living in Macedonia. They are all Macedonians, but the internationally-used name for the country, FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and that for ethnic Macedonians, Slav-Macedonians, do not take into account the feelings of the majority of the inhabitants of Macedonia. Their use again proves that there is no understanding of the fragile situation in the country; this is a simple example of the lack of social and cultural competence.

More than 70% of the Macedonian population want their country to become a member of NATO as soon as possible; this includes all Albanians, who have striven for it since the Kosovo crisis. However, it is doubtful that this percentage now includes those who have expressed clearly: NATO yes, but no to Greater Albania. It cannot be determined whether these people are still pro-NATO as it has lost their trust. Pride is a typical characteristic of the Balkans; the Ohrid compromise has been accompanied by a loss of confidence in the international community of a magnitude that is very hard to regain.

Albanians gained more rights through Ohrid, while the former rebels are now a coalition partner in the government. The Albanian language is spoken in parliament and in all constituencies where Albanians have more than 20% of the population. Albanians now have better access to higher education via newly-installed high school classes, while the former illegal Tetovo University and its degrees are accepted. Employment in public services and administration must also reflect the ethnic balance between the groups. This has put pressure on the government. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have demanded a sharp decline in the level of employment in public administration and five thousand administrative workers were due to be dismissed by March. A result of the equality decided by Ohrid is that this will result in new posts being offered only to Albanians, at a time when there are already 360 000 people unemployed – close to 50% of the workforce. The consequences are growing tension, Ohrid dividing the country and well-trained younger Macedonians trying with all their might to leave the country as there is no hope that they will gain employment.

The new rights have led to riots in Skopje, Bitola, Kumanovo and other parts of the country, including strikes by teachers. At the same time, special police units and the border brigades (the Army) still do not accept Albanians in their units as they carried the heaviest burden of the death toll in 2001. Such realities prove that Ohrid did not bridge the gap between ethnic groups; in contrast, it widened the gap into a canyon that might well be the reason for a future division of Macedonia, as demanded by

well-known opposition politicians. This is reflected in public opinion as two-thirds of Macedonians and Albanians are expecting large-scale violence over ethnic issues, a clear sign of dissatisfaction with the current situation.

Country building

Agreements like Ohrid cannot install trust; trust has to be developed through time and the careful handling of sensitive situations. Nationalism and ethnic intolerance were prompted by the failure of politics to address the concerns and needs of the citizens while the hope that bringing European values into a country would change this automatically for the better is insufficient. Permanent international attention would have been necessary to ensure the necessary changes in laws and the follow-up activities. The Helsinki Committee, in its latest report on Macedonia, provides proof that all the activities undertaken by the international community have not built sufficient capacity to ensure effective solutions.

Solutions could immediately support the modification of operations to end the hate and violence. Country-building depends on good governance and reliable bureaucracy and needs the rule of law, transparency and the end of corruption everywhere, with no exception. To end inefficiencies in the police, the judiciary and the amnesty law, etc., it is necessary to ensure minority rights while, at the same time, addressing the concerns of others. The international community never really tackled these areas, while the old elite, from both sides, still rule and organise the country. The implementation of these basics has to have first priority but must be carefully accompanied. Structures can be changed later. The international community must seek some role in stopping the bribery that is an integral part of the system from taxes to customs, from the university to the security forces. Corrupt politicians have to be named in public by the international community to give proof to the people that it is more than willing to influence changes in behaviour for the better. As long as a good position in politics or administration means work and jobs for friends and family alike, no trust will develop. A recent survey with the simple question 'Who is a good minister?' underlines the missing trust: about 40% did not reply or stated there is no good minister, while the Prime Minister attracted the support of 4.8%, giving him 6th place.

Trust is needed as the most important factor. The international community accepted that the new government chose many of its employees due to party membership and not by qualification. A government that starts by pleasing friends instead of practising state authority does not increase trust in its ability and accountability. How can Macedonians rely on these politicians and such an administration? However, country-building was seemingly not envisaged by the international community, the problem neglected.

What do the people of Macedonia need?

The population must realise a substantial improvement in its quality of life. This includes the economic situation, social welfare and personal security. The international community should start to realise that it is not changes in the law that are needed, but

changes in daily life. With a growth in GDP of 3.5% – an unexpectedly high figure – and a continuing low rate of inflation of 2.6%, the official prognoses for 2004 are positive. However, these results are not visible to the people and, therefore, do not produce positive political votes, while the survival of this government and the state as a whole remain in danger. Poverty is increasing while hope for a better future is decreasing. There is a need for investment and new jobs to prevent a new crisis, this time one of economic and social dislocation.

As long as the international community trusts in economic terms neither the banking sector nor the government and, therefore, does not support any investment in Macedonia, not even the more well-off Macedonians will invest money in their own country. Consequently, the need for new jobs cannot be met. As long as daily life does not change for the better, neither will the ethnic divide change, with fear continuing to remain over the equitable representation of Albanians in the public sector. Consequently, effective support for the economy has to be one of the most important tasks of the international community. Such support for Macedonia's economic and social development would lead directly to EU integration, but this needs a master plan that has not been established. The Schengen visa regime which, as a result of the extension of Europe, forces all Macedonians to hold a visa before they can travel abroad should be one of the first regulations to be altered or revised to give the economy a chance. Promising a European perspective and, at the same time, closing the borders is not convincing and does not increase trust or reliability.

The international community must also cease all external sponsorship and evaluate and treat events and countries in the broad context. No-one in Macedonia will feel safe as long as there is no effective border control and management. In 2001, the uprising started with armed fighters crossing the border from Kosovo. The latest events, former NLA fighters – wanted and chased in Macedonia – surrendering to the US forces in Kosovo, indicate that this problem has not been resolved. Illegal trade and the smuggling of weapons, women, drugs, and so on, has to end with the support of the international community. As long as markets in the home countries are the aims of the smugglers and as long as these markets give the opportunity for large gains, all the verbal efforts do not convince. Security in the Balkans starts at home by fighting organised crime everywhere. The same applies to the Macedonian World Congress, that supports the 'Macedonian question' in an unfavourable way by endorsing combat with Albanians: over 50% of all people worldwide that call themselves Macedonians do not live in the country but, with their money, support everything that backs their ethnic group. With the same consequences, all support for politicians in the Balkans that aim at, or even speak of, 'Greater Albania' has to end. Finally, support has to be given for a firm crack-down on armed Albanian extremists, such as the Albanian National Army.

All these negative influences have to be cut back with better means than offered by the EU- and US-maintained list of people who obstruct the peace process and the implementation of Ohrid. The international community has to act in a visible way to ensure the population that there is a positive future; the case-by-case approach will not work here. The different approaches by various international actors – including

the US, the EU, NATO, the OSCE, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – ultimately gave Macedonia the chance to receive the aid it wanted from whoever it wanted, and to use the conflict between NATO and the US to gain advantages.

There has never been any control or oversight as to gave what for what and to whom. This has opened up many possibilities for the misuse of aid and support. The parties in power have, as always, got rich and this is not the democracy and economy wanted by the international community. Furthermore, the international community has to develop ways of speaking with one voice, acting in concert and supporting the building of a functional, accountable and reliable government and administration. This needs an immediate and specific assessment of the Macedonian situation followed by the adoption of commonly set priorities.

The international community as a whole has to be independent, fair and trustworthy in brokering investments and in making decisions that will bring trust and hope back to the people of Macedonia. This is what the population needs. Granting a European perspective, demanding that the Copenhagen criteria are met and forcing the implementation of Ohrid is not sufficient to restore hope.

Meanwhile, the election campaign for a new president will raise new tensions. The Macedonian and Albanian parties are unable to enter into any coalition behind a good candidate. The result will be nationalist campaigning on both sides. The international community has no means to calm these developments as the EU police mission does not have executive rights, while all other missions, such as the OSCE and the EU monitoring mission, are either not equipped or not able to do so. The influence of the USA has declined and it has to be an EU task to become involved. However, there are no signs of a willingness to do so. Again, if the tension ends in armed conflict, there are no preparations and no plans to stop the crisis: another chance passing by unused by the EU to underline its real interest in the Balkans. The people of Macedonia cannot feel safe in this situation and the country will again have to fight the problems by itself and to try to survive without separation.

The media, the fourth pillar

Even art, culture and the media prove a widening gap between the two major ethnic groups. A free press and culture are necessary in a democracy and have to be supported by the government. This cannot be found in Macedonia as the government prefers media that support the official line and contain no criticism.

There are two well-known movies on Macedonia by Milcho Manchevski. *Before The Rain* (1994), a great work filled with tragedy and the fantastic scenic countryside, was nominated for an Oscar. The second movie, *Dust* (2001), is dominated by open brutality and defines the violence in Macedonia as follow-on collateral damage of the NATO involvement in Kosovo. The tensions are there and are not covered up. In *Dust* all Macedonians, whatever crime and brutality they commit, are good ones and their deeds can be justified. Thus can identity be formed and transformed at the same time through reality and the presence of common enemies.

This one-sided approach applies to all the media as well. There is no independent press or television in Macedonia. Readers and listeners have to find out the truth

themselves by checking different media. All the news is in favour either of the Macedonian or the Albanian. Even reports on the work of the government reflect this basic understanding and acting. If one is not 100% for me, one is against me. This polarisation cannot be bridged, as consumers would never believe, or even read, any information issued by the other side. The government has a negative part to play as well, since there are no attempts to be found which seek to change that situation. The country is ethnically divided and the media are not willing to close the gap, so the one-sided information and hate distribution will remain, backing all the misunderstandings and the prejudgements. A new culture of information can only be developed if hate and mistrust are overcome. For this there are no signs.

NATO membership

Macedonia allowed NATO in 1999 to deploy troops and to use its airspace during the Kosovo strikes. Macedonia accepted refugees from Kosovo, despite all the concerns, and asked NATO for support to collect the arms of the NLA in 2001. Macedonia thus gave support to, and has proved its ability to co-operate with, NATO. The late President Trajkovski, government and the population claim that membership of NATO is overdue. The Foreign Minister stated at the OSCE Permanent Council recently that the country expects a strong signal from the Alliance in Istanbul, which would enable Macedonia's accession in 2006. Why is NATO so reluctant as this could be a positive move, and one that the US also supports?

The army of the Republic of Macedonia is oversized and, even with the planned downsizing, will still be one-third stronger than NATO recommends. This will leave thousands of former soldiers unemployed and, with the changes in relations between ethnic groups, will develop further tensions between them. Soldiers in the army, especially, hold great resentment against Albanians, as they fought against the NLA to protect the country in 2001 and lost fellow-soldiers.

In the Ministry of Defence, two teams work to support Macedonia's path towards NATO; a US civilian team and a NATO military advisor team. There is little co-operation in existence between these two, but the US team has funds available whereas the NATO team has only advice. The US promised Macedonia that it would pave the way into NATO after it sent soldiers to Afghanistan, thus supporting the Alliance, and promised to support the US position on the International Criminal Court by not extraditing US soldiers. The NATO team works on structures and the basic regulations needed for full membership, like the Strategic Defence Review and regional co-operation. Changes are obviously necessary as 95% of the budget is used for wages and salaries; on the other hand, the road to NATO requires a large amount of finance and compatible equipment in order to meet NATO standards. The acceptance of Chinese IT equipment for the Macedonian army is negative proof of the oft-applauded work of the US and NATO teams as such equipment cannot be compatible with NATO.

At the same time, this shows how desperate the situation is: not the human resources but the current lack of economic power is, in this field as well, the largest obstacle and prevents the application of a higher budget. Money is further needed to continue with the reform of the security system, the transfer of the management of the

border to the authority of the police and the preparation of a national strategy. Despite the US promises, the road to NATO will be difficult and long.

The latest NATO voices reflect this. Positive comments on regional co-operation and the first reforms in the army do not hide that the situation in the region is still fragile and that a new crisis is always possible, although – as NATO assesses – this may not be of a particularly large military nature. This is the official explanation as to why NATO ended its mission, leaving Proxima to continue its police work. Reality proves again that this is pure politics. Whenever a crisis emerged with the so-called terrorist groups, the army supported the police and common actions were carried out. Neither means, ways nor conduct were assessed as there is no longer any NATO military mission. One ambassador alone cannot make up for the reduced military involvement. Here again, political speeches try to cover up the real situation but clashes between ethnic groups, or the former NLA and the security forces, cannot be ruled out. It is well-known that this is more than just police work against crime, but it is being ignored. It is hoped that this ignorance will not backfire.

Conclusion

Macedonia needs support and advice in every field as it is the entrance to the western Balkans. A weak Macedonia jeopardises the whole of south-east Europe. The international community pressed the country to accept substantial changes to its laws, but this lacked sustainability. An assessment of the real needs of the situation is required and should be conducted as soon as possible to decide on stringent follow-up activities. Ohrid was a start but not the solution, as it has been accompanied by a destabilising increase in hate and tension in the country. In overcoming this, the international community must face up to the requirement that it adopt a profile.

Nationalist elites fear both decentralisation and ethno-federalism, and herein lies the opportunity to improve democracy and transparency by increasing horizontal accountability, thus cutting down the power of these elites at the same time. This demands decentralisation by empowering the directly-elected mayors and will make politics and politicians more accountable.

Ethnic polarisation might not rule out federalism but it could lead to separation. This has to be ended by fighting poverty, as changes in daily living conditions are certainly needed instead of more changes to laws. The Stability Pact has to become more strongly involved by developing plans to stabilise the economy and bring in foreign investment. This cannot be left to the OSCE or to the World Bank alone.

Finally, all manner of support has to be given to reach a reliable practice of the authority of the state. This includes the performance of the security forces, the tax system, etc. If people all over Macedonia acknowledge that the power of the elites has disappeared, and that the rule of law applies to everyone in the same way, they will develop trust and hope in their country and their own future. A very positive side-effect will be that ethnic conflicts slowly decrease and, at the same time, do not hinder any possible developments in further ruling out separation.

A positive future for Macedonia and south-east Europe is in reach if the international community is willing to stop aiming at short-lived success stories. The interna-

tional community should, instead, intensify its efforts, bundle them into a master plan with priorities and set clear goals as well as a timeframe. The international community had almost completely taken independence and sovereignty away from Macedonia so it has to undertake all efforts to return it, in the process minimising, in its own interest, the factors involved in state failure.