

A laboratory setting with various glassware. In the foreground, a pipette is being used to transfer a purple liquid into a beaker. In the background, a rack holds several test tubes containing green and blue liquids. A large beaker with a blue liquid is visible on the left side.

Center for Research and Policy Making

Policy Study

The Independence of Kosovo and the Consolidation of Macedonia – A Reason to Worry*

"Cutting or Tightening the Gordina Knot? - The Future of Kosovo and the Peace Process in the Western Balkans after the Decision on Independence"

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Abstract

This paper explores the influences of Kosovo independence onto the Macedonian political scene, more specific on the model for managing the inter-ethnic relations. The main question that the paper tries to answer is what are the implications of the Kosovo independence in Macedonia? Under the framework of the theories of democratic transformation the paper explores the past ethnic politics in Macedonia and the developments with the status of Kosovo. It searches for the implications on the public perceptions and the policy processes, connected with the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The conclusion points that the independence of Kosovo has effect on the public perceptions, differently for the Macedonians and Albanians leaving in Macedonia. As such Kosovo independence can influence the development of the policy areas connected with the relations between Kosovo and Macedonia, but is unlikely to influence the model for managing inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

Keywords: Macedonia, ethnic politics, Kosovo, nationalism, Macedonian Albanians, public opinion

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Introduction

On February 17th, 2008 Kosovo declared independence, for many a sign of the final point of the brake up of Yugoslavia. In the period after, the US and the biggest EU Member States, many of the Balkan countries and other countries around the world recognized the independence of Kosovo. As Serbian official position is still "Kosovo je Srbija [Kosovo is Serbia]," the EU has deployed a mission that is deeply involved in the nation and state building of Kosovo.

Macedonia until the end of May 2008 had not recognized the independence of Kosovo. Yet the main ethnic Albanian political parties in Macedonia, but also the political leadership in Kosovo, expect that the recognition is a done deal. The relations between Skopje and Prishtina have been minimal in the early 1990's. More recently, Macedonia has a history of interaction with Kosovo, during the war in Kosovo and the refugee crisis in 1999 and during the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. These cases were more of physical interaction, and involved less political influences between the two. As Macedonia has scheduled early Parliamentary elections on June 1st 2008, the issue of Kosovo recognition will be undertaken by the upcoming Government.

After the 2001 conflict, Macedonia implements the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), an instrument for managing ethnic diversity, a new and innovative initiative considering the local and regional history³. Although the public opinion of the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanians diverged on the OFA issue, both communities show similar attitudes toward the public institutions.⁴ The stability and consolidation of Macedonia depends on a viable model for managing inter-ethnic relation. If the model sustains the test of time, it can be further used as a benchmark or best practice for other places, such as Kosovo. The viability of the model is dependent on the development and implementation of policies, deriving from OFA, and also on the public support for this process. The model is influenced by different internal, but also external factors. The independence of Kosovo is the most recent arising external factor.

This paper has three chapters. The first part unfolds the past Macedonian ethnic politics and the status of Kosovo using instruments from theories of transition and consolidation. The second part is an analysis of the public opinion in Macedonia from May 2007 to May 2008, focusing more particularly on the views of the ethnic communities of Albanians and Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia. The analysis encompasses the views toward Kosovo in various aspects from personal sentiments toward Kosovo to practical issues like the recognition and border demarcation. As a conclusion, the third and last part of the paper analyses the possible implications in Macedonia from the independence of Kosovo.

³ Zidas Daskalovski, *Walking On the Edge: Consolidating Multiethnic Macedonia 1998 - 2004*, Skopje: Dominant 2005

⁴ Dane Taleski, "Minderheiten und Mehrheiten in Makedonien: Sichtweisen und Auffassungen der Bevölkerung [Minorities and Majority in Macedonia: Attitudes and Perceptions of the People] in *Südosteuropa-Jahrbuch: Inklusion and Exclusion auf dem Westbalkan [Southeast Europe Annual: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Western Balkans]*, eds. Ulf Brunbauer and Christian Voss, Munich: Südosteuropa-Gessellschaft e.V. 2008, pp. 263-280

Macedonia's Ethnic Politics and the Status of Kosovo

What are the implications for Macedonia of an independent status of Kosovo? Among the Eastern European countries Macedonia has had a distinct yet successful transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Unlike most of the former Communist countries, Macedonia, together with Slovenia, and arguably Lithuania, experienced an evolutionary path to democratic rule.⁵ Yet, the peaceful and benign transformation of Macedonian society was preceded by an uneasy period of democratic consolidation. Among the different factors that negatively influenced this process were: the struggle for the international recognition of the country, the Greek diplomatic and economic pressure for the republic to change its name, the disruption of the economy due to the UN sanctions on Macedonia's main trade partner Serbia, as well as the financial impediments as a result of the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia and the Kosovo refugee crisis. None of these factors bears however, as strong importance for the consolidation of the democratic system as the disputing of the character of the state by Macedonian Albanians.

Macedonia is without any dilemmas a multiethnic country. Besides Macedonians, the largest group in the country population comprising 64%, of the total population, there are also 25% Albanians, 3% Turks, and 2% each Roma, Serbs, and others.⁶ The vast majority of Macedonians are Macedonian speaking and Orthodox, as are the Macedonian Vlachs and Serbs. On the other side, most of ethnic Albanians, Roma, and Turks are Muslims. While Macedonians populate the whole country, ethnic Albanians are predominantly concentrated in the Northwestern corner of Macedonia, along the border with Albania. Macedonian Albanians also reside in the capital city of Skopje and the towns of Northern Macedonia along the border with Kosovo. Except Skopje, Macedonian Serbs also populate the region around the town of Kumanovo. The other ethnic groups are dispersed throughout Macedonia. Given the diverse character of its population and especially the relatively substantial size of the largest national minority, the democratic consolidation in Macedonia was to be a difficult task to be accomplished.

Relations between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians have remained tense since the country's independence. Much of the tensions resulted due to the different perceptions among the two communities about the underlying concept of the Macedonian state. In the early 1990's both Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians had ambiguous feelings towards the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. Macedonians were cheerful for having secured independent statehood. On the other hand, they realized that the Macedonian state will face many obstacles from the more powerful neighbors. Since throughout history Macedonia's neighbors have either consistently or at one time or another chosen to deny the existence of a Macedonian people, and hence its right to possess its own state, and claimed Macedonia and the Macedonians as their own, membership in Tito's Yugoslavia provided Macedonians with a 'sense of security, a

⁵ On the topic in general and the understanding of reformatory change of the regime, see Kis "Between Reform and Revolution", *East European Politics and Societies*, 1/1998, p.323; on the democratic transition in Macedonia, see Daskalovski Z. "Elite Transformation and Democratic Transition in Macedonia and Slovenia" in *Balkanologie*, September, 1999.

⁶ For more details see the 2002 Census results from the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (http://www.stat.gov.mk/english/glavna_eng.asp?br=18)

sense of security both against unfriendly, even antagonistic states-Bulgaria, Greece, and to a certain extent Albania and against a condescending and patronizing partner and neighbor inside Yugoslavia, namely Serbia.’⁷

Similarly, for the Macedonian Albanians independence from Yugoslavia was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, with the dissolution of federal Yugoslavia and the proclamation of the Macedonian independence Albanians from Macedonia escaped the destiny of their Kosovo kin suffering under the strict rule of Slobodan Milosevic. Within the fledgling political system of the Macedonian Republic they could influence domestic politics to a certain extent. At least in theory Macedonian Albanians were guaranteed all civil, political and social rights. On the other hand, however, Macedonian Albanians regarded the independence of the country and the new frontiers vis-à-vis Serbia as an unnatural and burdensome obstacle to their relations with Kosovo Albanians. Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia perceive Kosovo Albanians as of sharing the same identity.⁸ In fact, during Tito’s times Pristina was a regional center for all Albanians in former Yugoslavia including those from Macedonia. Pristina University educated many of the political and social elites of the Macedonian Albanians. For example, Arben Xhaferi, the leader of DPA was educated in Pristina and for some 15 years he was a director of the province's TV station.

Although separated from their Kosovo kin, Macedonian Albanians have a perception that they are not a minority in the country. On the contrary they see themselves as equal partners to Macedonians and have ever since the late 1980’s asked for the aforementioned legal status. When in 1989 a new constitution was adopted defining the Socialist Republic of Macedonia as ‘the national state of the Macedonian nation’ rather than ‘the state of the Macedonian people and the Albanian and the Turkish minorities’ as it had stood before, Macedonian Albanians vehemently protested. When a similar formula was accepted in the Preamble to the 1991 Constitution Albanian political elites again protested against these developments and demanded that the Albanian community living in Macedonia should be given a partner-nation status.

Moreover, ‘the demographic superiority of the Albanians over the other ethnic minorities living in Macedonia is the main argument in their struggle to improve the status of the Albanian community’.⁹ Besides, ethnic Albanians present a significant percentage of the population in the areas they inhabit in Macedonia, representing an absolute majority in many municipalities in the Northwestern and Western parts of the country. Moreover, many Macedonian Albanians are claimed to be without citizenship although they have lived in the country for years if not decades, while also a number of ethnic Albanians from Macedonia have emigrated to Western Europe but keep a close contact with their places of origin. Treated as a ‘mere minority ethnic group’ Macedonian Albanian perceived the new state and its institutions as lacking legitimacy.

⁷ See Rossos, Andrew, 2002, ‘The Macedonian Question and Instability in the Balkans’, in Norman N. Naimark and Holly Case, eds., *Yugoslavia and Its Historians*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p.104

⁸ See for example De Rapper, Gilles, 1998, *Crisis in Kosovo: Reactions in Albania and Macedonia at the Local Level*, Ethnobarometer Programme Working Paper No.3, Rome: CSS/CEMES.

⁹ See Babuna, Aydin, 2000, ‘The Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia: Ethnic Identity Superseding Religion’, *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 28, no. 1, p.83.

On the other hand, throughout the post-independence period Macedonians felt themselves endangered and believed that granting partner-nation status to the Albanians would lead to a Bosnia-type situation. Before the Ohrid Framework Agreement Macedonians largely regarded the Republic of Macedonia as their nation-state, in which other ethnic groups are granted equal citizen rights. Macedonian political elites often argued that the minority rights for the ethnic Albanians in the country were on par with the highest standards of international legislation. Of especial concern to them was the fact that the percentage of the Albanian population in the country has significantly increased in the last decades. Before the conflict in 2001 Macedonians often pointed out that as a result of the very high birth rate of Macedonian Albanians and the migration of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo in the period from 1953 to 1993, the number of the Albanians had risen by 288,670 or 189.2% so that in 1994, the percentage of the Albanians was 22.6% of the total population in Macedonia, compared to 1953 when this percentage was only 11.7.

Partitioned during the Balkan Wars in 1912/3 Macedonians were faced with harsh assimilative practices, most of which remain intact even today in Greece and Bulgaria. As a result of the long lasting repression Macedonians in these countries have been assimilated in great numbers. Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia have thus felt doubly threatened; not only their presence in the historic region of Macedonia is rapidly dwindling but also, now that there exist a free Macedonian state, ethnic Albanians have vowed to overtake it both demographically and politically. By large, rather than anticipating sustainable peace or coexistence, ‘Macedonians remain mistrustful of the Albanians’ true intentions... at worst they suspect designs for a “greater Albania” (or, more commonly, “greater Kosovo”).’¹⁰

Indeed, the foundations of the new state in 1991 were not fully supported by the Macedonian Albanians. The independence referendum turnout for example, was 72% and it is most likely that ethnic Albanians did not take part in it being persuaded by its partisan leaders. Paradoxically, Macedonian Albanian politicians were, on the one hand, content with the changes of the system and took an active part shaping it. Ethnic Albanian legal experts were involved in the drafting of the new Macedonian constitution. Three ministers of the short-lived (March 1991- June 1992) non-partisan, ‘cabinet of experts’ were chosen among the ranks of this minority. The 1992 coalition government led by Branko Crvenkovski’s Social Democratic Alliance (SDSM) as well as all the other cabinets since included one ethnic Albanian party with five ministerial posts. Throughout the years Macedonian Albanians took increasing number of posts in the diplomatic service, public administration, the police and the army. Nonetheless, ethnic Albanian politicians in Macedonia ‘in the early years of transition, adopted an obstructionist tactic.’¹¹

Thus, the new constitution did not pass an important internal test as it was not being approved of by the political parties of Macedonian Albanians. The special parliamentary session was boycotted by the PDP-NDP (Party for Democratic Prosperity – National Democratic Party) to protest the preamble of the constitution which formally declared Macedonia to be ‘the national state of the Macedonian people, providing for the full equality of citizens and permanent coexistence of the

¹⁰ See Fraenkel, Eran, 2003, ‘Macedonia’, Nations in Transit 2003, New York: Freedom House, p.403.

¹¹ Hislope, Robert, 2003, ‘Between a Bad Peace and a Good War: Insights and Lessons from the Almost –War Macedonia,’ Ethnic and Racial Studies, vol. 26, no. 1, p.139.

Macedonian people with Albanians, Turks, Roma, and other nationalities'. Formerly, under the socialist constitution, the preamble defined Macedonia to be a nation of 'the Macedonian people and the Albanian and Turkish minorities' and in 1991 Macedonian Albanians felt that they have been demoted as they were not explicitly mentioned being constitutive nation along Macedonians.

As a matter of fact during the 1990's the Macedonian political elites clashed with their ethnic Albanian counterparts over the basic idea behind the concept of the state. Various elements in the constitution, the census taking, the laws on education, local self-government, and public display of national minority symbols, the ethnic make-up of the police, army, as well as the public administration, were all contested by Macedonian Albanians in this period. These are all constituent parts of the idea behind the Macedonian republic, the fundamentals which in all liberal states are accepted by the general public or at least by the principal sectors within.

Justice in liberal in ethnically heterogeneous states is provided if the state is not understood as a 'nation-state.' In an ethnically divided society:

"the state which treats every citizen as an equal cannot be a nation state: it must be a co-nation state. It cannot be identified with a single favored nation but must consider the political community of all the ethnic groups living on its territory as constituting it. It should recognize all of their cultures and all of their traditions as its own. It should notice that the various ethnic groups contend with unequal initial chances for official recognition and a share of public authority, and it should offer particular assistance to the members of disadvantaged groups in approaching a position of equality. The privileges which are meant to countervail the initial disadvantages are inevitably lasting (since the inequality of the relationships of force between the state-forming groups are also lasting) and they might need to be expressed as rights"¹²

A plural state is more legitimate the more all its citizens and not only the majority consider the territory of the state their own homeland, the legal system of the state and their institutions, the insignia of the state as their own symbols. These are goods to be jointly shared with all of the other citizens. The political community of a liberal democratic but multicultural country will be just if:

"it is formed from a union of ethnic groups living together. Its official symbols, holidays, its cultural goods handed down in school, and its historical remembrance will absorb something from the tradition of all the ethnic groups belonging to it, so that everyone can see the state is also theirs: likewise, everyone can see that the state is not their exclusive possession but is held jointly with the other ethnic groups forming it"¹³

In this context, the demands by the Macedonian Albanians can be interpreted as wanting such a just union. Indeed, when one looks at the claims put forward by political representatives of Macedonian Albanians one finds many which can be well suited in a just framework of relations in a multiethnic state. In the last ten years, the key demands of the Macedonian Albanians which became a bone of contention with the central government were: reform of the constitution, greater representation of Macedonian Albanians in the civil service sector, provision of university education in the Albanian language, and decentralization of state power.¹⁴ Certainly, reforms were enacted and improvements were made as the participation of the Macedonian

¹² Kis, Janos 1996. "Beyond the National State". Social Research. 63:1, pp. 224-5.

¹³ Ibid, p.237.

Albanians in the civic sector has risen in the last years. Similarly, a law was passed allowing private education in other languages than Macedonian while a European financed trilingual university (Albanian, English, Macedonian) was opened in 2001. However, these changes have not been sufficient for the political parties of the Albanians in Macedonia.

While Macedonians have kept insisting on a unitary nation-state Macedonian Albanians have refused to be considered an ethnic minority in a Macedonian nation-state and have advocated for official bi-nationalism. Although Macedonia recognized the rights of national minorities and promoted pluralism in the media, native-language education, minority civil society organizations, and interethnic power sharing in the national government living standards sank as unemployment soared. Under such circumstances the political transformation was formulated as a zero-sum game, pitting ethnic Albanian grievances against Macedonian fears for “their” country’s security and integrity.

Linz and Stepan have noted how difficult is to consolidate a regime if a significant group of its citizens is actively disobedient. On different occasions Macedonian Albanians have not accepted claims on its obedience as legitimate, thus presenting serious problems for democratic consolidation. Neither did considerable political crafting of democratic institutions and norms took place in Macedonia between 1991-2001. Macedonian politicians avoided ‘complex negotiations, pacts, territorial realignments or consociational agreements’ with their ethnic Albanian colleagues. On the contrary, at instances the government undertook drastic measures to uphold laws which were deemed controversial. The government did not act upon Linz’s and Stepan’s recommendation that to consolidate democracy in a plural society requires the state attention to the needs of national minorities. With a major segment of the population challenging the very foundations of the state, Macedonia, before the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement and the subsequent adoption of the amendments to the 1991 constitution could not consolidate its democracy.

Despite the unresolved inter-ethnic questions Macedonia surprised analysts and diplomats when it almost surged into a full-blown civil war in the first half of year 2001. Led by Ali Ahmeti, the previously unknown National Liberation Army (NLA) was a motley group of former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters from Kosovo and Macedonia, Albanian insurgents from the Southeast Serbian regions of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, young Albanian radicals and nationalists from Macedonia, and foreign mercenaries. From February to August 2001, the NLA organized an armed insurrection against the Macedonian government. Following a prolong warfare and with emotions running high among government officials and ordinary Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians, the danger of civil strife was real. The international community, led by the European Union, reacted swiftly bringing to life the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the pacification of the NLA.

¹⁴ See, for example, the reports by the International Crisis Group. 1999. *Towards Destabilisation?* ICG Balkans Reports No. 67 (May 1999), Skopje/Brussels, and *Macedonia’s Ethnic Albanians: Bridging the Gulf*, ICG Balkans Reports No. 98 (August 2000), as well as Farimah Daftary. 2001a. “Testing Macedonia”. *ECMI Brief # 4*. European Centre for Minority Issues, Flensburg and 2001b. “Conflict resolution in FYR Macedonia: Power-sharing or the ‘civic approach’”. *Helsinki Monitor*. no. 4.

What did the Framework agreement stipulate? The main goal of the Ohrid Agreement has been to accommodate the grievances of the Albanian community, while at the same time preserving the unitary character of the state thus addressing the concerns of the Macedonian majority who fear a 'federalisation' of the country and its eventual disintegration. The accord envisioned a series of political and constitutional reforms designed to address ethnic Albanian demands for equal standing. Consequently, the amendments to the 1991 constitution based on this agreement gave clear picture to the rights of national minorities and especially ethnic Albanians. The major provisions include: amending the preamble to the Constitution, instituting double-majority voting in parliament, increasing the representation of ethnic Albanians in the police force, and stipulating the use of the Albanian language in official proceedings. Other provisions from the Ohrid Agreement stipulate fulfillment of much of the demands raised by the Macedonian Albanians throughout the 1990's and introduced some features of power sharing, such as a system of double majorities requiring consent from minorities represented in parliament to key decisions of the Parliament, a substantial degree of municipal decentralisation, equitable representation in the public administration of the non-majority communities, as well as confidence-building measures to overcome the immediate consequences of the 2001 conflict.

Effectively, the legal changes based on the Ohrid agreement gave clear picture to the rights of national minorities and especially ethnic Albanians. On a symbolic level, a significant step forward was made when in November 2001 the changes to the constitution were voted by the political representatives of Macedonian Albanians. The Macedonian paramount legal document is now legitimized in the eyes of ethnic Albanians. Other provisions from the Ohrid Agreement stipulate fulfillment of much of the demands raised by the Macedonian Albanians throughout the 1990's. Having solved the dispute over the character of the country, and the new government having implementing the provisions of the Framework Agreement, it is assumed that Macedonian Albanians as a significant and crucial group of citizens in Macedonia will not have an interest in disobeying the institutions of the state and that democratic consolidation is largely accomplished.

Kosovo Independent: Implications on the Public Opinion in Macedonia

The wealth of information in the public space provides for a constant engagement in communication processes. According to Harold Lasswell, the communication process fulfills "three main functions in society: a) surveillance of the environment that provides warning about imminent threats and dangers to the system of values of a community or its parts; b) correlation of the parts of society in responding to the environment; and c) transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next or cultural transmission".¹⁵ In the political sphere the second function of the communication process is present on a daily base. The political environment changes under influence of different factors which have responses among the public, however in this process the public is not only the reflection of the changes, an inevitable outcome, but also an important factor influencing the changes in the political environment. In their work Jeff Manza and Fay Cook, overview the possible influence of the public opinion on the policy processes. They suggest that the underlying logic is to what extent is the influence present, rather than if there is any influence at all. Taking in consideration the existing literature on the opinion-policy link, they detect three sets of options: 1) public opinion has a significant and enduring effect on the policy process; 2) public opinion has a small and declining effect and 3) there are historical and institutional variations in responsiveness.¹⁶

The proponents of the first option use mainly quantitative studies to show "association between majority opinion and the adoption of new policies", while the proponents of the second believe that public opinion is weak on policy issues and thus it is constructed through polling and surveys.¹⁷ The third option is an in-between approach based on 'relativity' logic. Namely, the proponents of this theory suggest that the influence of the public opinion varies over time and space, and is specific to the policy dimensions. The three theoretical approaches are not mutually exhaustive in practice, they combine and overlap. As the research findings reflected in this paper reflect the link does depend on the importance of the policy area to the public and in that respect the link or influence can be strong or weak. On a general level, Manza and Cook find that the three theoretical approaches "reach fundamentally different conclusions that can not be easily reconciled".¹⁸

Our analysis does not intend to argue for or against such a conclusion, as not enough cases are explored, and sufficient variations to determine a supporting or contradicting argument are not presented here. This study is locked on to one policy dimension, and that is a pivotal point rather than the overall link between public opinion and policy processes. The following part of the paper analyzes the results from five distinctive data sets, deriving from five opinion polls done from May 2007 to May 2008. All opinion polls were conducted on nation-wide representative samples (N=1000+) with respondents over 18 years of age. However, we should mention that one has been

¹⁵ Mattelart, Armand and Mattelart, Michèle *Theories of Communication*, London: Sage Publications 1998, pp.29

¹⁶ Manza, Jeff et al *Navigating Public Opinion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002

¹⁷ Manza, Jeff and Cook, Fay "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: The State of the Debate., In: Jeff Manza et al. Eds. *Navigating Public Opinion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 17

¹⁸ Ibid: pp.28

conducted through face-to-face interviews, while the others were done over the phone. The results from these surveys on the perception of the Kosovo status and the implications for(in) Macedonia are taken as the basis for the analysis of the Kosovo independence on the public opinion and public policy in Macedonia. In that respect, the public policy that is most likely expected to be influenced is the recognition of the Kosovo independence. Another point of the analysis is whether the Kosovo independence will have effect on other policy areas, and in particular, multi-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

From May 4th to 11th 2007, the Institute for Democracy in Skopje (IDSCS) conducted a phone poll, asking the respondents questions concerning the perceptions of the public toward the reconciliation processes in Macedonia and in the Western Balkan region, the orientation of Macedonian foreign policy and the personal closeness of the citizens toward specific countries and international organizations. The survey was done for the purposes of the research project "Securing the Community: Reconciliation, Trust and Integration in the Western Balkans" led by Dr. Suzette R. Grillot from the University of Oklahoma and was conducted on a standardized nation wide representative sample which has been stratified according to the representative regions in the country. The structure of the sample has been modeled to best fit the data from the last National Census conducted in the Republic of Macedonia in 2002. A total of 1,115 adult persons randomly chosen have been surveyed.

The results of the survey confirm the previously stated point- that most of the ethnic Macedonians are not fully content with the way that the conflict in Macedonia was settled. Although the perceptions are divided whether the conflict was successfully resolved the majority agree that a return of violence in Macedonia is quite unlikely. In the same time the poll showed very different perceptions of Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians toward Kosovo. The results relevant to this paper are presented in the tables 1 to 3 below and in graph 1.

In table 1 we see that for 12.4% of the Macedonians the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 was very successfully settled, however 38.7% say that the conflict settlement was very unsuccessful. At the same time 8.6% of the Macedonian Albanians said that the conflict was very successfully settled, while 28.4% said that it was very unsuccessfully settled.

Table 1. Have the conflicts in your country been successfully settled?

	Macedonians	Albanians	Total
Very successful	12.4%	8.6%	11.6%
Somewhat successful	23.3%	41.4%	28.4%
Somewhat unsuccessful	17.9%	20.1%	18.8%
Very unsuccessful	38.7%	28.4%	35.2%
NA/DK	7.7%	1.5%	5.9%

Source: IDSCS phone poll, May 2007, N=1115

The differences in this respect are not that grave, however 41.4% of the Macedonian Albanians consider that the conflict settlement was somewhat successful, compared to 23.3% of the Macedonians. While the opinion of the Albanian community is split on

the issue, within the Macedonian community the majority inclines to the perception that the conflict was unsuccessfully resolved.

However, neither the Macedonians, nor the Macedonian Albanians believed in May 2007 that a return of violence is possible in Macedonia.

Table 2. Will the coming years in Macedonia be peaceful, or do you think that there will be a return to violence?

	Macedonians	Albanians	Total
Peaceful	59.6%	75.0%	64.2%
Violence	24.1%	18.7%	22.0%
NA/DK	16.3%	6.3%	13.8%

Source: IDSCS phone poll, May 2007, N=1115

While close to 60% of the Macedonians think that the coming years will be peaceful, even higher 75% of the Macedonian Albanians agree. The skeptical view is a bit more found among the Macedonians (24.1%), but also among the Macedonian Albanians (18.7%).

Regarding citizens feelings towards Kosovo there is a great divergence among the Macedonians and the Macedonian Albanians. While the Macedonian Albanians have predominantly positive views on Kosovo, the Macedonians view it strongly negative.

Table 3. Please rate your feelings regarding Kosovo on a scale 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive).

	Macedonians	Albanians	Total
1 (very negative)	40.4%	3.0%	30.7%
2 (negative)	20.6%	5.2%	16.7%
3 (indifference)	16.7%	12.7%	16.5%
4 (positive)	5.9%	26.9%	11.1%
5 (very positive)	4.8%	51.5%	16.1%
NA/DK	11.6%	0.7%	9.0%

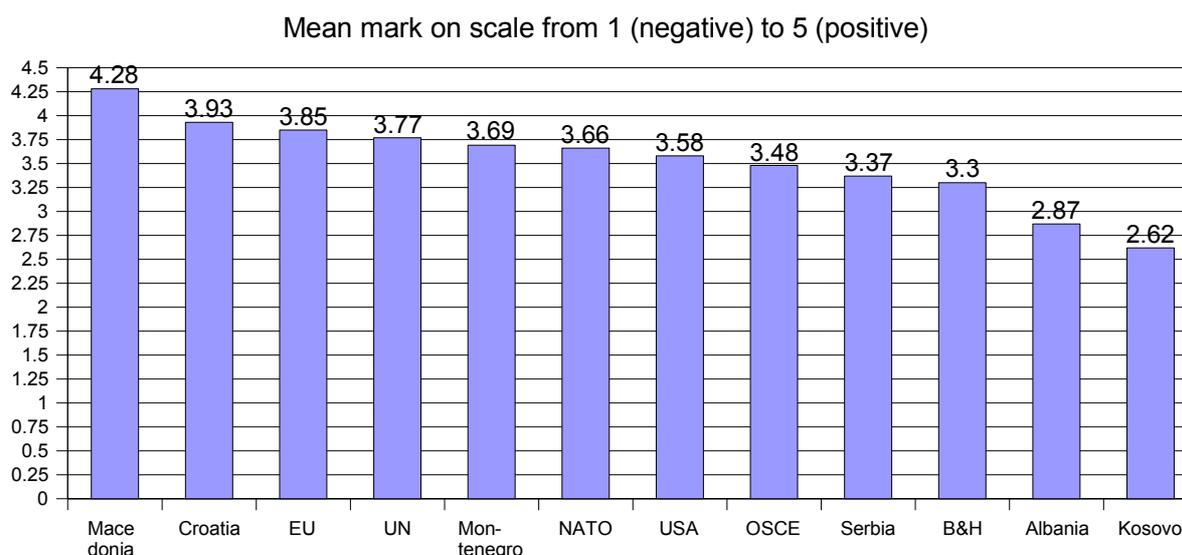
Source: IDSCS phone poll, May 2007, N=1115

A bit over 40% of the Macedonians said that they had very negative feelings regarding Kosovo, while additional 20% said that they had negative feelings. The situation is opposite among the ethnic Albanians. Some 51% said that they have very positive feelings regarding Kosovo, and close to 27% said that they have positive feelings. The polarization is complete if one takes a look in the opposite direction as well. Only 3% of the Macedonian Albanians had very negative feelings for Kosovo, and 5% said that they have negative feelings, while some 5% of the Macedonians said that they have very positive feelings and additional close to 6% said that they have positive feelings. In the total sum the negative feelings outweigh the positive; however, the difference is not that high as it is when comparing perspectives of the respondents from the two ethnic groups. The poll showed that the Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians have diametrically opposite views on the perception toward Kosovo. High majority of the Macedonians (over 60%) have generally negative

feelings for Kosovo, while high majority of the Macedonian Albanians (some 78%) had generally positive feelings for Kosovo.

The IDSCS's survey also compared the ratings of the feelings on a median scale for all of the countries and organizations that the respondents were asked to provide answers. In this comparison, as seen in graph 1 below, Kosovo has the lowest ranking from all countries and organizations. This shows that Kosovo is at the lower end of the list of positive perceptions in Macedonia.

Graph 1. Please rate your feelings regarding the following countries/organizations on a scale 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive).



Source: IDSCS phone poll, May 2007, N=1115

From December 8th to 17th, 2007 Brima Gallup, for the purpose of the People Centered Analysis Report of the UNDP Skopje office, conducted a face-to-face survey on a nation wide multi-stage random probability sample of the adult population. A total of 1309 respondents were interviewed.¹⁹ The results from this poll show that the resolution of the final status of Kosovo was a top priority for about 10% of the ethnic Macedonians personally. Accordingly, 10% of the Macedonians considered that this is of importance to the Macedonian ethnic group. In the same poll 35% of the Macedonian Albanians said that the resolution of the final status of Kosovo is important for them personally, while 51% said that it is of top priority for the interest of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. The difference of 16%, not found among the Macedonians, could be due to the fact that "substantive share of ethnic Albanian community feels under pressure to report more ethnically rooted options are priorities".²⁰ Generally, the results show that as time was unfolding, the resolution of the final status of Kosovo was a much higher personal priority for the Macedonian Albanians in Macedonia and also a perceived priority for that ethnic community in Macedonia, while among the Macedonians that perception was quite low both on a personal and on a community bases.

¹⁹ See for example United Nations Development Programme "People Centered Analysis,, *Report* March 2008 (also available at <http://www.undp.org.mk/Default.asp?where=news&id=403&start=1>)

²⁰ Ibid: pp. 54

This poll showed also some other interesting results considering the perception of the risk of inter-ethnic conflict in Macedonia. Over 50% of the Macedonians said that there is a high risk of inter-ethnic conflict, while another 30% said that there is a low risk of conflict. Below 20% of the Macedonian Albanians though that there is a high risk of inter-ethnic conflict, while close to 40% said that there is a risk of inter-ethnic conflict.²¹ These answers also relate to the possibility of an inter-ethnic. Some 80% of the Macedonians and 60% of the Macedonian Albanians believed that there are some risks for inter-ethnic conflicts in Macedonia. However, when asked about the risk of ethnic conflict on a local level the positive answers diminish to 30-40% among the Macedonians and the Macedonian Albanians. The divergence of answers shows that the two biggest ethnic communities see more problems for the ethnic relations on national than on local level. One explanation for this could be that in the views of the people the local factors are less potent and that the situation is better on the local level, that the national developments and the situation on national level, which is closely connected to the regional developments. However, another explanation could be that there were no rising ethnic problems on the local level, but there is a presence of fear of conflict due to national politics or regional developments.

In early March 2008, the Agency for Public Opinion Research and Communications *Rating* from Skopje, conducted a phone poll on a nation wide representative sample with 1045 adult respondents. Among the other things the respondents were asked ‘when should Macedonia recognize the independence of Kosovo.’ The answers show that the public is quite divided, while some asked for immediate recognition, other said that the Kosovo should never be recognized while most say that the recognition should happen. The detailed results are found in table 4 below.

Table 4. Should Macedonia recognize the independence of Kosovo

	Macedonians	Albanians	Total
Right now	3.4%	89.7%	24.4%
After few months	7.9%	3.7%	7.2%
Never	33.9%	0.8%	26.1%
After the border demarcation	49.9%	5.0%	38.4%
NA/DK	4.9%	0.8	3.9%

Source: Rating Agency, March 2008, N=1045

The results show that overwhelming part of the Albanian population in Macedonia, some 90%, requested immediate recognition of Kosovo, a position supported by only 3% of the Macedonians. One third of the ethnic Macedonians thought that the recognition of Kosovo should never happen, while the majority or close to 50% thought that the recognition of Kosovo should happen once the border between Macedonia and Kosovo is clearly drawn and recognized. The results display the strong will and request of the ethnic Albanians leaving in Macedonia, for the Republic of Macedonia to support the independence of Kosovo. On the other hand, the view of a smaller part of the Macedonians was never to recognize Kosovo, while the majority requests conditioning the recognition with the demarcation of the border between Kosovo and Macedonia.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 62, graph 3.3: The risk of ethnic conflict

From March 6th to 8th 2008, the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM), conducted a phone poll with 1,100 respondents aged 18+. The phone poll was made on a nation wide representative sample. The result showed that most of the population objected the recognition of Kosovo, and also that majority considered that the border demarcation should precede the official recognition. However when asked about the implications on the security situation in Macedonia, after the Kosovo recognition the answers of the public are quite dispersed.

The table below gives a glimpse of the results on the questions whether Macedonia should recognize Kosovo. Similarly to the results of the Rating agency, the poll showed that about 95% of the Macedonian Albanians support the recognition of Kosovo, while majority of the Macedonians (some 60%) oppose it.

Table 5. Should Macedonia recognize Kosovo as independent country?

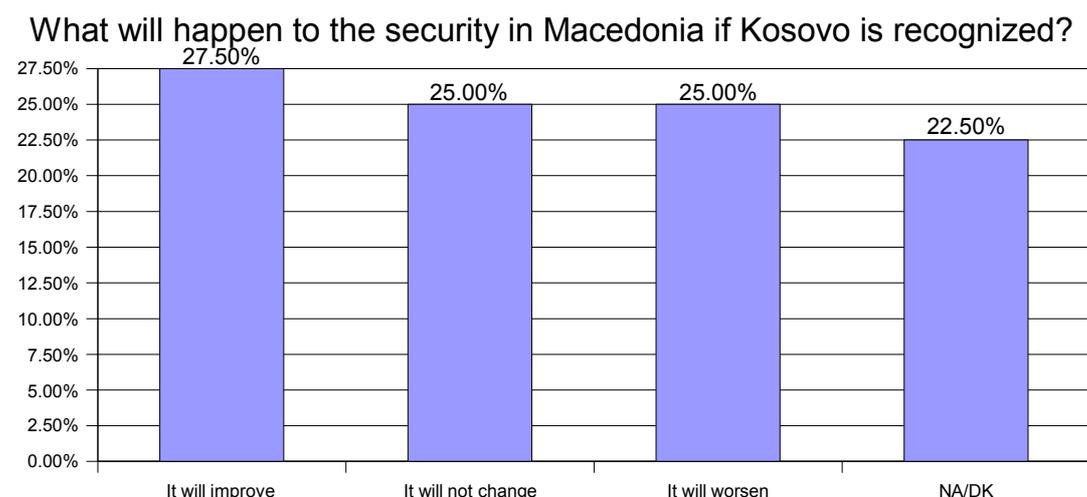
	Macedonians	Albanians	Total
Yes	16%	95%	35%
I do not care	5%	1%	5%
No	60%	1%	45%
NA/DK	18%	3%	15%

Source: CRPM, March 2008, N=1100

In this poll the demarcation of the border again was an important factor that influences the answers of the ethnic Macedonians. To the question "Should the border be marked before Kosovo is recognized?" some 55% answered positively, while 30% said that the recognition of Kosovo independence is more important than the border demarcation. There is clear polarization in the answers of the ethnic communities. Most of the Macedonians (74%) said that the border demarcation needs to be finished before Kosovo is recognized, while most of the Macedonian Albanians (85%) said that the recognition of Kosovo is more important than the border demarcation. The public interpretation of these results range from the fact that the ethnic Macedonians see a safeguard mechanism against Kosovo expansionist policies in the border demarcation to be concluded before the independence of Kosovo is recognized, to the belief of the ethnic Albanians that the recognition is a needed immediately so as to support Kosovo. The fact that the Macedonian Albanians insist on sooner than later recognition despite that the border is not fully marked, has been interpreted as an indication of what the "real Albanian motives" for Kosovo to be recognized are. In this regard the motivation to recognize Kosovo and not insisting to first mark the border is interpreted as being only a prelude to staging territorial demand on parts of Macedonia.

However, these views, found across the public discourse in Macedonia, are not shared among the general population. In fact, the people do not see a clear and present implication for the security in Macedonia if the Kosovo is recognized. The scenarios for Albanian secession are not dominantly shared among the public as being realistic. In the poll the answers to the question of the implications on the Macedonian security if Kosovo is recognized are fully dispersed across the spectra of possible answers. This conclusion is supported from the results displayed in graph 2 below.

Graph 2. Implications on the security in Macedonia if Kosovo is recognized



Source: CRPM, March 2008, N=1100

From all respondents 27.5% expect improvement of the security once Kosovo is recognized, 25% say that nothing will happen, and 25% believe that the security will worsen. Predominant part of the Macedonian Albanians (82%) believe that the security situation will improve once the independence of Kosovo is recognized, while 32% of the Macedonians said that they expect that the situation will worsen. To some extent these results support the so far supported thesis that the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia are radically and uncritically in favor of the recognition of Kosovo. They want immediate recognition and expect positive improvements from it. The ethnic Macedonians are more skeptical- even if they are not against the recognition of Kosovo per se, they have reserves concerning the security of Macedonia and are clearly focused on having the border demarcation done before anything else is finished.

These are again some of the findings of the CRPM's phone poll done on 24th and 25th of April 2008. The poll was done on nation wide representative sample of 1,100 adult respondents. The answers to the question on the recognition of Kosovo are displayed in the table below.

Table 6. Should Macedonia recognize Kosovo as independent country?

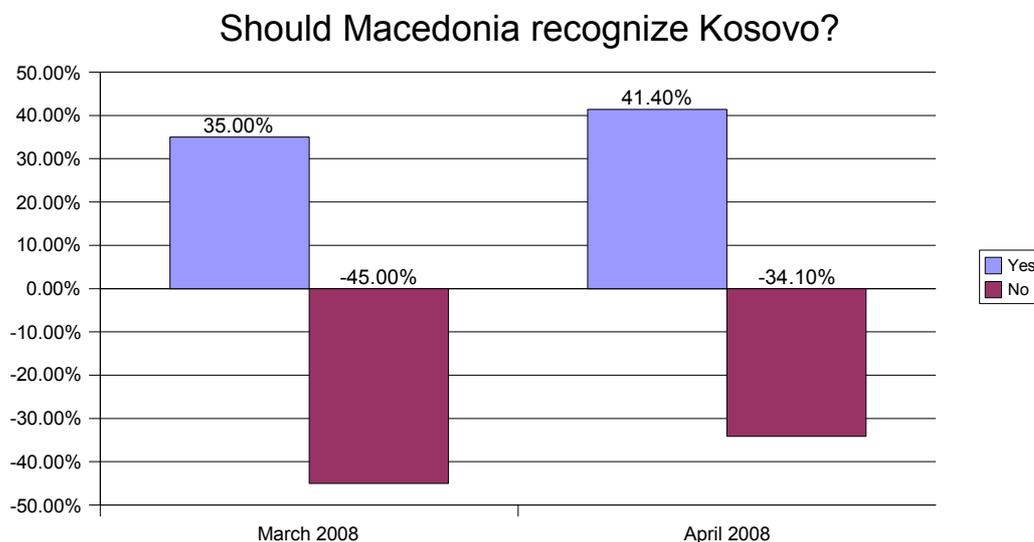
	Macedonians	Albanians	Total
Yes	20.3%	92.8%	41.4%
No	47.0%	3.5%	34.1%
NA/DK	32.5%	3.5%	24.5%

Source: CRPM, April 2008, N=1100

A predominant part of the Macedonian Albanians, over 90% want Kosovo to be recognized, while just below 50% of the Macedonians object to that idea. However, in the same time some 20% of the Macedonians said that Kosovo should be recognized, while close to one third remained silent. The undecided, silent group could swing in any side, pro or contra the recognition. Having in mind the current and past ethno-centric behavior in Macedonia, it is more likely that the 'silent' ones will oppose the recognition or at least condition it, rather than giving full support for it.

On average most of the population agrees that Macedonia should recognize Kosovo, while the resistance is also quite substantial. In April 41.4% of the population said that Kosovo should be recognized, while in March in the previous mail this percent was 35%. In the same period the opposition to the recognition declined from 45% in March 2008, to 34% in April. The results are displayed in the graph below.

Graph 3. Attitudes in Macedonia on the recognition of Kosovo



Source: CRPM, March and April 2008, N=1100

The shift of opinions and attitudes has been observed mostly among the ethnic Macedonians. On the one hand, the position of the ethnic Albanians has not seen any dramatic changes. Over 90% of the Macedonian Albanians were and remain supportive of the idea to recognize the independence of Kosovo. However, among the Macedonians in March 2008 some 60% opposed the recognition of Kosovo, while in April 2008 only 47% of the Macedonians said that they are against the recognition of Kosovo. Generally, the opposition to the Kosovo independence has decreased. It is quite unlikely that in one month slightly over 10% of the ethnic Macedonians have shifted from opposing the recognition of Kosovo independence to supporting it. But is more likely that in one month they have shifted from opposing the recognition of Kosovo to being 'silent' and not giving a specific answer, be it for or against recognition.

Kosovo Independent: Implications for Macedonia?

How much Macedonia should be concerned with the independence of its northern neighbor? Certain events since the birth of Macedonia in 1991, like the Bit Pazar demonstrations in 1993, the clashes surrounding the opening of the “University of Tetovo” in 1994, as well as the so-called Gostivar flag riots in 1997 indicate that interethnic conflicts might indeed be dangerous for the vitality of the Macedonian state. Bearing in mind that quite a few Albanians in Macedonia are closely related to the Kosovan Albanians we can imagine the fear among many Macedonians especially since during the war in Kosovo in 1999 many young Macedonian Albanians joined the ranks of KLA fighting the Serbian forces, while villages on the Macedonian border to Kosovo became their logistical bases. For Macedonians there is a strong feeling that ‘inter-Albanian’ informal organization transcends international boundaries. The popular view holds that this solidarity results from a shared ideal to create a Greater Albania.

Indeed given that Albanians living in Macedonia are closely related to the Albanians in Kosovo there is a strong and important link between Macedonia’s and Kosovo’s political developments. Nationalistic discourse makes us believe that for Albanian radicals the current Kosovan territory is not where the imagined border of the “liberated”, “great”, Albanian state should be. The main question concerning Macedonian stability is therefore what kind of repercussions an independent Albanian Kosova would have on the interethnic relations in Macedonia? Should Skopje fear Albanian nationalism if Kosovo becomes a sovereign state? Could there be a repeat of the warlike crisis that hit Macedonia in 2001?

The answer is clear. Macedonia’s leadership should not be worried with Kosovo being granted independence. This is mainly so because the conditions and the factors that led to the outburst of ethnic violence in Macedonia in 2001 are not prevalent at the moment. Some major issues have been modified or solved. The interplay of internal and external factors that led to the beginning of a mini-war in the winter of 2001 can hardly repeat itself now.²² Macedonia is a more mature interethnic democracy and an EU membership candidate country.

There are a number of reasons supporting this assessment. Let us briefly discuss the outburst of hostilities in the winter and spring of 2001. As previously discussed Macedonian Albanians and their political leaders have since independence fought for specific political rights for their ethnic community including changes of the constitution. When in 1998 the Social Democratic Alliance then in coalition with the Party for Democratic Prosperity lost power among many citizens of Macedonia there were hopes that the economic conditions and the interethnic relations will improve. Ethnic Albanians assumed that their political demands will be fulfilled. Three years later many of them were dissatisfied since the largely corrupt government coalition between VMRO-DPMNE and DPA did not fulfill the expectations of the Albanians in

²² See more in detail in Zhidas Daskalovski *Walking on the Edge: Consolidating Multiethnic Macedonia 1989-2004*, Globic: Chapel Hill, 2005 or *ibid*, *The Macedonian Conflict of 2001: Between Successful Diplomacy, Rhetoric and Terror*; Studies in Post-Communism Occasional Papers, St. Francis Xavier University: Antigonish, 2004.

Macedonia for faster reforms that would improve their status.²³ In early 2001, a number of young Albanians from Macedonia were radicalized to an extent that they were ready to fight for the nationalist cause.

Some of these young Albanians either directly or indirectly participated in the war in Kosovo in 1999, logistics being still functional in the winter of 2001. The routes for transfer of weapons or soldiers across the borders in the triangle between Kosovo, Macedonia and Southern Serbia were functional at that time.²⁴ Many Albanians across the border in Kosovo were ready to help brothers in Macedonia. In addition, in early 2001, the Serbian security forces pushed away the armed Albanian rebels from the regions of Preshevo and Bujanovac adding new possible recruits for staging an uprising against Macedonia. Accidentally, at that time Macedonia signed a border agreement with the then existent Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Since the agreement also confirmed the borderline between Macedonia and Kosovo, it was understood by Albanians in these regions as a kind of a provocation. The agreement was especially unnerving for those Albanian groups that object to a well defined border because of their clandestine activities across the border.

The great number of ethnic Albanian discontents needed a leadership and they easily found one. Following the war in Kosovo leading figures and one of the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, coming from Macedonia like Ali Ahmeti, Fazli Veliu, did not win any spoils neither in Kosovo nor in Macedonia. Ahmeti and Fazliu were influential among the Albanian Diaspora in the 1990's and instrumental in gathering funds to finance the struggle of the KLA. They and many Albanians from Macedonia that fought in Kosovo, and Southern Serbia but personally gained little or nothing had an interest in starting a moderately intense warfare in order to achieve benefits denied elsewhere.²⁵ Combining these facts with the availability of small arms in Macedonia, typically used for guerilla type of warfare and the porousness of the border one gets the picture why the war in Macedonia started in the winter of 2001.

Today in Macedonia such a configuration of factors does not exist. Although illegal weapons are still available to some extent, hot spots in particular regions of the country existent and radicalism among segments of the Albanian population still strong, Macedonian Albanians enjoy the benefits of the reforms enlisted in the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement and implemented since. All the political elites accept the workings of the political system despite occasional dissatisfactions with electoral results or functioning of particular governments. Notwithstanding the enlargement fatigue suffocating Europe, Macedonia is firmly entrenched on the EU integration path being granted the candidate status in the winter of 2005. Awaiting a date for beginning of negotiations with the EU, a unique success multiethnic story of the Balkans, Macedonia has the support of the whole international community. Lastly, the independent status of Kosovo is conditioned by a responsible policy making of the

²³ See for example, Brenda Pearson, "Putting Peace into Practice: Can Macedonia's New Government Meet the Challenge?" (*US Institute for Peace Special Report*, November 2002) or International Crisis Group, "Macedonia's Public Secret: How Corruption Drags The Country Down", *Europe Report* N°133, 14th August 2002.

²⁴ See for example Robert Hislope "Between a Bad Peace and a Good War: Insights and Lessons from the Almost-War in Macedonia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, v.26, n.1, (January 2003).

²⁵ See at Timothy Garton Ash, „Is There a Good Terrorist?“, *The New York Review of Books*, November 29, 2001 and in „Ali Ahmeti,, *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Ahmeti.

local elites. These factors negatively influence the possibility of an outburst of new violence in Macedonia following Kosovo's declaring a status of a sovereign state. Although we cannot absolutely guarantee such an outcome this analysis makes us believe that Macedonia should not fear from the independence of Kosovo.

However, the views and perceptions of the ethnic communities in Macedonia regarding the recognition of Kosovo remain diverged and even polarized. For the great part of the ethnic Macedonians independent Kosovo brings negative reminiscences. The Macedonians show greater worries for a possible development of an inter-ethnic conflict. Their perceptions are not at all connected to local politics but more to the developments on a national level and regional developments, such as the status of Kosovo. While most of the ethnic Macedonians believe that the return of violence is quite unlikely in Macedonia, they believe that the independence of Kosovo may have negative results for the security in Macedonia. For such reasons some of them oppose the recognition of Kosovo, while the ones that would be willing to accept it, state that the border between Kosovo and Macedonia has to be clearly set before the recognition takes place.

A great majority of the Albanians from Macedonia, close to 90%, have strong positive feelings for Kosovo and want the recognition to happen sooner than latter. Most of them believe that with the recognition of Kosovo the security will be improved. Same as the ethnic Macedonians they do not believe that violence is likely to occur in Macedonia in the future, and they too see a greater possibility for inter-ethnic conflict on national than on local level. However, their support for the recognition of Kosovo is high, strong and uncritical. For them the demarcation of the border between the two countries is not essential. Most of them considered it secondary to the act of recognition. The views of the Macedonian Albanians have not changed in the last year, but it is quite possible that for some of them recognizing Kosovo is a pressing issue due to their solidarity with the views and attitudes of their ethnic-community across the border. In that respect some of the Macedonian Albanians do not see any clear personal gain for them with the recognition of Kosovo. However, due to the wider Albanian empathy with the Kosovo recognition they opt to strongly support it.

The views of the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians will have effect on the Macedonian policies concerning Kosovo, and the recognition. The Macedonian Albanians are pressing for fast recognition while the Macedonians are conditioning it with the border demarcation. These views and pressures are not mutually exclusive, they apply to the same policy process and it would be needed for both to be included, which would slow down the implementation of the policy. In short, Macedonia is very likely to recognize Kosovo once the border line has been clearly set. In the mean time no meaningful political actor or institution object the recognition of Kosovo or leaves doubts that it will happen. This could be the main reason why in one month time there has been a 10% change in the active views of the Macedonians toward the recognition of Kosovo's independence.

Not only that there are no objections, but some political actors have strongly, openly and publicly demanded recognition of Kosovo. Namely, all Albanian political parties in Macedonia are unanimous that Kosovo needs to be recognized as soon as possible. After his temporary withdrawal from the governing coalition in March 2008, Menduh Thaci the leader of DPA, came back in the coalition Government with six demands, of

which one was the recognition of Kosovo. It is interesting to note that the other five demands applied to the status of the rights of Albanians in Macedonia, i.e. were political demands related to domestic political issues. In the same manner, DUI the strongest political party of the Albanians in Macedonia, during the campaign for the early elections in June 2008 has demanded recognition of Kosovo and introduced the policy in its election campaign. Similar to DPA, DUI is introducing the issue of Kosovo recognition on the domestic political scene in Macedonia. The reaction of the political parties of the Albanians shows accommodation to the views and needs of the ethnic Albanians. In general, the political parties of the minorities in Macedonia are mono-ethnic, functioning as interest seekers, and willing to enter various coalitions to meet their rational and pragmatic interest and needs.²⁶ In that respect the political parties of the Albanians in Macedonia are accustomed to using ethno-mobilization especially during election campaigns. They are not forgoing an opportunity to request recognition of Kosovo when the overwhelming majority of the Albanians in Macedonia support that and regard it as an important priority.

It is quite likely that the future policies of Macedonia in its relations with Kosovo will be influenced in similar ways as the issue of recognizing the independence of Kosovo. Most likely the ethnic Albanians will be strongly in favor, while the Macedonians will be more skeptical to developing stronger ties to Kosovo, being concerned of various implications that the development of such relations may cause. The underlying factors of the Macedonian behavior are the strong negative sentiments toward Kosovo, to a lesser extent, and to a greater extent the fears that the Kosovo independence and further on the development of relations between Kosovo and Macedonia will cause the appearance of 'Greater Kosovo' or 'Smaller Macedonia'. Beside the negative sentiments, for the Macedonians the negative implications on the security are still seen as possible and thus the development of relations will not be favored. In that respect the Macedonian Albanians will push for fast development of stronger relations with Kosovo, even taking the regional lead, while the Macedonians will push for a more cautious and slower approach.

The public opinion toward the policy area of developing relations with Kosovo is influenced by two factors, temporal and symbolical. The symbolical can be defined as a two-fold approach, one for the ethnic Macedonians and the other for the ethnic Albanians. The Macedonians need the act of border demarcation as a symbol for security, while the Albanians support the independence of Kosovo as a symbol of the commonness among the Albanians. The temporal factor shows that as time unfolds the eventuality of Kosovo independence was seen as a possible negative influence to the security and inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. However, since the independence, the practice has shown that there has been no influence on the security and inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. Possibly, in the future as time progresses and relations develop between Macedonia and Kosovo, the perceptions of a possible negative influence on the security and inter-ethnic relations will be changed. In the mean time the independence of Kosovo can not play an important role since as previously explained the post-Ohrid Framework system in Macedonia provides for consolidation and inter-ethnic cooperation. Kosovo plays a limited role as a symbol for ethno-political mobilization for the political parties of Albanians, but as long as the system set within the Ohrid Framework Agreement for managing the inter-ethnic

²⁶ See for more in Dane Taleski "Minorities and Political Parties in Macedonia", in *Political Parties and Minority Participation*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Skopje, 2008 (forthcoming)

relations is functioning, Albanians from Macedonia are more likely to go Prishtina via Skopje.

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