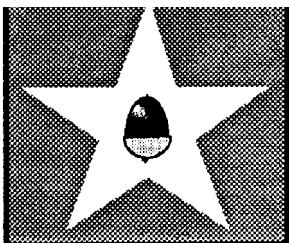


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FYROM After Ochrid

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This paper analyses the situation in Former Yugoslav Macedonia (FYROM) in the aftermath of the August 2001 Ochrid peace agreement, and the attitude of neighbouring countries to developments in FYROM.

In the months since the Ochrid peace agreement between the ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) and the FYROM government was signed in August 2001, Skopje politics have been dominated by the issues arising from the agreement, and the problems of gaining legislative change in the Skopje parliament to enforce provisions of the Agreement. In the main, the political process has been positive, if slow, the main provisions of the Agreement are now in force, and the demilitarisation and weapons collection programme by NATO from the NLA went without mishap.¹ There was criticism in FYROM that the number of weapons collected, 4000, only formed a small part of the ethnic Albanian arsenal, and this may well be justified at one level, although the proliferation of small arms supplies in the region generally probably makes the whole issue largely symbolic. The high degree of cooperation with NATO shown by the NLA gave a clear political signal to the ethnic Slav-Macedonians that the Albanian political leadership felt that military action had achieved as much as it was likely to do to advance their human rights and political reform claims.²

On the government side, the majority Slavophone party, VMRO-DPMNE led by Prime Minister Lljupjo Georgievski has endured severe internal strains as a result of having to accept long-resisted political reforms but has survived intact as a political force, although all opinion polls indicate it is now very unpopular indeed with the majority of the Slavophone electorate. On the side of the 25% plus Albanian minority, the same polls show that ex-NLA leader Ali Ahmeti is now much the most popular politician in this community, and has overtaken Arben Xhaferi in potential electoral support. Thus the Ochrid agreement has brought peace to FYROM as a whole, of a relative nature, but has not brought approbation to all of the peacemakers.

The parliamentary process of obtaining legal backing for the reforms has been protracted and difficult, and has required continual international pressure to force the Slavophone political elite to contemplate change.³ In general NATO and the EU have been able to maintain a united front with adept and prompt diplomatic activity, and have insisted on good enforcement of Ochrid as opening the road to peace. The mistake of many previous IC reform attempts in FYROM, neglecting the enforcement issue, has not been made.⁴ But there is still strong opposition to many of the reform provisions among the Slavophone majority and it is doubtful whether they command any real measure of popular support. This was a particular problem with the amnesty law to allow ex-NLA fighters back into civilian life in a secure way. The Presidential decree of Boris Trajkovski has not been sufficient to set up a legally binding amnesty, and many ethnic Albanians do not trust the police, army, or security apparatus to carry out a fair interpretation of the law. It is also far from

clear how the proposed degree of development of local authority power is going to work.

There has been very modest progress indeed in reversing the ethnic cleansing of the 2001 conflict period. International attention has been directed at obtaining refugee return for Slav-speakers to majority Albanian villages in the northwest but the international community has not given equal priority to the issue of Albanians and Moslems who were driven in 2001 from towns like Prilep and Bitola and their historic mosques damaged or burnt down. There are still several thousand ethnic Albanian refugees from FYROM in Kosovo, and a few in Albania. Local population displacement based on voluntary house exchange and other personal property arrangements is continuing all the time, so that the number of ethnic Albanians who live in the east, and Slavophones who live in the west, is diminishing at a steady rate, without coercion necessarily being directly involved, although the general FYROM atmosphere in the last year has certainly not been conducive to multiethnic community life in most places. The national population composition has also continued to change with the high average age of the Slavophone population and a significant emigration factor to diaspora centres like Canada and Australia increasing the relative size of the ethnic Albanian minority.

On the ethnic Albanian side a few extremists have said that they do not accept the agreement and there has been new paramilitary activity of a minor nature,⁵ and frequent local small arms fire from ethnic Albanian villages; on the Slav side, there has been no NATO or other International Community (IC) effort at all to disarm dangerous paramilitary groups, or to collect any of the proliferation of weapons in Slav communities that were purchased or otherwise obtained in the last eighteen months of violent conflict. The only disarmament, however symbolic, has been on the Albanian side. Thus, although Ochrid is often seen as giving major IC political support to the Albanian minority and its claims, which it does in the cultural and civil society fields, the military balance has swung significantly towards the Slavophones in the post-Ochrid period. This may be a major factor in the strong position of Ali Ahmeti in Albanian political perceptions, as he represents the possibility of a renewal of community self defence if Ochrid breaks down.

Despite the nature of the FYROM army leadership, and the possibility of Hague indictments against at least one leading figure, advisers from the British army and other forces have been reported to be training the army in anti-terrorist techniques. The FYROM army has replenished weapons stocks and equipment levels as far as financial constraints have allowed, with continuing purchases from the Ukraine and elsewhere. Greece has cooperated with the FYROM Defence Ministry in allowing cross-transit of tanks and heavy weapons, which has added to the general unpopularity of Greece with the ethnic Albanians in the region. It is believed by some regional experts that the Slav-Macedonian population is one of the most heavily armed populations in the Balkans as a result of FYROM having been a centre of weapons trading since the opening of the ex-Yugoslav wars, the proximity of Bulgaria with its ethnic affinity and developed local weapons manufacturing capacity, substantial small arms leakage from the police and army (both exclusively Slavophone-led institutions) during the spring and summer of 2001, and lack of confidence by many Slavophones in the capacity of the state security forces encouraging the possession of a personal arsenal.⁶ A small German-led NATO force has been deployed after the end of the 'Operation Harvest' weapons collection operation that in essence is a continuation of the German deployment with a Tetovo HQ that has existed for some years, dating back to before the Kosovo wartime period. Although the work of the force has been praised in FYROM, the small size

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of it must leave questions open about the IC's capacity for peace enforcement in the event of any unexpected or rapid breakdown in community relations. Inter-ethnic police patrolling, as prescribed by Ochrid, has begun in easier locations, although the practical constraints on police action and authority are severe.

The economy has suffered very severe losses in the recent period. The FYROM government estimates a drop of 18% in GDP took place in 2001. A major lever for the international community on the more recalcitrant and conservative elements in the Slavophone political elite has been the whip hand that the IC holds over the Skopje finances, and the cancellation of a planned donors conference in autumn 2001 had a significant effect on the political atmosphere. In practice, this means many aspects of FYROM government life are already conducted as a de facto protectorate, where external financial support and NATO security are preventing the development of a 'failed state' scenario. A central weakness of the philosophy behind the Ochrid deal is that it is based on the assumption that there is a functioning state which can be reformed and revived as a democratic framework for daily life. This is an optimistic view. Many of the Ochrid provisions are aiming only to restore the more positive aspects of late communism, i.e. multiethnic policing and fair representation for minorities on public bodies and public use of the Albanian language.

Thus it is possible to summarise the general situation, six months on from Ochrid, as one where a superstructure of useful human rights reforms has been passed to assist FYROM to develop towards a modern European state, but it remains a deeply fractured nation, with a minority of extremists on the Slavophone side who do not accept the arguments against a military solution to their problems, and a majority Slavophone population that often is deeply xenophobic, distrustful of its elected leaders, and in a state of great uncertainty about what the future may hold. The ethnic Albanian minority has seen many theoretical gains from the period of armed conflict, but limited practical gains so far for the ordinary citizen in many spheres. There has been an exodus of young ethnic Albanians from the old political parties, and a new party based around the ex-NLA tradition and Ali Ahmeti would attract widespread support.

If there was a general social breakdown again, it would no doubt be possible for the ethnic Albanians to reform a military force, given the widespread support the NLA had in the community, the experience of the last conflict and the absence of consent for the FYROM police and army to operate effectively in the minority community areas, and the probable incapacity of the IC forces to prevent paramilitary or army attacks on the Albanian and Moslem communities.

The Political Character of the Ochrid Agreement

What did the Ochrid agreement really contain? It was inevitably a compromise, between a strident minority with tough and able political and military leadership and a Slavophone majority who saw the entire process as eroding their privileges that until recently were protected by a communist security apparatus under the Titoist dictatorship.⁷ The great majority of the Ochrid provisions are those concerning ending communist-period in origin Slavophone cultural domination, and establishing basic European standards of minority rights in cultural, educational and linguistic fields. Ochrid did not address basic issues of national identity, and was based on assumptions about the nature of the 'Macedonian' state that are essentially a product of Yugoslav communism and the very nationalist constitutions

of the early FYROM period.⁸ As indicated above, Ochrid has moved the military balance somewhat in the Slavophones' favour. Nothing in Ochrid will affect the economic situation. In this respect it is worth noting that the Xhaferi group of Albanian leaders made major concessions in order to secure Ochrid as an agreement, abandoning long held objectives for an Albanian language and syllabus university in Tetovo, failing to get IC enforcement commitments for Moslem/Turkish minority/Albanian refugee return in towns like Bitola, recognizing the nationalist (arguably) definition of 'Macedonian' identity in the Constitution, and so on. Most important of all, for the reasons indicated above, Ochrid does not fully address the question of the survival of communist-period modus operandi in the Defence and Interior Ministries. The power base of Slav-Macedonian extremism remains completely intact.

At a circumstantial level, the Albanians were perhaps fortunate that the agreement was signed just before 11 September 2001, as in the international atmosphere afterwards, the Slavophones may not have been prepared to sign it with alleged 'terrorists'. All Albanian militancy has been characterised as 'terrorist' in the Slavophone media since then. There is no doubt that these major concessions on the Albanian side have led to a loss of confidence in Xhaferi's political leadership in the Albanian community. Objectives that Xhaferi gained, such as the right to use Albanian as an official language, may only remain academic if Slavophones do not modify their own cultural formation and institutions. Ochrid is, in essence, a modernization document, genuinely reformist in nature, but involving modernization from the top down, and within the existing FYROM state and institutional structures. It does not really affect the key internal power structures in the Interior and Defence Ministries. New initiatives that would have changed institutions, principally Tetovo university, in the field of education, were rejected, as were effective groupings of local authorities. Much of it depends on a hopeful evaluation of the benign political intentions and capacity of the Slavophone elite. But the dynamic of authority within the state will not make this easy.

It should also be noted that the IC has a very limited legal authority to enforce Ochrid, in what is still a sovereign national state, however dysfunctional, and that NATO currently has only a short term mandate to involve itself in internal FYROM political or military matters. The degree of successful IC pressure so far has only achieved legislative change. This should not be lightly dismissed, as it is much more than has been achieved by the IC in Skopje in the past. The Ochrid agreement has destroyed the traditional pattern of institutionalised Slavophone hegemony, whatever happens next. But there is a long way to go before there is fundamental change in daily life as a result of Ochrid. If this is the case, the question must logically arise as to what further reforms might be necessary to achieve social harmony, or at least greater social cohesion. In this context, the attitude of the traditionally involved neighbours to FYROM's problems is important.

Bulgaria

The post-Ochrid period has seen a greater rapprochement with Skopje than has existed for many years, and recent agreements signed between the governments over sensitive matters such as the language dispute and police training in Bulgaria illustrate this.⁹ During the war period in 2001, Bulgaria was an important source of small arms and ammunition supply to Skopje, and built up political capital as a result. The governing VMRO-DPMNE party of Lljupko Georgievski has many close Bulgarian links. In general, Bulgaria can be said to have done well in terms of

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regional influence as a result of the conflict and suspicions remain in some quarters that elements in the Sofia elite were happy to see it take place. Bulgaria is the only ex-Warsaw Pact/communist country in the region to enjoy good relations with the ethnic Albanian leaders in Tetovo, and Bulgaria has become an important trading partner in food and other commodities with Kosovo. Some manufactured goods that used to be traded in the old pre-1999 Kosovo with Greece or/and Serbia are now found in Bulgaria. Critics of Bulgaria claim that in the long term, or perhaps sooner, the Bulgarians wish to see a split FYROM, with the majority Slavophone community returning to the Bulgarian 'fold', not necessarily in the same state but perhaps in a 'Republika Srpska' type relationship with the 'mother' country, with an international presence in Skopje. Although these ideas are only made explicit by Bulgarian nationalists, they do have support at a private level throughout the political spectrum, even in the Socialist Party. Bulgaria has a strong hand in the FYROM question and has, since autumn 2001, seen many longstanding and key foreign policy objectives beginning to be realized, such as the improvement of road links with FYROM, freer circulation of Bulgarian publications, military links of an informal nature and the completion of the Sofia-Skopje railway. The FYROM uncertainties give Bulgaria an important diplomatic role, particularly in the important FYROM issues of culture and education. Sofia intellectuals have every reason to expect that as the artificial Titoist period 'Macedonian' identity and totalitarian language reforms dictated by communism wither away, elements of traditional Bulgarian culture will reassert themselves in FYROM.

Albania

The conflict in FYROM has played a more important part in Tirana politics than is immediately apparent, and has brought a reorientation of some foreign policy priorities. The ignition of violence coincided with the onset of the Albanian national election campaign, and there was concern in the IC that opinion polls were showing a rise in nationalist support for the right wing Union for Victory coalition led by Sali Berisha, linked to the Tetovo violence. Socialist leaders in Tirana were ill-informed about the military situation with the NLA and assumed the FYROM government would quickly crush the insurgency. The strongly anti-communist Tetovo ethnic Albanian leaders have traditionally had poor relations with Albanian socialists and little independent diplomatic or media presence in Tirana.¹⁰ The Socialist government of Ilir Meta cooperated fully with NATO in the conflict period, which led to some local criticism as the government was seen as underestimating the seriousness of some aspects of the conflict it did nothing to prepare for, or to assist refugees, and allowed NATO member forces to conduct counter-insurgency activities against the NLA from Albanian territory. For most of the military action period, the Tirana government seemed to be closer to the FYROM government than their fellow-Albanians. In the event, the national election campaign did not turn out as favourably for the Socialists as the IC hoped (although for reasons only marginally connected with the FYROM conflict).

The caution of the Meta government over the conflict has a real military basis. In terms of wider strategic issues, the prospect of conflict in FYROM between Slavs and Albanians has always been more of a direct and immediate security issue for Tirana than many aspects of the Kosovo crisis. The southern wing of the FYROM Albanian communities has quite close links with Albania itself, rather than Kosovo, the main Corridor 8 road link passes through their territory, there is some Gheg-Tosk cultural difference in the FYROM Albanian communities (although this should not be overestimated as a factor), and conflict in the southern communities could

easily spill over into Albania itself along the Corridor 8 road route. The decision taken by the NLA to avoid opening a southern front in May 2001 was partly linked, in military-strategic terms, to NATO's fairly successful attempts at border surveillance but more to the perceived lack of support from the Meta government for their cause. From the purely military point of view, southwest FYROM is less well suited to guerrilla operations than the mountains around Tetovo and Tirana's tacit or active support would have been essential for the NLA to control the territory. It was a key example of the sophistication of the NLA leadership; avoiding opening another front that, without at least tacit Tirana support, would have foundered.

Some ministers then in the Meta government, like Foreign Minister Pascal Milo, had good relations with fellow ex-communists in Skopje government circles, and with the Athens government in Greece, the strongest anti-Albanian factor in the region. It would, for instance, have been quite physically possible for Tirana to move troops into FYROM to try to prevent the ethnic cleansing of the Albanians from Bitola and elsewhere in late April 2001, but they did not do so. In the same way, the refugee claims of these people have not been taken up in the IC. The Meta government paid a heavy price for this inaction, and in the power struggle that emerged in the Socialist Party after the election, Meta lost his post as Prime Minister and Milo was also soon replaced as Foreign Minister.

Greece

Greece and Serbia have been the main regional losers in the FYROM conflict so far. After the period of boycott in the early 1990s, the onset of the so-called 'small package' agreement in 1995 improved relations quickly, and within a very short time Greece became the main foreign investor in FYROM, owning the oil refinery, a brewery, cement plants and retail institutions. Energy supply issues have given Athens a practical stranglehold over FYROM, with all the oil supply coming from Thessaloniki, and a new Greek plan for power station construction has been put forward in 2002 that would involve the building of new power stations exclusively fuelled with Greek lignite.¹¹

But the overall political background remains poor. Anti-Greek feeling in FYROM remains widespread at popular level. The rapid economic decline of FYROM over the last eighteen months and the risk of spillover of the conflict through refugee and movement of displaced persons has shocked Greek public opinion, and has added to the already strong anti-Albanian element in it. Difficult decisions have had to be taken over military issues, weapon transit to FYROM in particular. Important Greek trade routes north to Serbia and tourist routes south to Greece were disrupted in summer 2001 and, although traffic has resumed since, the conflict has added to the already strong impression among many sections of Greek public opinion that regional instability is chronic and relations with the Balkan neighbours are primarily military and security matters. The 'opening to the north' so badly needed by organizations like the Confederation of Northern Greek Industry has proved elusive in FYROM although better progress has been seen in Romania and Bulgaria. The chronic instability in the Preshevo/Kosovo Lindore area has also damaged confidence in northern Greece, as it was widely assumed that the overthrow of the Milosevic regime in Serbia would result in a quick pacification of Kosovo and a return to 'normality', with Serbian-Greek relations dominating the geopolitics of the region as they did prior to 1990. Greece collaborated closely with Britain in preparing the overthrow of Milosevic and has a large stake in the success

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of the Kostunica regime. There are strong traditional links between Greek and Serbian Royalists and the links between these forces and elements in the British foreign policy and intelligence orbits who wish to see the return of monarchy in both nations are not well known. They envisage a 'Juan Carlos' type 'reformist' monarchy, as a focus for moderate nationalism.¹²

Critics of Greek FYROM policy have argued that a more consistent, but small and moderate engagement with FYROM might have served Greek political interests better, with more emphasis on NGOs and civil society, and on minority rights for FYROM citizens of Greek descent, rather than the blockade/economic domination scenarios that have been followed.¹³

The Greek government has had to increase the resources given to security issues on the northern border. In general, the difficulty for the Greek government in the crisis has been that the majority of Greek public opinion has yet to come to terms with any of the major changes in the southern Balkans, probably since Dayton, and certainly post-1999 and the Kosovo intervention. It is still widely assumed that a large, strong 'Yugoslavia' is going to be reassembled, with a positive orientation towards Athens and the EU, and the pre-1990 dominance of Belgrade in regional politics can be restored. The vitality and dynamism of the new Albanian political space are not understood; nor the economic devastation current in Serbia itself, nor the national issues in countries such as Montenegro and Croatia, nor the increasing capacity of Bulgaria to play an active political role untrammelled by old Warsaw Pact days relationships.

Montenegro

The conflict in FYROM in 2001 played a significant part in the Montenegrin national election, as it started during the campaign, and enabled opponents of Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic to depict him as manipulated by the 10% minority of Montenegrin Albanians, and acting to further the aims of a 'Greater Albania'. It remains to be seen if this will be a permanent factor in Montenegrin politics, as the Albanian leadership in Montenegro is very moderate, and there are generally good ethnic relations in Montenegro, and little evidence to support the claims of pro-Belgrade extremists. Chauvinists within the Yugoslav Army have attacked Albanian villages in February and March 2002, and it is possible that they may be taking advantage of the pro-Belgrade climate in the IC to clamp down on ethnic minorities.

Kosovo

The political atmosphere in Kosovo in February 2001 was very uncertain, with concern over the Preshevo conflict, and no decision over the date of the national elections, or even a clear IC commitment to hold them at all. The opening of the FYROM conflict brought a major change in atmosphere, with the move to a wartime footing by pro-NLA forces. The insurgency was very popular in Kosovo, even to the extent of drawing support from the LDK of Dr Ibrahim Rugova, a sign of the evolution of that party since 1999. The fortunes of the ex-KLA parties of Hashim Thaci (PDK) and Ramush Haradinaj (AAK) were also boosted. The conflict relieved political pressure from KFOR on these leaders, and the success of the NLA in presenting its case in the media and avoidance of military errors of the type made by the original KLA were positive factors in public perceptions.

The IC accepted the argument that the Kosovo elections should not be further delayed, and they were held in November 2001, in a peaceful and positive atmosphere. Unlike the local elections of autumn 2000, there was reasonable Serb participation.¹⁴ The FYROM conflict was a major setback for Serbia (see below), and has enabled the Kosovo Albanian leaders to advance decisively since May 2001 on the path towards independence, and has broken the Serb-Greek pressure point on Preshevo following the Covic plan and its acceptance by the IC.

Within Kosovo, the conflict showed the basic residual strength of the ex-KLA political tradition, and the increasingly polycentric nature of contemporary Albanian nationalism. The standing of the Socialist government in Tirana has dropped considerably in Kosovo as a result of its failure to do anything to protect FYROM communities from ethnic cleansing.

At the beginning of the conflict, in February 2001, IC perceptions on the future of Kosovo were dominated by the possibility that if the ex-KLA parties could be cowed into submission by KFOR 'psyops' and open coercive measures against some activists, and every available means used to boost Rugova's LDK, then talks could be opened with Serbia, and a return of Kosovo to a future 'FRY' could be planned. This scenario, however ill-founded on the political realities of Kosovo, was common in some, if not all, IC circles. The FYROM conflict has played an important role in Kosovo in ending this thinking, even in diehard pro-Belgrade circles in the IC. Moderate Kosovo leaders such as Veton Surroi have emphasised that they envisage future communication with Belgrade to be over trade matters alone.¹⁵ The common political objective in the next period of all Kosovo Albanian leaders will be to build the new Kosovo institutions, particularly the Parliament, and the Kosovo Protection Corps, the first step on the road to a Kosovo defence force.

Turkey

There is a Turkish minority in FYROM with an official number of about 86,000 people, although it is claimed by Turkish groups that this figure is a substantial underestimate.¹⁶ In some important Ottoman origin towns, like Bitola, there was a small Turkish quarter, and a substantial number of ethnic Turkish villages exist as population centres in western FYROM. There is a Turkish population in Skopje, who all live in the northern, ethnic Albanian and Moslem part of the city. Apart from a few settlements in the Dojran area, the Turkish villages in the east have become heavily depopulated, due mainly to water shortages in the last ten years, and some were used to settle refugees from the Bosnian conflict in 1994-1995. Bilateral contacts took place between the Greek and Turkish governments at the beginning of the war period in 2001, and Turkey played little diplomatic role as a result.

On the whole, local Turkish politicians were marginalized by the Ochrid process. Some local leaders claim this is because of the preponderance of Greek officials servicing the Ochrid talks. As Moslems, ethnic Turks in some centres like Bitola have suffered badly at the hands of Slav Orthodox chauvinists, but so far the Ankara government has been inactive in pressing their case with the IC.

The Ankara government is always discouraged from acting to defend oppressed Moslem interests in the Balkans because it is afraid of pressure from the nation's large Albanian and Bosnian-origin populations for recognition as an ethnic

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minority. This has even extended to neglect in the restoration of Ottoman period secular buildings of major importance damaged in the Kosovo crisis.

Serbia

It is clear that, with Greece, Serbia was the main loser in the 2001 FYROM chaos. The regional picture looked encouraging for Belgrade in January 2001, with closer relations with NATO in the post-Milosevic period and an agreement to end the Preshevo conflict against the Albanian insurgents of the UCPMB paramilitary organization on highly advantageous terms for Serbia that was described by Serb Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic as 'our first victory for ten years'. Serb diplomatic initiatives, closely backed by Britain, had secured the key border recognition and delineation agreement with FYROM that the Milosevic government had failed to obtain. Britain had also agreed, in December 2000, to exchange intelligence information with Serbia and FYROM on Albanian matters. Yet it was perhaps this hubris that led to a rapid and dramatic reversal of fortune, with the leaders in Belgrade believing that with the same backing, a close relationship could be restored with Trajkovski's FYROM to reopen the traditional key regional power axis with Greece. Trajkovski had close relations with Kostunica, and once worked for him, and has close links with some British institutions.¹⁷

This view rested on an underestimate of the ambition, capacity and efficiency of the ethnic Albanians in FYROM, compared to the more easily controlled rural insurgents in Preshevo/Kosovo Lindore, and the fact that the Serb-Greek initiative, had it succeeded, would have threatened the status quo advantageous to the Albanians in Kosovo. The Foreign Office perspective on the southern Balkans is also not universally shared in the EU or NATO, and is seen as conditioned by the so-far largely unpublicized close links between the British security apparatus and the Kostunica government.¹⁸ Thus Kosovo Albanians, after the defeat in Preshevo, had every immediate incentive to assist the NLA.

Although the FYROM Albanian leaders are all politically moderate, a strong anti-Greek thread is present in their political psychology, and their determination to maintain FYROM as an entity is primarily based on the need to separate their two main enemies, Greece and Serbia. Apart from many other reasons why 'Greater Albania' as a policy objective is a myth, this is the decisive strategic argument, along with the fact that the FYROM demography and population age profile is working in the Albanians' favour and if present trends continue, they could be a numerical majority in FYROM within ten years or so. The Greek blockade of FYROM in the early 1990s and the Greek takeover of much of the FYROM economic assets are seen as part of a pattern of hostility to FYROM and asset stripping, and given the more Islamic character of some FYROM Albanian culture, even a threat to their religion. Many FYROM Albanian leaders consider privately that Greece is planning for a future partition of FYROM, and recent Greek proposals for FYROM energy policy could be used to support this view.

Culture is very important in the political struggle in FYROM, and the aggressive evangelism and financial resources of the Greek Orthodox Church that have been seen in southern Albania is genuinely worrying in these small, often poor, and socially conservative Islamic communities. The careful media management used by the IC to smother reporting of the mosque burnings and local anti-Muslim ethnic cleansing in the 2001 conflict has done nothing to assuage these fears, as has the climate of virulent anti-Islamic feeling among Slav nationalist chauvinists in

FYROM post 11 September. Orthodox evangelism may at first sight seem a far fetched threat, but it should be borne in mind that the Greek church is active in the underground in FYROM itself, and that over the border with Albania, only two or three hours drive from the birthplace of Ali Ahmeti in Kerkove, Greek money has been spent on a large scale to revive the Church in places like Pogradec and Korca. The role of Greece has also been a major issue in the conflict over the Socialist party leadership in Albania.

Another failure for the DOS coalition in the conflict has been in respect of protection of the legitimate rights of the 40,000 strong FYROM Serb minority. Their problems, mostly connected with the issues of the rights of the Serb Orthodox Church in FYROM, played little part at Ochrid. Interethnic violence in Kumanovo itself, their main centre, was avoided, but at a cost of their later absence from any significant role in the peace talks and subsequent agreement. The Serb controlled language reform made by Tito is under threat as general cultural discourse moves in a pro-Bulgarian direction.

In recent controversy, local KFOR and United Nations officials have made it clear that they do not recognize the 2001 FRY/FYROM border delineation, although the UN in New York seems to be more sympathetic to the Serbian position. But the Kostunica regime still has every motive to be active in FYROM politics, and is likely to use all the means at its disposal to try to reassert its old primacy in FYROM, although the mismangement of its position and intelligence failure over the war in 2001 may make it very difficult to do so, and it remains to be seen how much Greece is either willing or able to do to assist Serbia in its ambitions. British and French backing over Preshevo was a major factor in the Serb success there, but was highly counterproductive over the FRY-FYROM border recognition issue.¹⁹ If Greece goes too far in a Serb direction, Albanian nationalists have the option to cause serious difficulties for Greece over the Cam issue.²⁰ And in the medium and long term, Greece is likely to have to work with ethnic Albanians in order to protect its economic assets in FYROM. The Greek political elite has to decide whether, as in the last ten years, it wishes to back the declining Yugoslavist concept, or to come to terms with political reality and the emerging Albanian influence in the southern Balkans.

The Immediate Future

It was agreed at Ochrid that an internationally supervised census and new elections on the new electoral roll would be held in the near future, after the agreement had passed into law. These are likely to be the next contentious issues. A long standing Albanian grievance had been that the 1994 census was gerrymandered against them by the use of a 15 year residence qualification for registration.²¹ They also claim the system of parliamentary constituencies favours the Slavophones. The IC has agreed with the Albanian position on the first point, and a census is due to be held later this year. It is likely that, if it is fair, the Albanian proportion of the electorate should rise by several percentage points, and the number of Albanian MPs will increase as a result. The Xhaferi leadership did not press the issue of constituency sizes at Ochrid, but it remains divisive, with as many as five times the number of Moslem votes needed to elect an MP in some places compared to Slav areas. The extremists on the Slav side have every motive to prevent the census taking place, and it is likely the IC will be faced with a real challenge in ensuring a) it happens at all b) it is a fair event, and then c) a fair and democratic election process will follow it. A very large number of well trained and highly motivated

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OSCE monitors will be needed, together with an improved security climate in many places, and very close IC supervision of the census counting process itself.

The most obvious political problem is likely to be that if the current unpopularity of the government is maintained, and the VMRO-DPMNE and its allies lose the election, the main beneficiaries are likely to be the more nationalist wing of the Albanian movement, and on the Slav side, the old Social Democrat party that used to be more or less directly linked to Belgrade and was profoundly 'Yugoslavist' in orientation. Although its current leaders claim it has evolved, there is no doubt that there is still substantial Serb influence within it, and its arrival in government would reawaken the old Serb-Bulgarian power struggle in key ministries such as Defence and the Interior.

NATO is very likely to find that this leads to greater instability in military policy and a greater tendency for paramilitary activity based on political affiliation. The arithmetic of the new parliament, even more than the old, will require that the Albanians are drawn into a new government coalition, which given the wide ideological and personal gulf between the communities, will be difficult to achieve. It will no doubt be possible in the short term for the IC to threaten, persuade or bribe some Albanian politicians to join a government, but it is an open question as to whether it will actually function in any meaningful way, and whether such placemen leaders have much influence in their community and can restrain the radicalism of the young. If the Ochrid reforms are stalled in implementation, as seems possible, even likely, at this stage, the scope for major social conflict involving a revival of paramilitary activity is on the cards.

Military issues and the role of NATO are likely to hold an undiminished importance, therefore, in FYROM in the next period. There is current debate about whether a EU rapid reaction force should replace NATO as the peacekeeping agent in FYROM, something that would produce consternation in the Albanian minority, and administrative and logistical difficulties for NATO in Kosovo. Some countries, like Britain and Greece, have been drawn into training programmes with the as yet unreformed FYROM army and security apparatus that could well be drawn into a future civil conflict, and where counterinsurgency skills currently being passed on to the FYROM army could be used for highly undemocratic ends.

The Cantonisation Option

At an early stage of the crisis last year, a document purporting to come from the Macedonian Academy of Science set out a plan for the de facto partition of the country. It was angrily rejected by most observers, and would have given about 20% of the FYROM land mass to the Albanians in the west and kept the rest for the Slavs. Cantonisation has a bad name among international community professionals as a result of their Bosnian experiences. There are, however, different forms of cantonisation, and the crude proposals from the Academy are not the only way the subject could be approached. It should also be borne in mind that population distribution favours cantonisation much more in FYROM than in Bosnia. On both the Albanian and Slav sides, there is pro-cantonisation opinion as well as opposition. If Ochrid fails to deliver a more stable and less dysfunctional society in FYROM, it is very likely that attention will turn to the possibility of forming cantons.

The main argument in favour is that much of the conflict in FYROM has been about cultural rights, identity, language and education, but that the overwhelming majority of Albanians and Slavophones wish to keep FYROM as a state. Cantonisation would allow autonomous cultural development, while limiting political and constitutional disturbance and impressing on FYROM's difficult neighbours that they had nothing to gain by meddling in its internal affairs on behalf of particular kin-groups. It can be argued that cantons based on ethnicity and language would do much to defuse the conflict by removing the threat in Slavophone minds that the Albanians want a 'Greater Albania' and to destroy FYROM. Cantonisation could also be an attractive medium term option for Slavophones if current demographic and population movement trends continue, as they would limit growing Albanian practical power.

The contrary argument is that cantonisation would only separate the communities, that it would be awkward to protect the interests of small minorities like the Turks and the Roma, and that it would prepare the ground for separation by enabling the Albanians to set up local power structures that in practice would be out of Skopje control. This of course begs the question as to whether there is any real practical possibility of restoring Skopje 'control' on old lines in western FYROM, in any circumstances. A cantonal FYROM would also raise the possibility of campaigning for a Slav-Macedonian canton in northern Greece, in the Florina region where most of this community in Greece live, perhaps a Serb canton in the north of a future independent Kosovo, or a 'Macedonian' canton in the Pirin region of southwest Bulgaria. Cantonisation is also often discussed on the Balkans using old Yugoslav 'federal' terminology, which many Albanians are not keen on.

A significant fact in these discussions will be the Swiss experience, which is influential in the minds of many pro-cantonisation Albanians. A recent study of the history of the subject, 'The Swiss Labyrinth'²² has stressed the administrative complexities that cantons can bring, and the degree to which a cantonal society depends on political consensus for its success. The future debate about FYROM cantonisation, if it takes place, is likely to focus on whether such a consensus might exist. Many observers of the Swiss cantons have felt that the system only really began to function properly when Switzerland was faced with the threat of fascism. It could be argued that FYROM faces similar uncertainties with its untrustworthy neighbours, and if Ochrid does not deliver the goods, this debate is probably inevitable. The great advantage for NATO and security actors of a moderate form of Swiss cantonisation based on cultural rights is that it would clarify firmly the limits of political change and could provide a suitable future exit strategy for NATO with internal and possibly border security handed over to a new version of the old UNPREDEP 1993-1998 force, or something similar. On the negative side, any cantonisation negotiations could be complex and difficult and presumably some sort of referendum or other popular endorsement of the proposals would be needed.

From the point of view of military and security actors, a movement, however small, towards cantonisation would, in the short term probably lead in the direction of a Cyprus-type, 'Green Line' peacekeeping framework. This may be inevitable anyway, given current population trends.

ENDNOTES

¹ See MIA, Skopje, October 2001 to date, and Albanian-mk(Digest), Albanian-mk@yahoo.com, in German. A useful general survey of the earlier stages of the 2001 conflict from a viewpoint generally sympathetic to the Slav-Macedonians is 'Crisis in Macedonia', Ethno-Barometer, Rome, 2001.

² A key sign of this change was the decision of the NLA leader Ali Ahmeti to close his military HQ in Sipkovic in February 2002 and open an office in Tetovo.

³ The IC decision to delay the donors conference was a crucial factor here, in October 2001.

⁴ See CSRC paper G98, 'Former Yugoslavia Macedonia - Shades of Night' by James Pettifer, July 2001.

⁵ As in Tetovo, on 28 March, when the office of Ali Ahmeti was attacked by militants from the self-styled 'Albanian National Army' (ANA), a small splinter group who oppose the Ochrid agreement as a sellout of Albanian interests, and in the unsuccessful attack on the Xhaferi-Thaci leadership group in 'Dora' restaurant in Tetovo on 4 April 2002. Some analysts believe that the ANA is an umbrella name for a variety of small armed groups, and is not a coherent paramilitary organisation. Its roots lie in the extreme Right wing in Kosovo and in some parts of the Albanian diaspora.

⁶ The so-called 'keyring', manufactured in Bulgaria, is a very popular personal weapon among Slav-Macedonians, a device which fires two bullets from a close range.

⁷ For a representative Albanian view, see Robert Goro, 'FYROM: Supermacia e inferioritetit', Athens, 2001.

⁸ See 'Yugoslav Communism and the Macedonian Question', by Stephen Palmer & Robert R King, Connecticut, 1971, p47ff.

⁹ See MIA, Skopje, 25 February 2002 ff.

¹⁰ See CSRC paper OB83, 'The Albanian Election 2001: Legitimacy, Stability & The OSCE' by James Pettifer, September 2001.

¹¹ See MIA, Skopje, 2 March 2002 ff.

¹² This is related to the whole nature of the movement that removed the Milosevic regime: how far it was a genuinely spontaneous and Serb affair, and how far it was planned and orchestrated from outside Serbia. Allegations have been made in the Belgrade press that this was so. The media coverage in the UK and elsewhere was heavily 'spun' by FCO and Cabinet Office officials, with virtually unknown freelances being given major stories to promote the preferred FCO view of events. It was also certainly the case that current US Ambassador Bill Montgomery was dealing with the then DOS Opposition in Budapest in the 1998-99 period, along with British officials, such as Charles Crawford, now British Ambassador in Belgrade, and that there was substantial US NGO funding of DOS-inclined organisations. Allegations made in the Belgrade press of foreign special forces involvement in assassinations of prominent figures in the Milosevic inner circle remain unproven to date, but are likely to emerge in later stages of the current Milosevic trial at The Hague IWCT.

¹³ See numerous analyses of the November 2001 Kosovo elections. On average, the Kosovo Democratic League of Dr Rugova has lost about 10-15% of its vote annually over the last five years, from over 90% under the Milosevic regime, to about 45% plus now. The advent in April 2002 of the new right-wing party founded by ex-Rugova associate Bujar Bukoshi will weaken the LDK further.

¹⁴ Estimates vary, but at least 35% of Kosovo Serbs probably voted.

¹⁵ James Pettifer interview with Veton Surroi, 21 March 2002. The visit of Albanian PM Pandeli Majko to Kosovo in April 2002 has brought forward a new agenda to develop the Albania-Kosovo economic space.

¹⁶ These statistics are derived from the 1981 Yugoslav census, the last with a reasonable degree of objectivity on minorities.

¹⁷ See CSRC paper G104, www.csrc.ac.uk on the Preshevo issue by Bob Churcher, March 2002 for data on how closely the IC ended up backing Belgrade, and how far the Serbian case was dependent on foreign presentational help. FYROM President Boris Trajkovski received strong British backing in his campaign to replace Kiro Gligorov, and has been a regular visitor to an international Christian leadership organisation base in Windsor, UK. The costumes of his Presidential Guard were redesigned to resemble British royal models as a result.

¹⁸ The close links between the British movement behind Kostunica, the Serb royal family in exile in London and the exiled Greek royal family are not widely known. The Serb royal family living in London is partly Greek by descent, and the wife of the current Serb 'monarch-in-exile' is a Greek commoner of Jewish descent. Wealthy Greek Royalists were prominent in the funding of the DOS campaign, and media links and lobbying of sympathetic journalists by the Serb lobby in London were important in the initial euphoria over the advent of Kostunica. See FN 12 above. These forces hold, of course, in general, highly ideological views of traditional Serb nationalism, but this has been successfully concealed in the UK media. It was more difficult to conceal in Greece, with its strong anti-monarchical population, and led to some criticism of the PASOK government and key foreign policy advisers such as Alex Rondos in the Greek press. See V.I.P. News, Belgrade, November-December, 1999.

For general background, see Carole Hodge, 'The Serb lobby in the United Kingdom', Washington, 1999 and Brendan Simms, 'Unfinest Hour - Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia', London, 2001 for information on Serb-UK links. See 'Vojislav Kostunica and Serbia's Future by Norman Cigar, Saqi, London, 2002 for a very useful evaluation of the nationalist nature of the Kostunica project. A central difficulty for the IC has been that youth culture had to be used to 'overthrow' Milosevic, but the culture of the Kostunica regime is actually more conservative and has a more 'bourgeois' character than that of the populist Milosevic regime, where many leading popstars and youth ikons supported the government. See 'The Culture of Power in Serbia' by Eric Gordy, Pennsylvania, 1999. The IC in Kosovo tried to use youth culture to discredit the NLA in April 2001 by funding anti-NLA rock concerts, held under the banner of the AAK party, but to little practical effect except to discredit Haradinaj's AAK in some local eyes.

¹⁹ The key border recognition issue precipitated the FYROM conflict. See CSRC, G98, op cit, and Churcher, op cit G104, www.csrc.ac.uk

²⁰ See forthcoming paper by Miranda Vickers on the Cameria issue, to be published on www.csrc.ac.uk, April 2002.

²¹ See 'The New Macedonian Question, ed James Pettifer, Macmillan, London & New York, 1999, p137ff.

²² See 'The Swiss Labyrinth', ed J-E Lane, Frank Cass, London, 2001.

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