

8. The Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on Macedonia: Between the Hammer and the Anvil

I International responses to the Kosovo crisis and the position of Macedonia

Since the beginning of the Yugoslav drama, numerous security organisations have proven incapable both in early warning and action, conflict- and violence-prevention and conflict management. Having lacked a global and strategic view on the Yugoslav conflicts the so-called international community most often behaved as a fireman putting out one fire after another. The general impression is that what has been going in the region may be named conflict mismanagement. The Macedonian and the Kosovo cases may illustrate two contrasting approaches toward prevention of immediate break out of a violent conflict. The Macedonian case is usually considered a clear success on the ground, even though there are no established, agreed-upon criteria on how to measure the success of preventive missions. Of course, one can argue that the very absence of violent conflict is the main criterion - but then, what is the time perspective? But a success must also include guarantees that peace is likely to prevail long time after the termination of a mission.

The analysis of the character and de facto changing mandate of the UN preventive deployment in Macedonia (UNPREDEP) might prove that this unique mission was stationed for totally wrong reasons, based on a deficient diagnosis of the conflict: it was established to prevent external aggression from the north when this was a highly unlikely scenario - and thus turned its back to conflict potentials inside Macedonia. As time passed, fortunately the mandate was transformed and focused on internal conflict mitigation, but officially this has been admitted neither by UN officials nor by the Macedonian government. So the much-praised political will among all the relevant factors in Macedonia was based on a blurred conception of the real mandate of the mission. Undoubtedly, UNPREDEP's overall achievements were positive; but it did not succeed in really alleviating the internal conflict potential or to address the root causes of the conflicts. Basic problems are still immediate, and there is no conflict transformation or conflict-resolution on the horizon. The greatest achievement of this early action was the avoidance of use of pressure or threats toward the parties in the dispute and on different segments in the Macedonian society. Interestingly, it contained elements of real preventive diplomacy on the ground and - more important - it was diplomacy not backed by force.

From a wider point of view, the main limitation of this mission of preventive peacekeeping was that it was tied to one state's territory but having to deal with a problem that connects with several territories. With the 1999 developments in Kosovo - which were very predictable and warned against by many for years - there is a need for re-evaluating the achievements and results of the UN mission in Macedonia. It is crystal clear that Macedonia needs some sort of mechanism for conflict-mitigation and conflict-transformation within its own society. In addition, Macedonia itself and the region as a whole would benefit greatly if this mission had been extended in time to cover also Kosovo. The fatal delay of numerous and possible types of conflict-prevention in Kosovo jeopardised the situation in Macedonia. Without some corresponding or integrated mission on the other side of the border, UNPREDEP was not able to fulfil its mandate, as much as one would have wished.

The outbreak of open and a large-scale violence in the Serbian province of Kosovo in early 1998 was the final evidence that international responses to this conflict had been unsuitable and/or tardy. With his non-violent politics, the leader of the Kosovo Albanians, *Ibrahim*

Rugova “bought” sometime for the international community in a very critical moment of escalation of the war in Croatia and Bosnia. The outbreak of violence in Kosovo was among the most predictable events in the world. Despite loud early warnings about this conflict, there was no early action. The period of several years gave enough time to the international players to implement some form of conflict prevention, but the opportunity was missed. Both the Yugoslav (Serbian) regime and the international community looked satisfied with the situation on the ground, relying all the time on common sense of the confronted peoples and parties. Indeed, for several years there existed a unique model of hostile coexistence, i.e. a low degree of friction and apparent stability of the Serbian-Albanian dualism in Kosovo.

After NATO intervention over Yugoslavia, it is reasonable to ask whether miscalculations of the so-called international community were result of its short-sighted and very often divergent policies toward Kosovo crisis, or there was something more in the background, something more deliberate in terms of a long-term strategy. The attitude towards the Serbian regime has been inconsistent and unprincipled since the beginning of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. From one side, the West has treated *Milošević* as “a butcher in the Balkans” and the Serbs have been demonised as the only guilty ones in the highly complex conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia.

At the same time, the so-called international community accepted *Milošević*'s signature on the Dayton Peace Accords, considering that he was the main guarantor that the agreement would be implemented. During this period, the international community was deeply aware of the situation in Kosovo, but intentionally turned its blind eye to it. Actually, it tolerated the Serbian state repression in the province, while loudly demanding that the Human rights of the Kosovo Albanians' be greatly improved. It seems that the international so-called community had intentionally waited until the situation in Kosovo had heightened so much that coercive international measures appeared to be “indispensable” and NATO could be sold as “*there is nothing else to do now*”. Western global media indeed helped rallying public opinion behind the *we-must-do-something* policy. At that stage of the violent conflict, the international ‘help’ inevitably has a character of involvement in the conflict, especially regarding the imposition of the final solution.

From a Macedonian perspective the subsequent motions of the international community were extremely contradictory and even dangerous. Reportedly, the real motivation for the Americans and Europeans in undertaking all ‘necessary’ measures including the military intervention over Yugoslavia was prevention of the conflict spreading to Macedonia. With this stated purpose and with the rapid escalation of the conflict, due to NATO and the US transformed themselves from ‘mediators’ into active, side taking parties to the conflict, strange missions were established both in Kosovo and –Macedonia.

The first one was so-called OSCE verification mission (KVM) in Kosovo, which was followed by the NATO-led 4000-troop “extraction” force stationed on Macedonia's northern border. Some observers believe that the real role of the OSCE mission was, in fact, to serve as a prelude for the NATO-led mission in Macedonia and subsequent bombing of Yugoslavia. Both Macedonian and international representatives were repeatedly stating that the ‘extraction mission’ in Macedonia was of an essentially humanitarian nature and that its main task would have been to protect and evacuate unarmed OSCE verifiers if and when necessary.

However, suspicion about its real mandate increased when speculations about sending additional military force in the form of ‘extractors of the extractors’ were revealed by the media. The absurdity of the mandate of this mission became very apparent when in fact OSCE verifiers withdrew from Kosovo without any incident, in a very short time, and just before the beginning of the NATO military campaign over Yugoslavia.

Since 1991 the Republic of Macedonia has been trying to deserve the epithet of the only peaceful actor in the Yugoslav drama. Peace in the country has been a result of many endeavours undertaken both by the Macedonian government and citizens and the international assistance of various kinds. Suddenly, just before the military intervention, the mild Macedonian landscape was dramatically changed by the presence of the NATO forces. One cannot avoid the impression that Macedonia was put in a very ambiguous and undesirable position, at the same time hosting UN and NATO forces with essentially different mandates and different impacts on its security. As a result, Macedonia was transformed in a place d'arme.

If it is true that the UN preventive peacekeeping mission was initiated by the Macedonian government, but in this second case the situation was radically different. Brussels (and Washington) resolutely demanded the installation of NATO troops in a very critical moment of Macedonia's internal political life. Macedonia was caught in an interregnum period, when the new Macedonian parliament and government were not constituted after the latest elections. The NATO leadership presented it as a test for Macedonia's co-operativeness and willingness to join NATO. It was de facto blackmail and the Macedonian government had no choice. Both president *Gligorov* and the young Prime Minister *Georgievski* were faced with a difficult dilemma. They were aware that it was not in the country's best interest to participate in something that was bound to antagonise Serbia and looked like a support to Albanian separatism through violence. Heavily dependent upon foreign military assistance and tending toward NATO membership and EU integration, the Macedonian government accepted increasing foreign military presence. One of the leaders of the coalition government, a professor of international law, *Dr. Vasil Tupurkovski* wrote in 1997 that, Macedonia must not seek to exploit existing differences among the Balkan states, nor must it seek to improve its international position to the expense of its neighbours." However, being now in the ruling position, he obviously changed his mind.

At the beginning of 1999 the situation in Macedonia as well as in the region could have been described as a stage for a collision between preventive diplomacy versus preventing diplomacy. Previously, there was a widespread consideration that UNPREDEP had provided a stable security environment in Macedonia in which democracy could have established its roots in society, the moves of so-called international community endangered all positive achievements of preventive diplomacy, and brought Macedonia to the edge of catastrophe. The Macedonian case became famous in the world as a paradigmatic precedent of UN preventive deployment, which gave the UN prominence in the field of conflict-prevention that is supposed to be an essential part of its mandate.

In February 1999, on the eve of the Kosovo war, this unique mission was terminated, and very soon the role of the UN in the Balkan conflicts was definitively marginalized by the non-authorized NATO military intervention in the FR of Yugoslavia. The violent conflict in Kosovo was a failure of the whole international community, but the military intervention and the way it was undertaken by NATO was a failure of conflict prevention in general. Conflict-management by extensive use of force in and over Yugoslavia endangered and worsened the prospects of successful conflict-prevention endeavours in neighbouring Macedonia and the entire region. It has been one more proof that the international so-called community has not built a long term strategy of preventing intrastate conflicts, especially not in the Balkans.

II “Collateral damages” of the NATO’s intervention in Macedonia

The term ‘collateral damages’, which has been cynically invented by strategists, applies perfectly to the war in Yugoslavia and the situation in Macedonia. The Macedonian euphoria that followed words of moral support and praise from NATO Secretary-General Solana vanished during the first weeks of the war. The government was soon in a state of shock. When the Prime Minister *Georgievski* accused NATO that its military campaign was about to make Macedonia an innocent victim of the war in Yugoslavia, it was too late, because the country had already been badly hurt. Regardless of whether Macedonia was an “innocent victim” or a “naive collaborator” in the military campaign, it is abundantly clear today that the consequences of the war are visible in every sphere and that their reparation will be a difficult challenge for the long-term future.

By 24 March 1999, when the NATO air-campaign began over Yugoslavia, Macedonia’s government was viewed with ambiguity by its citizens. Even before the outbreak of war, the public evaluation of the first “100 days in office” showed great disillusionment with regard to the promises made during the parliamentary elections. The new government that had come to power under the motto “Changes” had been anything but successful in bringing about real and positive changes, especially in the social and economic spheres of society. However, foreign observers highly appreciated the very experiment of getting the two most nation parties together in the coalition. Some of them hastened to say that the biggest trials in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations had been overcome and that the country proved its maturity in the search for ethnic *modus vivendi*.

So, the situation was far from stable — as manifested very soon by the de facto disfunctioning of the major political institutions and procedures. The maintenance of the ruling coalition between VMRO and DPA resulted partly from a compromise between their two leaders and partly from exercising the famous “ostrich tactics” that Macedonian politicians have developed to perfection. Whenever the problems were to be resolved through the legitimate institutions, tremendous obstacles appeared. The exit of such blockade of the political system was seen in turning a blind eye and deaf ear to the actions undertaken by the coalition partner. The survival of the government was paid for by sacrificing democratic principles and legal procedures. Macedonia’s government stayed in office, but the nascent democratic achievements and rule of law suffered unrecoverable damages.

In the first days of the military intervention in Yugoslavia when upset Macedonian citizens expected some official explanation by their government, the political institutions pretended that nothing was going on. The parliamentary debate on an insignificant law on communal taxes was underway without any disturbances before the eyes of the confused citizens.

The coalition partners, more specifically the minister of interior (from DA) and vice-prime minister (from DPA) were arguing over the legal status of the people from Kosovo that were arriving in the thousands by the day and night. DPA party activists were already active in the fields helping their km. They organised efficient transportation and private accommodation for the refugees from Kosovo in the towns and villages in western Macedonia. Media announced that KLA fighters were given medical treatment in the *Tetovo* hospital, but the Macedonian authorities simply disregarded the information, indeed seems to have lost contact with the rapidly unfolding crisis.

During the 78-day military campaign, Macedonian police undertook several actions in the villages close to the borders to Yugoslavia and Albania and found huge amounts of ammunition and military equipment in what looked like secret KLA stores or headquarters. These actions were presented as a major success of Macedonian police, but at the same time

nothing was done when there was a public Albanian mobilisation and youngsters were sent from Macedonia into Kosovo to fight. In the same period, in an interview to the Italian radio, *Arben Xhaferi* said that Albanians in Macedonia would not respond to an official mobilisation call should the Macedonian authorities issue one.

The Macedonian government was crying for international help and particularly insisted on Europe to open its doors too — appealing that the number of refugees had become alarming and that it was an unbearable burden for the weak and collapsed Macedonian economy. On the other hand and simultaneously, the representatives of the Albanian parties and community were proving the opposite: that all the country's resources and capacities had not been used yet and that all the refugees had to stay in Macedonia. Their main arguments were that Kosovars were 'at home' in Macedonia, and Albanian members of the parliament claimed that they were legal representatives of the people in the refugee camps.

The general conclusion is that during the war in Yugoslavia and refugee exodus of the Kosovo Albanians, the feeling of internal cohesion increased rapidly, not only within the Albanian community in Macedonia, but also between Macedonian and Kosovo Albanians. The Albanian ethnic community has been perceived as one unifying whole both by ordinary people and politicians, and the question of citizenship to two different states has been unheeded.

Albanians in Macedonia showed unprecedented empathy, solidarity and hospitality to their Kosovo brethren, while the Macedonians feeling and attitudes were rather mixed and ambiguous. One part of the public manifested sincere compassion with the unhappy people, remembering that Macedonian people have gone through the same horrible experience several times during its history. On the other hand, there was increasing fear and even anti-Albanian feelings which were often intermixed with anti-NATO and pro-Serb sentiments. Different political structures were manipulating those expressions, interpreting them once as anti-NATO and sometimes as anti-Albanian and/or pro-Serbian attitudes. In general, the Kosovo war was a highly politicising issue in Macedonia as it was in many countries in the region. Political parties tried to mobilise public opinion over this sensitive issue in order to win some significant points in regard to their opponents.

Actually, the attitudes in certain segments of the Macedonian society can be explained on a non-political basis. As for the Albanian side, the situation is quite unambiguous. War and sufferings of so many innocent people with the same ethnic affiliation inevitably represent a good basis for creation of sense of belonging and solidarity. The attitudes of Macedonians are more difficult to explain, because there were so many mixed feelings. Undoubtedly, Macedonians having experienced horrors of exodus several times in their history manifested their compassion with suffering people.

However, their attitude was more complex, because they also felt a fear from exactly the suffering people who came in. The sympathies found among the Serbian people cannot be explained by a similar ethnic and/or religious affiliation, but rather by the image of having a "common enemy" in the face of Albanian population. The level of ethnic identification and homogenisation of the two most numerous groups in Macedonia has reached its peak since independence in 1991. Albanians accused Macedonians of lack of empathy for the refugees, while many Macedonians started looking at members of the Albanian minority and refugees as if they were all potential KLA fighters.

The seriousness of the situation could have manifested itself when violent incidents were imminent, especially in the ethnically mixed areas (*Tetovo*, *Kumanovo*, villages around the capital, *Skopje*, etc.) and between the refugees and the local population near the refugee camps. One of the reasons behind the sceptical attitudes of the Macedonians was that they had several doubts about the NATO military campaign it took place without any legal

authorisation, with lots of “collateral damages” and it created a frightening pre-war atmosphere in Macedonia during the Kosovo war itself. Furthermore, there was the humiliating and arrogant behaviour of NATO and its troops and representatives in Macedonia throughout the crisis.

Nevertheless, the deeper source of animosity among Macedonians will be found in the extremely severe social and economic situation. Even before the war, Macedonia had more than 300,000 unemployed people, and half of the employees had not received their salaries for several months; the number of socially endangered people was constantly increasing. Instead of an expected economic growth in 1999, it dropped by more than 10 per cent.

These economic hardships mainly affected the Macedonian part of the population, because the Albanians are mostly employed in the private sector, in small agriculture units or are immigrant workers in Western European countries. Macedonian firms were closed in a big number, and their workers sent home on a “forced vacation” either because of the lack of raw materials or because of inability to export the goods out of the country. The main roads to Europe’s markets lead exactly through war-ravaged Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, during many decades the biggest trade partner of Macedonian economy has been Yugoslavia (Serbia and Kosovo). Understandably, devastation of the civilian and infrastructure targets in neighbouring Yugoslavia amounted to a de facto strike on Macedonia, too: on its economy, citizens’ security and future. Therefore, Macedonians spontaneously took a side in the conflict opposite to the one chosen by their government which was still trying, rather, to position itself by bowing to foreign masters in the competition race to join NATO.

Thus, while citizens engaged in public protests and anti-war concerts, the foreign minister was touring European capitals demanding a full NATO membership for Macedonia. His hopes were definitively ruined after the Washington Summit in mid April-1999. The chance of quick entry turned out to have been an illusion.

At the peak of the refugee crisis Macedonia hosted over 350,000 people (according to unreliable official estimations) which amounts to almost 18 per cent out of the total population. It was a burden that even developed countries could hardly have borne – and knew how to avoid. Macedonian citizens were watching humanitarian convoys for the refugees, while the international community was not even thinking about the damages that the host country suffered. The West saw Macedonia not as a sovereign state faced with a humanitarian catastrophe that greatly alleviated the pressure on Europe, but rather as a kind of nameless area settled by refugees in “tent cities” combined with thousands of heavily armed foreign soldiers in barracks and bases. Western journalists that were not able to pronounce correctly the name of the capital of Macedonia knew the strangest names of the refugee camps.

Cynicism and hypocrisy of the leaders in the Western countries only deepened the existing gap between the ethnic groups in the country. Humanitarian aid arrived much slower than the military troops, while the Macedonian state and Army were facing bankruptcy. In the face of complaints from the Macedonian side that KLA had moved its headquarters and onto Macedonia’s territory and that the country might become the next involved party in the conflict, the assurance came from *Gen. Wesley Clark* and German Foreign Minister *Fischer* who said that they were personally going to appeal to KLA leadership not to destabilise Macedonia.

The feeling of insecurity among the citizens grew along with the increased number of NATO troops. At one point NATO had three times more soldiers there than the regular Macedonian army! – and kept on stating that its mission was purely humanitarian and that

they were not going to transform NATO's presence into ground troops for an invasion of Kosovo.

The terrifying "sound of protection" over the Macedonian sky and the frequently heard detonations caused by some "mistakes" by NATO jets, were additional factor contributing to something of a war psychosis. After the first biggest protests before the embassies of the Western countries in *Skopje*, Macedonia's police corps engaged in protecting the alleged "protectors of Macedonia" – NATO country embassies – which only worsened the gap of mistrust between Macedonian citizens and their state.

The war is over and the Macedonian government has survived. The country has gone through the heaviest challenge since 1991. However, the story does not end here and now. Macedonia has been left degraded in political, economic, social and environmental terms. The country's inter ethnic relations have never been worse despite persistent denial of that fact by officials. The gap of distrust and animosity is deeper than ever. In Albanian-populated villages one can see graffiti such as "UÇK- NATO". The Albanian community in Macedonia has not identified only with the Kosovars, but also with what was seen as a common mighty protector – NATO and the US.

III Macedonia after the NATO intervention: Before or After the Rain?

The appearance of Macedonia as a sovereign state on the international scene followed many dare predictions as well as hopes and amazement. Since 1991 it has been seen as "oasis of peace" and/or "bacon of hope" on the turbulent Balkans. The Macedonian citizens have become satisfied with the fact that there has not been war in their country – yet. The metaphor of the film "Before the Rain" has become reality, but nobody has been sure whether the rain will bring relief or sorrow. One year after the NATO intervention over Yugoslavia and the transformation of Macedonia into "refugee heaven"– the question is still open. Actually, Macedonia does not know whether the current situation can be described as before or after the rain. The memories of the horrible scenes of human sufferings and the cold breath of death are still fresh, but the Macedonian citizens ask themselves – is it all over or might it happen again?

For a decade the Macedonian citizens have been told both by their government(s) and the so-called international community that the political and security situation in their country is the ultimate happiness. They should have been happy with the situation where the human sufferings were some other people sufferings not their own. State of peace and stability, which is not happiness but a normal state of affairs and a pre-condition for development in any normal state in the world, for the Macedonians citizens, should have been a source of extraordinary satisfaction. The government announced negative peace as its achievement, while the so-called international community got opportunity to show, at least, one successful and even paradigmatic case of preventive diplomacy (or preventive peacekeeping) undertaken on its behalf

Summing up the consequences of NATO intervention is a very difficult and ambiguous task. Difficulties arise from the fact that the humanitarian catastrophe from spring 1999 has left extremely deep but not always visible scars on Macedonia and its people. Ambiguity is, however, a result of the "ostrich tactic" practised by the Macedonian government(s) that is not willing to allow an open debate on the issue – what was the price that Macedonia had to pay during the Kosovo crisis in spring 1999? It looks far more concerned with defence of the so-called Euro-Atlantic values and New World Order than with the situation in the country.

For the parties directly involved in the Kosovo conflict, particularly during the NATO intervention as well as in its aftermath, the need to claim victory is quite understandable. But the behaviour of the Macedonian government in the aftermath of the intervention was nothing less than bizarre. The Prime Minister *Georgievski* hurried up to congratulate *Gen. Clark* for the “shining victory“ and publicly declared that during the crisis NATO troops had been so welcome in Macedonia that they were “not guests but hosts in our country“. Since then nobody has ever tried to make an analysis of the costs of the “victory” that Macedonia had to pay in terms of economic, political, human, and ecological damages. Most of these issues have been seen as not desirable for opening debate. NATO intervention over Yugoslavia is still one of the most politicised issues in Macedonia. Any attempt to pose delicate questions that might condemn “our allies” is seen as a betrayal of Macedonia’s strategic interests to join the Alliance or a direct attack of the coalition government.

Not surprisingly, the one-year jubilee is also seen as a memory of the ‘great victory’. From the government’s perspective, staying in office under the tremendous conditions that have been prevailing during the last year is a great success indeed. The real question is – what this jubilee means for the Macedonian society and its citizens? The leading political elite tries to link the survival of the state with the survival of the ruling coalition. In this interpretation these two different matters are presented as synonyms. Truly, the last year brought many challenges for the fragile Macedonian state and society, and some moments will be remembered in the future as a nightmare. Nevertheless, explanation of the public stand on the Kosovo crisis is a very difficult task because there is not one Macedonian perspective but several ones.

The Macedonian governing elite claims to be a saviour of the country, since its wise policy contributed to peaceful overcoming of the Kosovo crisis and avoiding violent conflict in Macedonia itself it also claims that Macedonia’s Position and respect within the international community has been improved thanks to its co-operative behaviour during the climax of the crisis. The Macedonian government has a misperception on the country’s geo-political and geo-strategic significance and is convinced that the “international community” ultimately guarantees its security. It is fascinated by power in the international arena in the same way it is fascinated by power in the domestic framework. Exercising authoritative patterns of rule on the internal political scene, it knows how to respect more powerful actors in the so-called international community.

The Kosovo crisis was the first contact of the small Macedonian state with world (geo)politics and it appeared to be a knock down. Despite many disappointments, the Macedonian leadership has not figured out yet that international relations are not based on altruism, but on bare interests. During the Kosovo crisis EU/NATO “invented” new admission criteria for Macedonia – providing a shelter for the enormous refugee influx that on the peak reached 18 per cent of the total population in the country. Macedonia (together with Albania) saved Western Europe from a security threat that was seen as a nightmare for all security advisers. Macedonia’s “good behaviour” was forgotten very soon and even the compensation for the damages has not been paid yet. The only “award” was situating Macedonia in the “Western Balkans” i.e. a sanitary corridor for failed or (potentially) collapsed states. The country infamous for its tent-cities and refugee hell has transformed into a transit zone – to Kosovo.

Having failed to provide any concrete proofs of the benefits from the “co-operatives” with EU/NATO structures, the Macedonian government emphasises more abstract and value-based aspects of “globalisation”. It has been trying to keep the public into a state of hyper-real existence in international relations. They all have been promising that Macedonia’s admission into NATO and/or EU is a matter of days. In the years that followed Macedonia has been everything but an economically attractive country for foreign investments. The internal

conflicts potential along with the violent conflicts in the neighbourhood divert foreign business. Macedonia cannot catch up with new developments in the economic sphere, and most usually has been an object of humanitarian/economic assistance provided by the international institutions.

The “carrot and stick” methods practised by the “international community” did not make Macedonia learn anything, but rather helped built a servile mentality. The new-born state has not been thought how to walk on two legs but rather how to crawl on the knees to please the powerful “allies” and get NATO/EU membership and economic assistance from the World Bank/International Monetary Fond. Consequently, instead of experiencing state independence for the first time in her history, Macedonia has been transformed into an immature client state and pawn in the game of the powerful actors on the international scene.

The worst and potentially the most dangerous consequence of the NATO intervention are shaken identities (or better of intra-ethnic identification and homogenisation), especially on the micro level. While the Macedonian government is speaking about “positive energy” and “relaxed inter-ethnic relations”, according to many indications the feeling of internal cohesion in each of the major ethnic groups has increased rapidly. It is the case not only within the Albanian community in Macedonia, but also between the Albanians in Macedonia and those in Kosovo. The Albanian community in Macedonia has not identified only with the Kosovars, but also with what was seen as a common mighty protector – NATO and the US. The Albanian ethnic community has been perceived as one unifying whole both by ordinary people and politicians, and the question of citizenship to two different states has been unheeded. In short, the NATO intervention over Yugoslavia has directly strengthened fragmentation processes in Macedonia. The consequences are still serious. The gap of distrust and animosity is deeper than ever. To make things worse, after UNPREDEP mission’s termination, there has not been any systematic endeavour for conflict prevention in Macedonia. While the eyes of the international community are focused on Kosovo, Macedonia’s problems seem to be definitively neglected.

Inter-ethnic confidence building on micro- and macro-levels in the Macedonian society has been a priority and seen as a precondition for survival of the state and maintenance of peace in the country and wider. The task is difficult, obstacles abound. But there were positive moves since 1991, permanent and visible. By autumn 1999, after this unprecedented violent upheaval, we seem back to “Year Zero”, a year when everything must start all over again. Traumas are now much deeper and numerous than they were before March 24, 1999. Regardless of the whole cynicism of this “B-52 humanitarianism,” one must say that NATO has turned the hands of the historical watch back and pushed Macedonia backwards in history. To start going in the right direction again, this must be acknowledged in a deep sense.

Its fantastic aurora of an “oasis of peace” or a “miracle” in the Balkans has been destroyed. Macedonia was handed back its old historical epithet of a “powder keg”. This rather local prism in the evaluation of the developments from spring 1999 only confirms the general opinion that peace and progress in the Balkans has never been so unachievable. Loud optimistic promises and expectations connected with the utterly empty Stability Pact discussions won’t change that a bit.

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