



Democratic Consolidation and the 'Stateness' Problem: The Case of Macedonia *Zhidas Daskalovski, University of Oxford*

Introduction

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.¹ 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 bombing of 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.

During the 1990's 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. 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. It is the aim of this paper to argue that the Macedonian consolidation of democracy has not been achieved in the last decade or so since independence due to the unresolved stateness issue. Using insights from Juan Linz's and Alfred Stepan's discussion with reference to the importance of the interplay between democratization and nationalism for democratic consolidation and outlaying a detailed chronology of major events in Macedonia during the period in question I will point out how the stateness problem has been the fundamental issue for this country's failure to consolidate democracy.

Democratic Consolidation and the 'Stateness' Issue

According to Linz and Stepan, a country is democratically consolidated when, in one phrase, 'democracy is the only game in town' (Linz and Stepan 1996:5). Behaviorally, democracy is the only game in town 'when no significant political groups seriously attempt to overthrow the democratic regime or secede from the state', while attitudinally, consolidated democracy is achieved when, 'even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic formulas' (ibid.). Finally, constitutionally, democracy becomes the only game in town when 'all the actors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict will be resolved according to the established norms and that violations of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly' (ibid.). Within the category of consolidated democracies there is a continuum from low to high quality democracies.

¹ On the topic in general and the understanding of reformatory change of the regime, see Kis 1998:323; on the democratic transition in Macedonia, see Daskalovski (1999).



Consolidation of a democratic regime in multiethnic countries is more difficult than in more homogenous ones. The main problems for achieving consolidation in plural societies arise due to a 'stateness' problem, namely the disputes over the boundaries of the state, its character, the question regarding who has a right to citizenship, etc. In fact, 'the more the population of the territory of the state is comprised of plurinational, lingual, religious, or cultural societies, the more complex politics becomes because an agreement on the fundamentals of a democracy will be more difficult' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 29). The opposite is also accurate. Conflicts are 'reduced when empirically almost all the residents of a state identify with one subjective idea of the nation, and that nation is virtually contiguous with the state' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 25). The congruence between the polity and the demos facilitates the creation of a democratic nation-state and is therefore one of the conditions for successful consolidation of democracy.

If a significant group of people 'does not accept claims on its obedience as legitimate... this presents a serious problem for democratic transition and even more serious problems for democratic consolidation' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 27). Because of the potentials of inter-ethnic discord, considerable political crafting of democratic institutions and norms must take place so that democracy can be consolidated in multicultural states. According to Linz and Stepan, homogenizing policies, even if not antidemocratic, would probably not be conducive to democratic crafting. Rather, 'complex negotiations, pacts, and possibly territorial realignments and consociational agreements are often necessary before the majority formula will be accepted as legitimately binding' (ibid.). To consolidate democracy in a plural society requires state attention to the needs of national minorities. In a multiethnic setting 'the chances to consolidate democracy are increased by state policies that grant inclusion and equal citizenship and that give all citizens a common 'roof' of state mandated and enforced individual rights' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 33). In their research on democratic consolidation Linz and Stepan have devised a table in which they delineate the possibilities of reconciling nation-states and democratization. Within, of particular interest to us is their outline of the relationship in multiethnic societies.

The Macedonian Stateness Issue, 1991-2001

How is the discussion of democratic consolidation in plural societies in Linz and Stepan related to Macedonia? For one Macedonia is multiethnic country. According to the 1994 population census, Macedonia has 1,945,932 inhabitants. Besides Macedonians, the largest group in the country population comprising 67%, of the total population, there are also 23% Albanians, 4% Turks, and 2% each Roma, Serbs, and others (Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1997: 11). 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.

Table 1: The Inter-relationship between State, Nation(s) and Democratization (Linz and Stepan 1996: 36)

Degree of presence of other nations besides titular nation in state territory	Policies and Actions of State -leaders of 'Titular Nation'				
	Drives toward Goal of Nation-State	Extends Some Recognition to Legitimacy of Cultural Diversity	Crafts some Federal or Quasi federal Institutions and/or Quasi-consociational Practices	Accepts in Principle Possibility of Peaceful and Democratic Negotiated Secession	No Clear, or Extremely Weak State Leaders
No other nation exists and there is little cultural/ethnic differentiation	Democratic nation-state can easily consolidate and be strong		Mononational democratic state can easily exist		
No other nation but extensive cultural diversity		Democratic state nation can easily exist	Mononational democratic state can easily exist		
Other nation(s) present but not awakened	Democratic nation state possible				
Other nation(s) present and awakened	Generates conflict, making democracy difficult but not impossible	Democratic state-nation can exist but will be under pressure to move toward —	Multinational state is only democratic possibility. If crafted carefully, democracy can be consolidated.	If a clearly demarcated territorial base exists, peaceful secession is possible with democracy in both new States.	
Other nations present and militant	Generates so much conflict or repression that democratic consolidation is highly implausible	Democratic state-nation can exist but to be consolidated should move toward —	Multinational state is only democratic possibility but prospect for consolid.dif ficult. / Pressures — toward	If no territorial base exists, 'velvet divorce' is impossible and if militancy persists democracy cannot be consolidate	
No group has sufficient cohesion and identity to be a nation-builder					No State is possible so democracy is impossible



In the following section we will carefully scrutinize Macedonian politics since independence. Our aim will be to sketch a clear picture of the most important statehood issues in the process of democratic consolidation, how and why did they appear, and how they were resolved, and if they were not why so. The answers to these questions will inevitably throw a light on the relationship between the majority Macedonians and the largest minority, ethnic Albanians. Part of Tito's Yugoslavia since 1944 Macedonia disassociated itself from the crumbling federation during the course of 1991. On January 25th, 1991, the parliament adopted a Declaration of Sovereignty which declared that the independence and the territorial integrity of the Macedonian people, based upon their right to self-determination and secession, should be guaranteed in a forthcoming constitution and validated through a popular referendum. Shortly after the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty, on January 27th, 1991 the Macedonian assembly elected Kiro Gligorov president of the country. Immediately upon his inauguration Gligorov won the support of the parliament and dedicated his efforts to a three point plan: preservation of Yugoslavia through a peaceful resolution of the crisis, creation of a parliamentary democracy secured by adoption of a new constitution, and promotion of the rights of national minorities in Macedonia (Spasov 1992). Aware of the perils for Macedonia if Yugoslavia disintegrated, Gligorov, together with Alija Izetbegovic, the president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, concentrated in mediating between the two sides holding opposing views on the future status of Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Serbia. On June 3rd, Gligorov, aided by Izetbegovic, proposed a new Yugoslav framework which would have included a common army, currency, and foreign policy (Cohen 1993: 213). However, throughout 1991, despite the Gligorov and Izetbegovic's mediating efforts, the political rift between the opposing sides of the Yugoslav conflict only widened. Yugoslav Army's intervention in Slovenia in June, 1991, and the multiplication of armed skirmishes between Serbian irregulars and police authorities in Croatia only worsened the already tense situation.

Following the violent summer of 1991, when fighting erupted first in Slovenia, and then throughout Croatia, Gligorov and the new Macedonian government, decided to go ahead with the plans for obtaining independence. On September 8th, 1991, a referendum was held in which more than 95% of those voting, voted for a sovereign and independent state. On September 17th of the same year the Macedonian parliament, the *Sobranie*, adopted a Declaration on the proclamation of the results of the referendum. The new Macedonian constitution promulgated on 1st of November, 1991, established Macedonia as a parliamentary democracy and provided space for 'cohabitation' between the Macedonians and the minority groups within the country.² Finally, on November, 21st, 1991 Macedonia declared independence, thus disassociating from rump Yugoslavia.

Modeled on constitutions of well established democracies, the Macedonian supreme legal document introduced a system of checks and balances, dividing the executive, legislative, and judiciary powers (Chokrevski 1996: 148). According to the constitution, safeguarding the principles of human rights and freedoms was the 'basis on which the social organization of the Macedonian society must be built' (Chokrevski 1996: 146). In order to serve the interests of the ethnic minorities and appease interethnic conflicts, the constitution provided for the establishment of a Council for Interethnic Relations within the legislature (Goldman 1997: 325). The new constitution also avoided the vacuum in the sphere of legal continuity through successfully resolving the issues of the relationships of the new legal order vis-à-vis both, the previous federal legal framework, and the international laws and conventions. It received positive comments by a number of legal experts, including the 1991 EC Arbitration Commission, responsible for reviewing

² For a commendable discussion on the Macedonian Constitution and the rights of minorities see: G'org'i Caca, 'Status and Rights of Nationalities in the Republic of Macedonia', *Balkan Forum*, no. 2, 1996.

the applications to EC by the former Yugoslav republics for independence, chaired by the French constitutional expert Robert Badinter.

Yet the foundations of the new state were not fully supported by the Macedonian Albanians. The 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' (Hislope 2003: 139).

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 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. Moreover, the article 19 of the constitution speaking about religious rights and liberties referred only to the Macedonian Orthodox Church in name, denoting the other religions present in the country as 'religious communities and groups' thereby aggravating the sense of injustice on the Muslim Albanians in Macedonia even more. The 1991 constitution was to become a major bone of contestation between the representatives of the Macedonian Albanians and the state institutions.

Successive events showed that Macedonian Albanians have adopted radical stance against the legitimacy of the new country. In 1992 ethnic Albanians boycotted the regular Macedonian census. More importantly, in early January 1992 a clandestine referendum was held in the western Macedonian counties where Albanians comprised a majority (Economist 1992: 48). The referendum gave 90% for own independence, although no immediate actions were taken upon it (Isakovic 1997). However, later on, in Struga in April of 1992, Albanian leaders proclaimed the 'Albanian Autonomous Republic of Ilirida' although again no concrete steps were taken to materialize this entity (Hislope 2003: 139). Meanwhile the PDP-NDP walked out of voting sessions in the parliament regarding the international recognition, and the national anthem, while also vigorously lobbying against Macedonian international recognition by the United Nations and the European Union until 'greater ethnic rights were given to the Albanian community' (Fekrat et al. 1999).

As one political commentator put it, the situation became tense as some Macedonian Albanian leaders 'encouraged their people to dream about Ilirida, a proposed autonomous entity within Macedonia...These politicians spoke of "radical 'remedies if they did not succeed by "peaceful means"' (Mehmeti 2001). Under such circumstances one could easily predict the reaction of the ethnic Albanian public. Further political mobilization of Macedonian Albanians followed. On March 31st, 1992 up to 40,000 ethnic



Albanians demonstrated in Skopje demanding that Macedonia should remain unrecognized by the international community until the state grants Macedonian Albanians the right to autonomy in regions and villages where ethnic Albanians make up the majority (Fekrat et al. 1999). More acutely in June, 1992 in Radolishte, an ethnic Albanian village on the Ohrid Lake and near to the Albanian border, Macedonian police uncovered a cache full with illegal weapons, explosives, ammunition, and paramilitary uniforms and fears were elevated that radical Macedonian Albanians could organize a militia and spark an inter-ethnic conflict (ibid.). Only few months later the first serious incident occurred in Skopje when on November 6th, 1992, Macedonian police had to use force to disperse ethnic Albanian protestors after an arrest of a young cigarette smuggler. As what later turned out to be a false rumor spread that the boy has been severely beaten by the police a huge Macedonian Albanian crowd gathered demanding his release. Clashes with the police turned extremely violent and gunfire was exchanged, the riots resulting in the deaths of four people, 36 injured, the destruction of over 50 shops, and several police vehicles destroyed (ibid.). Following the disturbances, the Ministry of the Interior Affairs seized 2,000 leaflets signed by the 'Ilirida Albanian youth Movement' calling on Macedonian Albanians to wage war for the right to self-determination.

In December 1992 the Macedonian parliament passed a new citizenship law which was furiously objected by ethnic Albanian politicians because of the fifteen-year residency requirement for naturalization to Macedonian citizenship. Since thousands of ethnic Albanians have migrated to Macedonia from the Serbian province of Kosovo in the 1980's and early 1990's Macedonian Albanian politicians argued for a five-year residency requirement. The fifteen-year residency clause for obtaining citizenship has been criticized by the leaders of Macedonia's Albanians like Arben Xaferi, who claimed that the law disproportionately affected ethnic Albanians, who had traveled freely between Macedonia and Kosovo when Yugoslavia was one state: 'Albanians have been moving freely around this area for centuries. You can't use the term 'emigration.' This law aims at ethnic cleansing because at once there are a large number of people who are stateless. Approximately 125,000 people are without citizenship' (Abrahams 1996). These figures were probably grossly inflated.

For the moment Macedonian Albanian politicians refrained from any direct rhetoric pertaining to greater Albania, or secession from Macedonia. However, their political actions throughout the early years of independence did not legitimize the state and gave the impression to the Albanian community in Macedonia that they have a license for radical measures. At a December 1992 press conference, Muhamed Halili, leader of the two-party alliance, warned that if change did not soon come about, 'we will then seek to achieve our ends through acts of civil disobedience' (Caplan 1992: 725). Moreover, after on April 8th, 1993, Macedonia was admitted to the United Nations, with a proviso that it was to be referred to as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia within the auspices of the UN, and that it has to strive for a solution to the 'name dispute' with Greece, the Macedonian parliament met to vote on the issue but PDP-NDP boycotted the session arguing that Macedonia should not receive international recognition until the country's record, in respect to its ethnic Albanian minority, 'improves significantly' (Fekrat et al. 1999).

Even worse, some of the members of PDP- NDP were implicated in one of the most prominent scandals of 1993, when in November; the Ministry of the Internal Affairs once again seized illegal weaponry stored in Skopje and Tetovo, as well as a list of 20,000 'potential supporters'. The Deputy Defense Minister Hisen Haskaj and Deputy Health Minister Imer Imeri, both from PDP were arrested for the alleged involvement in aiding the development of an organization called the All Albanian Army (AAA) (Isakovic 1997). Not surprisingly, the PDP claimed that the incident was a frame-up designed to legitimize

further constraints on the ethnic Albanian minority. In January of 1994 however, the police made additional arrests. Mithad Emini, the former General Secretary of the PDP, together with nine other persons was charged with involvement in the AAA plot to smuggle weapons into Macedonia in order to develop an ethnic Albanian militia (Fekrat et al. 1999).

During 1993 a struggle had developed for the control of PDP as a young generation of politicians favoring a radical agenda rose to eminence with the support of the president of Albania and leader of the Democratic Party, Sali Berisha (Koppa 2001). PDP radicals, led by Arben Xhaferi and Menduh Thaci, complained strongly that the party, as part of the ruling coalition, made too many compromises which undermined ethnic Albanian interests, and initially argued for a separate Albanian state in Macedonia (Fekrat et al. 1999, Eldridge 2002). At a national congress held by the PDP on February 12th, 1994, the party officially splintered into two factions, the moderate still supporting active participation in the political system. The radical faction founded a new party, PDP-A (Party of Democratic Prosperity of Albanians) and immediately asked that the Albanian language become an official one in Macedonia, and that the country is cantonized along ethnic lines. Immediately after the foundation of the party the rhetoric of PDP-A became even more militant. The leader of PDP-A, Arben Xhaferi, made explicit remarks to *The Observer* on 27th of February 1994: 'If Macedonians go on refusing Albanian demands, there will be bloodshed here... Only Albanians hold the key to stability in the country- we have a strong position and have many unused cards' (Koppa 2001: 49). This radical wing among Macedonian Albanian political elite, even claimed the right to autonomy or secession with the ultimate goal of unity with Kosovo (ibid.).

During the same year Macedonia held an extraordinary census. Since the regular one in 1991 was boycotted by the ethnic Albanians, and their numbers were disputed, the international community decided to help Macedonia organize a new census taking in July of 1994 thereby alleviating some of the interethnic tension. Just a month before the census in a street fighting in the town of Tetovo, a Macedonian youth was stabbed fatally by an ethnic Albanian. The atmosphere surrounding the census was tense, and its results were again disputed by Macedonian Albanian politicians as they did not reveal a significantly higher proportion of this population in the overall count than the estimated 22%. Macedonian Albanians complained of technical irregularities and that many of the Albanians who have moved to Macedonia in the recent years have not been counted in, but credible international observers dismissed objections by ethnic Albanian parties that the census was irregular and that they accounted for up to 40% of the population (Fekrat et al. 1999).

Another serious political problem emerged in December of 1994 when a private Albanian-language university was established in Tetovo by the municipal councils of Tetovo, Gostivar and Debar. Denying the legality of the project at first the Macedonian government reacted strongly against the university and quickly moved to close it down. Indeed, on February 17th, 1995 a man was killed in clashes between about 1,500 ethnic Albanians and Macedonian police outside the illegal Albanian-language University in Tetovo (ibid.). All Macedonian Albanian MP's supported the initiative to establish this university and on at least one instance walked out of a parliamentary session demanding governmental approval of an Albanian-language university in Tetovo. In February 1995, they also accented their demand for the right to use the Albanian-language in parliament. After Tetovo University reopened in November 1995, the central authorities did not act any further regarding the issue and thus, this institution has been functioning ever since without official recognition, funded by the ethnic Albanian community in the country and abroad. Throughout the 1996 Macedonian Albanian political leaders claimed grievances concerning the question of higher education in



Albanian, as well as a number of other issues such as the citizenship law, representation in public institution, etc.

Local elections in 1997 brought to office a number of ethnic Albanian mayors belonging to the PDP-A, which advocated a more hard-line stance toward the Macedonian Government (International Crisis Group 1997). Thereafter, various political analysts warned that troubles are imminent and it did not take much for the interethnic problems to surface on the front pages of newspapers. In the summer of 1997 a serious confrontation occurred between the mayor of Gostivar Rufi Osmani, member of PDP-A, and the central authorities. After putting up the Albanian and the Turkish flags in front of the town hall, Osmani together with the mayor of Tetovo, Mr. Alajdin Demiri, defied a May ruling of the constitutional court that other countries' flags (including Albanian and Turkish) could not be flown in public. Gostivar is a multiethnic town, where Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians, and Turks, live intertwined. Macedonian Albanian politicians have been referring to the flag issue as a 'human rights violation,' 'raising the rhetorical temperature above the record previously set by the Tetovo university confrontation: mayor Rufi Osmani called on Gostivar's Albanians to "protect their flag with their blood"' (ibid.).

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On July 7th, in an effort to defuse tensions, the parliament passed a law allowing the flags of Macedonian national minorities to be flown outside town halls on state holidays, but the mayors in both towns rejected the law. After the government in Skopje sent in Special Forces to take down the flags flying outside Gostivar's town hall the police was surrounded by a hostile mass of ethnic Albanians. After what the police explained was an unjustified attack on their units, it violently intervened to diffuse the crowd. In the process exchange of fire was reported and three protestors were killed, while 312 people had been reported arrested, including the town's newly-elected radical mayor, Mr. Rufi Osmani. Gostivar was effectively under undeclared martial law for a week following this incident and repeated OSCE requests for permission to enter Gostivar on July 9 were flatly refused by the police (ibid.).

Macedonian Albanians demonstrated against the perceived discrimination of the state authorities and the imprisonment of Osmani on several occasions in 1997 and 1998. However, apart from the three explosions that shook Prilep, Kumanovo, and Skopje on 22nd of July, causing material damage, later claimed to be the work of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighting for the 'Albanian cause' in Macedonia, there was no instances of significant ethnic related violence in the country in 1998. This was the year when the third parliamentary elections took place in October and early November, after

which an unlikely governmental coalition between the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), the new Democratic Alternative Party and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), successor of PDP-A was made. To promote better interethnic relations immediately after its inauguration the new government enacted an amnesty law which pardoned among others the mayors of Gostivar and Tetovo, sentenced to rather harsh prison terms after the 1997 riots.

Interethnic relations in Macedonia however, suffered dramatically during the war in Kosovo and the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. Coalition partners disagreed how to deal with the increasing influx of Kosovo Albanian refugees. By early May, a total of 250,000 refugees had arrived in Macedonia, many of which were accommodated by local Albanian families, the rest being placed in quickly built camps. The Macedonian governmental experts believed that given the economical position of the country it could host no more than 20,000 Kosovo refugees. Once the numbers of refugees on Macedonian soil started to increase dramatically above this ceiling, the Macedonian parties of the coalition asked international assistance and transfer of the displaced persons to third countries. At the same time DPA demanded that Kosovo Albanians should remain in the region. The views of the coalition partners on the question of the future of Kosovo also dramatically differed. While Xhaferi and Albanians in general wished for independence, IMRO-DPMNE as well as the majority of Macedonians thought that this would be a dangerous precedent for Balkan constellations.

Meanwhile, 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. While the Macedonian press was highly alarmed by the militarization of ethnic Albanians in the country, the government, and especially the biggest coalition party IMRO-DPMNE, decided to keep a blind eye hoping that Macedonian Albanians would constrain their actions. Although DPA decided to wield its influence so that Macedonia is not destabilized despite the obvious militarization of ethnic Albanians, it did not cease to demand significant political changes of the Macedonian political order. In an indicative statement made to Agence France Press on 29th of May, Adelina Marku, the spokeswoman of DPA, stressed that Macedonian Albanians were not satisfied with their status of national minority: 'We want Macedonia to proclaim itself a multi-ethnic country made up on an equal basis of a Macedonian and an Albanian nation' (Fekrat et al. 1999). The victory of NATO and the quick return of Kosovo refugees in the summer of 1999 proved helpful in abating the tensions in Macedonia.

Nonetheless, tensions remained high throughout 2000 especially as the new government failed to move on quickly enough on the pressing issues concerning Macedonian Albanians. DPA and IMRO-DPMNE worked closely to solve the burning questions concerning the demands of Macedonian Albanians, like the question of higher education and the citizenship law. However, for many in the Macedonian Albanian community the intended governmental reforms were too slow and too meager especially considering the solution to the Kosovo issue. Thanks to the military struggle of KLA and the NATO intervention, their brethren in Kosovo achieved almost all their goals in a very short time period. Indeed, 'the emergence of a radical Albanian grouping in the face of the DPA; and the continuous protests of the Macedonian Albanians over the issues of their status, higher education in their mother tongue and the release of their leaders from prison, outlined a background which pointed to a next Balkan conflict with high intensity and far reaching regional dimension' (ibid.) It did not take much for the political conflict over the status of Macedonian Albanians to become very violent.



Macedonia almost surged into a full blown civil war in the spring and the summer of 2001. Led by Ali Ahmeti the previously unknown 'National Liberation Army' or NLA, (acronym of which is ONA in Macedonian and UCK in Albanian) a motley group of former Kosovo Liberation Army (also UCK in Albanian) fighters from both Kosovo and Macedonia, Albanian insurgents from the Southeastern Serbian regions of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja crossing the border into Macedonia, young Albanian radicals and nationalist from Macedonia as well as foreign mercenaries, organized a seven-month armed insurrection against the Macedonian government (February- August 2001). At the first stages of the conflict it was not clear what aims the organization has as in its communiqués it proclaimed to be fighting against the 'Slavo-Macedonian' oppressors and in favor of 'Greater Kosovo/Albania'. Its rhetoric later became one of 'fighting for human rights of the Albanians in Macedonia and constitutional reforms'. Using guerrilla warfare but also such as brutal methods as ethnic cleansing and various terrorist acts against ordinary civilians, Ali Ahmeti's group soon became a powerful factor in Macedonian politics being capable of prolonged combat and further exacerbating the ethnic divisions in the country. With emotions running high among the government and ordinary Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians the danger of civil strife was high. Under international mediation Ahmeti agreed to pacification of the NLA under the conditions that constitutional reforms were to be made in Macedonia which would clarify the position of the Macedonian Albanians in the society. Indeed, the constitutional reforms envisioned in the so-called Ohrid Framework Agreement effectively entrenched special rights for this group in the country.

Perceptions and Nation Building

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 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' (Rossos 2002: 104).

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 (de Rapper 1999). 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' (Babuna 2000: 83). 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 Albanians perceived the new state and its institutions as lacking legitimacy. 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 (de Rapper 1999). 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.

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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. Macedonians 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 1994, 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 the Republic of 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")' (Fraenkel 2003: 403).

Democratic Consolidation in Macedonia

As it is evident much of the political problems can be attributed to the radically different perceptions of the political reality of the country. A close analysis of the most important inter-ethnic events in Macedonia in the period of 1991-2001 reveals not only that this former Yugoslav republic did not consolidate democracy but also that effectively it could not have done so. Ever since independence, Macedonian Albanians, the biggest national minority in the country, and their political representatives have questioned the validity of the Macedonian state, its basic foundation, the logic of its existence. Macedonian Albanian parties have denied the legitimacy of the 1991 constitution, disputed the results of the 1991, as well as the 1994 census, internationally monitored and verified. In the early 1990's political representatives of Macedonian Albanians did not support the quest for international recognition of this country, as long as the alleged injustices against the ethnic Albanian status in Macedonia were not addressed. Moreover, ethnic Albanians have acted in favor of the preservation of their interests, legitimate or not, in spite of the state's laws and regulations. At various occasions Albanians in Macedonia have shown readiness to demonstrate even violently against what they have perceived as state injustice. Different structures among the Macedonian Albanians including politicians who have entered the government have not excluded armed struggle against the state if certain demands were not fulfilled. The arrests of the two important ethnic Albanian governmental members in 1993, as well as the radical rhetoric by DPA leaders emphasizing a 'right to autonomy or secession' with the ultimate goal of unity with Kosovo, testifies that Macedonian Albanians did not accept the Macedonian concept of the state and that they were literally ready to fight to change it if circumstances required.

On the other hand, in the same period the Macedonian political elites have initiated state building that was centered on the desires of Macedonians. The preamble of the 1991 constitution and the article 19 testify that Macedonian leaders were inclined to perceive

the country as being primarily belonging to the Macedonians. Surely, they have outlined legally equal rights and possibilities for all the other ethnicities including Macedonian Albanians, but conceived them as junior partners in the enterprise. The ambitions and experiences of national minorities were not taken into account when the state was envisaged. Macedonia was to become a nation state where national minorities were to adapt to Macedonian based institutions. If the Macedonian Albanians did not fare as well as the majority population in socio-economic terms, the problem was not with the system but with the minority's willingness to adjust to it.

Similarly, the symbols of the country were to be distinctive and those who did not accept them or wished for their own ethnic ones to be also represented in public were acting illegitimately. Higher education was to be conducted only in the official language of the country, even if there was interest in establishing private educational institutions in other languages. Macedonian nation building clashed head on with ethnic Albanian nationalism and the conflict dragged on the country's stabilization. Regional factors such as the raiding of the army depots in Albania in 1997 and the smuggling of a bunk of these weapons to the Albanian populated territories in the Balkans, the emergence of KLA and the war in Kosovo in 1999-2000, as well as Kosovo Albanian nationalism, contributed to the deepening of the polarization between the two communities and the increased possibility of an armed conflict.

Clearly then, Macedonian main problems achieving democratic consolidation arose due to its 'stateness' problem, namely the various disputes over the character of the state, and the question regarding who has a right to citizenship. 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.

Paradoxically, the conditions for stabilization of democracy in Macedonia were met only after a bloody armed conflict in 2001 and the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement by all the relevant political parties in the country including DPA and PDP. The amendments to the 1991 constitution based on this agreement gave clear picture to the rights of national minorities and especially ethnic Albanians. 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 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 will soon be accomplished.

In Lieu of Conclusion

Despite the positive developments, recent radical statements of the political leaders of IMRO-DPMNE, DPA, and PDP reveal that it is an open question whether the consolidation of democracy has been achieved in Macedonia even after the changes of the political



system in 2001.³ In the table made by Linz and Stepan concerning the inter-relationship between State, Nation(s), and Democratization, we can observe that by accepting the Ohrid Framework Agreement and passing amendments to the 1991 constitution, Macedonian political elites have altered their policies towards [the column] 'crafts some federal or quasi federal and quasi consociational practices'. Combined with a situation where the 'degree of presence of other nations besides titular nation in state territory' of the Macedonian Albanians is 'other nation(s) present and awakened' then, 'democracy can be consolidated'.

However, if Macedonian Albanians tally in the category of 'other nation(s) present and militant' then consolidated democracy will not be possible in Macedonia. The leaders of the opposition parties in Macedonia have recently made statements that testify to their readiness to move to the category of 'accepts in principle possibility of peaceful and democratic negotiated secession.' Given however, the national mixture of Macedonia and the geographical dispersion of the ethnic groups in the country, there are no 'clearly demarcated territorial bases' making a peaceful secession impossible. The solutions suggested by Georgievski and readily applauded by Xhaferi and Thaci, include such anachronistic principles such as exchanges of population and territories and/or construction of armored walls separating the communities if necessary.

However, the new coalition government is inclined to implement the Framework agreement and make a major effort to accommodate the ethnic Albanian minority by crafting a series of political arrangements that recognize minority rights. Under such circumstances Linz and Stepan argue that a democratic polity can 'isolate the extremists in any ethnic, cultural, or religious national minority but cannot prevent its existence and antidemocratic actions' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 431). More importantly, in such a situation 'democratic leaders can generally count on the support of the peaceful democratic majority of the minority population, thus limiting the influence of the extremists on the polity...violent actions (whatever their 'idealist motivations') are likely to be defined in the end as criminal by both the majority and the bulk of the minority' (ibid.) Among the Macedonians the ideas of Georgievski have fallen on deaf ears. Most commentators and political figures have vigorously criticized his concept. Not even the presidency of Georgievski's own party has been ready to accept his views as acceptable. Given the disastrous defeat of IMRO-DPMNE in the last elections, and the continuous support of the Macedonian public of the governing SDSM commitment to reforms of the system, it is more likely that the burden of responsibility will fall on the ethnic Albanians. Macedonian Albanians' reaction to the radical ideas coming from the current leaders of the opposition will be the ultimate test for the democratic future of this country. If the general mood among the Albanians in Macedonia swerves in favor of militant solutions democracy will not be consolidated and the pressures for partition of the country will rise.⁴

³ See the column of the long time leader of IMRO-DPMNE Ljupco Georgievski in the issue of *Dnevnik*, 18th April advocating ethnic partition of Macedonia and the reactions of Xhaferi and Thaci. Though Georgievski's idea of ethnic partition faced huge disapproval in the country, the leaders of the opposition Democratic Party of Albanians supported the proposal. DPA leaders Xhaferi and Thaci have been promoting similar ideas, albeit not quite so publicly. Commenting on Georgievski's proposal during the 19 April press conference, Xhaferi said: 'It is the only way out of the catastrophe, but for the moment it has no international approval' (Alagjovovski and Raxhimi 2003). A few days later, in an interview with Albania's largest daily, *Shekulli*, Thaci said that following his resignation he would 'continue to work on the idea of creating ethnic states in the Balkans, which would mean permanent stability' (ibid.) Moreover, as Macedonian media reported at a 19th April press conference, Xhaferi and Thaci called the proposal 'fantastic' and 'worth fighting for.' More warningly, during the 12th of July congress of DPA, they flirted with the idea of 'self-determination' of the Albanian people in Macedonia. Around the same time, the new leader of PDP, Abdurahman Bexheti, warned that failing to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement Macedonia should brace for the self-determination of Albanians for which the basis were laid down during the clandestine referendum of 1992.

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