

**MACEDONIA:  
THE CONFLICT  
AND  
THE MEDIA**



**SEENPM / BHRN  
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THE CONFLICT AND THE MEDIA**

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The Conflict and The Media

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## **Foreword**

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Scotsman*



# Foreword

*By Alistair Crichton*

Taken as a whole, this book offers a fascinating insight into how the media in different countries reacted to and reported on the conflict in Macedonia in 2001.

It also shows that the media in the region is much more than a mirror of society; while it can and does reflect the public opinion, it also plays a major role in shaping that opinion in the first place, through the selective reporting of facts and a bias to one source, official or otherwise, over another, as well by allowing free reign to certain political ideas through editorials, commentary and analysis.

The Bosnian journalist Senad Slatina takes a very negative view of the press in the region in his piece, titled *The War in Macedonia was Bosnia Lite* – a rather disparaging, cynical allusion to lower-alcohol, reduced calorie beers. The rather war-weary tone of this piece reflects a deep distrust of the media’s role in Balkan conflicts: “the first combatants in the conflict in Macedonia were the media, both Macedonian and Albanian. It was only

later that other parties joined in the killing”. This cynicism is taken further by the same country’s *Dani* magazine:

“First, there is a crazy idea launched by ambitious and criminal minds. Then the media come along. After the media, comes the fear. After the fear, there is the first fool that pulls the trigger. Then, the names of the dead in the newspapers. The names become numbers and no one remembers them any more. At the end, there are false promises and peace conferences.”

It was not the aim of this introduction to draw too many conclusions or give a potted history of the conflict (attempting to summarise even recent events in the Balkans, especially as part of a project like this, is inherently difficult and fraught with dangers; here, at least, we can let the facts – the reportage – speak for themselves.) However, a few common trends emerge which deserve closer attention.

A faintly disturbing seam, which runs through many of the pieces from the Balkans, is the cry of ‘It’s not our fault!’

The events in Macedonia – and almost any in the Balkans – are not as a result of longstanding ethnic tensions, political rivalries or historic disputes: rather they are the result of outside machinations, be it militant extremists striving to establish a mythical Greater Albania, or the West coming up with yet another grandiose scheme to keep the Balkans in its place, or find a new route for oil.

In the regard, the Greek press appears to be bordering on the paranoid – and irresponsible. In Athamadia Baboula and Lina Roussopoulou's excellent and extremely comprehensive research into coverage of the events by two of the leading Greek papers, *Ta Nea* and *Eleftherotypia*, one report cannot go unquestioned: the unnamed foreign diplomat who says that the fear of a Greater Albania – taking in Greece, or parts of it – is very real indeed. But the same diplomat then exposes this statement as being utterly fatuous by saying a) lacking a sizeable Albanian minority, there would be absolutely no support for such a movement, and b) Greece is a member of Nato, the world's most powerful military alliance, which puts the idea of a Greater Albania incorporating Greece into the realms of the preposterous.

The Greek press does itself no favours by reporting such xenophobic

nonsense, which amounts to little more than scaremongering against its neighbours.

Indeed, the Albanian media dismissed the idea of a Greater Albanian outright. If, as is alluded in so many of these articles, such an idea was the cornerstone of the UCK's actions, not one of the 14 articles in this book can point to a single line in the Albanian, ethnic Albanian or Kosovan media supporting such an aim. Indeed, According to the analysis in this book, the Albanian media strove to achieve balanced, fair coverage of the events; given the media's lack of resources, and of course the ethnic ties and expected natural sympathy to the Albanian Macedonians, that the media managed to pull this off with a fair degree of success is a major achievement, showing a sophistication among the private and state broadcasters and newspapers that many outside the country may find surprising.

No such luck in Macedonia itself, however, where the media drew its own battle lines across familiar ethnic divides, and journalists, according to the Bosnian analysis, were practically combatants. Indeed, in one infamous incident, seeking to spice up a broadcast, one Macedonian TV presenter fired a rocket-propelled grenade towards the UCK lines.

Another common complaint from the authors of these articles is the lack of financial and technical resources faced by journalists. This had serious repercussions for those trying to cover the conflict: the inability of many broadcasters and newspapers to put their own correspondents in on the ground forced most media in the region to rely on agency copy and pooled video footage for the bulk of their reports. Thus, nations with an intimate knowledge and possibly political interests in Macedonia were publishing articles written and edited by journalists with insufficient knowledge of the problem, and tailored to entirely different market in the West.

With this in mind, it is interesting to see the vehemence with which one of the Macedonian pieces attacks the Western press — and its alleged hidden agenda — despite the fact that most of the Western media was relying on exactly the same sources.

German Filkov is happy to rip apart the Western coverage, but frequently resorts to nit-picking almost every printed fact and figure in his pedantic analysis.

Bill Hayton's defence of Western coverage makes for compelling reading, largely for his deep insight into how and why the Western media makes errors of judgment. His

explanations of how a modern Western newsroom is run ('selling' the story to editors, etc) ring all too true from my experiences, where one day a foreign desk journalist can be required to write an "expert" comment on child soldiers in Sierra Leone; the next, an analysis of the latest political machinations in a region as complex as the Balkans.

I do believe Filkov could be a little more forgiving; I also disagree with his view that the mutation of "Macedonian Army and Police" into "security forces" during the course of the conflict by some US newspapers is prejudicial, especially since the so-called "special police" had now come into play. Terms such as "paramilitary police" are far more loaded, and security forces has been used for many years as a catch-all for the British security presence in Northern Ireland, to give just one example.

Of course, he is correct in that semantics and vocabulary play a huge part in conflict reporting, especially in places such as Macedonia where the names of villages and towns, and even the country itself, can be politically loaded. While I have tried to achieve a basic consistency of style between these diverse pieces, I feel I would be defeating the aims of this project by homogenising everything: thus, the "terrorists" in one piece are the same

people as the “extremists”, “rebels” or “militants” in another. The UCK are pretty much the UCK throughout. In the Greek pieces, the authors’ preferred label, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or FYROM, remains, and, where it is obvious where is being discussed I have left the authors’ preferred spellings of towns and villages in place.

Sources, official and especially otherwise, are a huge bone of contention for many of the journalists who contributed to this book. This leads on to one of the most controversial conclusions, clearly and concisely phrased by the BBC’s Paul Wood: when it came to the information war, the UCK were the clear winners. At least five of these articles complain about the simplistic way the Western media divided the parties in the conflict into “goodies” and “baddies”, with the Albanians invariably being cast as the good guys. Whether this was predetermined, or influenced by earlier coverage of the Kosovo conflict, is not quite clear:

The Macedonian language media complained bitterly that the Western press gave too much time to statements of the UCK and its leaders. But as Wood states, the Macedonian government was at best reticent and at worst hostile and aggressive towards foreign correspondents. What

really emerges, however, is indignation among certain facets of the Macedonian media that journalists reported any of the UCK’s statements whatsoever. Such a stance would, of course, make a mockery of any idea of impartiality.

A piece that breaks the mould and deserves to be singled out is the article by the Ukrainian journalist Andrei Tsapliyenko. While he diverges from the brief – there is little overview of how the Ukrainian media in general reported on the conflict – he concentrates instead on the one aspect of the events most important to his home country, the involvement of Ukrainian-sourced helicopters – and possibly pilots – in the attack on UCK positions in Tetovo. His fascinating piece straddles war reporting, investigative journalism and face-to-face interviews with UCK power-brokers and warlords as he jumps from the hills of Tetovo to the arid, “cowboy country” of Sierra Leone as he tries to pin down who was flying the machines. He finishes back in the mountains of Macedonia, with a vivid picture of how the current calm may yet prove to be an illusion.

What conclusions can we draw? Certainly, in these cash-strapped times for media everywhere, the global news agencies, particularly Reuters, PA and AFP, dominate international

news coverage. While their reports are taken locally with a large pinch of salt, the managers of these agencies must understand their responsibilities go far beyond serving the needs of their traditional markets in the US, UK and Western Europe. Consequently, they have a responsibility to the public in the zones they report from, who these days are far more likely to be consumers than combatants, to be better informed from the start. The incredulity of seasoned war correspondents covering a “combat zone” equipped with all the basics of modern European life, from Coca Cola and mobile phones to satellite television, testifies to this.

We in the West, spoon-feeding our information by an all-conquering global news empire, often forget that the media in the Balkans and Eastern Europe operate on a far more

sophisticated and subtle level than we give them credit for. Most of the authors here put great emphasis on objectivity, impartiality and journalistic integrity. Preaching this is not nearly enough, however, as even a cursory glance of this book shows that prejudices, stereotypes and a bias towards religious or historical allies are still rife.

A final point: the events in Macedonia of 2001 received unprecedented coverage in the Western press. For all the talk of inaccuracy, bias and ignorance, it’s worth bearing in mind that, if the rebels or government had procrastinated just a few weeks longer, the events of September 11 2001 would have driven all coverage of Macedonia, the Ohrid agreement and subsequent events from newspapers and television sets around the world. ¶



# **Albania**

## **Albania's Media: A professional approach**

*Llazar Semini  
Freelance journalist (40), Albanian*



# Albania's Media: A professional approach

*By Llazar Semini*

On the whole the Macedonian crisis was covered in a generally professional manner by the media in Albania, which sought to avoid nationalist sentiment and successfully provided an objective overview of the crisis, its historical routes in the former Yugoslavia, particularly Kosovo, and its impact on Albania society.

## **Election dominates news agenda**

In the summer of 2001, while neighbouring Macedonia teetered on the brink of civil war, the media in Albania was dominated by news of the general election at home and the political chaos that followed. The first poll in the election on June 24<sup>th</sup> was rejected by the opposition, leading to four subsequent rounds of voting and countless legal disputes as the judiciary and rival political parties failed to agree on the outcome. Fortunately, the crisis was resolved with out bloodshed.

The prolonged election and its after-

math kept the media focussed on domestic issues throughout the month of July. Little attention was paid to the crisis unfolding in Macedonia.

Reported assaults on Albanians carried out by the Macedonian border police were largely ignored by government ministers. According to an official within the foreign ministry, the Albanian authorities "continued to highlight their concerns through diplomatic channels, but the issue was not publicised beyond that because attention was focused elsewhere at the time."

That is not to say however that the predicament facing the Albanian population in Macedonia went unnoticed. It is more likely that an agreement to avoid the issue was reached, either tacitly or explicitly, prior to the election campaign. At a time when the impartiality of the Albanian government during the Kosovo crisis was being widely praised throughout the international community, it is also doubtful that any party could have increased its share of the vote by taking a nationalist stance

on Macedonia. Conversely, the very real dangers involved in using such an emotive issue as the basis for a political campaign were clearly evident. Although disputes over the result of the election led to a prolonged and damaging period of political infighting, it is fair to say that in their handling of the Macedonian crisis, Albania's ever-factious political parties showed signs of maturity and diplomacy.

Despite the dominance of election news, the conflict in Macedonia was nonetheless a serious regional concern and Albania, which shares a 137 km border with Macedonia, was not impartial. However the perceived threat of a "Greater Albania" existed only in the minds of observers outside the country. The government of course had to be seen to lend support to the Albanian population within Macedonia, but the enlargement of the Albanian state and the unification of the Balkan's Albanian populations was not a commonly held goal.

Ultimately, the conflict grabbed the attention of the media in Albania because the very existence of Macedonia's ethnic Albanian community was thought to be at stake. Furthermore, there were real concerns that Albania's fragile economy, still struggling to rid itself of the poverty associated with the former communist regime, could not cope with an influx

of Albanian refugees from Macedonia. During the Kosovo crisis in 1999, almost half a million refugees were accepted into Albania where they were housed first by the local population and subsequently by the government and international humanitarian organisations.

### **Lack of financial resources**

The ability of a news organisation to provide coverage of a given event is, to a large extent, dependent on access to adequate financial resources. Just one decade after the fall of communism, the Albanian media was still badly under-resourced. Without exception, all of the print and broadcast media active in Albania at the time of the Macedonian conflict have acknowledged that the main reason for their failure to provide extensive on-the-spot coverage of the conflict was lack of money.

"It is difficult for any media institution in the country to send a correspondent into the field to cover the story," said Teodor Misha, editor-in-chief of the business magazine *Albanian Observer*. "You do understand that we can barely meet our daily financial requirements," said one editor at the daily *Koha Jone*. "It should be evident from the number of staff we have at our disposal that we simply cannot

afford to send correspondents to Macedonia,” he added.

In the face of such rigid financial constraints, most organisations relied on international news agencies for on the spot reports. Ready access to Internet news sites run by both foreign media bodies and NGOs also helped keep those covering the story from within Albania up to date. Only the few either managed to send correspondents into the field or enlist the help of Albanian colleagues already in Macedonia. However, even this was valuable in providing a key group of journalists and correspondents with international experience and allowing a different view of developments to be reported from the front.

Compared to previous conflicts in for example, Bosnia or Kosovo, the Macedonian conflict was far less bloody, which may also have contributed to the low level of interest the story generated in war weary Albania. “There’s nothing like the number of victims there were in Bosnia or Kosovo,” said Lutfi Dervishi, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Albania*. “To many, the war in Macedonia looks more like a Hollywood gun battle than anything else, so the media in Albania can react to the story rationally rather than emotionally,” he said.

## **Media Commentary**

One important result of this was that the media restrained itself from speculative commentary and stuck to reporting events as they unfolded. News of killings and the frequent collapse of the peace talks had the potential to enrage the population in Albania if reported irresponsibly. However, international efforts to restore the peace process were covered in detail and the local media showed that, at last, efforts to reconcile the two communities in Macedonia were paying off.

At least one page a day was devoted to coverage of the Macedonian conflict in most Albanian newspapers. Inflammatory, nationalist editorials were notably absent and the papers were careful to repeat time and again that the government in Tirana was in absolute harmony with the position and actions of international mediators.

Daily coverage featured articles entitled *Army Takes Revenge on Civilians*, and *War Threatens Peace Accord*. Strait news pieces with direct quotes from Trajkovski, NATO’s secretary-general Lord Robertson, Georgievski, Macedonian politicians including Branko Crvenkovski, and the Albanian Arber Xhaferi were also

included daily whilst the role of NATO and the United States was covered in detail.

There was also unanimous condemnation of the bomb attack against *Fakti*, the leading Albanian newspaper in Macedonia. As an act of solidarity and in an effort to prevent a backlash, every paper in Albania reprinted a story from the Institute of War and Peace Reporting by Veton Latifi, entitled: *Plea for Moderation - IWPR journalist in Macedonia appeals for tolerance following arrest last week*.

The position of the Macedonian government was also reported, with particular focus on the conciliatory role of President Boris Trajkovski. Crucially, the news media in Albania also reported the activities of the extremist Albanian National Army, the presence of which threatened to overturn the nascent peace process in Macedonia. Although some of the more “patriotic” news reports attributed to ANA sources may have been less than objective, they were few in number.

### **Stereotypes and Impartiality**

Where the Albanian news media fell short was in the area of research. Stories reported elsewhere were often repeated without any serious attempt

being made to verify the facts, while editorials with a clear political slant were reproduced verbatim. Albanian news organisations frequently referred to the Macedonian papers for stories, thus often reflecting the pessimistic and sometimes inflammatory tone of the reports, particularly where the proposed peace negotiations were concerned. *Macedonians Chose War* screamed a headline in *Rilindja Demokratike*. Furthermore, while the Albanian media ran lengthy interviews with key Albanians in Macedonia and quoted international players in detail, Macedonian commentators were for the most part not given a voice.

Although blatant stereotyping was absent from reports coming from both sides of the conflict, opposing views were not explored in any depth. There was no attempt made to allow for a real exchange of views by encouraging journalists from both sides to communicate directly and publicly. Rather, any Albanian journalist seen to be contributing to a Macedonian paper would more likely have been accused of betraying his own country.

In addition, there can be no doubt that some Albanian media coverage was slanted towards ethnic Albanians. *Skopje - A Timebomb* said a headline in the *Shekulli* newspaper on July 1, referring to the “good” Albanians protecting Macedonian churches at a time when their own mosques were

under attack. *Fiasco of the Macedonian Nationalist Policy* commented Ylber Lili of the same newspaper who covered the crisis from inside Macedonia for some time (*Shekulli*, July 5). Other headlines in the paper included: *Macedonians Attack American Embassy*; *UCK to disarm - What of Macedonia's Paramilitaries*; *UCK Hands Over Arms - Skopje keeps artillery*; *NATO and Skopje Blind and*; *Albanians Targeted in Explosions* (*Shekulli*, July 8 & 17, August 7, 8, 27, 29 & 31).

But *Shekulli* was not alone in its bias. *Macedonian Soldiers Thieves and Rustlers* wrote *Koha Jone* on July 13 followed by *Macedonian Troops Kill Albanian Children, Women and Elderly* and *Macedonian Government Attacks International Envoys* on July 13 and 25. August 8 headlines in the same paper warned *Macedonians Mine Border* and *Police Execute Five Albanians*. However, *Koha Jone* also published reports casting Albanians in a less than favourable light, including one on August 4 about the seizure of grenades in Albania not far from the Macedonian border.

On July 26 *Rilindja Demokratik* wrote *Berisha Denounces Anti-Western Hysteria in Skopje* followed by *Macedonian Forces Disrupt Agreement* and *Senior Macedonian Officials Let War Continue* on August 5 and 12.

## **Print media**

The Albanian media relied on news agencies such Reuters, Agence France Press, and the Associated Press for reports on the peace process and the action NATO might take to disarm the UCK. Reports from these agencies were printed without additional comment in most Albanian newspapers. Even when considering the UCK peace plan there was little comment or analysis. "There is no need to fear the ideal of a Greater Albania. Does it only exist in our minds?" asked Aleksander Cipa of *Koha Jone*. "It is hard to comment from here," he concluded.

Abuse of Albanian citizens by the Macedonian police was a staple of most newspapers in Albania at the time. *Violence in Skopje Continues - Six Beaten Albanians Arrive in Tushemisht* claimed *Shekulli* on June 26 followed by *More Immigrants Return Beaten and Insulted by the Skopje Police* in the same paper on June 25. As an alternative, *Rilindja Demokratike* published regular UCK communiqués (August 3 & 12).

Much attention was paid to the role of the international community, particularly NATO, in resolving the crisis. The movements of Javier Solana, European Union Foreign Policy Commissioner, and Lord Robertson, NATO

Secretary General, were reported in detail on a daily basis. The contents of interviews provided by press agencies and published in foreign media always found a place in Albania's papers. *The future of Macedonia – Dialogue, Not Violence* said the *Korrieri* newspaper quoting from an interview with Robertson on June 20.

Even the *Koha Jone*, with a local correspondent in Skopje, failed to provide commentary or analysis of events from an Albanian perspective. *Trajkovski: All Albanian Problems should be Resolved Here* the paper wrote on June 15 followed by *Macedonians do not Accept Change of Constitution* on June 17.

Space was also filled with reports of race hate crimes against Albanians. *Arming of Macedonian Civilians Ads Flame to Fire* wrote *Shekulli* on June 17. *Macedonian Paramilitaries Break with Parliament* claimed the cover page title of the *Albania* on June 26, but even here there was no comment or condemnation, just strait reporting from foreign news agencies. *Implementation of Agreement Begins - UCK withdraws from Haracine, replaced by NATO Troops* wrote the *Korrieri* on June 26.

## **Broadcast media**

Much more attention was paid to the Macedonian conflict by Albanian television stations, public and private. Even at the height of the electoral campaign – and on polling day itself – events across the border were amongst the top news stories. However the images used to accompany these TV news reports were for the most part purchased from other stations.

Daily bulletins reported on the fate of refugees and the plight of the Albanian population in villages inside the conflict zone. “I spent many hours monitoring all the international news broadcasts from the area in order to provide a grounded and balanced view of events,” said Aferdita Sokoli of the public television TVSH. “With breaking stories, I tried to be impartial above all else,” he said.

Tele Arberia, a private channel, broadcast a series of talk shows with various guests making very open and sensitive comments on how the conflict may expand and what the prospects were for peace. With memories of the war in Kosovo still fresh in their minds, analysts called for an end to violence and the commencement of real peace talks, while clearly supporting the role being played by the

international community and calling on NATO to prevent further bloodshed.

“To date, the media in Albania have been balanced in their coverage of the crisis in Macedonia,” said Robert Austin, a Canadian historian and Albanian analyst at the University of Toronto, during a research trip in Albania. “They have avoided taking a nationalist position and have relied more or less on international sources,” he said.

### **Nationalism creeps in**

The threat of an imminent refugee crisis in Albania attracted much attention in the domestic media. The visit of the UNHCR envoy, Eric Morris, to Albania was covered in detail revealing domestic preoccupation with the refugee issue. The media also provided full coverage of the efforts being made by UNHCR to arrange suitable accommodation for refugees in the event of such an emergency.

But the media never failed to stress that the return of Macedonian Albanians to Albania was the only viable long-term solution to their problems. Although accommodating half a million refugees had put the country under enormous economic and political strain during the war in

Kosovo, “true” Albanians were encouraged to welcome their brethren in such hard times. Whether in fact the country was equipped to deal with a second influx of refugees was never discussed.

### **Peace and crisis solution**

Given Albanian anxiety about the potential influx of refugees, and the rising death toll from yet another ethnic conflict in the Balkan region, the signing of the peace accord in mid-August understandably took front page in every paper nationwide. It also sparked a series of commentaries about the conflict and its long-term consequences.

Statements by the Albanian government dominated the print and broadcast media, but without exception the country’s newspapers also published reactions from across the political spectrum, invariably hailing the agreement.

But it was a fragile peace and its fragility was noted by all. “After peace ... the war continues,” wrote one Albanian newspaper referring to violence that began to erupt again shortly after the peace accord was signed.

Reactions from key international players, as well as major international

media bodies were given high priority as usual. Comments and statements made by other regional powers were also published, particularly from the governments of Greece and Turkey and all papers reserved front page space for photos of Albania's leaders shaking hands with Macedonian officials, in particular Xhaferi and Georgievski.

Without exception all news reports and editorials denied the existence of fervent nationalism in Albania, insisting that at no stage had the people or government of Albania sought to use the conflict to create a "Greater Albania". Furthermore, it was stated that the government in Tirana had done everything within its power to help bring about a speedy resolution to the conflict. Despite this conciliatory tone, the media in Albania firmly supported the position of the Albanian minority in Macedonia who took up arms against Skopje to demand their basic rights and it was suggested that the international community must act quickly and definitely in order to avoid a repeat of the bloodshed seen in Bosnia or Kosovo.

A clear distinction was made in the Albanian media between the role played by the Macedonian government headed by Lubco Georgievski and that of the Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski. Georgievski was

openly criticised and it was suggested his own short sighted and populist nationalism had been the primary cause of the crisis. "The Macedonian nationalist leaders, the most distinguished of whom is premier Georgievski, are pawns of their own vocabulary," wrote an Albania paper in a commentary entitled *Peace in a Low Voice*.

Along with the majority of the public, the media was aware that although signing the peace agreement was a huge step forward, much would depend on whether both sides were prepared to observe it. The UCK fighters who agreed to disarm were hailed as heroes. But in an article entitled *Blocking the Mechanisms of Agreement*, Agron Vojnika pointed out that the violence continued. "For the sake of the people and Macedonia," he wrote, "now more than ever, we should shake hands with each other and think of our mutual interests; Macedonia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community".

The Albanian press did not turn a blind eye to the fact that divisions along ethnic lines had deepened in Macedonia as a result of the conflict and that mutual trust between the two peoples had been lost. As one headline put it: *Albanians in Macedonia Don't Feel Secure Without NATO Troops*. Commentaries such as that of Alfred

Moisiu, former deputy defence minister and head of the Albanian Atlantic Association, warned that real peace could not be achieved while there was still such a huge military arsenal in the region.

*Who is Will Disarm Macedonia's Civilians?* asked Shekulli in an article highlighting the fact that the 14, 000 light weapons which had been distributed among the Macedonian population presented a serious and continuous threat. The daily newspaper remembered the destruction of Albanian shops and homes during the conflict and concluded, "The main threat to peace now comes from Macedonia's paramilitaries."

An editorial in *Koha Jone* went even further. "An imaginary enemy is always necessary for a government with dictatorial ambitions to stay alive and maintain the nationalist spirit ... The executive arm of the state is far removed from the balanced approach of its President Trajkovski." The newspaper denounced attempts by Georgievski and his government to involve the Albanian government in the conflict, and went on to deny accusations from Skopje that Tirana had supported Albanian extremist active in Macedonia. The paper then accused the Macedonian prime minister of re-directing the hatred of the Macedonian Slav population to the

state of Albania once the peace agreement was signed. "Finding an enemy somewhere outside his country, importing the blame and trying to justify it, is of course not new to the short-fused prime minister," it said.

### **Albanian Media – Reluctant but Mature**

Overall the media in Albania tried to be balanced and impartial in its coverage of the conflict in Macedonia, and stay clear nationalist sentiment. The position of the international community was constantly referred to and the need for international intervention was frequently sought. "It would be good if the Macedonian government observed international advice and returned in an honourable way from the brink of civil war, leaving aside disorder," noted one report.

By the time the conflict in Macedonia reached crisis proportions, the media in Albania had been covering Balkan wars for over ten years. When the all too familiar battle lines were drawn once again in Macedonia the war weary media reacted reluctantly but I believe maturely. Journalists, correspondents and commentators were unanimous in their refusal to give credence to reports that the initial attacks against Albanian villages in Macedonia were authorised by the

government in Skopje and in their insistence that a solution to the problems facing Macedonia could not be reached through the use of weapons. It was also clearly understood that the imposition of a more moderate regime in Macedonia supported by the West could only improve the lives of Alba-

nian's immigrants and that making inflammatory nationalist statements would only hinder this process of change, causing the situation to deteriorate further. After a decade of bloodshed, Albania's young reporters and their editors knew only too well that hatred can be deadly. ¶

# **Bosnia and Hercegovina**

**The war in Macedonia was Bosnia - lite**

*Senad Slatina  
Freelance journalist – correspondent for TIME magazine,  
IWPR, South Eastern European Times (35), Bosnian*



# The war in Macedonia was Bosnia-lite\*

*By Senad Slatina*

Regarding the conflict in Macedonia, public opinion in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) depended on the reports of global news agencies, the comment and analysis of the world media and statements delivered by influential Western officials involved in resolving the crisis in Macedonia.

Bosnia as a state did not take sides in the conflict; it did not track the crisis through active diplomatic engagement; and the media in the country as a rule took the news from the leading world agencies. The rare Bosnian media that deployed correspondents to the crisis areas made parallels with the much more serious conflicts that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a professional sense, those reports were pretty well balanced and contained the viewpoints of all relevant sources that journalists from a relatively small media could have reached in a crisis area. In those reports, bias, as a result of ethnic or religious

affiliations with some of the sides involved, would have been easily recognised.

As with the official Bosnian diplomacy, the Bosnian media tried to recognise — and calm — the basic antagonisms of the conflict. “At the time of the conflict, we did not have any special diplomatic activity,” Amer Kapetanovic, at that time the main spokesman of the Bosnian Foreign Ministry, said. “Still, we were regularly issuing press releases where we were calling for the observing of Macedonia’s territorial integrity. Through those press releases we also called for constitutional reforms that would improve the position of the Albanian community in Macedonia.”

The observations of Bosnian political commentators, i.e. reporters who were deployed on short missions in Macedonia, followed the same direction. The Bosnian media as a whole supported the struggle to improve the

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*\*The headline is an allusion for a beer with less alcohol that can be found in the U.S. Take into consideration the Miller Beer and Miller Lite, etc.*

position of the Albanian community, but at the same time they condemned the violent methods used to achieve those aims.

The two largest political dailies, *Dani* and *Slobodna Bosna*, most frequently deploy correspondents from Sarajevo — war correspondents who gained their experience during the bitter civil war — on weekly or monthly assignments. Other papers relied on agency news or reports written by correspondents based permanently in Skopje, while the broadcasters made extensive use of bought-in footage and agency reports.

### **Reporters on the ground**

Perhaps surprisingly, Macedonia never made the front pages in Bosnia. Despite the relative geographic closeness, the conflict never preoccupied the Bosnian public. In fact, it was only the departure of the brave reporters to the crisis area which allowed the Bosnian experience to touch on the tragic reality that was developing in Macedonia. Although not even those reports hit the front pages, they were the best illustration of how the war in Macedonia was felt from Bosnian perspective.

The correspondents of *Dani*, during February to August of 2001, published

four excellent reports on the beginning of the conflict, its development and the peace negotiations. In those reports, especially in the personal opinions, there was a typically Bosnian “wounded pride” that only those who have lived through war can feel, and which can be very difficult for others to understand. Still, those journalists were truly delivering the most interesting opinions on all aspects of the conflicts.

In their first reports they started to introduce the conspiracy theories dominating the disproportionately large number of Macedonian publications.

Was the essence of the conflict the nationalism of the Albanians who sought separation? Or was it a legitimate rebellion against repression and marginalisation? Was the drama caused by a corrupt government attempting to deflect attention from the scandals that broke before the conflict? Was an “international mafia” involved? What about the US? Or Serbia?

Testing the theories that they read in the Macedonian media through talks with ordinary citizens, the Bosnian reporters came to conclusions that went beyond the conflict in the region. After speaking to Skopje citizens, and

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<sup>1</sup>*Dani, Mafia Struggle for Free Zone, p. 39, March 30, 2001*

hearing exactly the same opinions, the *Dani* reporter commented: “The people are using someone else’s brain to think, they are led by the chaos created by the politicians, the media and various interlopers from inside and outside.”<sup>1</sup> In the same article, foreign journalists are also criticised. In the Balkans they may have distinguished themselves; but in Macedonia they reported on the conflict from miles behind the frontline. In their conclusions and arguments they completely relied on local colleagues, who are very biased about politics. “The journalist, speaking about the events in this country, is brought down to a level of caricature,” they concluded. The same journalist later in Skopje attended a conference titled “The Media and the Conflict in Macedonia” where he concluded that the first combatants in the conflict in Macedonia were the media, both Macedonian and Albanian. It was only later that other parties joined in the killing.

In one of its later descriptions, this magazine, citing examples from Macedonia, described how wars in the Balkans start. First, there is a crazy idea launched by ambitious and criminal minds. Then the media come along. After the media, comes the fear. After the fear, there is the first fool that

pulls the trigger, then the names of the dead in the newspapers. Then the names become numbers and no one remembers them any more. At the end, there are false promises and peace conferences. Still, this journalist concludes, the people in Macedonia did not *have* to take this path – they chose to.<sup>2</sup>

Most reports from the Bosnian correspondents on the ground were peppered with remarks that – compared with the Bosnian war – the conflict in Macedonia was little more than a child’s game, which existed more in the media than it did in reality.

On two occasions during the conflict in Macedonia, *Free Bosnia*, the second largest weekly, deployed correspondents to Macedonia. One noted how everyone in Macedonia, before stating his or her political orientation, demanded to find out which ethnic group the journalist belonged to. Trying to give the Albanians’ struggle a historical perspective, the journalist repeated the same basic question – why did guns replace words in 2001? He received the same answer both from the Albanian rebels above Tetovo and from the political representatives of the Albanians in Skopje – because in the Balkans you are taken seriously

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<sup>2</sup> *Dani*, *Easily Provoked Drama*, June 1, 2001

<sup>3</sup> *Free Bosnia*, Šar Mountain might become Macedonian Pale, March 22, 2001

only if you show power. The journalist completed his story with dark warnings, describing Macedonia as a country “whose name is denied by the Greeks, history and nation by the Bulgarians, church by the Serbs and country by the Albanians.”<sup>3</sup>

The situation in Macedonia was brought closer to the experience of the readers of *Free Bosnia* through a fascinating interview with the leader of the Islamic Community in Macedonia, Jakup Selimoski, who spoke about the suffering of the Muslims during the conflict. Dozens of shops owned by Muslims were burned down, and thousands of Muslims were forced to flee. The reason for the tensions, according to Selimoski, was first, the rigidity of a system that prevented the development of a multiethnic democracy and second, the dissatisfaction generated by that system. Still, Selimoski believed the violence in Macedonia would not come close to the scale seen in Bosnia. “The Bosnian example showed that war makes much more losses than benefits,” Selimoski said.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reports taken from agencies**

The daily newspapers covered the conflict in Macedonia in a similar way,

but much more intensively. Coverage was based upon reports from the foreign agencies and international analysts. The media in the Republic of Srpska (RS) tended to use the reports from the Serbian agencies and media. If we can speak about impartiality, it might be best observed through the terminology used for describing the conflicting sides. As a general rule, press in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina dubbed the Albanians “guerrillas”, “fighters” or “rebels.” The RS media, usually used the terminology of the Macedonian and the Serbian media — “extremists” or “bandits”. Another potential bias was reflected through the acceptance of different assessments of the number of the Albanians in Macedonia. The media in the Federation said that they made up about 30% of the population, while the media in RS focused on the number of 20%. However, these discrepancies were not consistent, and could have been a reflection of what was being stated in the global media at the time.

The Bosnian daily newspapers and broadcast media covered all significant events in Macedonia, from the first incidents in the village of Tanusevci, the Presevo valley and Kumanovo until the final operations

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<sup>4</sup> *Free Bosnia, Ethnically cleansed Prilep and Bitola, mosques and shops set on fire, 100,000 Muslims expelled*, August 16, 2001

of the Macedonian army in Tetovo and the signing of the agreement, in mid-August in Ohrid. Still, all these stories were put deep inside the newspapers (mainly in the “world” or “regional” sections) They never dominated the front pages of the Bosnian papers. The conflict in Macedonia was small-scale. Ultimately, a state of war was never formally declared, and special security measures were applied only in the crisis areas.

### **Post-war Relations**

During the period of conflict, the Bosnian government supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia, but avoided the use of the complicated and politically-loaded official name of that country. However, relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia cooled significantly after the war as a result of two incidents, which, according to Sarajevo’s assessment, were created by the previous Macedonian government and especially by the controversial interior minister Ljube Boskovski. First, at the beginning of 2002, an incident in which an alleged terrorist group from Pakistan was liquidated was spiced up by the unfounded allegation that the group entered Macedonia from Bosnia. When the Bosnian government, under

pressure from the Sarajevo media, asked for information that could back up this claim, made by Boskovski, it was told that this could not be disclosed as it would undermine the investigation. The second incident also happened in the beginning of 2002, when two Bosnians who studied Islamic sciences in Jordan were arrested, beaten up and tortured for several days in a prison in Skopje. The same Macedonian minister claimed at the time that the students belonged to al Qaeda and that, based on an US request, they were transferred to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. This was promptly denied by the US. The truth is that the Bosnian students were released from prison after three days and allowed to continue their journey to Jordan. Again, an official explanation was requested but never arrived. The Bosnian ambassador was recalled from Macedonia and there was a threat to end diplomatic relations. Still, the situation was overcome, and relations with the new Macedonian government are now progressing in a much better atmosphere. Today, Macedonia is a member of the Partnership for Peace and has signed the Association and Stabilisation Agreement with the EU. These, and not the war experiences, are the subject of talks between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia today. ¶



# **Bulgaria**

## **Macedonia, the hub of the Balkans**

*Nikolay Petrov  
Freelance journalist ( 51), Bulgarian*



# Macedonia, the hub of the Balkans

*By Nikolay Petrov*

*“If you want peace in the world, there must be peace in Europe. If you want peace in Europe, there must be peace in the Balkans. If you want peace in the Balkans, there must be peace in Macedonia.”*

Vanche Mihailov, 1934

## **What actually happened in Macedonia in 2001?**

Several years before the conflict began, Vlado Gligorov, son of the former Macedonian president Kiro Gligorov and one of the best economists in the region, described with great accuracy the key issues which would bring Macedonia to the brink of civil war. “Macedonia”, he said, “is something of a state and something of a *modus vivendi*. The big issue,” he said, “is to what extent Macedonia will go on being a state and to what extent it will go on being simply a *modus vivendi*. The Macedonians failed for 10 years to understand whether they want a single state with the Albanians, and if

so – what kind of state. All their energy has been directed at winning recognition as Macedonians. Even today they do not know whether they want their state to be divided, whether they want a civil-society, or some kind of a Macedonian Macedonia.”

“The Albanian people do not trust their politicians. They are not protected by the Macedonian army or police. Hence, when the UCK (National Liberation Army) enters a village, everybody seems to accept it. Whenever dialogue is held at gunpoint and agreements are sealed with cannons, alas. I recognise that weapons can be instrumental in bringing about new agreements. Unfortunately, however, here in Macedonia, the two groups grew incessantly more radical. The battle cry of the ethnic Macedonians became - *we shall never give them anything*, leading the ethnic Albanians to fear - *we shall never get anything*. It is absurd. Macedonia is a nest of political amateurs.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nim Ahmeti, AFL will bear the new politicians, the “168 Hours”, 22-28.07.2001

In March 2001, *Kapital*, a Bulgarian weekly quoted a university professor from Skopje as saying, “Macedonia feels cheated. It served for more than 10 years as the shield for the international community against all the errors the community has ever made – from Slovenia to Kosovo”.<sup>2</sup> The professor admitted that after the first days of the so-called Macedonian crisis she had begun to seek refuge for her family.

In Bulgaria, the official stance of the Macedonian Government was reported to be that there was no Macedonian crisis; that this was a Kosovan crisis that had spilt over onto Macedonian soil. The crisis, it was argued, boiled down to “the export of pressure, the export of a political conflict”. The major motive for this export, according to one explanation, was entirely criminal. Another suggested that the conflict was provoked by the political ambitions of the Kosovar Albanians who were determined to leverage support throughout the region with the aim of achieving independence. But Macedonia’s moderate politicians and their supporters held a different view of events. The leader of the Democratic Party of the Albanians, Arben Xhaferi, claimed the Macedonian crisis was an

internal issue, caused by the exhaustion of the ethno-political institutions that had held the country together for 10 years. He argued that regardless of where those actually doing the shooting around Tetovo came from, in Macedonia itself there were many young people ready to take up weapons and join the fight.

### **The grey market and inter-ethnic relations**

The real roots of the crisis lay in the stagnation of the Macedonian economy and its impact on society as a whole. The Bulgarian public had never taken much of an interest in Macedonia’s economic situation or the life of its people. “Well, Macedonians are not doing well with an almost totally flat economy, 40 % unemployment and a large grey market which has been almost entirely taken over by ethnic factions. Hence, there is little room for inter-ethnic relations. The private sector is predominantly Albanian while Macedonians are predominantly employed in the state administration, the police and in education.”<sup>3</sup>

As is often the case in such situations, the involvement of a large number of

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<sup>2</sup> *Stanka Tosheva, Will there be a Macedonia?, the “Kapital”, 24-30.03. 2001*

<sup>3</sup> *Macedonia in crisis, Bulgaria faces elections..., readers forum, the “Kapital”, 7-13.04. 2001*

foreign interests added to the complications. “Corridors intersect... Corridor No. 8 was immediately forgotten after the emergence of the Macedonian crisis. The agreement on Corridor No. 10 – the ancient corridor from Belgrade to Athens – was signed while the crisis was at its peak. Economic interests will always result in the ambition to deploy foreign troops in the Balkans... and Macedonia is the hub of the Balkans.”<sup>4</sup>

“The wars ... the competition between the US and the now defunct USSR for oil, and the Biblical conflict between the Jews and the Palestinians are part of everyday life for us and for the whole world. Oil pipelines are being constructed in the Balkans; Macedonia lies in the centre of the Balkans. The planned gas pipeline from Siberia will also cut across the region. American, Russian and Greek-Macedonian interests and inter-relationships are locked into the interests of the EU and of individual EU member states.”<sup>5</sup>

An American pipeline carries Caucasian oil through Macedonia to the Ionian Sea in Albania, and from there to the Italian port of Otranto. The Russian pipeline transfers Siberian oil to Bourgas, and from there to Alexandropolis. The Macedonian-Greek pipeline carries Russian, Middle-Eastern and even Latin American

oil from Thessaloniki to Skopje. The final target of all these pipelines is Western Europe – the energy market with the largest deficit in the world. It would be naive to expect the competing interests behind all these projects to work together to bring prosperity and peace to the nations whose lands are criss-crossed by these pipes that carry oil and power.

### **A humanitarian precedent**

The very existence of Macedonia and Bulgaria and the growing influence of the two sovereign states both in the Balkans and Europe was, until recently, proof of the inherent tolerance of the diverse peoples encompassed within their borders. Both states play host to representatives of virtually all ethnic communities and religions with a presence in the Balkan region. This tolerance dictated that Macedonia accept huge numbers of refugees from Kosovo – regardless of the consequences – thus setting a humanitarian precedent in Europe.

The emergence of armed groups along the “Northern Arc” above Skopje that raised the banner of combat for Albanian independence shocked the Bulgarian public. Until that moment both states had looked to their own

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<sup>4</sup> *Krassimir Uzunov, Peace in Macedonia is still far away, the “Focus” agency, 08/2001*

<sup>5</sup> *Oil pipelines fired the conflict in Macedonia, the “Standard”, 21.07.2001*

affairs, each without much interest in the other. Macedonia appeared in the Bulgarian press only when mention was made of some new hysteria in the Macedonian media about Bulgarian efforts to “Bulgarise the lands along the Vardar”. Such reports generally garnered replies from “Bulgaria experts” who suggested the Macedonians had better look to their own affairs rather than spending their time cooking up such sensationalist fiction.

### **Bulgarians accept Macedonia at face value**

In Bulgaria, we accept Macedonia at face value. It is simply a neighbouring state. We like to visit Ohrid – a place everyone should experience at least once in a lifetime. I have never encountered any animosity during the numerous visits I have made to Macedonia. On the contrary, Bulgarians and Macedonians compete for the title of most hospitable neighbour. I have never known a Bulgarian to bear a grudge towards Macedonia. We Bulgarians and Macedonians see things in a similar way, our perceptions appear to be seamlessly merged. But the rigors of everyday life in Bulgaria, particularly over the last 13 years, have left little time to consider the circumstances of our Macedonian neighbours or pay attention to the development of the state. That is why

the events of 2001 came as such a shock.

In 1999, and more so in the spring of 2001, Bulgarians finally started to realise that Macedonia was in trouble. It was faced by serious problems that could spill over into Bulgaria and impact on the political life of the whole country. Sensitive issues were beginning to raise their heads once more: ethnic intolerance, the fate of minorities and, the potential for conflict between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. The events that took place in the spring and summer of 2001 in Macedonia forced us to consider our own society, its propensity towards intolerance, its vulnerability to propaganda and media “spin” and ultimately, whether we Bulgarians were capable of thinking collectively as a single nation.

I arrived at the Blace border crossing one night shortly before Orthodox Easter in 1999. I remember being shocked by the mass of human misery, the pitifully sad faces of the tens of thousands of Kosovar refugees stranded in no-man’s land, passively awaiting their fate. This single image determined to a large extent my perception of the Albanian community, about whom I knew practically nothing. Even the language they spoke was completely unfamiliar – a rare thing in the Balkans where only politicians use interpreters. There are few nations that live so close and yet

know as little of each other as do the Bulgarians and the Albanians.

It is natural I suppose, to expect such an experience to cause an emotional response that would influence the way in which I reported subsequent events. But my response did not differ greatly from that of hundreds of colleagues who had come to Skopje from all over the world. I believe that any attempt to examine the response of the Bulgarian public to the events in Kosovo and Macedonia that does not highlight the emotional bias of the media at the time can only be misleading.

### **Macedonia is neither calm nor romantic**

In 2001, Macedonia finally, violently shed its image as an island of stability in the Balkan region. It was neither calm nor romantic. Its perceived stability had been artificial. Deep internal divisions and mistrust had been there all along, simmering under the surface.

“We used to live peacefully with the local Albanians, there were no problems. God knows where this Army for National Liberation came from, what they want. They claim they have no rights. The Albanians in Macedonia have all the rights they want, here they have rights that others don’t have”, a citizen of Skopje told the *Monitor* daily.

The Bulgarian media were, to a certain extent, not prepared to meet the challenges of the conflicts in Kosovo and Macedonia. Reports of clashes, assassinations, ambushes and pogroms in the immediate vicinity of Bulgaria’s Western border in early 2001 failed to explore the underlying tensions that had always exist. Later, when the Bulgarian press started running full-page interviews with prominent Macedonian personalities, a clearer picture of what was happening in Macedonia was to emerge, viewed from a multitude of angles and standpoints.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *In an alphabetical order – Ademi Djevati, Secretary General of the national Democratic Party of the Albanians; Arben Xhaferi, leader of the Democratic Party of the Albanians; Chedomir Kravevski, leader of the parliamentary faction of the VMRO-DPMNE; Erdogan Sarac, Chairman of the Democratic Party of the Turks in Macedonia; Imer Imeri, leader of the Party for Democratic Prosperity; Ivica Jovev, member of VMRO-DPMNE; Kastriot Hadjiredja, leader of the national Democratic Party of the Albanians; Kim Mehmeti, writer; Kiro Gligorov, the first democratically elected President of independent Macedonia; Commander Kushtrum Razimi, ANL; Ljubcho Georgievski, former Macedonian Prime Minister; Ljuben Paunovski, former Minister of Defense; Ljubisha...*

## **They do not believe in Bulgaria's good intentions**

Bulgaria's policy towards Macedonia over the previous years had been dictated by several factors. First, the government's desire to formulate a foreign policy that conformed to that of the EU member states and the international community as a whole. Secondly, the deep mistrust of Bulgarian intentions in Macedonia itself – which forced the government to act with caution and diplomacy. Thirdly, the need to exercise sound reason and sober judgment in a region prone to instability.

Bulgaria's policy until 1999 was fairly consensual and attempted to address the concerns of each of the country's various political factions. However, members of Movement for Rights and Freedoms, a party founded on ethnic grounds that aims to represent Muslim Bulgarians and those of Turkish origin, have subsequently

claimed that the government of the day failed to formulate an adequate response to the crisis preferring the tactic of avoidance. But this is not a frequently made criticism. No other groups have accused the cabinet of former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov of avoiding its responsibilities. In fact the general impression has been that the government was proactive in its approach to Macedonia, assuming responsibility for risky and even unpopular measures, for instance refusing to accept Albanian refugees and challenging the attitude of the wider public during the Kosovo crisis. Nobody accused the Prime Minister of avoiding his responsibilities when he decided to interrupt his election campaign in early 2001 to visit Macedonia (although at that time he was certainly accused of other things). In the end, the National Movement Simeon II won a surprising victory in the general election in 2001. A declaration issued by the NMS, in

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*...Georgievski, Ambassador of Macedonia in Bulgaria; General Mitre Arsovski. Former Chief of Staff of the Macedonian armed forces; Mohammed Halili, Secretary General of the Party of Democratic Prosperity; Rustam Mustafa – Remi, chief of staff No. 6 of the Kosovo Protection Corps; Sasho Ordanovski, editor in chief of the "Forum" magazine; Commander Shpati, ANL; Skopje; Srgjan Kerim, Minister of foreign Affairs of Macedonia; commander Sokoli ANL; Vasil Tupurkovski, leader of the Democratic Alternative; Vlado Buchkovski, Minister of Defense on the coalition cabinet of Ljubcho Georgievski since June 2001; Jordan Boshkov, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Macedonian Parliament; Ljuben Paunovski, former Minister of Defense.*

support of the negotiations between the Macedonian president, Boris Trajkovski, and legitimate representatives of the Macedonian Albanians, as well as statements made by members of the new NMS parliamentary faction, demonstrated that the incumbents saw no grounds for alarm. "We shall say when the time is ripe," they said. But a large number of Bulgarian political observers and experts claimed exactly the opposite – their nervous forecasts were tied to expectations of a possible escalation of the tension in Bulgaria's neighbour to the West.

Despite the assurances of the NMS the public soon grew weary of the party's wait-and-see approach to the crisis. Situations develop quickly in the Balkans and sudden crises require urgent and immediate attention. In such a highly charged atmosphere there is no time for political foot dragging if you want your voice to be heard at all.

But what were the issues that most frightened Bulgaria's politicians as conflict raged across the Western border? The former Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov maintained that Macedonia would always be in the hearts of the Bulgarian people who feared the realisation of any one of several scenarios, most of which also existed during the Kosovo crisis, but never came to pass.

Reporting of events in Macedonia was

affected by internal developments. For instance, despite official statements of support for the actions taken against the Milosevic regime by the international community, the Bulgarian public was adamantly against NATO involvement and the use of force on a scale tantamount to all-out war. It is no surprise that public opinion in Bulgaria today is deeply divided over whether the country should join NATO. Indeed, the invitation to join is viewed by many as a whim and few expect it will be taken up. Despite these reservations, in an effort to be seen as a loyal ally and supporter of US policy, the Bulgarian government of the day portrayed Milosevic as Satan, the Kosovo Albanians as victims and the Serbs as mindless zombies. A former minister of the interior went as far as to hint that those that who openly objected to NATO's actions could face arrest. The *Demokratiya* newspaper, the official voice of the then ruling Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) even published a list of the names of Bulgarian intellectuals who supported the bombing raids. This infantile approach was repeated during the Macedonian crisis.

The crisis erupted at a time when the former incumbents were in desperate need of some miracle to prevent their defeat at the general elections. Thus, a childish simple connection was drawn between the bombings and the cause of those who employed one and

the same tactics in Kosovo (and were mastered by Milosevic) and in Macedonia, where they encountered a seemingly weaker but at the same time a much more dedicated adversary. But it was difficult to paint the UDF government into this picture, particularly ministers such as Hashim Taci and Agim Cheku. The fact that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) had been created by the CIA for use as a tool in Washington's policy against Belgrade could not be explained away. Nor was there any argument made against the frequent identification of the KLA with the Army for National Liberation (UCK). The fact that the Kosovo's Albanians were the victims of both the Belgrade regime and of their own self-proclaimed leaders remained outside the scope of official propaganda.

But the desire to bring down a dictatorship should not be realised at the expense of the civilian population. This argument was recently made with crystal clarity while the US and Britain sought support for their offensive against Iraq. In 2001, the position, actions and intentions of the US and Western Europe were met in Bulgaria with an obvious mistrust.

### **No borders may be changed in the 21st century**

Some have argued that the Kosovo and Macedonian crises were conduits for the ideal of a "Greater Albania". However at the time the reality of this objective was by no means clear. At the beginning of the 21st century the notion of "nation building" is unrealistic and attempting to redefine international borders is anachronistic. Nevertheless, a similar concept published by the French branch of the Schiller Institute under the title *Towards a New American Policy for the Balkans* and allegedly developed by the former British Foreign Secretary Lord Owen, became the focus of a heated dispute between the Bulgarian newspapers *Monitor* and *Standard* and the Macedonian *Utrinski Vestnik* and *Vecher*; with *Monitor* and *Utrinski vestnik* in agreement on one side against *Standard* and *Vecher* on the other. After an avalanche of words however, it transpired that the dispute could be traced to a fictitious statement that had been attributed to a Bulgarian politician.

But there were other similar disputes. There are about one million Muslims in Bulgaria. The conflict between "Slavic Macedonians" and Muslim Albanians, as well as efforts to seek a solution by revising existing national borders were judged to be a serious

threat to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian media published reports about intensive contact between political leaders from the predominantly Bulgarian Muslim Kurdjali region and ethnic Albanians from Macedonia. "This is the way to stimulate nationalism among Bulgarian Turks and get them gunning for some form of an autonomy,"<sup>7</sup> said one commentator. But these fears were groundless, focused as they were on the timing of a single visit paid by Ivan Kostov to the US.

### **A compromised finale**

Macedonia used to be represented as a successful example of Western intervention. It was portrayed as the only state among the former Yugoslav republics where the timely involvement of the international community had prevented the outbreak of war on a scale similar to those waged in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This image was shattered within the first weeks of the conflict in 2001. The international community turned out to be an extremely weak guarantor of internal security in Macedonia. When terror-

ists appeared on the doorstep of Tetovo, it became clear that the international community was not prepared to return fire. After a decade of decay, Macedonia's armed forces were state of disarray. It wasn't long before Bulgarian tanks and 155 mm field guns were rumoured to have made an appearance on the battlefield. According to one analyst, "Macedonia's dependence on the import of munitions was revealed with the first large-scale shoot-out on the hills above Tetovo in March [2001]. According to Western experts, by the end of May the same year the country had totally exhausted its reserves of large-gauge artillery shells and began to search for help from abroad. At the same time, Bulgaria started sending tanks and artillery shells to replenish the exhausted Macedonian stocks."<sup>8</sup>

"These are the most readily accessible products in the Balkans now. Weapons are the easiest things to purchase, especially in Bulgaria. Bulgaria produces weapons, right? They are products sold for money. Today arms are the cheapest commodity in the Balkans."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Todor Proichev, *Ethnic splits on the Balkans, the "Monitor"*, 23.04. 2001

<sup>8</sup> *Mobile rebels fight with old tanks in Macedonia, the "Dnevnik"*, 06.07.2001. Bulgaria has granted to Macedonia, since 1998, about 200 tanks type T-55, armoured personnel carriers type BTR 70/80, armoured reconnaissance carriers type BRDM, 122-mm and 155-mm artillery systems and some quantity of munitions.

<sup>9</sup> Ademi Djevati, *interview for Elena Yoncheva, the "Monitor"*, 17.03. 2001

There was a concerted attempt made to implicate Bulgaria in events taking place on the frontline. "We have all kinds of weapons, including – thanks to your country – a sufficient number of missiles of a specific model"<sup>10</sup>, a UCK leader said in an interview for a Bulgarian newspaper *Kushrum Razimi*. "We have channels in Macedonia, and channels from Bulgaria and Serbia. The goods arrive from Bulgaria more quickly than they arrive from Kosovo. We don't want to lose time. There are no problems with borders and border control,"<sup>11</sup> the statement continued. The Italian news agency ANSA also circulated a UCK communiqué claiming that a Bulgarian officer was among the slain "Slavic Macedonian occupiers".

But did any of us really understand what was happening in Macedonia in 2001? The Albanian mafia was using drug money to finance terrorist acts in Western Macedonia and Southern Serbia. Thus, the Bulgarian people did not recognise the rebel leaders as legitimate representatives of the Albanians. In response, Albanians all over the world started to hate Bulgarians. One Bulgarian report stated, "There are genuine forces [in Macedonia] for whom ... the war is a blessing, and these are the former ALK

commanders who refuse to accept the loss of their positions in the power structures and (most of all!) the drug's trade, prostitution and arm's dealing networks. These people rely [on the war] as a means to restore their power, business and popularity."<sup>12</sup>

According to reports in the Bulgarian media and elsewhere, drugs were supplied to the Albanian mafia from Georgian and Armenian crime gangs. The Albanians allegedly paid for the deliveries and then sold the goods in the West. Large quantities of heroin were seized in Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Greece in the months before hostilities broke out. The arrested drug dealers were mostly Albanians from Pristina, Skopje and Skodra. Two other towns also played a large part in the trafficking of heroin: Vratnitsa on the Serbian-Macedonian border, and Blastitsa in Kosovo.

"These towns are populated mainly by Albanians. According to reliable sources, Tropoja in Albania and Gostivar in Macedonia are also on the heroin trail. A whole floor in a hotel in Gostivar is allegedly booked for the new elite of the Albanian mafia, all of them driving Mercedes, dressed in Armani suits and accompanied by a flock of redneck bodyguards. According to experts, Albanians living

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<sup>10</sup> *Albanians: "Bulgarians, do not come, we shall strike at Skopje", the "Trud", 11.07.2001*

<sup>11</sup> *Commander Shpati, the "Monitor", 18.05.2001*

<sup>12</sup> *Macedonia between NATO and Great Albania, the "NIE" magazine, 03/2001,*

in Switzerland, the US and Germany are the main link in the heroin supply chain. They are even pushing the Turkish mafia out of these markets. In developing their business, the Albanians know that they can rely on the Georgian and Armenian mafia that have access to heroin from the Caucasus.”<sup>13</sup>

### **“The most romantic part of Bulgarian history ”**

Newspaper headlines were evidence of another natural response to the conflict – the sympathy felt by one Christian nation for the plight of another (the Slavic Macedonians, as they were often referred to by representatives of the Albanian community). This sympathy also placed Bulgarian society as a whole in support of the Kosovo refugees, demonstrating that links between ethnic/religious groups in the Balkans have always been much deeper than the relations between the Balkan states themselves. Every community, whether in Bulgaria, Macedonia or elsewhere, has its own problems and divisions that can be exploited in the name of purely political and economic interests.

Balkan conflicts have stood Christians against Muslims, Muslims against

Muslims, and Christians against Christians. Bulgarians, Serbs, Croatians, Romanians and Albanians have waged war against each other – sometimes as allies to foreign powers – and have gone to war side by side against common adversaries. Is the fact that the two parties to the conflict in Macedonia were ethnically homogeneous sufficient to prove that the roots of the conflict itself were ethnic divisions? I believe the Macedonian conflict is just one more example of the use of terror to exert pressure and obtain political legitimacy. “The UCK does not recognise that peaceful citizens are used as a living shield against the Macedonian army and the Albanian rebels.”<sup>14</sup>

Tetovo, inhabited mainly by Albanians, was turned into a ghost town like the Macedonian villages along the Northern Arc above Skopje. Such tactics implied that the perpetrators were set on provoking the response of the regular army and inflicting casualties on the civil population with the aim of leveraging pressure from the international community to force the commencement of peace negotiations. Bulgaria and Macedonia share a common border, a common history and a close relationship. Bulgaria was the first state in the world to recognize the independence of its neighbour

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<sup>13</sup> *Mafia finances the Balkan wars, the “Standart”, 25.07.2001*

<sup>14</sup> *Elena Yoncheva, Albanians claim they will take over Skopje, the “Monitor”, 18.05.2001*

despite decades of bias and rivalry between the intellectual elites of the two states on common points in their history. The former Bulgarian president Peter Stoyanov even referred to Macedonia as, “the most romantic part of Bulgarian history,” which caused a flurry of angry retorts. I allow myself to quote these words without any desire to inflame ancient disputes but rather to point out the spiritual connection shared by the two countries. Bulgaria and Macedonia have long resolved their disputes, finding compromise in the language of conflict. It was Stoyanov again who, while visiting Skopje in 2000, said in the Macedonian language, “Long live free and independent Macedonia”. But of course there was danger hidden in his enthusiasm for Macedonia. At a time of crisis in the Balkans any statement of support was liable to be distorted and used by both the Albanian separatists and the Macedonian nationalists who could then all be heard to cry, “The Bulgarians are coming!” As a university professor from Skopje told me, “We had problems with building a multi-ethnic society in peacetime, I cannot even start to imagine the results of a conflict”. The flow of refugees from Kosovo into Macedonia in 1999 was a manifestation of the tragic destiny of a

whole ethnic community. The reversal in 2001 of the attitude of the Albanian leaders both in Kosovo and in Macedonia, when measured against the background of 1999, was staggering. The events in Macedonia proved the naivety of Western political science, which prescribes the observance of human rights and the integration of minorities into the power structures as a universal medication. A broad coalition government, with the participation of the two major political parties representing Macedonian Albanians, namely the Democratic Party of the Albanians and the Party of Democratic Prosperity, was formed in Macedonia in the summer of 2001 under strong pressure from the West. The move was intended to satisfy the Albanian minority and dissuade them from engaging in armed violence. But the agreed solution was not suited to the paternalistic Albanian community, where informal leaders draw their authority from economic ties and clan relations and are independent of Skopje politicians. At the same time the fact that the Skopje authorities were appointed neither by Brussels or Washington but by the Macedonian people must be taken into consideration.<sup>15</sup> Lack of tactfulness and diplomacy (US special envoy, James Pardu, now US ambas-

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<sup>15</sup> *Plamen Dimitrov, A long slide towards an international protectorate, the “Demokratsia”, 04.07.2001*

sador to Sofia, was asked to leave Macedonia) can be dangerous, opening a deep chasm between the institutions of the state and the ordinary citizens of the state. This in turn may present a green light to radical groups ready to exploit extremism, both Albanian and Macedonian.

The pogroms against Albanian shops and houses in Bitola, the burned mosques and the punitive raids against Albanian chapters, as well as the attack on the Parliament building in Skopje, demonstrated that events were moving out of the sphere of influence of the state leaders and may yet grow to a scale beyond all control.

### **A new crisis looming?**

Interest in Macedonia subsided somewhat after Skopje was forced to initiate one of the most radical measures dictated by Western diplomacy – the coalition cabinet. There was a definite perception that this approach was selected to avoid the alternative, emergency measures. The total on-site penetration of Western media, the pictures of field guns positioned next to harvesters, were naturally acceptable to Western observers who – because of their own limitations – had already created an image of an irrational, mindless Balkans. Actually,

“the war seemed real only on the TV screens. The audience, watching missile salvos, were given the impression decisive measures were being taken by the Macedonian forces - that a real war was being waged. However, there was no war”.<sup>16</sup>

Observers and politicians started called for talks with the Albanian armed factions as the only possible way out. Such an approach seemed reasonable – anything was better than bloodshed. But the moral dispute – whether it is acceptable and feasible to negotiate with terrorists – was stripped of its substance and ignored. The talks with the UCK failed to bring about a durable solution to the existing problems. There remained the real danger that some other armed groups would take to the mountains with a collection of new demands. Despite the results and the relative – albeit strained – calm in Macedonia since then, the danger of the emergence of some future Army for the Liberation of Ohrid, or Skopje, or Kumanovo or any other city is quite real.

“Macedonia is again facing a civil war. The fighters of the Albanian National Army (ANA) are priming for a spring offensive in Macedonia”, the Bulgarian weekly *168 Hours* wrote last February. These claims were described by Macedonian sources as an illusion, as the

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<sup>16</sup> *Elena Yoncheva, The strange war in Macedonia, the “Monitor”, 28.05.2001*

ANA allegedly exists only as a media conjecture. The same ANA, however, claimed responsibility for the explosion at the courthouse in Struga on February 15, 2003 – a region that had remained outside the area of conflict between the Macedonian armed forces and the UCK. In an attempt to dismiss the importance of the incident, the perpetrators were described as “armed Albanian bandits” who were fighting “by teeth and fangs to preserve their control over drugs, weapons and the white slave trade in this part of the country.”<sup>17</sup>

The Albanian territory stretches to Ohrid, a young man sitting in a coffee bar in Tetovo told a Bulgarian journalist in 2001. Similar excuses were used to paper over the cracks in those days when nobody really believed that UCK existed.

It is possible however, that the Macedonian crisis may serve to consolidate Macedonian statehood. Macedonia needs to be a true state. The bizarre political model on which it is based must be redeveloped. Peaceful coexistence between two peoples is not possible when their political institutions encourage ghettoisation and when they refuse to communicate with each other. The major problem is not whether Macedonia needs functional or territorial federalization. The adoption of a federal constitution would

emerge in the long term as a failure of Macedonian statehood, and regardless of whether it is defined as functional or territorial, such a constitution would hardly be capable of preserving the state. The major problem is whether there will be a political consensus in Macedonia for a transition towards a civil constitution.

In 1991, Macedonia adopted a constitution that contained a famous preamble, namely that the Macedonian state is a state of the Macedonian nation, with a specific paragraph stating that the preamble is by no means directed against the Albanians in Macedonia. It was, in fact, to a large extent directed against any remaining Bulgarian claims over the identity of the Macedonian nation. This document is now emerging as the most vulnerable area of the Macedonian constitution as it provides the necessary flexibility for federalism.

Negotiating with the armed factions resulted in a destabilization of the system of political representation that took years to re-establish. The negotiations also demonstrated that procedures such as elections, voting, ballots, observers, coalition talks and executive formation may be cut short by a bunch of partisan commanders with exotic nicknames.

“Realising that the international pressure exerted on the Albanian

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<sup>17</sup> *Macedonia faced with a civil war again, the “168 Hours”, 28.02 – 6.03.2003*

rebels is had been ineffective and that the Macedonian authorities had the will to continue to fight, the Bulgarian government initiated its first steps to restrict access to arms and support the measures of the EU in this regard, as well as the NATO agenda for a controlled intervention.

In this delicate situation, the Bulgarian government was an example to Macedonia's other neighbours by stating clearly that none of the parties to the conflict should be granted any incentives."<sup>18</sup>

The negotiations could only be considered successful if they resulted in an agreement that could allow the two communities to start living together. If the objective of the negotiators was to further separate the two communities and to split the state, then they would amount to nothing but a waste of time. This perception of a no-win situation was obvious in the contradicting messages transmitted by the European and Atlantic community.

The EU and the US were ready to interfere to preserve the territorial integrity of Macedonia as they did in Kosovo and Bosnia. But establishing new international protectorates in the Western Balkans does not necessarily further integrate the violent region into Europe. A protectorate is expensive – and somebody will have to foot the bill. But more importantly, the stability within a protectorate is artificial. It consists of nothing more than artificially maintained living standards, artificial institutions and artificial understanding. ¶

*\*Acknowledgement*

*I would like to express gratitude to my colleagues at Sega, Monitor, Trud, Novinar, Standart, Dnevnik 168 Hours, and Kapital newspapers, Tema magazine, and Focus news agency for their indirect contributions and the materials that were used extensively in this analysis but were not explicitly referred to in the endnotes.*

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Beaver, *The CIA may press the rebels to stop fighting, the "Dnevnik"*, 06.07.2001.



# **Greece**

## **Whatever happened to objectivity?**

*Takis Diamandis*

*Correspondent for the Greek newspaper Eleftherotypia, ET-3 TV in  
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## Whatever happened to objectivity?

*By Takis Diamandis*

On February 19, 2001 a statement from the Ministry of Defence reported that “armed groups of Kosovo Albanians” were moving towards the border. The frontier village of Tanusefci was under immediate threat. I sent a news story containing this information from Skopje to *Eleftherotopia*, the newspaper for which I was working as Balkans’ correspondent, that night. I also gave a live interview to Thesaloniki’s ET-3 TV channel containing the same information and presented a full analysis of the situation in the area during the previous two months in a dialogue with the press representative of the Greek Ministry of External Affairs. I had been filing such reports and providing such routine analysis on a daily basis. But the story was now starting to attract the attention of the Greek media as a whole and the country’s government.

The news would have come as no surprise to anyone who had been keeping an eye on developments in the region over the preceding years or even months. On January 24 2001, a group of Albanians had carried out a bloody attack on the police station at

the village of Tearce, near Tetovo. Just three days earlier on February 16, a TV crew from the A1 channel were held by a group of armed Albanians at Tanusefci for several hours having stumbled upon them accidentally.

These events – taking place as they did only two years after the Kosovo crisis of 1999, and just one year after an Albanian uprising in the Presevo region of southern Serbia - triggered acute fears that were later confirmed. A new Balkan crisis had begun. It lasted for six months and left in its wake several unresolved issues and loose ends that continue to cause tension in region.

Several factors played a decisive role in the crisis and its outcome: a) the actions, motives and objectives of the Albanian insurgents; b) the various roles played by the country’s political groupings, both government and opposition; c) the role played by the international community and; d) the role played by the mass media and its impact on public opinion which will be the subject of this article.

Modern warfare is fought on two levels: on the battlefield and in the media as both sides struggle to convert public opinion through the use of propaganda. Military might and strategy are the deciding factors in the former while access to the tools of communication and, by implication, the mass media is a deciding factor in the latter. The importance of the role played by the mass media in modern warfare is such that attempts are made to manage and exploit it, covering up criminal activities and deliberately creating confusion and misunderstanding – the long-term consequence of which can be very serious.

Several factors play a part in this manipulation, including journalists who get caught up in the story and fail to observe the usual standards of objectivity. Members of the public who are often all too willing to accept biased or even distorted reporting also play a role. Equally important are those who fail to take an interest in the events that shape their future and are apathetic about the role being played by their own government. Analysis of this third group however, requires a more detailed examination of the way in which the media functions and of the economic status and standard of education enjoyed by their target audience which shall not be entered into here.

With regard to the specific subjects of war and conflict that concern us here, it is possible to identify three main factors that may explain why journalists sometimes fail to present an objective view of events. First, the speed at which stories unfold and must be reported often mean there is little time to seek independent confirmation of information. Secondly, young or inexperienced reporters covering a conflict situation for the first time often react with greater emotion, which can prevent objective analysis of developments. Thirdly, and most significantly, journalists are often guided by the editorial slant of the organisation they work for which may lead them to colour events to fit the political, social, national or religious beliefs of their employer.

It should also be understood that in any turbulent domestic situation, it is inevitable that those who work in the media side with one party or another, producing what can only be described as propaganda in support of their interests. This became absolutely clear during the conflict of 2001. Most of the country's newspapers, radio and television stations allowed sentimentality, subjectivity and direct propaganda to colour their reports. In addition, fear that the crisis would escalate out of control and outright arrogance in some cases led to the concealment of particular facts, over

emphasis of others, and the distortion of certain events. All of this served only to increase tension and deepen the ethnic divide.

Where regional conflict comes to be of global concern foreign reporters active in the field also have an important play a role. They can be categorised as follows: a) those arriving from neighbouring countries, who are inevitably influenced by views and emotions back home and; b) those who represent the world-media or powerful states that “see” events through a political perspective, which nearly always derives from the international centres of power.

Thus categorised, is possible to understand more clearly the factors that can influence foreign journalists in the field and lead to selective and biased reporting. In particular, the requirements of television with its unquenchable need for emotive imagery can encourage TV news journalists to project inaccurate or even manufactured images. During the Kosovo crisis of 1999 and NATO’s subsequent bombing of Yugoslavia there were numerous examples of this. The competition amongst foreign news channels for sensational bomb blast imagery was fierce, particularly amongst those with a world-wide network. Foreign reporters openly supported the “oppressed” Kosovo Albanians

against the “diabolical” Milosevic regime, constantly vindicating the actions of NATO while ignoring the large number of civilian casualties and the environmental destruction these actions caused. Similarly, television coverage of “Operation Desert Storm” in Iraq in 1991, and more recently, the attack against Afghanistan at the end of 2001 or the US-led invasion of Iraq this year sought to justify the actions of the world’s leading powers by turning these conflicts into prime time television. During the most recent invasion of Iraq, all kinds of “special effects” were used to present the war as “a battle of good against evil” despite the global controversy over its legality and ultimate objective.

The global media networks are financially powerful and well connected to the power centres in their states of origin. As such they play a hugely significant role in guiding public opinion and the way in which news is reported by smaller organisations all over the world. During periods of crisis and particularly military conflict, these networks become the most important “instruments” of Western propaganda, clearly marking out the “goodies” from the “baddies” for the benefit of the public and offering powerful states the moral legitimacy they need to act against “rogue” peoples and leaders. Typical examples of this now well-established practice can be found in

the media's handling of the US-led bombardment of the former Yugoslavia in 1999 when over zealous journalist attempted without success to implicate president Kiro Glogorov and his government.

The development of the Greek media has also been greatly influenced by the power of the global media. The profound changes that shook Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s coincided with the emergence of a plethora of private radio and television stations, which found themselves unprepared to respond to the needs of the era. By way of a solution these broadcasters saw fit to mimic the methods of the major global networks, even to the point of copying the manner and style of news presentation and the content of some of their programmes. This aping intensified following the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia and reached its peak during the first Gulf War. Primarily due to the coverage provided by CNN, the Gulf War was transformed into a hit TV show, causing a communications revolution on a global scale.

In a simultaneous development, the wholesale political change sweeping across the socialist bloc and the Balkans led to the rebirth of nationalism and nationalist conflict which greatly influenced the way events in

the region were reported by local journalists. Old ethnic and territorial disputes with neighbouring states, which had remained unresolved since the end of the Second World War, were brought back to the fore. For some Greeks, these developments signified the revival of forgotten claims over a number of neighbouring countries, while for others they meant renewed fear of invasion from old enemies. In such a highly charged atmosphere, neighbouring countries were quickly divided into two categories: "friendly" and "hostile". The basis for this categorisation was of course emotional rather than rational. It was in this context that Greek journalists were sent to Skopje, Tirana, Sofia and other Balkan capitals to investigate the disposition of neighbouring states and their peoples towards Greece during the first half of the 1990s.

The reporting of subsequent developments in any given Balkan state was necessarily influenced by the disposition of that state and its people towards Greece coupled with the view of the journalist in question and that of the news organisation he/she represented. Objectivity was abandoned in favour of propaganda and the public was left in the dark. During the period, of course there were clear differences of opinion between several journalists and their employers as to how developments in neighbouring countries

should be reported. But these differences were not openly debated and, as is often the case, they were not apparent to the wider public at the time. This atmosphere began to change in 1995/96 as a result of a sequence of external and internal developments, coupled with a change of government and foreign policy in Greece that gradually came to influence the media's approach to conflict in the Balkan area. However, old habits die hard as became evident during the Kosovo crisis and NATO's subsequent bombing campaign in 1999.

The recent history of the Greek state is one of social upheaval and change. It must be remembered that until 1974 Greece was ruled by a military dictatorship. Such recent experience of dictatorship has had a profound effect on the nature of the modern state and its people. We guard our democracy and the freedom of expression it allows jealously. We are a highly politicised people. Our strongly held beliefs make themselves known on an almost daily basis often with a good deal of exaggeration.

The broadcast media is not without its problems but do not I believe they differ greatly from the problems faced by media bodies the world over. These problems relate to the institutional framework, ownership and structure

of the media as whole, the professional environment in which journalists operate, the lack of an agreed code of practice and the relationship that exists between media bodies and national centres of political power.

The Greek journalists who covered the Kosovo crisis and particularly NATO's bombing campaign in 1999 were guided by personal ideology and sentiment, dividing themselves not into two, but into three camps. The first group believed Kosovo's Albanian minority had been brutally repressed by Serb nationals and for this reason they supported NATO's military involvement in Yugoslavia and believed Slobodan Milosevic must be overthrown. A second group believed the Serbs were the traditional friends and allies of Greece, some even referring to them as "brethren people", and for this reason they objected to the NATO campaign. The third group acknowledged that problems inside Yugoslavia existed, but argued that these could only be resolved through peaceful means and, as a result, considered NATO use of military force against a the sovereign state of Yugoslavia to be politically dangerous and illegal. It was also argued that the real motives for NATO involvement had not been revealed. As a result of their opposition to the NATO campaign members of the second and third group were labelled "Serbophiles".

Those who agreed with NATO's involvement followed the lead of the world's media giants, reproducing verbatim the reports of foreign correspondents. Those who disagreed sought to portray events in a different light. Thus, the same stories were covered from several different angles often leading to confusion and contradictory information. This led to the beginning of a prolonged debate amongst journalists, intellectuals and ordinary citizens about the way in which the war was reported. It continues to this day.

At the time, intense criticism was levelled against the media as a whole, which was judged to have failed in its responsibility to provide accurate and objective news coverage. The debate has had a profound effect on the way in which news is reported in Greece today. Journalists are now often obsessive in their desire to prove their own objectivity. However, it should be noted that a similar if less intense debate also took place following the Bosnian War, which ended in 1995, and the Albanian uprising in 1997. On these occasions reporters and broadcasters were again accused of misleading the public. These accusations were subsequently published in a series of books.

Largely as a result of these the developments, the Greek reporters who

came to Skopje in 2001 to cover the crisis were meticulous in their objectivity. Several other factors also contributed to this change of attitude. Unlike during the previous Kosovo conflict, in 2001 it was impossible to treat the Albanian insurgents as victims of an oppressive power, rather they were unanimously charged with being the main source of violent unrest. Furthermore, the journalists covering the conflict were politically non-aligned and were thus less likely to come out in support of either side. It was also noteworthy that the majority of regional journalists had lost their faith in the global media networks as by then it was patently clear that they had sacrificed their objectivity in order to carry out propaganda for the global power centres. Thus, the familiar CNN mimicry of previous conflicts was not as readily apparent. The war weariness of the Greek public, exhausted by the unending Balkan crises of the last decade, also played a part in making sure that journalists did not inflame the situation, particularly amidst rumours about the movements of various armed Albanian groups in southern Serbia, Kosovo and even Greece. Those that fell short would also have to face stern criticism from the government as Athens began to play a more important role in the region due to its geographic position and its EU membership. Although the competitive professional environment

continued to encourage sensationalism, particularly amongst television reporters, these reports did not take on the political dimensions so clearly visible in earlier conflicts.

At this point I wish to clarify one issue. The criticism I have levelled against television reporters relates not to their ability as journalists but rather to the requirements imposed on them by the medium of television itself. I have the utmost respect for all of my colleagues regardless of medium in which they work.

I would also like to stress that since the aim of this article was to examine some of the factors which may cause journalists to abandon their objectivity in conflict situations, the article is prone towards criticism rather than praise. There were of course many TV, radio, and newspaper reporters who worked with absolute professionalism throughout the crisis, presenting it to the public accurately and objectively in extremely difficult circumstances.

For the overwhelming majority of Greek reporters and their respective media, the coverage of the crisis of 2001 was marked by three decisive elements: emancipation from the direct influence of the global media; the absence of nationalist sentiment and; the cumulative experience of the previous decade which made the need for a clearer, more insightful and analytical view of events much more apparent.

These are the developments that led the overwhelming majority of Greek reporters to engage in perhaps their first friendly contact with journalists from neighbouring countries. Many journalists from Athens and Thessaloniki still maintain friendly relations and regular contact with their colleagues in Skopje. This exchange of views can only improve the overall quality of journalism in the region. More importantly, it has helped to generate a greater understanding between the peoples of the region ushering in a new era of *raprochement* in the war torn Balkans. ¶



# **Greece**

## **Shedding light on an invisible crisis**

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## Shedding light on an invisible crisis

*By Athamadia Baboula  
& Lina Roussopoulou*

*“The largest challenge we are facing today is to draw your attention to the “invisible” crises, to protect the rights of the ‘forgotten victims’.*

“Terrorism has made the world more dangerous, curtailing human rights, undermining the international rule of law and protecting governments against public control. It deepened the divisions among the people of different religious affiliations and origin, planting the seed for new conflicts. The devastating impact of all this is the genuine fear – both among the rich and the poor.”

These are the words of Iris Chan, the General Secretary of Amnesty International. They may have been written recently, but they voice universal truths. What might for the Balkans be a long-standing historical and political problem – such as the Former Yugoslavia Republic Of Macedonia (FYROM) issue – has only just been discovered by the international community, which sought a comprehensive solution in just a few months. In August 13, 2001 an agreement was signed in Ohrid, FYROMacedonia,

between the Trajkovski government and politicians from the Albanian side to end a conflict that brought the country to the verge of civil war. In 2001, the inter-ethnic tension that had existed in FYROMacedonia for several years escalated into outbreaks of violence and eventually armed conflict. These developments made the protection and promotion of human rights almost impossible.

In Greece, the FYROMacedonia crises had an impact on both foreign and domestic policy, sometimes as negotiations away from the public eye, but certainly never relegated to small news bulletins.

During 1990-2000, Europe witnessed the disintegration of Yugoslavia. We watched the new reality of the formation of six new “ethnically pure” countries. The people of the former Yugoslavia had to choose their nationality: whether they were Serbs, Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians, citizens of FYROM or Kosovars. Yugoslavia also contained dozens of different cultures

and languages, three major religions and a 'feast of complex historical vendettas.'*(Misha, 1993)*

Political intrigues of neighbouring governments towards FYROM peaked in 2001. The events in the region may well have deserved the massive coverage dedicated to the Kosovo crisis a few years earlier but many people felt that the coverage fell well short of that, despite the fact that FYROMacedonia was a neighbour and that the argument over the use of the name "Macedonia" was still fresh in people's minds.

The Greek press also failed to highlight the human rights predicaments of both parties, or the innocent victims of the conflict.

### **Lessons from the past**

Regarding the Greek media, it is worth mentioning Roza Tsagarousianou's analysis of the television coverage of the Bosnian war in his book *Bosnia by Television* (1996). Tsagarousianou said that the coverage of the Bosnian conflict should be seen as inextricably linked to the coverage of Balkan developments in general. In addition, she believes that the coverage of the conflict revitalised the potent image of

the 'Islamic arc' and offered a simplified outline of the political field in the Balkans as perceived by the majority of the Greeks.

The journalist Takis Michas wrote: *The picture of the war in Kosovo emerging from the Greek media was totally different from the one that predominated in the west. It was as if there were two different wars. The main difference from the very start concerned the attribution of blame. All the Greek newspapers blamed NATO and the USA for the outbreak of the hostilities.*<sup>1</sup>

*The role of the Greek media is described as key to the climate of strong disagreement with the campaign. A NATO country was being strongly anti-NATO, a stand they sustained in the crisis in FYRO Macedonia, supporting the government of a formerly troubling population against a what seems to be reckoned as another troubling population, the one of Albanian origin.*

### **The role of the media**

The media had always been a key factor in all stages of foreign policy formulation. The involvement of the media in this process is complicated,

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<sup>1</sup> Michas, Takis.2002. *Unholy Alliance*, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 82

and it is worth bearing in mind that leaders, like the public, often learn about crises from the media.

The period this research focuses on is August 2001, when the agreement between the conflicting parties was signed. The August 13 peace agreement provided for far-reaching constitutional and political measures aimed at enhancing the status of the sizeable ethnic Albanian minority. In return, the UCK agreed to demobilise and hand over its weapons to a NATO force, deployed in FYROMacedonia at the end of August.

In our research into the representation of the FYROMacedonian issue in Greek newspapers, it's useful to examine the use of language in the Greek press. The selection of news is the first assessment of what is considered to be important and what is not; the selection and the combination of the words in the text reflects the ideological content of a newspaper. A news text uses connotations in order to communicate meaning. Every word has an obvious meaning, but also a latent, hidden meaning. The use of connotations, of words which have been 'loaded' with values and opinions, can lead people to have a certain reaction towards a situation. Thus, the use of language can lead people to agree or to oppose to an issue. News is a social and ideological product (Harley, 1984) and is a discourse that

reflects just one version of social reality.

Language in the media provides images of society as part of an ideological framework to define and explain the world, but at the same time evaluates and criticises the world. In other words, the media conveys ideology. This analysis seeks to locate the use of stereotypes in the language.

### **An overview of the Greek media**

With the Greek media, we need to take into account their target audience, political leanings and the competitive business environment in which they operate — the picture is very similar to most media in Europe.

Political newspapers — comprising morning dailies, evening dailies, Sunday editions and weeklies — account for the greater share of total sales, although their share has been continually decreasing: 86.5 per cent of total sales (1989) to 73.4 per cent (1998).

National evening dailies and Sunday editions of political newspapers account for the majority of sales and titles: 74 per cent of total sales (1994), 73.5 per cent (1996), 65.7 per cent (1998), and for the majority of titles.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Data from the European Journalism Centre/European media landscape/Greece*

Magazines number around 600 but readership has decreased over the past few years due to price increases, plus a surplus of advertising inserts that discourage the buyer. The most well-known and respected political magazine is *ANTI* – a traditionally leftist monthly review.

The broadcast media has made progress, with private and local stations starting out in 1987 and now numbering dozens, while private television channels have acquired a major influence over the public and count alongside the daily political press in terms of power and influence.

From the Greek press, two national quality newspapers are selected for analysis: *Eleptherotypia* (Press Freedom) and *Ta Nea*. They both devote extensive coverage to foreign news, and *Ta Nea* has the biggest circulation, with *Eleptherotypia* usually second or third. Both respectively reflect the centre and centre-left points of view. *Ta Nea* was first published in 1931 by the journalist Dimitris Lambrakis. His son, Christos Lambrakis, continued the tradition and now *Ta Nea* is just one of the three newspapers and five magazines of Lambrakis Press Publications. (Skalvounis, 1995). *Ta Nea* is a traditional newspaper which presents a number of opinions and views

and is renowned for its investigative journalism and deep research into current affairs. By contrast, *Eleptherotypia* was first published after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, and was started as a journalist-led newspaper. The journalists were supposed to have complete freedom and take full responsibility for their work.

The general result of our survey is that coverage of the crisis focused on the points below:

The role of NATO and the US during the crisis, especially:

- A) The fact that NATO armed the Albanian rebels, before and during the war in Kosovo, when they wanted to contribute to the overthrow of Milosevic.
- B) The “intention” of NATO to turn the FYROMacedonia into its protectorate; so much so, that many newspapers saw a repetition of what happened in Bosnia and Kosovo.
- C) And, as mentioned in Michas’s book<sup>3</sup>, anti-Americanism became a common feature in conservative newspapers.

Especially noteworthy was the fact that the disagreement over the causes of the conflict – UCK leaders claimed that they were fighting to end sys-

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<sup>3</sup> Michas, Takis. 2002, 132, as above

tematic discrimination, while the government claimed that the UCK's real goal was control over the territory — did not make it to the news.

Another focal point has been the fear over the formation of a 'Greater Albania', with Kosovo at its heart, a fact that would create ongoing instability in the region.

Nevertheless, much was written about the efforts taken by the Greek government to support its neighbour: a genuine reversal in relations given their recent problems. Efforts were also made — and backed by the media — to offer the hand of friendship towards the Albanian government, which was trying to distance itself from the crisis and show its support for peace and stability.

Despite these points, the coverage was diverse.

In our research, we examined the headlines of the articles, which serve to encapsulate the whole meaning of the news story.

Only three days before the agreement was signed these were some headlines from Greek newspapers:

*AGGELIOFOROS: Public buildings under the "microscope."*

*ADESMEFTOS TYPOS (Rizos publ.): Action plan for candidates in the municipal elections, for campaigns out in the country and premature elections.*

*ADESMEFTOS TYPOS (Mitsis publ.): 12.5 billion subsidy to unemployed professionals. Unemployed people between 18-60 years old are given funds to set up their own businesses.*

*ATHINAIKI: Vasso keeps distant. She is ruining Simitis' holidays.*

*APOGEVMATINI: Invasion of Bulgarians and Albanians, changing the composition of the population.*

*AVRIANI: They are setting a trap for Simitis.*

*ETHNOS: "No" to diplomas from the Centres of Free Studies.*

*ELEFThERI ORA: 50,000 Bulgarians enter illegally every month.*

*ELEFThEROS: They destroyed the country and blame the Archbishop.*

*ELEFThEROS TYPOS: Where do 5,928 teachers go?*

*ESPRESSO: We came face to face with Passaris. Eye-witnesses narrate.*

*ESTIA: The repeated delays in Sifnos –partisan manoeuvre.*

***I AVGI: Skopje: Agreement under the shadows of guns, and the auspices of US and EU intermediaries.***

*I VRADYNI: Private universities with an EU “visa”.*

*I NIKI: Pre-congress Vavel. Contradictory proposals by all sides.*

***I CHORA: Bloodshed in the Balkans.***

*I KATHIMERINI: Rises – Motivation for the low-wage workers and businesses.*

*KARFI: Ten thorns at the Congress – headache for Simitis.*

*O LOGOS: Scandal at Panteion University.*

*MAKEDONIA: 5,928 teachers are being detached*

***RIZOSPASTIS: Explosive cocktail in FYROM.***

*To Vima: Exploitation of personal data is a growing problem. Candidate MP’s are the best clients.*

*To Pontiki: He’ll leave, he won’t leave: anxiety has reached its peak.*

***ELEFTHEROTYPIA: Skopje up in arms again.***

A major factor to consider is that August, when the most important events took place, is a month of holidays and rest for most families in the country and is considered a “dead” month in media terms. As a side issue, the crisis did not end up in civil conflict and the role of NATO was limited to supervision, and did not result in military intervention as in Kosovo two years before.

### **No news**

Monitors from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Helsinki Committees and Human Rights Watch produced reports on the situation on human rights regarding the following topics, which the newspapers in question singularly failed to cover:

- International Humanitarian Law
- Freedom of Expression and Media
- The Judicial System and Independence of the Judiciary
- Torture, Ill-Treatment and Police Misconduct
- Conditions in Prisons

- Right to Privacy
- Religious Intolerance
- National Minorities
- Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons
- Rights of the Child
- Environmental Rights

Another point that did not matter much was that international and local journalists, both ethnic FYRO Macedonian and ethnic Albanian, faced frequent hostility and occasional violence, mostly from ethnic FYRO Macedonian crowds and security forces.

### **Coverage: Ta Nea and Eleftherotypia (August 2001)**

#### **Ta Nea**

Peace delays for Skopje: FYROM will sign an agreement only if the rebels disarm.

#### **3-08-2001**

The president of the parliament strongly condemned the US attempt to stop the armament flow to FYROM, while he insisted that peace can be achieved only when the rebels disarm...

‘We have to take our occupied lands back, because we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that we are talking under the threat of guns’, said the FYROM prime minister, L. Georgievski.

*comment*

*The news article expresses the fear and scepticism towards the peace process, since both sides seem to have no intention to compromise.*

The rebels broke the ceasefire: Albanians and Slavo-Macedonians remain at the negotiation table.

#### **08-08-2001**

On the eve of the agreement between the Albanian-speaking and the Slavo-Macedonian citizens, new clashes broke out. The armed UCK Albanians broke the ceasefire 24 times the night before in the Tetovo area, a representative of the FYROM army reported.

*comment*

*The text reveals the difficulties in achieving peace, with both the title and the text implying that the side not helping is that of the Albanian rebels. Even without using strong words it is obvious that this is the side being blamed.*

Skopje: A fire with a past which they are trying to erase by... remote control. The anxiety of Athens and the role of NATO and Washington in the Balkan crisis: even if an agreement is reached in Ohrid, can it be applied?

### **11-08-2001**

NATO is watching passively. KFOR is not making any effort to effectively supervise the borders of FYROM, where rebel groups come and go ...

Albanians perceive the American's passive stance as support. 'As long as no-one messes with them, the rebels feel invincible,' European diplomats in Athens admit. The same sources note that 'the aim of the Kosovar Albanians, even that of moderate Rugova, has always been independence. The infamous Greater Albania has the historically richer Kosovo as its natural centre, not Tirana'...

Informed sources in Athens predict that 'it is difficult for Skopjans and Albanians to co-exist in a multicultural state. The demographic reality itself does not allow for that. Today's 70-30 shall be tomorrow's 50-50. The Albanians have the largest population growth in Europe. It is not to the Skopjans benefit to co-exist in the same state as them'.

#### *comment*

*In this text the following points can be identified:*

*A) Cynicism towards the role of NATO: "NATO is watching passively".*

*B) Anxiety over the creation of a Greater Albania.*

Peace, under the sound of guns: agreement between political parties has been achieved but clashes continue.

### **14-08-2001**

Everybody admits that the agreement is not going to hold unless the Albanian-speaking rebels abandon the territories they have invaded, give up their arms to NATO forces and disperse...

Western negotiators, however, stated that FYROM turned a page towards peace and security ... by acknowledging rights to the minority of the Albanian-speaking population, which is estimated to form one third of the country's population. Nevertheless, such enthusiasm was not shared by the majority of the population, nor by the local media.

#### *comment*

*Despite the fact that this particular article was written and published a day after the agreement, it does not convey optimism, as neither side shares the euphoria of the Western negotiators. Peace continues to be fragile.*

Mission accomplished (from the column Beyond the Borders)

### **16-08-2001**

The NATO guys trained them, armed them, let them destabilise the Skopje government for six months, tolerated

the pogroms against the Slavo-Macedonian population in the villages the rebels invaded (something that the Western press assiduously kept secret) and now they are here to do justice? ... The transformation of FYROM into another NATO protectorate reminds us of that disgraceful agreement between Adolf Hitler and Britain's Neville Chamberlain for the delivery of the Sudetenland to the Nazis from Czechoslovakia in 1939 ...

NATO already has three protectorates in the former Yugoslavia, where its army forces act independently to the will of the citizens: in Bosnia, Kosovo and now FYROM.

*comment*

*In this particular article the cynicism towards the role of NATO in the region is even stronger, as is the hardening attitude to perceived attempts by NATO to turn FYROM into a protectorate.*

How far will the UCK go?

### **16-08-2001**

Washington moved in the spirit of "the enemy of my enemy...". Even after the Kosovo war, the CIA reinforced the UCK and fostered the activity of the Albanians inside Serbia, in the hope that they would speed up Milosevic's fall, which has become a matter of prestige for the Clinton presidency...

the former barefoots in tracksuits carrying rifles were trained by the Americans (and British) commandos and were armed with high-tech equipment. Today, they are known as the "most well-trained rebel army" in the Balkans.

The British leave for Skopje

### **17-08-2001**

The NATO forces are not going to get involved in clashes, but instead go to FYROM to help keep the peace and collect the weapons from the rebels... 'We recognise the existing dangers', a British officer noted, adding that 'the two sides in FYROM do not share NATO's ambitions'. He added that this mission would be restricted strictly to the collection of arms and would last for 30 days, after which NATO planned to withdraw.

How this agreement will be implemented is the question. Already a new, tougher group has appeared among the Albanian rebels, one that refuses to give up its guns and insists on a Greater Albania, also involving Greece. Albanian rebels at the border with our country? However strange it might seem, foreign diplomats in Athens do not rule out this development, even though they admit that 'due to the lack of a native Albanian minority, such a move would not appeal to any part of

the local population', as is the case in FYROM. As for the rest, it is noted that Greece is a NATO country ...

One way or another, the extreme Kosovar Albanians are a destabilising force for the Southern Balkans. Indeed, their treatment is one more issue to divide Europeans and Americans.

*comment*

*Once more the mistrust of NATO and the US is obvious. In the text, the writer quotes foreign diplomats to remind us of the obvious danger of "Greater Albania".*

Split about the intervention: the NATO research mission begins.

NATO soldiers in FYROM today begin their research mission to confirm whether there are secure conditions for the deployment of a bigger coalition force in the region, which will be responsible for collecting the weapons of the Albanian rebels ...

However, the NATO officials warned yesterday that the ceasefire between the rebels and the government forces is not yet fulfilled, preventing the deployment of all the coalition forces.

NATO's decision today: Mission in FYROM delayed

## **22-08-2001**

... Yesterday the FYROM government condemned the attack on an Orthodox monastery as a major provocation. Apparently, Albanian-speaking rebels caused serious damage during the night at 14<sup>th</sup> century monastery in a village near Tetovo, the FYROM authorities announced. A source from the FYROM Ministry of Defence said that the government of the country considers this attack a provocation with potentially serious consequences.

They are now counting the dangers: "Second thoughts" as third NATO venture begins in the Balkans.

## **23-08-2001**

...To start with, the mandate itself creates problems. NATO leaders have given the force just 30 days in FYROM after its full deployment, which should be completed 10 to 15 days from today. However, the Albanian rebels with whom NATO has agreed a separate deal for the collection of arms have stated that they are not going to hand in weapons unless the political agreement is passed to the parliament. The Skopjan government, however, has stated that the parliament will not approve the deal unless the arms have been collected.

The Greeks take up action: FYROM, soldiers will receive the first guns from the Albanians.

## **27-08-2001**

...The communications breakdown between those in charge of NATO and the government of Skopje in relation to the number of the arms and the method of their collection from pre-agreed points (Kumanovo, Tetovo, Debar) was also evident yesterday. The statement of the Skopjan prime minister that when he was putting his signature on the text of the Ohrid agreement, he did not believe in the achievement of peace, inflamed the situation and showed the aloofness with which the FYROM side meets the NATO venture. Such aloofness passes down to the press and local FYROM channels.

### *comment*

*In all four texts, what is dominant is the fears for a peaceful solution, as the crisis does not seem to calming down. A new element, however, appearing for the first time is the religious one, based on the damage caused to the Orthodox monastery of Agios Athanasios, reportedly by Albanian extremists. The presentation of this news, however, is not done using strong language or semantic connotations, which could raise the crisis into a religious clash, reminding everybody of the fear over the birth of an "Islamic arc".*

## **Eleftherotyia (August 2001)**

### **01/08/2001**

In Rhodes: George (Papandreou) and Milo on the Skopje crisis.

### **02/08/2001**

The crisis in Skopje helped its neighbours mature.

Foreign ministers in Greece and Albania express hope for a quick solution for Skopje.

### *Comment*

*Evident is the support offered by one neighbouring state to the other, be it Greece and Albania or Greece and FYROM, in an attempt to establish new paths of development.*

### **05/08/2001**

Without any illusions or fear of instigation: that the NATO mission in Skopje will end quickly with no dangers but... persists that Athens will take part in any NATO mission in the neighbouring country.

### **05/08/2001**

Step by step towards a breakup: ... US and EU representatives were quick to announce progress in negotiations on the official use of the Albanian language in Skopje.

**09/08/2001**

The prime minister of FYROM, Georгиеvski, at risk of being branded a hardliner by the West ... noted rather sensibly that he cannot proceed with any kind of agreement under the threats of extremists.

What the EU and the US want is nothing less than the step by step “decomposition” of one more redundant Balkan state and the addition of one more “ethnically cleansed entity” beside Kosovo.

*Comment*

*Both articles emphasise the role of the US and NATO, expressing at the same time their anxiety on the effectiveness of the plans for solution, and their hidden agenda.*

NATO “reprimands rebels”: NATO condemned the attack of Albanians against the army convoy in FYROM, while the US president called for an end to violence on both sides

**09/08/2001**

Skopje up in arms again (front page)  
A draft was signed, but the formal agreement signing was postponed after recent developments. Yesterday the Council of National Security met, reportedly to declare that the country was at war.

**10/08/2001**

The best recipe for peace: Never stop the dialogue (front page)

**12/08/2001**

...Why is it that in FYROM, where Albanians and Serbo-Macedonians are about to come to an agreement, something happens at the last minute and spoils the recipe? *Here are some tips...*

1. Involve those not involved. That’s what happens in FYROM as well. The progress of negotiations this week came under the auspices of US and EU representatives, and under the affirmation that NATO troops will impose any agreement to come.

Foreign intervention makes the belligerent parties think of their international image and position. No one wants to be seen as unreliable by international community. Still, arbitration solves the problem of mutual distrust between the conflicting parties.

4. Do not impose more demands. When there appears to be a way forward with one demand don’t follow that with one anymore. The agreement in FYROM stumbled at the last minute because, although the government had managed to get the rebels to agree to disarm, it also demanded a strict timetable for that.

*comment*

*Here are extracts from a long list of “tips” to achieve peace that stresses the lessons that Balkan history has taught. The positive message is contained in the headline saying that dialogue can be the only solution*

Fragile agreement! NATO is sending 3,500 men to Skopje to destroy the weapons of the Albanian rebels.

The NATO Force will consist of 1,800 British troops and 350 French, Italian and Greek soldiers. A contribution will also be made by the US, Germany, Turkey, Spain etc.

**12/08/2001**

The EU makes it its business to reform the Balkan.

*“In the footsteps of the Cosa Nostra” (comment on a book by Xavier Rauf-fer, a criminologist, recently published in Greece on the threat posed to Europe by the Albanian Mafia)*

**13/08/2001**

NATO-EU reluctance over Skopje is noted by George Papandreou.

**13/08/2001**

Despite the worsening situation, because of the summer holidays it is proving hard for EU and NATO ministers to meet in order to act over the crisis. This is also the current concern of the Greek Foreign Ministry, which

is also reluctant in the middle of the summer to court the member countries and allies for a more serious commitment to dealing with the situation. With the exception of the British, none of the member countries is showing any willingness to get into a military adventure in Skopje.

Agreement is a minefield (front page)

The dramatic developments in FYROM give evidence now to how aimless the American inspired intervention to Kosovo and the bombings in Yugoslavia have been. The ‘peace mission’ not only failed to put out the fire in Kosovo, but poured oil on it, so that it spread beyond the borders and now threatens to break up FYROM.

**13/08/2001**

Volcanoes: Skopje, Palestine (front page)

**14/08/2001**

Athens: support to the FYROM government and guarded optimism over the post-agreement situation

**16/08/2001**

Agreement for two states, packaged as one...

The agreement was signed. Virtually all rights are recognised for the Albanian minority, so much so that the impression is given that nothing can

happen in this country without the consent of the Albanian minority. Can this be considered as a sign of stability and peace?

One more thing: why does the agreement recognise Catholicism as equal to Orthodoxy and Islam when 67% of the population are Orthodox and 30% are Muslim? Why aren't the Protestants, or Buddhists or Jews recognised as well? How did the Catholics suddenly emerge?

**16/08/2001**

The NATO mission in "installments"

**18/08/2001**

A US advertising campaign is aimed at convincing the parliament of Skopje to approve the deal agreed upon by the Slav and Albanian political parties.

**19/08/2001**

Weapons are well-hidden: Rebels threaten to blow up disarmament agreement.

**19/08/2001**

*comment*

*The argument over whether the rebels have been asked directly if they are willing to surrender their weapons has been dismissed amid the realisation that negotiations can only be made between political authorities – never with those holding the guns.*

Construction of consent (front page)  
– Sunday edition

**20/08/2001**

G. Papandreu to Georgievski : It is to our benefit to have a united FYRO Macedonia... with no change in borders and with a European perspective.

**21/08/2001**

'Recomposition' due to NATO: Skopje tells troops to pull back from front line so that NATO can start collecting weapons.

**22/08/2001**

NATO, the monastery: ...at 3am Albanian rebels damaged the historic monastery of Agios Athanasios.

**23/08/2001**

*comment*

*Play on the word 'nato' which means 'there it is' in Greek. This was the only news article covering religious violence during this period.*

First Greeks soldiers leave for Skopje.

**23/08/2001**

Mitreva is coming for talks with Simitis and George (Papandreu).

**23/08/2001**

If they fire we will defend ourselves: only a few hours after NATO's order

to deploy in FYROM, at 1pm yesterday the first French soldiers arrived by plane. It is estimated that by Sunday all 3,500 men will be deployed.

**24/08/2001**

Putin in doubt, Kostunica allows.

**24/08/2001**

60,000 weapons? Calculations are being made to find out how many guns the Albanian rebels possess.

**25/08/2001**

The new imperialism.

**26/08/2001**

For the success of the mission “essential harvest” there are serious reservations. The Albanian rebels do not seem to be willing to give up all their arms; most will probably be moved to Kosovo.

Therefore, the peace procedure will mainly depend on Washington’s plans concerning the region. Does it want peace or a protectorate in FYROM under its absolute control, with the fire still smoldering in Kosovo?

*Comment*

*Again, a piece showing evident feelings of mistrust and disbelief towards the measures taken and the hidden objectives of the intervening parties.*

NATO is here again.

Nobody believes that the mission of NATO’s “light brigade” in our neighbouring little country is or should be the... farce of the collection of UCK arms.

**27/08/2001**

Greek Communist Party against the mission.

**28/08/2001**

Phylloxera in the harvest.

**28/08/2001**

*comment*

*Another successful wordplay: NATO dubbed its mission ‘essential harvest’; phylloxera is a serious disease that affects grape vines.*

John McCain: Beware of being ridiculed, ... the former attaché of UN for human rights said that NATO runs the risk of being ridiculed with this operation which may well end up a very dangerous situation.

**28/08/2002**

Konstadopoulos (head of Synaspismos/coalition party of the left): “Intended chaos” with the NATO in Skopje.

Conclusion

The devastating role played by the so-called “hate media” has been avoided

in the cases studied, and in most European countries are confined to the margins of society. Therefore, the media have always been confronted with the challenge of the coverage of hate speech and of reporting diversity in increasingly multicultural societies. The key duties of journalists, to seek the truth and to be objective, should always be the bedrock of reporting, especially when neighbouring countries are concerned. As far as this specific crisis is concerned, the most influential Greek newspapers have shown no distinct signs of hatred. But it always depends on who is reading... With the aim of improving the quality of newsgathering and dissemination during conflicts, we have tried to objectively present facts. Knowing that the violent interethnic conflicts that broke out during the past decade in the former Yugoslavia have been aggravated by the unprecedented involvement of the media, we strongly believe that the interethnic issue in FYRO Macedonia once more proved that members of the media are among those to blame for inciting hate.

Institutions like the NATO and the EU, of which Greece is a member for many years, have been put under scrutiny; being critical towards them is the right of any democratic country.

The US has played a crucial role in a number of conflicts and has been subject to criticism a number of times.

The jury is still out on many of the superpower's actions. The crisis in FYROM was no exception.

FYROM is a neighbouring country in a time of need; Albania is another. Both, however, had difficult relations with Greece. During the crisis, however, Greece saw an opening to use its position to help bring peace and stability to FYROM. According to the articles studied here, it successfully took advantage of the opening. ¶

### Notes.

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# **Kosovo**

## **Misunderstandings and the threat of permanent friction**

*Haqif Mulliqi*

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# Misunderstandings and the threat of permanent friction

*By Hakif Maliqi*

The Kosovo tragedy of 1999, and the placement of more than 250,000 Albanians in refugee camps and with Albanian families in Macedonia, served to reinforce the prejudices Kosovo Albanians and Macedonians have long felt for one another.

Albanians saw Macedonia, and the Slavic Macedonians, as allies of the Serbs, who had waged a fierce war with the aim of driving the Albanians from Kosovo.

This gulf between the Kosovo Albanians and Macedonians was apparent when not one door of a Macedonian household was ever opened for an Albanian in trouble. The gulf could only get wider. Those refugees forced to flee to Macedonia observed that the ethnic Albanian minority and Macedonian majority were barely communicating with each other.<sup>1</sup>

On their return to Kosovo, apart from expressing the gratitude that they had

for their “blood brothers” who looked after them in Macedonia, they spoke about the tense situation in the country and the yearning of the Albanians to improve their lot. The media made it clear that, should the necessity arise, we in Kosovo should be prepared to open our doors for our brethren in Macedonia, who stood with us before, during and after the war. These were not hollow words: every day, it was becoming clearer that events were leading to inevitable conflict.

Something that was featured more and more in the Kosovo daily newspapers were reports about those former Kosovo Liberation Army members<sup>2</sup>, who originally came from Macedonia. Men who for more than a year and a half had fought in battle after battle, on all Kosovo fronts, and who the press had lauded as skillful fighters.<sup>3</sup> But the same papers also noted that many of the mercenaries and paramilitaries that fought for the Serbs in Kosovo, had alleged that the KLA

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<sup>1</sup> March 6, 2001; *Gazeta e Re*

<sup>2</sup> March 9, 2001; *Koha Ditore*

<sup>3</sup> March 20, 2001; *Koha Ditore*

formations responsible for crimes all over Kosovo had Albanians from Macedonia in their ranks.

So apart from the long-standing ethnic disputes in Macedonia, we can add to the equation those recently demobilised fighters, and we have a situation where we risk permanent frictions and aggravations in the country.

The existence of these fighters fostered paranoia in the Macedonian government that, as the Kosovo media reported, embarked on a witch-hunt for former KLA members all over Macedonia. There were also reports of the murder of a former KLA member in the village of Aracinovo, near Skopje.

It was the beginning of 2000 when *Koha Ditore*, *Bota sot*, *Rilindja* and *Kosova sot* published a short communiqué from the AKSH, at that time an unknown military formation, claiming responsibility for an attack on a police patrol in Gostivar. Some analysts had already begun to speak of a countdown to war. The majority of these analyses tried to douse the flames of possible conflict – another war in the Balkans<sup>4</sup>, and another conflict for the Albanians would be too much. This was the common approach of all analysts, who were now preoccupied with the reconstruction of

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<sup>4</sup> *March 30, 2001; Koha Ditore*

Kosovo as well as with the escalating situation in the Preshevo Valley, where an armed group in Dobrosin was identified as the UCPMB (Liberation Army of Preshevo Medvegje and Bujanovac).

After the attack in Gostivar, predictions of a major fracture were still largely absent in the press and the broadcast media, which were controlled under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. An exception was *Radio Kosova e Lire*, run by the former Kosovo Liberation Army. But it had only a small reach in Kosovo and did not exert any direct influence in the political processes.

But after the events at Tearce, Tanushevci and Sharr the media openly began talking about the possibility of war. After the Tearce event, the *Gazeta e re* newspaper (no longer in circulation) ran a headline saying “It Broke in Macedonia”. But even then, the Skopje based daily newspaper *Fakti*, available in Kosovo, ran a long interview with the leader of the Democratic Party of the Albanians, Arber Xhaferi, in which he ruled out any possibility of open conflict between Albanians and Macedonians. *Gazeta e re* ran a series of six analyses claiming to shed light on the historical, demographic, political and national aspects of a possible conflict in the region.

It emphasised the fact that Albanians and Macedonians had never fought against each other in their history, that they stood together during the Ilinden uprising against the Turks, and that “Macedonia was and remained the biggest headache in Europe”, bearing in mind the fact that the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and Albanians had different claims on the country – the most interesting of which was the alliance between Albanians (Kosovars) and Serbs on the division of their southern neighbor.

What was put in perspective by the media, especially after the events of Tanushevci and Sharr, was that things could never go back to how they were: Bridges needed to be built between the opposing sides, with the help of the international community.

The fact that most of the Kosovan print press, and all of the broadcast media, refused to fan the flames of conflict came as a surprise to both domestic and foreign observers. One exception was *Bota sot*, a newspaper that traditionally supported the Kosovo Democratic League (LDK) President Ibrahim Rugova. *Bota sot* had a more aggressive approach towards the situation in Macedonia, especially its journalists based in Switzerland, where the newspapers’ main news-

room was.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the war in Kosovo, this newspaper actually opposed the Kosovo Liberation Army, while claiming to be its spokesman. It was obvious that the leadership of the Albanian guerillas did not have any direct contact with the newspaper, because the information carried in this newspaper was neither timely nor accurate.

Paradoxically, this was a newspaper that supported the pacifist policy of Rugova in Kosovo while at the same time pouring oil over Macedonia’s already troubled waters. The language and content of its reports, however, got it into trouble with the Swiss authorities, who stopped its distribution in many parts of Switzerland because of its overt racism.

In Kosovo, an extraordinarily constructive role in the “appeasement” of the media was played by Christopher Dell, the Head of the US office in Prishtina<sup>6</sup>. At the beginning of March 2001, he chaired three meetings with the editors of the main media in Kosovo, where he requested professionalism and objectiveness from their organisations – a number of which had received funds from the international community and US Government – so as not to become propaganda tools.

Similar meetings were held with politicians as well, and perhaps, the

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<sup>5</sup> *March 30, 2001; Bota Sot*

<sup>6</sup> *March 8, 2001; Zëri*

meetings with Mr. Dell, as well as the careful use of words used by Kosovo politicians, who at that time were on the defensive regarding the processes in Macedonia, resulted in the media in general playing a very constructive role.

Since the border between Kosovo and Macedonia was completely closed several times, preventing journalists from reaching the crisis zones (Nuhi Bytyqi from Radio Television of Kosovo managed to reach Slupcane at least two or three times) most of the information came from news agencies and local correspondents in Macedonia. The Macedonian daily *Fakti* was often quoted – with entire articles being carried over to the domestic press.

Nevertheless, one can say that even with the close ties that Kosovo Albanians have with their kin in Macedonia, the Kosovo media approached the crisis in the country in an objective and professional way, perhaps because the memories of its own terrible war just two years before were still fresh. Special commendation must go to the broadcast media, which never attempted to fan the flames of conflict.

On the contrary, the media's influence in improving the general climate, which in turn guided Macedonia to the Ohrid Conference, was both extensive and positive. ¶

# **Macedonia**

## **Foreign media coverage: manipulation or ignorance?**

*Aleksandar Damovski*  
*Co-editor in chief at daily newspaper “Dnevnik” (41), Macedonian*



## Foreign media coverage: manipulation or ignorance?

*By Aleksandar Damovski*

Effortlessly and irresponsibly, the stars of the world's media divided the two sides to the conflict in Macedonia into "goodies and baddies" in their daily reports, just as they had done in Kosovo. This is the reality of the "professionalism" displayed by my colleagues from the western European media in 2001. Other issues, such as the long-term impact of media exploitation on the new world order; the suggestion that foreign intervention in Macedonia became a catalyst for terrorism and; the commencement of stringent self-censorship in some states, will remain outside the boundaries of this article. However, it is useful to be reminded that ever since the printing press was invented in Europe, the media has been under the control of a powerful elite. The structures of state have also long sought to control the press, through the introduction of censorship and other instruments of repression. Thus, hard fought "press freedom" should oblige the western media to find out the truth and report it. No one

government has a monopoly in this regard. Manipulation and repression of the media are the tools used in conjunction with manipulation and repression in public and political life. A century ago, A.J. Liebling of the New York Times summed up the issue when he said, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." One hundred years later, Dan Rather, the CBS news anchor, said after September 11, "George Bush is the President, he makes decisions, and you know, simply as an American, if he wants to recruit me, all he needs to do is say it and I will come."

But lets forget about the use of the media as a political instrument and focus on the facts. In the pages that follow I will present just some of the shocking inaccuracies and blatant prejudices I came across as a Macedonian journalist, monitoring the activities of foreign colleagues in my country in 2001. Without any shame, these journalists seemed to believe, "Ignorance is power."

## Attempts to deny national identity

Keeping in mind the Kosovo precedent, as it was seen to be by many, the players in Macedonia appeared at first sight to be more or less the same, or, as one Western colleague described them, “Orthodox, militant, Slavs, and poor, oppressed and neglected Albanians.”

These “highly-professional” reporters dearly loved their stereotypes: food coupons for the Albanians, and money for the Macedonians; clever and cunning Albanians, but martial and humourless Macedonians were just a few of those that the international public were exposed to. In this way the wider public discovered that Macedonia was populated by Slavs, Slav-Macedonians, even Macedonian Serbs, and also by Albanians, Albanophiles non-Albanians, ethnic-Albanians, and only very occasionally, Macedonians. In whose name was the cultural identity of Macedonia and the Macedonians altered? Let me start by listing specific illustrations of what passes for “fair and objective journalism” in the West.

*Agence France Press (AFP)*, on July 24, 2001 non-selectively quoted a statement given by the general manager of the Communities’ Theatre in Skopje who said that he hoped that soon he would be able to “stage some

Bertolt Brecht pieces in Albanian”. In fact, for more than 40 years, every play staged in this theatre has been performed in Albanian, Turkish or Romanian.

I should also mention *Reuters*, from August 21, which carried the following report.

“The US condemns the demolition of the Greek Orthodox church near the historical monastery in Macedonia on Tuesday.” The report refers to the destruction of the Lesok monastery, which is, of course, a church building of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and not of the Greek Church. Any reporter or editor should know the extraordinary sensitivity the Macedonian people have to these terms. It may seem trivial, but for us, these mistakes are of crucial importance, and are always pursued by conspiracy theories and much searching for hidden intentions.

Belgium’s *Le Libre*, on August 10, published a caption under a picture of an older Orthodox man taken during the riots in Prilep. “Death to the Albanians, says the text on the wall of this demolished house in Prilep, an Albanian village. This is the retaliation for the murder of ten Macedonian soldiers, when most of the shops in this town were demolished.” The correction that this newspaper never published should have read: Prilep is a Macedonian town.

Speaking of photographs, on August 11

*The Economist* published a photo (without a caption) of a group of people dressed in the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century garments of the Komitas, who travel to Krusevo on horseback every year as part of the celebration of the Ilinden rebellion. The newspaper identified them as members of the Macedonian National Army.

Lets take a look at the standard of journalism broadcast by *CNN*. In the reports of the cable news giant, the Macedonians were always introduced as bad, Orthodox, nationalist boys, similar to the “evil Serbs”. The Albanians were “rebels, fighting for human rights” because they were “second-class citizens.” These reports were always accompanied by footage of frightened Albanian women and children who became the symbol of a looming refugee crisis. But no one asked what caused these refugees to flee from Macedonia? *CNN* reports indicated that it was the same fears that had motivated so many to leave Kosovo several years earlier. The fact 60,000 Macedonian refugees were also fleeing the western area of the country was not deemed to be of interest or importance. Neither was there any attention paid to the kidnapping of Macedonians. No one was interested in the terror the NLA wielded over the Albanians. Not a word about the ethnic cleansing in western Macedonia carried out by the NLA. The blockade near Blace, for

*CNN*, was the work of “nationalists”, not people expelled from their homes, angry with their government; people who simply wanted to return to their lives.

In *CNN*'s Macedonia, there are few Albanian language schools, there are no Albanian members of parliament and there are no Albanian ministers or ambassadors. For *CNN*, the Albanians were a people, “excluded from the public life, discriminated against and without human rights.”

### **Right to denial**

The Czech newspaper *Dnes* published an article by Lubos Palata on March 29 which purported not only to inform the Czech public about the reasons why war had broken out in Macedonia, but also about the origin of the Macedonians as a people. In it the author makes some outrageous assertions, such as claiming that the Orthodox Slav Macedonians are merely “an advanced form of Bulgarians”, who rule the country through force of arms. He also takes reckless guesses at the country's demographic make-up.

The newspaper subsequently refused to publish the clarifications sent in by several Macedonians living in the Czech Republic. The text of one of these letters is reproduced below.

“Dear editor,  
Regarding your article from

Macedonian correspondent Lubos Palata, I would like to make the following clear:

1. Mr Palata is a journalist and not, I presume, a historian, so he cannot know the origin of the Macedonians, which is certainly not Bulgarian,
2. Mr Palata obviously does not know what the situation is in Macedonia, since he claims that the Macedonians are ruling with force,
3. Mr Palata also cannot know how many Albanians there are in Macedonia, because the census will take place this year,
4. As a journalist, he should report objectively. Instead, he is defending one side only.

I appreciate the interest in my country, but this article represented a one-sided view of the given situation and a distortion of reality in regard to certain events. In my opinion, the approach of the journalist must be more objective.”

A further example of such blatant bias is contained in the following extract taken from an article written by Paul Watson for *the Los Angeles Times*.

“The two-room school is empty, its windows shattered by the blast of a mortar round that landed outside the front door. As ethnic Albanian rebels fight to hold their ground here, only three people in the village remained unarmed. The constitution declares the Macedonian language, and its Cyrillic alphabet, as the country’s only

official language. The ethnic Albanian minority says that denies them access to state universities *and even makes visiting a doctor difficult* [own emphasis]. Just under half of all soldiers are believed to be ethnic Albanian, observers say. Ethnic Albanians comprise between 22 and 30 percent of the country’s population, with Macedonian Serbs comprising about 60 percent.”

The reader can extrapolate from this the reason for the war in Macedonia – someone wants to take the land from the Albanian population in this part of the country, where, for them, even visiting a doctor is difficult only because they are Albanians. In two sentences, he gives a definition which is both overly simplified, and of course, largely untrue. This reporter also makes the usual mistake in identifying the Macedonians as “Macedonian Serbs,” probably a hangover from his reporting of events in Kosovo.

The pathos of war – the weeping mothers, the terrified children – always make for good copy, and a useful tool for reporters in their attempts to describe the horrors of armed conflict. There is nothing wrong with this, provided the end result does not lead to manipulation of the facts in order to produce a good story.

## Pathetic misuse

The *Independent* on August 12 published an article headlined, “Macedonia’s ethnic cleansers claim first victim,” written by Justin Huggler. It read in parts as follows.

“... They buried Tafil under scorching sky in the barren mountains of central Macedonia last week, the red and black Albanian flag draped over his coffin ... this is the reality of what is happening in Macedonia. Meanwhile, the ethnic cleansing has begun. Within hours of Tafil’s death, his family had hurriedly packed up what possessions they could and left their house for good. They did not even have time to pack the photographs of their son when he was alive.”

A few months earlier, on March 21, Huggler published a report in the same newspaper.

“The Macedonian attack started at 4.00 p.m., just a few hours after the rebels offered peace talks. The guerrillas warned that their attacks would continue if the Macedonian government did not answer their offer. The government’s response was in the flames on the Baltepe hill and in the massive explosions that echoed from the rooftops in Tetovo.”

So, without any verification, it becomes clear who are the peacemakers in this case: the rebels. But the reality was very different. Several hours after an ultimatum from the Macedonian

authorities demanding a ceasefire, five civilians from the Koltuk settlement were wounded by two mortar rounds fired from the Tetovo fortress.

The same author also wrote the following article. “In the city beneath the hill, the remaining citizens were hurrying down the streets in their cars. From the abandoned children’s playground several soldiers were shelling the nearby hill, while the blue and white swings rocked in the wind. Terrified soldiers were patrolling the city, probably as a precaution in case some of the rebels tried to come down into the city. There were no signs of civic unrest...”

The persistent failure of the paper to be objective in its reporting of events seemed almost deliberate. The following is yet another example of this.

“The rebels are saying that they are fighting for an improvement of the minority rights of the Albanians who comprise at least a quarter of Macedonia’s population. There are no signs of illegal persecution, but the Albanians are extremely displeased at what they say is general discrimination against them in Macedonia.”

This portrayal of events is frightening in its simplicity. One of the main causes of the war is deliberately forgotten – armed groups entered the country and attacked it. Nobody even thinks to open a debate about the

political motives of these groups. This is one-sided reporting at its worst.

The BBC's Paul Wood started his first report from the village of Tanusevci with the death of a 22-year old man who was killed in a field near the village while he was planting potatoes. Is there any where in world where people plant potatoes at an altitude of 1,500 meters, during the month of February in thick snow.

Apart from being impressed by the wealth of folklore and tradition in Macedonia, foreign reporters were also frequently amazed that it is possible to buy Coca-Cola and Fanta in Tetovo, and even to use a roaming mobile phone. "What is frightening is that Tetovo - more a big village than a small town - is completely inside modern Europe. You can watch cricket on BBC World in the hotel. You can go to a well-supplied supermarket where you can buy Snickers, Coca-Cola and Fanta, as well as everything else that the European consumer needs. What is even more frightening, is that so far the total death-toll here is lower than in the average shootout in an American high school."

The *Independent's* John Sweeney presumed that the first victim under the Tetovo fortress died from a bullet fired by a member of the Macedonian Army.

"One Albanian civilian was hit in the forehead - probably by the Mace-

donian Army. An Albanian policeman was also killed in a shootout with the UCK. This makes two dead Albanians plus one dead Macedonian soldier, who was killed when one of the four Macedonian helicopters crashed on the hill. There are rumours that 10-15 children have been killed, but where are the bodies?"

Had the reporter bothered to try and find out who had really killed the Albanian civilian, his research would have brought him into contact with the head of the Tetovo Police Department, an ethnic Albanian, who told *News-week* that the civilian in question was killed by a sniper in the Tetovo fortress, a stronghold of the extremists.

The following was also published "At the foot of the hills lies Tetovo, with an 80% ethnic Albanian population, but which is ruled by the Macedonians, who are very similar to their Orthodox friends - the Serbs. At the foot of the hills is the Macedonian Army, better armed, but with less motivation than the Albanians."

Here the reader is encouraged to conclude that the rebels have real reasons to fight and, therefore, that justice is on their side. Such manipulation does not deserve further comment. However, I must point out a serious factual error. At the time the article was written the local government in Tetovo was of course, under the complete control of the Democratic Party of the Albanians.

**And finally, a gem from the BBC.**

“Macedonia is a country of two nations, who barely speak to each other. This is a marriage made in hell. The Macedonians are Orthodox Slavs, kith and kin of the Serbs, martial, tough, some might say a little humourless. The Albanians are mainly Muslim, clever, witty, some might say a little, well, sly...” (BBC Radio March 24).

BBC correspondents frequently organise training courses for young

journalists throughout Eastern Europe. They hold lectures about conflict reporting, the strict rules of our profession in such circumstances, warnings over incitement and ethnic prejudice. Reporting of this “quality” devalues the profession and casts a shadow of doubt over the way the entire event was covered. Do you remember how the Second World War started? With the lie that Poland attacked Germany.

As a Macedonian, I apologise if in saying this I sound martial, cruel or humourless. ¶



# **Macedonia**

## **Fact and fiction: the media's negative role**

*Iso Rusi*  
*Editor in Chief on weekly newspaper on Albanian language "LOBI"*  
*(52), Albanian,*



## Fact and fiction: the media's negative role

*By Iso Rusi*

*“Freedom of expression is only formally guaranteed in the constitution. The media are structurally weak, perform poorly and are not independent. Radio, television and the press remain under the political and financial control of the government. Top posts are filled by political appointees. Intimidation of journalists and obstruction of their work have been reported. The state-owned and the private media need to learn how to be more responsible. Media coverage during the 2001 crisis significantly contributed to worsening the political situation. The media (radio, TV and print, including Albanian language and multiethnic media) should therefore undertake radical reform”.*

This assessment is from the *Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Report* by the Commission of the European Communities (Brussels, April 4, 2002). It gives a general evaluation of the activities of the media during the crisis in 2001. I believe that the assertion that media coverage during the 2001 crisis “significantly

contributed to worsening the political situation” is partly correct.

The negative influence of the media in Macedonia, both before and during the war of 2001 (using hate-fuelled language to increase the tension in an ethnically divided society), cannot be compared to the influence of the media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina during the wars in those areas. But the war in Macedonia was different from those in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in every sense.

Mark Thompson, the author of *Forging War*, an acclaimed analysis of how the Serbian and Croatian media prepared for war, summed up the situation in the Macedonian media with much precision. According to Thompson, “the government of newly independent Macedonia took a *laissez-faire* approach to the media, allowing an explosive growth in the number of broadcasters”. About 250 broadcasters were registered before 1994, out of which about 50 were aided by the financier and philanthropist George Soros, who also supported the

first private TV station, *A-1*. However, Thompson also points out some other aspects:

- The main weakness in Macedonia's broadcasting law is of central importance: it fails to guarantee the independence of the Broadcasting Council.
- Despite burgeoning competition, the national network, *Makedonska Radio-Televizija* (MRTV), dominates the broadcast sector. Apart from being badly managed and inefficient, MRTV's public credibility has declined.
- Although the print sector has not been deregulated, this has not prevented liberalisation.
- The press still has to register under Yugoslav legislation dating from the 1970s.
- Commendable as Macedonia's media legislation may be, it is not fully respected or implemented. The Government-controlled media routinely break their public-service obligations of objectivity and balance.
- Unlike in Croatia or Bosnia, the national divide is also linguistic, the Macedonian and Albanian languages being mutually unintelligible.
- The audience for MRTV's local stations in Albanian areas appears to be very small. People prefer to watch and listen to private Albanian-language stations, which are often far more radical in their coverage of domestic issues.
- Political differences within the minority community tend to vanish

under the assumed consensus on national issues. Likewise, Macedonian-language media coverage of Albanian issues tends to reflect a national consensus, dependent on stereotypes and generalisations

- This situation is not, of course, limited to the media. Quite the contrary, the ethnic Macedonian majority and Macedonian Albanian minority exist as parallel communities that intersect only at the political summit. This is a social fact that finds expression in the media. In effect, there is no integrated Macedonian audience for Macedonian media.

In order to fully understand the behaviour of the press in relation to the crisis of 2001, this overall picture should be supplemented with the explanation of the phenomenon of "journalists as socio-political workers". Macedonian journalism suffered as a result of the ambition of many journalists to play a key role in political events. Journalists in Macedonia were not willing to limit themselves to providing the public with information, they wanted to play the role of mediators; explaining why the "wise leadership" acted as it did, as well as interpreting the will of the people and advising politicians how to respond.

Although Macedonian journalism has undergone a generational shift (the elite now consists of those who lack the complexes inherited from socialism),

the new generation still favours the socialist definition of the journalist as socio-political worker.

When the crisis in Macedonia occurred, the government was comprised of political parties that had no connection to radical, nationalist positions. The accession of the VMRO-DPMNE and Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA) coalition had been viewed by many analysts as the end of nationalist manipulation in Macedonia. Those who remained in opposition, like the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) or the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), tried hard to take on the role of defenders of nationalist causes, but they failed.

After successfully overcoming the Kosovo crisis of 1999, the new government, composed of former opponents in a society deeply divided along ethnic lines, encouraged more relaxed ethnic relations. When conflict broke out in 2001 most media organisations were as a result taken by surprise, despite the fact that the opposition press, both before and after the 1998 elections, repeatedly accused coalition partners Ljubcho Georgievski and Arben Xhaferi of having agreed to divide Macedonia. The weekly *Start* published a series of articles that preceded the Tanushevci events and which were assumed to have been initiated by the security forces, exposing the military activities

of unidentified Albanians in the mountains of western Macedonia. The government ignored these claims.

### **The beginning of the crisis**

To this day, the events of 2001 have not been properly explained. The question, “What happened to us in 2001?” has not really been answered. There are two events that together can be considered as the beginning of the war in Macedonia. The first was the assault on the police station in Tearce on January 21, 2001, during which one police officer was killed. The second was the kidnapping of the A1 TV crew in Tanushevci, by armed, uniformed men claiming to be from the National Liberation Army (NLA, or UCK), who said that Tanushevci was under their control.

On February 17, 2001, an A1 broadcast crew, led by editor Snezana Lupevska, left for Tansuhevci to film a report about the village, which, even 10 years after the declaration of independence, was to all intents and purposes not part of Macedonia. The Macedonian authorities had no administrative presence there, nor did they control the border with Kosovo in that part of the country. The everyday life of the residents of Tanushevci was closely linked to that of neighbouring Kosovo. The A1 crew was intercepted by a group of armed men, who detained

them for several hours, took their cameras and released them with a message to the public: the village had been liberated by members of the UCK, an armed organisation that was entirely unknown to the security forces or Macedonian public at that time. This version of events at Tanushevci was given to the Albanian weekly *Lobi* by UCK commander Hoxha.

The two events were scrutinised by both the state and opposition media in Macedonia, but neither went so far as to claim that a war on Macedonian soil was imminent. The events around Tanushevci were interpreted as retaliation by smugglers to an attempt by the Macedonian police and army to establish control over that part of the border after years of neglect. Even the abduction of the A1 crew was seen as part of an overall attempt by the Macedonian government to establish control over the area by providing the necessary justification for tougher action. The Tanushevci events were also interpreted as the work of disgruntled Kosovo Liberation Army fighters, or else related to events in southern Serbia.

The Minister of Internal Affairs, Pavle Trajanov, announced the discovery of a weapons bunker near Lojane, in the Kumanovo area, during the Kosovo crisis. But he also backed the theory that the main threats to the security of the region were events in southern Serbia and the activities of the

Preshevo, Medvegja and Bujanovac Liberation Army. On February 19, only two days after the kidnapping of the A-1 crew in Tanushevci, Trajanov was quoted in the daily *Vest* as saying that “Albanian paramilitaries gathering in the Tetovo, Kumanovo and Skopje area are preparing to attack southern Serbia.”

The government went to great lengths to present the events that followed as insignificant and the media under its control obediently followed this lead. But by the beginning of March, it was no longer possible for the government or the media to turn a blind eye to developments on the ground. Three members of ARM (Army of the Republic of Macedonia) lost their lives on March 4, in the Tanushevci region; one killed by a sniper, two by a mine. Several days later, a police convoy, led by the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Refet Elmazi, and the head of the State Security Agency, Ljube Boshkovski, was ambushed in the village of Brest. The party was detained for 20 hours.

But even then the media coverage remained restrained. On March 13, members of ARM and KFOR from the villages Debolde and Mijak, blockaded the Tanushevce region, while ARM entered the empty village (which according to Commander Hoxha had been deserted a full week earlier!). Yet even as these dramatic events unfolded

the media coverage remained low key. Soon afterwards however, the “Tetovo front” was opened and all attention was quickly drawn to developments in the Tetovo Kale.

On March 14, Albanians protested in Tetovo’s centre and shooting was heard from the fortress and the surrounding mountain area. Footage of the incident was broadcast several times that evening. It was an indication of just how shocked by and unprepared for such an escalation the public, and indeed the media, had been. From that moment on, the TV cameras regularly filmed the activities of the Macedonian security forces, as they fired on the fortress and surrounding hills. Their main positions were on the outskirts of the city: at the first station of the Popova Sapka cable railway and at the football stadium; later tanks were positioned at the police station on the road to Gostivar and near the city centre. The fighting lasted several days. It was broadcast live almost in its entirety. Then, at the end of the month, something unexpected happened. During the course of a single morning on March 25, the Macedonian forces took the Tetovo Kale and the hill over the centre of Tetovo. Helicopters purchased from Ukraine were used for the first time in that action, along with transporters and tanks. The action, hailed by the Prime Minister, Ljubcho Georgievski, as “the greatest victory

since the time of Alexander the Great” is still shrouded by a veil of mystery. One of the questions still asked regularly by former members of the UCK is: “Who sold us out?” On the other side, the Macedonian-language media depicted the event as a great victory; it was only much later that they started to ask why there were no prisoners or casualties among the UCK.

### **Division in the media**

These events marked the point at which the VMRO-DPMNE and DPA slowly, but inevitably began to drift apart. This internal division within the coalition government also affected the state media. The fact that there were no DPA officials present at Georgievski’s speech at the entrance to Tetovo was only registered much later. The Macedonian-language media started to launch commentaries, analysis and recommendations in favour of “a final showdown with the Kachak gangs”, while the Albanian-language press began to side with the UCK.

However, there are other interpretations of the role played by the Albanian-language media at the time. In his book entitled *A Media War: Why the World Media Couldn’t Sell the Story of the War in Macedonia* (BIGOOS, Skopje, 2002), *Nova*

*Makedonija* journalist Ljube Profilovski, claimed that the foreign media was largely anti-Macedonian. At the same time he suggested that, apart from the Albanian department of Macedonia Television, “the other Albanian-language media in Macedonia were mainly objective and unbiased in their reporting of the crisis. Their objectivity”, he said, “was much greater than that of the foreign media mentioned above, i.e. the Western media.” He illustrates this by pointing out their use of terms such as “Albanian guerrillas” and “extremists”, and by the considerable amount of airtime given over to statements by Macedonian statesmen, as well as statements by Albanian politicians. The author used the newspaper *Fakti* as an example, saying that it, “frequently published interviews or short statements given by the UCK commanders that either favoured bringing the war to an end and implementing a ceasefire, or that stated the UCK’s opposition to any alteration of existing borders.” He also cited headlines from *Flaka* (*The war is a great loss for everyone; Extremists will not spoil relations between Tirana and Skopje; It is surprising that the world doesn’t understand that the aggression comes from Kosovo*), and quoted commentaries published in that newspaper (“All the Albanian liberation armies”) and *Fakti* (“Three reasons why the UCK should lay down its weapons”) in his lengthy elaboration.

Profilovski concluded as follows. “The Macedonian journalists of Albanian ethnic origin did not accept the provocations of the Western journalists. It was obvious that they did not want the war to spread throughout Macedonia and they understood the message of the international community, which stated that it wouldn’t allow bloodshed... therefore, the assessment that the Albanian-language media made a certain contribution to stopping the war and preventing devastation is quite realistic.”

Late March was however, the starting point of an ugly phase of reporting in Macedonia, at least as far as the crisis was concerned.

The website [www.ok.mk](http://www.ok.mk) is an interesting case in point. It was founded by *Forum* magazine’s Centre for Strategic Research and Democracy. At that time, the highbrow biweekly was branding the Albanians as a “Balkan Taliban” and preached a final showdown with Albanian gangs. The sub-head of the “[www.ok.mk](http://www.ok.mk)” mission statement made no bones about its stance: “After it became clear that we were losing the battle with the terrorists on a propaganda level, something had to be done immediately”. April passed almost without incident. Then, at the end of the month, on April 28, several police vehicles were ambushed at Vejce and eight police officers killed. To date there has been

little information about the incident. In one of his first interviews for the Mace–donian media after the UCK was disbanded in September 2001, Ali Ahmeti told journalists from A-1 TV to ask the Macedonian leadership who was responsible for the incident. After all, he claimed, they had sent the police officers into Vejce knowing full well who controlled the terrain. The American Ambassador Lawrence Butler described the incident in an interview for *Lobi* in May 2003 with the words “lambs to the slaughter”.

Vejce can be seen as a turning point in the reporting of events in Macedonia, leading to an increase in the use of nationalistic stereotypes and clichés and the appearance of clear prejudices amongst journalists. A new vocabulary was invented to describe the parties to the conflict including terms such as “Albanian terrorists”, “Albanian (Kachak) gangs”, “primitive Albanian hordes”, “vicious and bloody mercenaries and murderers” etc, while the foreign media adopted the term “Slav Macedonians” instead of Macedonians.

On May 11, 2001 *Forum* published an article by Vladimir Jovanovski’s entitled *After Vejce all is different*. It posed the following question: “If the extremist Albanians continue their armed provocations, if they demonstrate a clear will for segregation and if they confirm it with the slaughter of Macedonian defenders - do values

such as tolerance, cohabitation and co-existence have any meaning at all in this state?”

Two factors favoured the further division of the media along ethnic lines. First, new casualties among Mace–donian security forces followed Vejce, and the Kumanovo front was opened. Secondly, the Government and the state leadership was restructured. Ljube Boshkovski took over the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ljuben Paunovski resigned from his post in the Defence Ministry in the midst of a corruption scandal. The ministry was briefly run by the Prime Minister himself, while Pande Petrovski was made head of the General Staff. He will be remembered for his purchase of MI-24 helicopters and Suhoi jets from the Ukraine and for placing them at the centre of his military strategy. These two factors initially boosted levels of confidence within the state leadership and the media.

### **Examples of media irresponsibility**

The changes in the military leadership led to an increased reliance on air power. The newly acquired air force may not have had any real results on the ground, but it looked the part, particularly on TV. A journalist from Skopje TV Channel 5 went as far as launching a grenade at a UCK position

to add colour to a live report from a Macedonian army position in Kumanovo.

The key events of the 2001 crisis occurred during the period end May to end June. The Macedonian forces entered the Kumanovo villages of Lojane and Vaksince on May 24. Fighting around Matejce lasted from May 28 until June 5. The first sign that the battle against the UCK was not going well came when the Macedonian forces were finally forced to retreat.

Prolonged fighting around Arachinovo revealed the futility of attempting to resolve the crisis by military means alone. On June 7, the media announced that the UCK had entered the densely populated village, effectively a suburb of Skopje. It then emerged that the police had vacated the village days before, when the local population had begun to leave. Over the next few days, the UCK issued threats – relayed through the foreign media – that they would bomb the refinery, airport and government buildings.

Internal divisions began to emerge within the coalition government over how to resolve the crisis. Some members of the government advocated the use of force while others believed diplomacy still had a role to play. This division was reflected in the media, with the Macedonian-language press backing a military solution. By the end of June, the influence of those who claimed that Arachinovo could be

taken in 12 hours had prevailed. The international community gave its tacit support to the increased use of military force and on June 22, the Macedonian security forces launched a fierce attack using all the available hardware. But things did not go according to plan.

TV and radio stations broadcast triumphalist propaganda in the first hours of the offensive, reporting that the Macedonian forces had entered Arachinovo and that white flags could be seen flying over the village. The standard of reporting fell to a new low when the main news bulletins of MTV and TV Sitel stated that there were up to 700 casualties among the UCK. Estimates of the numbers of UCK members in Arachinovo differed widely. According to the Minister of Internal Affairs, the UCK had 1,000 members in Arachinovo, while according to the Minister of Defence Vlado Buchkovski, the number was one tenth of that. Xhezair Sakiri (Hoxha) later claimed that he entered Arachinovo with about 70 members of the UCK, and that he had commanded about 170 armed men at the time of the Macedonian attack.

The Macedonian media glorified the conclusion of the battle as a great victory for the armed forces but in reality things were quite different. After a diplomatic pause, Xavier Solana came to Skopje to search for another way to break the stalemate. He was assisted by NATO Ambassador Peter Feith.

Five months later, Vladimir Jovanovski published an article about the impact of Solana's arrival in *Forum*. "At least we have learned one thing," he wrote, "although they continued to repel the advance of the Macedonian forces, acting on the advice of Solana and NATO the UCK and hung white flags in the village in order to enable the police to return. The Macedonian side can only be envious of such discipline." But the Macedonian public reacted fiercely to news of Solana's arrival and NATO involvement in the crisis. "Spontaneous" protests took place in front of the Parliament, in the presence of armed police reservists. Certain members of the media acted as provocateurs and for the first time journalists in the field deliberately "created events". In the following months a group of senior journalists organised parody of the NATO's weapons collection, and later the "March on Leshok", after the church monastery was blown up.

The message was clear - the international community was being accused of supporting the UCK, and of saving it from defeat at Arachinovo by imposing pressure on the Macedonian authorities to pull back. The Macedonian-language media was particularly vocal in this regard. The Macedonian population was led to believe that Macedonia was the victim of an international conspiracy. Later interpretations of these events suggest

that they represented a concerted effort to provoke a coup against President Trajkovski, who had accepted the involvement of Solana and NATO.

But Arachinovo had taught the international community and some Macedonian politicians and media that the conflict could not be resolved through the use of force. The fighting was now dangerously close to the cities, in particular Skopje; a line the international community did not want to see crossed. Through Peter Feith, a ceasefire agreement was worked out. The agreement was announced on July 5 2001. 20 days later, the UCK had fallen back to the positions agreed under the ceasefire (before the truce was put into effect, the UCK had almost taken Tetovo, and established full control over the Tetovo-Jazinec road).

In his retrospective on the crisis Vladimir Jovanovski described the situation as follows.

"After the ceasefire the Macedonian-Albanian conflict entered its third phase. The country was in a state of flux. There was no physical "front" anymore, but there were many bloody incidents, the first of which occurred on July 23, when security forces clashed with UCK fighters who had descended from the Tetovo-Kosovo road and entered the centre of the town on July 5, several hours before the ceasefire began. The people of

Tetovo will remember that night; it was one of the loudest. According to MTV, 200 shells hit the Tetovo barracks that evening, and it was assumed that many soldiers had died in the attack. The next morning however, it became clear that MTV had lied. The loudest explosions had in fact come from the Macedonian artillery. Georgievski had “freaked out”, calling for the mobilization of 130,000 Macedonians and an all-out war against the Albanians! The following day Buchkovski announced the existence of two separate plans to resolve the crisis: the peaceful one of SDSM and the military one of VMRO-DPMNE”.

In those critical days, when every new incident was considered a continuation of the conflict, the unsuccessful dialogue in Skopje was replaced by negotiations in Ohrid, mediated by the EU and US (Leotard and Perdue). Just as the final details of the Ohrid Framework Agreement were being hammered out, a series of incidents and the nature of the media coverage they received, threatened to derail the process.

On the August 7, police in Skopje killed five members of the UCK as they slept. On August 8 and 9, in the vicinity of Karpalak, army reservists were attacked on the Skopje-Tetovo road, and a patrol was ambushed in Skopska Crna Gora, at Ljubotenski Pat. Eighteen people lost their lives. No one has taken responsibility for the attack. Then, according to Human Rights Watch, on

August 12, police entered the village of Ljuboten near Skopje and killed ten Albanians. These events had a direct impact on the way the media covered the rest of the crisis.

### ***Dnevnik snaps***

In early August, a series of editorials were printed in *Dnevnik*, the most popular daily newspaper, beginning with one written by editor-in-chief, Branko Gerovski, on August 9 entitled, *The Macedonian chooses between freedom or death*.

“No more running. We don’t have anywhere to go. We don’t have a reason to. The Albanian terrorists have declared a total war. They are taking Tetovo. Tomorrow they will attack Gostivar, Skopje, Kumanovo, Kichevo, Debar, Struga. But they will not stop there. Macedonia is their goal. Those bloodthirsty murderers don’t want peace. After yesterday, there is no peace, nowhere and for no one. There is not a single piece of Macedonian soil that is not in danger. There is not a single Macedonian house that is safe. There is not a single Macedonian family that is calm.”

Although it was clear that the Ohrid negotiations were a success and the Framework Agreement was to be signed in Skopje on August 13, Gerovski did not view the agreement as a solution to the crisis.

“This is the end of all our hopes that the six-month crisis might come to an end peacefully, reasonably, and with a political agreement. The hour we hoped would never come has arrived. This is the moment that we must declare: Macedonia’s politicians have no mandate to sign any kind of political agreement while Albanian terrorists murder Macedonian soldiers, police officers and civilians, in an attempt to realise their territorial ambitions at any price. Any agreement signed under such conditions, against a background of threats against the Macedonian people has no legal, political, or historic value. The signatories of any such agreement can only be considered traitors.”

Gerovski had the following message for local politicians.

“If Macedonia’s leaders value their political and personal future, we demand that they show bravery at this moment. We demand that Supreme Commander Boris Trajkovski puts on his uniform goes to Tetovo with his soldiers. We demand that the leader of the Social Democrats Branko Crvenkovski goes to join him, because he told us that Macedonia is to be defended in Tetovo. (From the Prime Minister, Ljubcho Georgievski, we demand nothing, except to stay away from our sight). We demand that the people we have elected, paid and fed so that they might lead us through good and evil, make a decision and lead us in a battle for justice, peace and freedom”.

An even stronger message to “foreign representatives and diplomats, to George Robertson, Javier Solana and the others”, was also published in the paper.

“The Macedonians that still believe in you can be counted on the fingers of one hand! Macedonians can no longer accept your hypocritical games... When you finish with your dirty work, when you divide Macedonia, our troubles will be over, but yours will just begin. With your money you will try to make a state out of that piece of occupied Macedonian territory, just as you tried to do in Kosovo. You will try to make some sort of army or police out of those bandits. And that will cost you dearly. Your soldiers will be sent home in coffins; you will feed refugees; bombs will explode in your cities, while your children get hooked on drugs from the Tetovo enclave. Than you will have to explain to your voters why you created and paid for such a monster in the Balkans.”

The editorial concluded as follows.

“That is the state of things, people of Macedonia. Fate cannot be avoided. We have done everything to preserve the peace and we must not regret that. Peacemaking and loving are Christian virtues. And now, here we are, going to meet our destiny. May God lead and watch over us.”

## **Albanian-language blackout**

The murder of the five UCK members in Skopje on August 7 marked the beginning of a 23-day blackout of Albanian-language programming on MTV.

The day after the attack, MTV's deputy general manager, Imer Ismaili, and the editor-in-chief of Albanian broadcasts, Milaim Latifi, held a press conference during which they accused the general manager of Macedonian Radio Television (MRTV), Ljupco Jakimovski, of imposing censorship on Albanian language news programming.

According to Ismaili and Latifi, Jakimovski had asked that the Albanian language news be placed under the supervision of MTV news editor-in-chief Branislav Dimovski, who was supposed to check the Albanian edition before broadcast. The Albanian journalists refused to comply and interrupted the programme. "Jakimovski has taken a decision that represents classic censorship; a dictate imposed on the Albanian language programme", Ismaili said. The press conference was covered extensively in the Albanian language media, which sympathised with Ismaili's position.

The Macedonian-language press had a different view of the event. It covered the conference given by Jakimovski, but much less space was given to the

comments of his deputy Ismaili. Jakimovski was reported to have said, "The decision to interrupt the news broadcasts in Albanian was provoked by the way that this programme covered the events of August 7, when it failed to highlight the significance of the main news that five UCK members had been killed and large numbers of weapons recovered... this represents an extremely biased viewpoint." He added: "The Albanian language programme has rebelled and is acting contrary to the editorial policy of the house. We have had misunderstandings before, but we have always been tolerant and slow to over-react, even in the face of blackmail."

"The one-week interruption of Albanian language news programmes is of its own doing. It is a result of its own journalists disagreeing with the decision of the head of MRTV, who decided that in future all content aired in Albanian must be approved by the MTV news editor." (*Utrinski Vesnik, Why Were the Informative Programs on Albanian Language Stopped?* Subheading: "Albanian Journalists Became UCK Fighters", August 15 2001).

## **Gazi Baba, Karpalak, Ljubotenski stalemate**

The communications scientist Klime Babunski made the following

statement at a seminar organised by the Macedonian Institute for the Media.

“If the strained relations between Macedonians and Albanians were only coyly referred to in the Macedonian media prior to Tanusevci, now, i.e. after Tanusevci, and after Tetovo, Kumanovo, Vejce, Gazi Baba, Karpalak and Ljuboten we can speak without any doubt of a “showdown” in a “media war.” In fact, for the cold-blooded analysts, it was always just a matter of time before professional and ethical standards would take second place to outbursts of ethnic “loyalty”. In such cases, to be with “your people” and for “your people” becomes the primary “professional principle”.

Babunski presented two cases to support this statement. The first was the media response to the role played by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVR) after the killing of five people in the Skopje district of Gazi Baba, on August 7.

“The Macedonian-language media portrayed the victims as terrorists who were killed in a shootout, i.e. when the police inspected the building, the terrorists opened fire and the police forces fired back. A statement by the Interior Minister, Ljube Boskovski, was also reported, and all the Macedonian-language media emphasised that a huge amount of explosives had been discovered in the building.

Reports claimed that an infamous UCK commander, Teli, was among those killed, and the next day it was reported that two Albanians were among the dead. It was also reported that the MVR claimed to have received intelligence on this group through sources in the UCK. The same information was relayed in the Albanian language media, who claimed it was treasonous.”

“The Albanian language media reported the incident as the execution of innocent Albanian citizens and barely touched on the confiscated weapons. Instead, they described in detail the blood and brain matter found in the room where the men were killed. The *Fakti* newspaper claimed that the ‘peace process was covered with blood.’”

According to *Fljaka* the attack was a “massacre carried out by the Macedonian special police forces, blinded by a pathological hatred. In order to justify the murder, they presented the victims as dangerous.” The newspaper did not believe the press release from the Ministry of Interior, which the paper said was merely a lie fabricated to justify the massacre. Era TV also portrayed the incident as a massacre. The station broadcast a letter from Human Rights Watch, originally published in the UK *Guardian* and addressed to the Macedonian authorities, calling for an investigation into

what appeared to be evidence of summary execution. A1 TV also reported this demand making it the only Macedonian-language media to do so, albeit in a shorter version.

The second case Babunski highlighted was media reporting of an attack on a Macedonian Army convoy near Karpalak, which left ten dead. The Macedonian-language media emphasised the casualties and condemned the “cowardly” attack as a crime carried out by UCK terrorists. The Macedonian-language media indicated that this incident was a serious threat to the Ohrid Agreement. No Albanian-language media broadcast images from the scene of the attack.

*Dnevnik* reported, “The terrorists carry out a massacre near Grupcin, and the politicians sign documents in Ohrid”. *Utrinski Vesnik* claimed, “It is clear that there are dark forces working against a peaceful conclusion to the conflict... the massacre should have been prevented, especially after the events in Gazi Baba”. *Utrinski Vesnik* openly criticised the government, especially the general staff of ARM, for not having provided the convoy with adequate protection.

It is also interesting to compare the way in which the Macedonian and Albanian language media reported incidents of looting and vandalism in

Skopje and Prilep carried out in reaction to the attack. The Albanian language TV Art, for example interpreted the event both as retaliation for Gazi Baba and the murder of Teli, and as a backlash against Macedonian security forces, this time from the village of Zelino. A comment published in *Fljaka* read, “the other side undermines the peace. Slav-Macedonians are collectively allergic [to peace] and their allergic reaction is becoming stronger as the day of compromise approaches, that day that will bring all Albanians out from the ghetto.”

### **The roots of the media divide**

At the same seminar, editor-in-chief of A1 TV, Aco Kabranov, said that, “the language of hate and nationalism was conceived by the state-owned media ... the moment Georgievski took one side in the war and Xhaferi the other, was the moment Macedonian Television began to collapse, and it started in the Albanian language newsroom.”

But the editor of the *Fakti* had an opposing view.

“Subjective reporting of events by the Macedonian media is not a new phenomenon; it goes back ten years. Rather than analyse the problems that exist between the two communities, journalists have allowed themselves to get

involved in the politics of the situation. Despite the fact that in Macedonia there are numerous private and state-owned media, they all have one common characteristic, they present a twisted image of Albanians as a people who desire nothing more than to create a 'Greater Albania' or a 'Greater Kosovo'. This kind of biased reporting has strengthened various stereotypes, for example that all Albanians are criminals and drug smugglers... To change that position would have been seen by many as a betrayal tantamount to treason and would also have required recognition of the mistakes made by the Macedonian media. Under such circumstances the Albanian and Macedonian language media differed in their reporting of key events, especially in regard to events concerning inter-ethnic relations."

"The usual standards of journalism were discarded during the six-month war in Macedonia. The Macedonian-language media were used to create an atmosphere of hatred and to encourage violence against the non-Macedonian population. In short, they were used to spread racism against Albanians. Through various forms of media propaganda and manipulation, they opened new zones of conflict, which increased exponentially."

## **Consequences of the crisis**

The end of the 2001 crisis was formally announced with the signing of the Framework Agreement in Skopje, on August 13. But even the signing did not go smoothly. In a speech delivered during a celebratory banquet following the conclusion of the agreement, Arben Xhaferi made comments about the status of the Albanian language envisaged in the Framework Agreement which caused VMRO-DPMNE leader, Ljubcho Georgievski, to walk out in protest. Once again, reporting of this event in the Macedonian and the Albanian language media differed completely.

Then came NATO's "Essential Harvest", the disarming of the UCK, which was to take place concurrent with the imposition of certain changes to the constitution. The UCK had disbanded by the end of September, but legislation deriving from the Framework Agreement was implemented much more slowly. The pace of these developments was followed in the media, which employed a new and confrontational vocabulary to describe events. There were visible differences of opinion over the constitution and the future status of the Albanian language. These divisions remain today as demonstrated by the two following examples.

On 17 May 2003 the weekend issue of *Dnevnik* published an editorial written by deputy editor, Gjorgji Barbarovski, entitled *Krushevo is above Ohrid*. It read, "Ilinden (a Macedonian holiday, commemorating the 1903 uprising) cannot be celebrated, according to Ohrid. It may seem ...unfair to the Albanians, but it is not possible to divide the day amongst the ethnic communities according to percentage of population. If Albanians cannot understand this, if they have no respect for the strong national nature of Ilinden, then there is no possibility for a solution, either internal or European, which aims at conceiving a common future."

This commentary was provoked when officials from the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) said that they would attend the Ilinden celebrations, "if our presence is at the same level as it was 100 years ago." These comments were made in reaction to a statement from DUI vice-president, Agron Buxaku published in *Dnevnik* the previous day. "We are ready for a common celebration involving Macedonians, Albanians and Vlach who fought together for the liberation of Macedonia and for the creation of a Macedonian state", he said. "We are now building a new Macedonia, a multiethnic state, following the example of the Krushevo Republic."

On the same day, the daily *Macedonia Denes*, published an article by Jagnula P. Kunovska entitled *What is the truth?*

It examined inter-ethnic cohabitation in Macedonia. Part of the text read as follows.

"These incidents over Albanian ethnicity are nothing other than a de facto assault on the sovereignty of the state and tend to widen the already large gap between Macedonians and Albanians, something that will ultimately cause permanent instability in the state and bring it to the point of collapse."

The text also defends the theory that citizens of Macedonia are hostages to the will of Albanian leaders and political parties, aided by a biased international community. The text refers to the escalating "destructive energy" of the Albanians and, "their nationalist agenda". Ali Ahmeti is described as "the former leader of the Kachaks who have plundered, burned, kidnapped and killed." The fact that Ahmeti "now becomes a symbol of democracy, supported by all that took part in his transformation" is also deplored.

The 2001 crisis has changed the nature of reporting in Macedonia. Deliberate attempts to inflame the population through the use of an increasingly nationalistic vocabulary were first made during the crisis. Now, such attempts go virtually unnoticed; stereotyping has simply become part of the everyday routine. ¶

# **Serbia**

## **Far Away from South Serbia**

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## Far Away from South Serbia

*By Dragan Djoković*

In February 2001, events in southern Serbia and Kosovo dominated the Serbian media. Between one-quarter and a half of all television broadcasts at the time dealt with these issues. Everything from statements made by top political figures to brief news reports gave the impression that there was a decisive political battle being fought in Bujanovac, Preshevo and Kosovska Mitrovica over the future status of the Serb people in these areas. A Serb-sponsored plan to resolve the crisis was often mentioned, but there were never any details provided. Nor was there any analysis of the crisis in southern Serbia and its causes.

The Skopje summit of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process, notable for both its condemnation of “ethnic violence” in southern Serbia and the signing of an agreement on state borders by Macedonia and Yugoslavia, received special attention. The media

stated that NATO was going to allow the Yugoslav army and the Serbian police to enter one part of the Security Zone,<sup>1</sup> along the border with Macedonia, under the supervision of KFOR. Members of the Serbian government tried to portray this move as a major success, but the Deputy Prime Minister explained in an online analysis for the Belgrade Media Centre that KFOR was not capable of controlling the border, and that it was only shifting responsibility to the Yugoslav Army. NATO’s Secretary-General, George Robertson, said, “It is absolutely unacceptable that the extremists are using the Security Zone as some sort of shelter...”

But the entry of army and police units into the Security Zone, however politically significant, was reported in the media without mention of the reaction from the ethnic Albanian population. Much was made of statements from

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<sup>1</sup> *Established under the Kumanovo agreement between NATO and the Yugoslav security forces, the Security Zone was a 5 kilometer demilitarized zone surrounding Kosovo on the border with Serbia.*

state officials and high-ranking police officers, but the reports failed to provide a balanced view.

Reports in the Serbian print and broadcast media of armed clashes between the Macedonian police and Albanian extremists in the border village of Tanushevci emphasised the fact that NATO and KFOR were either incapable or unwilling to control Albanian extremism. Efforts to explain the complexity of the situation in southern Serbia and Macedonia extended to reprinting excerpts from the Western media about a “new war in the Balkans”. A Belgrade-based newspaper, *Glas*, reprinted an article with the headline *War is getting closer* originally published in the London *Times*. Another article asked, “Are we facing a new war — with Serbian hands tied and Macedonia off the hook?” While another stated, “A new Racak is being prepared”. The newspaper also quoted Ivanović, chairman of the Serb National Council from Kosovska Mitrovica, who said, “not even God can help Macedonia.” He claimed to be expecting bitter clashes over the summer months.

Coverage of the Macedonian conflict in the Yugoslav media was on the whole professional, but the southern Serbian issue dominated. The theory that events in Macedonia were only one link in a chain of attacks being perpetrated by ‘the Albanian side’ in a grandiose attempt to unify southern

Serbia with regions in Macedonia and Kosovo gained widespread acceptance. Yugoslavia’s political leaders warned the international community that, “the violence could spread from southern Serbia to Macedonia”. TV stations also broadcast a statement from the Macedonian President, Boris Trajkovski, in which he said, “armed Kosovo Albanians are coming to help the Albanian terrorists.” His message to the West was, “the Albanian terrorists are a danger for the entire region”. News of the Macedonian army regaining control of Tanushevci published in the Belgrade media was blatantly triumphalist.

A Belgrade news magazine, *Vreme*, published an article about the events in Macedonia under the headline *End of the Ethnic Romance*.

“Certain theories about the latest events not only in Macedonia, but also in southern Serbia, maintain that the Albanian side is trying to ‘catch the last train’ to a more intact solution of its national issue and, by radicalising the situation on the ground, which could eventually reach a new Dayton...”

Short of adequate human and financial resources - and hampered by dated technology - the Yugoslav media enlisted local journalists and media. Coverage was mostly sourced from the Skopje television stations *A1* and *TV Kis*, and there was a lack of reporting from the independent Albanian media

in Tetovo. Even news agency reports from Kosovo and information from relevant international institutions were published selectively. But by March 2001, Serbian interest in the developments in Macedonia was decreasing. Soon after however, the story disappeared from news schedules to be replaced by reports of the clashes in southern Serbia and the arrest of Milosević.

### **War had already broken out**

But it was also in March that the Serbian media started to reflect on the beginning of the conflict in Macedonia. An agency report, from Skopje, saying that the Macedonian government had ignored the crisis prior to Tanushevci, went unnoticed. According to the Macedonian journalists who wrote the piece, the village was held by about 300 armed extremists, but they had help from the other side of the border, from the Kosovo village of Debalde. It was, they said, a synchronized action by Albanian separatists linked to the so-called Albanian Liberation Army, whose goal was ‘the liberation’ of the Preshevo valley. A Belgrade magazine, *Reporter*, published an article by a special correspondent from Skopje, which claimed that in late February a Skopje TV crew was met in Tanushevci by a soldier in an unknown uniform who asked them, “What are you doing

here, didn’t you know this has been free territory for over a month now?”

But these stories and their accompanying analyses were met with a wall of silence from the Macedonian government, which insisted that those active in Tanushevci were nothing more than a band of common criminals. This position was portrayed in the Serbian media as an attempt to deny links between Macedonian and Kosovo, links that could undermine the security NATO was providing in Macedonia at the time. Skopje sources detailed ever more bizarre information about inter-ethnic deals and interests at a “higher level”.

Events showed that the Macedonian police had no control over the border region whatsoever. The Belgrade media reported that, “the Albanians stick to the proven media images... Kosovo Television reports on convoys of Albanian refugees heading towards Kosovo. The camera shows cars, tractors with trailers and horse-drawn vehicles full of elderly people, women and children. They witnessed the terror of the Macedonian police, and their men are forced to stay there.” It was interesting to note how often the Yugoslav media referred to what is properly the border between Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as “the border with Kosovo”. The use of such terminology

reveals a high level of uncertainty among journalists and editors about the political and territorial status of the Kosovo region and whether it was part of Yugoslavia or not.

The Serbian media also took a second look at the most important inter-ethnic dispute in Macedonia prior to the crisis: the issue of higher education for Albanians. But the possibility that lack of access to education was a primary motive for the Albanian unrest in Western Macedonia and Kosovo was ultimately dismissed. The real reason for the crisis, it was concluded, was Albanian separatism. The *Reporter* highlighted that violent incidents had only begun to erupt after the signing of an agreement between Macedonia and Yugoslavia, which defined mutual borders and which had never been accepted by a large part of the Albanian population in Macedonia. The publication also reminded its readers that the objective of the newly-formed Albanian National Party was to realize the so-called Ilirida, an illegal referendum supporting the secession of West Macedonia in 1992. The major news media also published a statement from the leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, in which he rejected the agreement between Macedonia and FRY because it was unacceptable to Albanians, wherever they lived, to have an agreement between Skopje and Belgrade on the

border with Kosovo. His comment that cooperation with the Kosovo Albanians was, “one of the conditions for the stabilization of the region”, was taken as proof of the strength and ambition of Albanian nationalism by Belgrade analysts. Genaddy Sissoiev, a Foreign Affairs Commentator for the Russian *Kommersant Daily*, wrote, “Moscow understands the activities of Albanian extremists as a severe blow to its politics in the Balkans and its interests in the region”.

### **What’s the Use of NATO?**

On the first day of March, the Belgrade dailies and broadcast media reported a statement by the KFOR Commander, Italian General Carlo Cabbigioso, in which he said he had no proof that Albanian armed groups were crossing from Kosovo to Macedonia. A NATO delegation arrived in Skopje at the invitation of the Macedonian President to begin talks on the crisis.

News of the “dramatic situation in north Macedonia” was changing day-to-day. A correspondent for *Politika*, a Belgrade daily, reported that “the Albanian terrorists” were intensifying their activities despite a NATO warning, and that Skopje was in a dilemma over whether to offer negotiations to the Albanian extremists or an ultimatum to leave the area around

Tanushevci. After several Macedonian soldiers were either killed or wounded in fighting along the border with Yugoslavia, the media broadcast expressions of condolence from Yugoslav President, Vojislav Koštunica. He expressed hope that “the international community, which had assumed the responsibility of preserving peace and security in that part of the Balkans, would finally face up to this responsibility”.

*Reporter* carried an interview with NATO spokesman Mark Leighty under the headline *We will Crackdown on Extremists*. Leighty did not view the situation in Macedonia or the clashes in the Preshevo valley and Bujanovac, as an escalation of violence. “We will not allow Kosovo to be used to back extremists anywhere,” he said. In answer to the simple question of whether Macedonia was at war, he replied, “No.” The magazine also quoted the vice-president of the Tetovo-based Party of Democratic Prosperity, Dzermal Musliu, as saying, “The goal of Albanians in Macedonia is to live in unity, in a common Republic of Macedonia.” He maintained that there was no basis for the claims that insisted Albanians were seeking unification. “I am always talking about Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia, about Albanians in the Republic of Kosovo, about Albanians in Yugoslavia and in Serbia...” he said.

In an analysis for the Belgrade Media Centre, Vatroslav Vekarić, the Director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics, wrote that NATO’s credibility would face its greatest challenge in the case of Macedonia. The lack of a straight response to the Albanian separatists’ military action would lead to the conclusion that NATO did not have the strength or confidence it proclaimed. The author reminded the Serbian public that Macedonia could serve as an example to other countries in the Balkans of how to respect the rights of national minorities. He pointed out that Macedonia had been a loyal ally of NATO during its intervention against FRY, when it offered immeasurable humanitarian support to Kosovo Albanian refugees. However, he argued, this was not enough to garner support for the territorial integrity of Macedonia. The analyst cited assurances from NATO that it “was not going to allow the disintegration of Macedonia, not its federalization, or cantonisation”. The US, he continued, was now considering using only “non-military means” to assist the Macedonian government. Such a limp response, he argued, would disappoint all NATO’s partners in the Balkans and could slow down the implementation of the Partnership for Peace programme.

In his column “The World and Us”, in the biweekly *Republika*, Bojan al Pinto

Brkić argues that war in Macedonia was a more frightening prospect than the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been. “How is it possible that the complicated stability and security of the region is not functioning?” he asked. Dailies reported comments made by the OSCE Head of Mission in Skopje, Carlo Ungaro, that what was happening in Macedonia was “an escalation of the Albanian terrorism, which is endangering the security of the entire region”.

### **Living Together**

During the escalation of the conflict in South Serbia and in Macedonia, *Radio-Television of Serbia* broadcast a show presented by Dubravka Marković, *Living Together*. The presenter said he believed that the Albanians in Macedonia were oppressed and were entitled to fight for their rights, but that Albanian extremists were using unacceptable methods. In an effort to explain the root causes of the conflicts in southern Serbia and in Macedonia, the author broadcasted statements from Serbian and Albanian historians. Professor Ibrahim Kadriu from Preshevo said, “Albanians have lived on this land from the beginning”, and his colleague cited the fact that “at the London conference in 1913, parts of Macedonia and Kosovo seceded from Albania”. The Serbian historians

came up with different histories of course. Yet, all agreed that living together was necessary and that a peaceful solution had to be found.

The Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Nebojsa Čović was a guest on another show, *The Open Studio*, where he answered viewers’ questions about the situation in southern Serbia and Macedonia. Speaking about the regional problem of Albanian separatism, he insisted on referring to the armed fighters as “extremists, even though many of their acts were terrorist”. But the Serbian public could not envision a future in which Serbs and Albanians lived together peacefully. This kind of rhetoric was reserved for top state officials only, which explains why the idea of clearly dividing the Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo became popular as a possible solution to the problems of inter-ethnic tension and conflict.

Commenting in *Vreme* on remarks made by Albanian politicians, which stated that the only way out of the crisis was to accept the independence of Kosovo, Professor Ljubomir Frčkovski, a former minister in the Macedonian cabinet, wrote that there was little sign of any stable institutions in Kosovo and that its independence would not improve the situation. Frčkovski also pointed out that there were no violent incidents in Macedonia during the wider Balkan conflicts. In an interview broadcasted by *TV*

*Politika*, the former leader of the KLA, Hashim Taci, said that Kosovo would never be part of Serbia or FRY again. "We can speak only of the peaceful secession of Kosovo," he said. He added that the Preshevo valley had a bleak future due to the presence of the Serbian police. Taci declined to answer questions about missing persons and the return of Serb refugees to Kosovo. The president of the Democratic Party of Serbs (DPS) in Macedonia, Dragisha Miletić, was quoted by the Jagodina TV station, *Palma Plus*, as expressing the fear that, "the actions of Albanian terrorists from the region could spread to all parts of Macedonia." He also doubted that the Albanian extremists were ready for a peaceful political solution. "Albanian separatist activities in North Macedonia were coordinated with the activities of armed Albanians in southern Serbia". All the Belgrade dailies (*Politika*, *Večernje novosti*, *Blic*, *Glas*, *Danas*, *Nacional* etc.) and broadcast media cited comments made by Zoran Djindjić, that "the terrorists were trying to change European relations". Djindjić had said in a press conference that he expected the problem of Albanian terrorism would "be solved on the regional level". He explained that the extremists were attempting to sever communications between Nis, Skopje and Saloniki, which would have a negative impact on NATO member, Greece. This, he believed, would only

necessitate a more decisive approach to the settlement of the crisis in southern Serbia and Macedonia. Thus, the actions of the Albanian terrorists served only to ease the position of the Yugoslav authorities, he said.

### **Information war**

What cannot be achieved through politics can be achieved with propaganda. A news story can arouse the passions of the masses. Political blunders can be successfully reshaped by the media through lies, manipulation and the distortion of facts. The news media is thus key to the formation of political ideas and stands at the front line of any conflict.

Sources of information are often unreliable, because the intention is often to use the media to reproduce a specific viewpoint. We hear or read opposing reports every day. One of many such cases is used as an example to illustrate this point below.

Sources within the Albanian National Liberation Army (UCK) informed the media that the mid-March fighting near Tetovo killed 11 Macedonian police officers and left another 18 wounded. The Macedonian police denied this, acknowledging that only two of its officers had been killed and 15 injured. Police sources quoted by the Belgrade-based news agency *Beta* said, "a number of terrorists were

caught". The Associated Press reported that more than 350 women and children had fled across the border with Yugoslavia from the region worst hit by the fighting. The police accused the Albanian extremists of ordering women and children to flee and the UCK called on the entire Albanian population to join the struggle. Thus, editors, journalists and members of the public were faced with completely conflicting information making it difficult to judge the reality of the situation

By relaying information about the number of dead and wounded police officers, the UCK wanted to encourage its supporters; by denying the figures, the police wanted to convince the public they had everything under control. Under the circumstances, journalists were unable to cross check the information they were receiving with an independent source. Their movement in the crisis area was always limited and they were often used as a conduit for propaganda by both sides in the conflict. Ultimately, news sources and stories were selected to back up any number of preconceived ideas and values and passions were easily inflamed in the confusion. On March 14, the Belgrade media reported that a group of Albanians had beaten up a reporter for Skopje's private TV station A1, Atanas Sokolovski, in the centre of Tetovo during demonstrations. A cameraman for the

Skopje-based *TV Sitel*, was also beaten and his camera destroyed. On the same day, the Belgrade *Politika* daily published a comment on the situation in Macedonia.

"Few people in Skopje believe in NATO's effectiveness, but without such limited protection, the situation could get worse. NATO appears to be a tentative ally of the actual enemies in the conflict and, despite calls by both parties, it is not capable or not willing to do more than protect its own staff by avoiding dangerous locations," *Politika* concluded.

In the Yugoslav media, news coming from Tetovo was overshadowed by the arrest of Slobodan Milošević. The arrest took place in Belgrade at the time of the fiercest fighting around Tetovo. The Media Centre published a comment by a journalist working with A1, Dragan Nikolovski, under the headline, *Macedonia on the Edge*. Analysts, diplomats and journalists were warning that the situation could spiral out of control if Solana were to be given a mandate to forge a truce between the two sides. The commentary warned that by forcing negotiations Europe would legitimise the use of terrorism as a tool in bringing about political change. Nikolovski concluded his commentary by confirming that the media had frequently crossed the line between reporting and speculating during the crisis. Journalists, he said, had relied on rumour,

conjecture, unreliable sources or even outright fabrications, in an attempt to meet public expectations.

### **Being a journalist at war**

The clashes in Tetovo dominated front pages and news bulletins on March 16. The Belgrade daily *Glas Javnosti* carried a report from a correspondent in Tetovo under the headline, *Extremists are threatening to come down from the hills*. A background analysis, *Shqiptari rebellion in Macedonia: Could it light the fires of the region*, was also provided with the matching banner head, *Tetovo — trigger of the Balkans* (the paper referred to Albanians as “Shqiptari”).

The analysis quoted former Macedonian President, Kiro Gligorov, as saying that “a blow suffered when Macedonian soldiers are killed has to be returned”. The President of the Gostivar-based Forum for Human Rights, Milaim Fejzi, said that his compatriots would claim their rights in Macedonia “peacefully or by force”. The following day, the front page of the *Glas* weekend edition brought the KLA response from Tetovo; *Tetovo was just a warning to Skopje*. The army of Albanian extremists was “capable of setting Macedonia on fire”.

Another Belgrade daily, *Blic*, quoted agency reports on the Tetovo fighting in its weekend edition with comments

from the FRY President Vojislav Koštunica about how “countries in the Balkans are hostages of extremism”. Kostunica’s comments came after talks with the UN Special Envoy for Human Rights, Jirzhy Dynstbir. Dynstbir had said that the problems in southern Serbia and in Macedonia were a consequence of “UNMIK and KFOR coming to Kosovo and not having disarmed the KLA and not having stopped the ethnic cleansing of the non-Albanian population.”

On the last day of March, news of the killing of an AP TV cameraman, Kareem Lauthon, in Krivenik, on the Kosovo side of the Macedonian border, overshadowed reports of the arrest of Milosevic. Reporters for *Sans Frontiers* condemned “the obvious violence against journalists” covering the conflict in Macedonia. After Lauthon’s death, the attack on Skopje journalists and an incident in which *Agence France Press* reporters came under fire, the organisation sent a letter of protest to the OSCE representative in charge of freedom of the press, Freimut Duvet, and to the UN Special Envoy, Dinstbir. Unfortunately there was little else that could be done to protect journalists operating in the region.

One organisation however, that deserves special attention in this regard is the German NGO Journalists Help Journalists (JhJ — Journalisten helfen Journalisten), which was founded

after the death of *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* journalist Egon Scotland in the Balkan wars. JhJ assists journalists and their families, threatened by war or politically or religiously motivated violence. The NGO provides financial and medical assistance as well as help in replacing damaged equipment such as personal computers, typewriters and cameras. Last year, they provided assistance to Olivera Djurdjević, from the Belgrade daily *Glas javnosti*, whose husband died covering Dubrovnik in 1991.

Over the past 15 years, more than 800 journalists, men and women from all over the world, have been murdered while carrying out their work.

### **Stereotypes as a means of suppression.**

One characteristic of the Serbian media's coverage of the crisis was the heavy use of ethnic stereotypes. Often defined as clichés, stereotypes are a kind of shorthand that exist not because of incompetence on behalf of journalists, or a lack of funding or technology, but because stereotypes provide easy and superficial definitions of complex concepts.

In the case of Macedonia, stereotypes can be found in any news item that referred to Albanian extremists, political leaders, government officials, etc. There is little real information behind

all of these expressions, terms, names and titles. Who are "extremists" and what makes them extreme? Are they grown men who resorted to extreme acts in order to achieve radical political causes; or people of mixed gender and age ready to use extreme means to achieve some ideal; or even organised paramilitary groups equipped and financed by powerful people? And what about political leaders and government officials? How did they acquire their power? Is it legitimate? Are they recognised as leaders by all or part of the community?

In early April, as reports of the arrest of Milosević dominated the news, the final few agency reports used by the Serbian media said that the extremists were retreating towards Kosovo, or on the run in the Macedonian countryside. Macedonia took a back seat, and news about the peace agreement was only available by word of mouth. The public had to speculate as to how the dramatic events had come to an end, and guess that the bloodshed had ceased. And when it was all over, the media then ignored, or perhaps even suppressed, an important human-interest story: how does life return to normal in a multi-ethnic society riven by war? It is a difficult question to tackle; too difficult for a global media that simply does not know how to cover events that are not fuelled by war, fear, blood or political scandal.

## **Still overshadowed by Milosević**

The crisis, which sometimes loomed as a serious threat to the region, was covered by the Serbian media as just one battle in series of conflicts in Kosovo, southern Serbia and along the border with Macedonia. Most of the print and broadcast media relied on news agencies (*Beta*, *Tanjug*, *FoNet* etc) and only a few had their own reporters in the field (*Vreme*) or access to special reports from southern Serbia and Macedonia (*RTV B92*, *Reporter*, *Politika*). These agency reports differed from one paper to the next only in the headlines placed above them.

Until the death of Ramadan Sulejmani in the battle for Tetovo, the first

civilian to be killed in the conflict, the Serbian media treated the crisis in Macedonia as a continuation of tensions already present in southern Serbia. Following the arrest of Milosević, the Macedonian problem received less and less attention in the Belgrade dailies, finally disappearing from the pages with the first signs of an end to the conflict.

The last news report about the crisis to be found in the *Beta* agency archive is a report dated April 20, which said the anti-terrorism division of the Macedonian police had successfully removed an explosive device from a railway track in the Skopje suburb of Kisela Voda. The correspondent wrote that there were fears in Skopje that this signalled, “the beginning of the Albanian extremists’ urban guerrilla campaign”. Fortunately, things did not turn out quite that way. ¶



# **Turkey**

## **The clashes in Macedonia and the Turkish media**

*Oral Calislar*  
*Columnist in daily Cumhuriyet and lecturer, Turk*



# The clashes in Macedonia and the Turkish media

*By Oral Calislar*

The collapse of the former Soviet Union had a dramatic impact throughout the Balkan region. The process, which led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the rise of new states, caused great upheaval and led to a huge exodus of people. Turkey followed these developments closely, and was affected by them. For more than a century, people from the Balkan countries have been migrating to Istanbul, and in many ways the city is like an old Balkan town. Thousands of people living there had relatives in the former Yugoslavia. Regular busses ran between Istanbul and various cities in the former Yugoslavia for years. Today in Istanbul you can still come across meetings and association of people from places like Uskup (Skopje), Thessaloniki, Pristina, and Istip.

One of the consequences of Yugoslavia's disintegration was an increase in the number of migrants entering Turkey. As war raged across the Balkans, thousands of people fled their homes to join their relatives in Turkey. Turks with relatives in the Balkans

were of course extremely concerned for their well being during the war in Yugoslavia.

## **A special country**

Macedonia, which split from Yugoslavia and became independent on September 8, 1991, is of special importance to Turkey for a number of reasons. Alexander the Great was in fact Macedonian, and Macedonia was once a province under the Ottoman Empire and many Albanians and Turks with roots in Macedonia live in Turkey today. Manastir (Bitola) holds a special place in Turkish history as the place where Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, spent the first years of his life. The treatment of Macedonia's Muslim population is also of particular interest in Turkey.

In this article, I will evaluate how the Turkish media covered the civil war that claimed the lives of many people and forced thousands more to flee their homes. The main source of my

research and evaluation will be the daily *Cumhuriyet*<sup>1</sup>, where I work as a writer, but I will also cite stories from other press organisations.

In 2001, *Cumhuriyet* published a total of 469 news reports, articles and commentaries on situation in Macedonia, that's more than one every day. These stories and commentaries mainly focused on issues related to the civil war, reflecting serious concern about the future of the Turkish and the Muslim communities there. It is possible to list the key issues covered in the Turkish under several categories.

### **The future of the Albanian-Macedonian settlement**

Commentators on this issue suggested that the warring sides were fighting to unite Macedonia's Albanian settlements with Kosovo or even southern Serbia. Towards the end of the conflict, it was even suggested that an attempt would be made to set up an autonomous region within Macedonia. It was also suggested however, that if the armed conflict could be limited and ultimately brought to an end, relations between the cultures would improve in time, taking violence out of the equation.

### **Questions before this settlement**

The Turkish media placed great importance on the outcome of the elections to be held in Macedonia in 2002. There was in depth discussion of whether the Albanians living in Macedonia would become part of a new coalition government. What rights would Albanians and other Muslim minorities be given? It was also recognised that any settlement would bring its own challenges and problems; the Macedonians may feel that they had compromised too much, while the Albanians may be dissatisfied with their gains.

### **Origins of the UCK and UCPMB**

According to the Turkish media, the rebels fighting in Macedonia called themselves the National Liberation Army (UCK). It was accepted as fact that they were Macedonia-born, although most had also fought with the Kosovo Liberation Army. According to the media, another militant group, the Liberation Army of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja (UCPBM) was also active at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, daily newspaper. Circulation apr.50.000 daily. Founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

## **History of the clashes**

According to the Turkish media, the first clash took place in February 2001 in the town of Tanusevci on the Kosovo border, as Macedonian police tried to arrest Albanian refugees. On February 26, the Albanians revolted when Macedonian forces tried to wrest control of the town. Throughout the period, the armed conflict in Tetovo, or Kalkandelen as it was known in Turkey, was the primary focus of most Turkish media.

## **Guerrillas target Albanians**

This issue was handled in several different ways in the Turkish media. Pro-Muslim media organisations reported that the Macedonian government was trying to wipe out the native Islamic population. They claimed that the Albanian minority was fighting to preserve its religious and cultural identity. In an article outlining Albanian demands one Muslim commentator wrote: "On September 8, 1991, after the disintegration of the old Yugoslav Federation the Republic of Macedonia announced its independence with a new constitution. However, while the old Yugoslav constitution had regarded Turks and Alba-

nians as founding members of the state along with Macedonians, the new constitution said that Macedonia was a state made up of Macedonians and that all other communities were considered minorities. Thus, Albanians, who made up 20 percent of the population, and Turks, who amounted to 12 percent of the population, were deemed minority groups.<sup>2</sup>

Much of Turkey's Muslim population believed that this discrimination was the primary cause of the conflict. But Guner Oztek, a diplomat who served as director of the Middle East and Balkans Research Foundation established by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, held a different view. "In my opinion," he said, "Albanian nationalism is the biggest threat to peace in the Balkan region... Macedonia is a multinational state. If you aim to create a homogenous home state as the Albanians do, you run the risk of setting the whole of the Balkan's ablaze," he said.<sup>3</sup>

## **The organised power of the Albanian guerrillas**

According to the Turkish media, the Liberation Army of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja (UCPBM) had begun to organise 18 months before

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Varol, "The Macedonian Reality", [www.vahdet.com.tr](http://www.vahdet.com.tr), September 2001

<sup>3</sup> Güner Öztek, *Cumhuriyet newspaper*, 13.05.2001

violence erupted. But the UCK was by far the stronger of the two and was active in three different regions of Macedonia. Some UCK and UCPMB guerrillas were former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army which also lent its support to both organisations. About 70,000 of the 500,000 Albanians in Macedonia live in the Presevo Valley of Serbia. It is not known how many of them supported the guerrillas.

### **The Commercial Importance of Macedonia**

Macedonia is strategically important as a gateway between Europe and Turkey. As such, instabilities in the region directly affect the import and export of goods to and from Turkey. It is also important for European states with links to the east. The importance of maintaining stability in Macedonia was reflected in the news stories and commentaries that appeared in the Turkish media at the time.

### **Oil as the catalyst for intervention?**

A Turkish journalist living in London claimed that US interest in oil was behind the conflict in Macedonia and

the Balkans. Quoting research by Michel Chossudovsky, Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa, this journalist reported that the ABMO consortium, made up of American and British companies, was behind the Trans-Balkan oil pipeline project. Brown & Root had prepared the feasibility study for the project. Halliburton, owned by Dick Cheney, the US vice-president, was a partner of Brown & Root, and had been given the mission of providing for the needs of US troops in the Balkans. Halliburton was also the company that built the gigantic US military base in Kosovo.

The European Union had been excluded from the process of planning and marketing the Trans-Balkan oil pipeline. “Moreover,” the allegations continued, “according to Chossudovsky’s findings, secret US operations in Macedonia were aimed at forming a series of protectorates and strategic corridors along the route of the oil pipeline in the Balkans... There are many compelling reasons to view the destabilisation process in Macedonia as ... an attempt to start an era of US and dollar domination in the region ... by reducing the influence of the EU and the euro,” he concluded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ergün Yıldızoğlu, Cumhuriyet new., 18.06.2001*

## **The peace settlement**

The Turkish media was cautious but optimistic about the peace agreement signed on August 13, 2001 by representatives of the Albanian and Macedonian political parties. One headlined echoed the sentiments of NATO Secretary-General George Robertson: *Agreement is Just the Beginning of the Road*, it said. Earlier, Robertson had warned that peace was still not guaranteed and that the road to real regional stability would not be a short one. Javier Solana, foreign policy chief for the EU, had said that NATO would be entering Macedonia within 10 days and would be doing everything it could to disarm the Albanian guerrillas.<sup>5</sup>

Another news story to come out of Ohrid focused on the Macedonia Turkish Party and its criticism of Turkey. On May 23, Turkey's state-owned Anatolia news agency carried the following report: "After a board meeting in the town of Ohrid, the head of the Macedonia Turkish Party, Erdogan Sarac, has criticised efforts to exclude Turks from talks about the country's future. The party's board of directors said the international community, and especially the EU, treated Macedonian Turks with double standards, and complained that this

was not in accord with the concept of democracy in Europe."

Sarac called on Turkey to be active in solving these problems. "Unless Turkey assumes an active role, it will not be possible to prevent assimilation and exodus. A new frailty will be faced," he said.

Another commentary drew attention to the importance of protecting Macedonia's territorial integrity. It was said that if the territorial integrity of Macedonia was not protected the idea of a "Greater Albania" would grow in strength, leading to great upheaval in the region as competing ethnic groups struggled to redefine national borders. By not intervening directly, US involvement was seen only as an added complication. Macedonian security meant the Balkan security, according to the article, it was time for an end to the uncertainty in Kosovo.<sup>6</sup>

## **Turkish-Macedonian relations and the media**

Among the more important stories that appeared in the Turkish media at the time were those covering the officials visits taking place between the Turks and Macedonians. At the invitation of Ismail Cem, the Turkish

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<sup>5</sup> *Cumhuriyet new.*, 14.08.2001

<sup>6</sup> *Emin Gürses, Cumhuriyet new.*, 24.03.2001

Foreign Minister, Srgan Kerim the Foreign Minister for Macedonia came to Turkey in March against a background of intense conflict. Throughout the visit, clashes at Tetovo featured heavily in the Turkish media. The UCK, which had taken the initiative, claimed they would advance on Uskup.

On March 17, the day Kerim arrived, the Turkish media carried a news story from AFP. It provided details of a telephone interview with a high ranking Albanian militant in Pristina, Kosovo: "Those in Macedonia's government are stubborn; but we don't intend to stop. The clashes will continue as long as the Uskup administration refuses to understand our demands. We wanted to warn the Macedonian government in Kalkandelen (Tetovo). We will continue our fight on all fronts. If Macedonians forces attack in one area, we will respond in another."

On the same day, state run radio in Macedonia reported that war had broken out in Tetovo. Citing police sources, the report said: "The state commandos have opened fire with mortar cannons and machine guns on the Albanian militants who are positioned in the Sar mountains. Militants fired back. Clashes broke out right outside Kicevo, 120km north-

west of Skopje. A police station in the village of Zajas on the Albanian border was targeted."

According to report from the news agency Reuters cited in the Turkish media, the city was in a state of panic: "In Tetovo, the people, frightened by the sounds of explosions, are fleeing in panic. Paramilitary police are positioned on the outskirts of the city. Police have lost control in certain parts of the town.

"Turkey will stand by Macedonia," said Foreign Minister Cem, as he prepared to meet Kerim.

Ali Sirmen from *Cumhuriyet* accompanied Minister Cem on a visit to Macedonia. On May 12 he wrote in his column: "People connected to the UCK and men of the Albanian mafia are among those who caused these events. Everyone knows that lucrative drug smuggling, and the desire to control the smuggling routes, are the real reasons behind the militants' demands for greater rights for Albanians. The Albanians want the constitution to recognise that Macedonia was formed by Macedonians and Albanians <sup>7</sup>... Before things get worse, everyone has to make an effort to save this state and put pressure on those who control the UCK from neighbouring Kosovo as soon as possible."

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<sup>7</sup> Ali Sirmen, *Cumhuriyet new.*, 12.05.2001

In June, Macedonia's President, Boris Trajkovski, and Turkey's President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, held a meeting. Turkey had been stepping up its efforts to push for a settlement, but Necdet Sezer used the meeting to point out that the Turkish minority in Macedonia had come under attack and ask Trajkovski to take preventive measures.

Turkey's prime minister, Bulent Ecevit, had also met with Trajkovski. "If things continue like this, there will be a massive refugee flow," said Ecevit. "Many of these refugees will end up in Turkey. This could lead to serious problems. In my opinion, we should be preparing for that eventuality."

According to the Turkish Media, in just two days in June, 1,117 people with Macedonian passports had entered Turkey, and more than 3,000 had entered over the whole month.<sup>8</sup>

### **"Albanians are being discriminated against"**

The Turkish media also discussed the issue of discrimination against Albanians. Professor Faruk Sen, of the Turkish Research Centre based in Essen, Germany, released a joint statement with Marine Liakova and

Hayrettin Aydin: "Albanians, who make up 22.9 percent of the population, have only 2.7 percent of the administrative jobs. Some 87 percent of Albanians feel they are being discriminated against. Although Macedonian law protects minority rights, these laws are not implemented. The recent economic crisis has deepened the inequality between Albanians and Macedonians. People with Albanian roots are being discriminated against. It was determined that, because of language problems many Albanians were unable to attend Macedonian universities. A diploma from the university at Tetovo, which is 74.4 % Albanian, is not recognised in other parts of Macedonia."<sup>9</sup>

### **Macedonia in the Turkish parliament**

At a time when things were getting heated, the MP Kemal Vatan spoke about the Macedonia problem in parliament. Vatan said: "Albanians want to be regarded as a founding member of the Macedonian state; they want Albanian to be a formal language; they demand education in the Albanian language, and they want to have access to senior positions in the civil administration and army, as

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<sup>8</sup> *Milliyet newspaper*, 15.06.2001

<sup>9</sup> *Cumhuriyet new.*, 28.03.2001

they did under Tito. At that time, all these rights were granted to Turks, too, both in Macedonia, and in Kosovo. It should be remembered that these rights that Albanians want, are not being granted to their Turkish brothers. Their treatment of Turks, with whom they even have family ties through marriages, is not in accordance with Islam or brotherhood. If Albanian demands are not accepted, it is said that they will strive for federation; their final goal being the creation of a Kosovo centred "Greater Albania".<sup>10</sup>

At a time of very high tensions, Salih Boztas from the daily *Zaman*, met with Salim Kerimi, Macedonia's representative in Ankara. The Kerimi's interview was carried in *Zaman* under the headline, "There is no Macedonia without Albanians." The report quoted Kerimi as having said that, "Albanians and all other nations in the region should aim to establish a 'Greater European Union'. This is the only way that dreams of "greatness" in the region can be realised."<sup>11</sup>

The Turkish media also regarded the killing of journalist Kerem Lawton in Macedonia to be of great importance.<sup>12</sup>

Journalist Sami Kohen gave an account of the subsequent developments in Macedonia in his column. "In those countries which broke away from the former Yugoslavia and which are home to separatist movements, the people cannot stand to live with each other," he wrote. "They do not want to live together. Unfortunately, it just does not work."<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

The over all picture to emerge from a study of the Turkish media during the Macedonian conflict is as follows. The media in Turkey placed great importance on several issues: flow of refugees into Turkey from Macedonia; the treatment of Turks and Muslim Albanians in Macedonia; the growing number of attacks against Turks and; Albanian demands for greater civil and religious freedom – this latter issue was covered in great detail and with sympathy by Pro - Muslim media organisations. The Turkish media was also pro-peace and was supportive of the peace negotiations and subsequent peace agreement. The activities of the UCK were criticised alongside pleas for full recognition of Macedonian Turks

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<sup>10</sup> *Turkish National Assembly Documents, March 2001*

<sup>11</sup> *Zaman newspaper., 25.03.2001*

<sup>12</sup> *Milliyet new.20.03.2001*

<sup>13</sup> *Milliyet new.7.05.2001*

and Albanians as founding members of the Macedonian Republic.

The respected Ankara based journalist Sedat Ergin told of his fears of attacks against Turks in the town of Manastir (Bitola). "It seems that the incidents that took place in Manastir last month and last week, are part of the same scenario," he wrote. "In both cases, the Albanian National Liberation Army sparked the clashes, targeting Macedonian security forces, and leading to many deaths. Last Tuesday, five Macedonian soldiers were ambushed and killed by militants. By way of revenge, radical Macedonian nationalists attacked houses and shops belonging to Turks and Albanians in Manastir ... When the Macedonians respond to attacks, they indiscriminately target all Albanians. In the same way, they attack all Muslims, without making a distinction between Turks and Albanians. The fact that Turks and Albanians have often

intermarried and that they have similar cultural and religious traditions, put these Turks in a very difficult position,<sup>14</sup>" he said, ending the article with a warning that Turkey should be prepared for a flood of refugees.

While the Turkish media as a whole touched on fears that the Turks could be driven out of Macedonia entirely, Murat Belge, a respected Turkish intellectual, scientist and writer focused his attention on the democratic foundation of the Macedonian state. However, he recognised that such complex national institutions could not be without their problems. He suggested that the stand off had been provoked by Macedonian nationalists who had failed to understand that the heterogeneous population could only be held together through democratic means. The only hope for Macedonia, he concluded, was the victory of those who advocated democracy and shunned violence.<sup>15</sup> ¶

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<sup>14</sup> *Hürriyet newspaper, 10.06.2001*

<sup>15</sup> *Radikal newspaper, 23.06.2001*



# **United Kingdom**

## **In defence of international coverage**

*Bill Hayton  
Acting News and Current Affairs Editor- Europe Region,  
BBC World Service (34), British*



## In defence of international coverage

*By Bill Hayton*

How well did the international media cover the Macedonia conflict? Most of the Macedonians I've spoken to think they did a terrible job. Most of the journalists I've spoken to think they did a good one. The truth presumably lies somewhere in between.

Looking back on the crisis now, it seems a pretty small affair – by world standards. It lasted less than seven months, from the UCK's first operation against a police station in Tearce on 21 January 2001 to the signing of the Ohrid agreement on August 14. Around 200 people were killed: a tragedy for each and every one and for their families and friends. But during that year 200 people were dying every day in the Democratic Republic of Congo and every week in Colombia and Algeria, yet those countries received a tiny proportion of the media attention given over to the crisis in Macedonia.

But the interest of the world's media was attracted as much because of what had happened in the region during previous conflicts as anything else. The

appeal of the story lay in what might happen if the violence in Macedonia went unchecked. In other words, the media were interested in Macedonia because it was the latest chapter in the Balkan 'story' - a story of death and destruction which journalists had been telling for a decade and which the world had come to understand.

In this chapter I will argue that the story of the Macedonia crisis was reported in the way that it was because of what had happened in the region before – and I will try to explain why that was the case. My comments should be regarded as general remarks, informed by my own experience of working for the BBC and other organisations before, during and after the conflict. However, they do not represent the official view of any of these organisations. They are not aimed at any particular individual or organisation – though I believe they apply to the news industry in general.

But this is not a comprehensive survey of international media coverage of the issue, nor could it be. With thousands

of TV and radio channels and tens of thousands of publications producing news every day it's simply impossible to do more than make generalisations. My own experience was that of a newsroom reporter based in London; I didn't visit Macedonia until after the conflict had ended. But perhaps it's a useful vantage point from which to have written an article like this. After all, who decides which stories are placed in a news programme or newspaper, where they are placed and how they are treated? It's not usually the reporter at the scene; more often it's the people back home who make the big decisions. The field reporter has to work hard to get the story, but if they can't convince the editor to run it, they might as well not have bothered.

News reporting doesn't exist in a vacuum, it's there to provide a service to the people who pay for it. Before one can understand why certain issues are covered, or not covered, in certain ways, it's important to understand the context within which journalists operate. After all, why do media organisations exist? I think there are three answers: commercial media (such as CNN) exist to generate profit through sales and advertising; public service media (such as the BBC) exist to inform and manage a citizenry and; partisan media (such as government-controlled broadcasters) exist to educate and mobilise political support.

Given the above, therefore, what do media organisations want from their newsrooms? In a word, ratings: whether to win sales and tempt advertisers, to justify public funding or to change minds. And not just any old ratings, most media outlets want to reach certain segments of the population. In particular, commercial channels want those viewers and readers who will spend money and attract advertisers. And advertisers clearly want the kind of content which will attract, or at least not repel, potential consumers.

So the overarching demand placed upon the managers of news programmes is to deliver an audience large enough and targeted enough to satisfy the managers of the channel. That audience is won by offering them a menu of the most interesting stories of that day – and that's the basic discourse of news. 'Interesting' is a function both of the meaning of the story to an audience and of the material available to the programme editor: strong pictures or a good interview will give added value to a weaker story and weak content will subtract value from a stronger one.

Being topical is just as vital. News managers must answer the question, "why should this story get into this programme *today*?" The most important story at any one moment may

be the daily death of thousands of people from curable diseases, but if there's nothing new to say about it, then it's not "news" — how can an editor justify putting it in the bulletin?

So editors are always trying to deliver what they believe the audience wants. Neither commercial nor public service news organisations could survive for long if their programmes didn't appeal to the right audiences. Early in 2001 news audiences, by and large, weren't demanding in-depth explanations of the roots of the crisis in Macedonia.

In this context, how does a journalist convince an editor to spend their organisation's precious money and perhaps risk lives and equipment by sending them to a faraway country? In short by "selling" them a story. In January 2001 most people in most foreign news organisations had only the most general idea of where Macedonia actually was, "Is that the one next to Serbia? Or is that Montenegro?" was a frequently heard question in newsrooms around the world. The country was known to some reporters because they had been based there during the Kosovo crisis two years before. But memories are short and many things had happened since then.

Some people may be outraged to discover this level of ignorance among news organisations, but by-and-large

journalists aren't paid to be experts. Instead, they're paid to be generalists, expert at picking out the key details of any story in a short space of time. One day they might be looking at Korea, on another Argentina, on the next Nigeria and so on. Only the largest news organisations, such as the BBC or the wire agencies, have an extensive network of correspondents based in the countries about which they report. The rest must rely on the agencies or "parachute-in" reporters to the scene whenever big stories break.

So in February or March 2001 how did a journalist "sell" a story about Macedonia to a sceptical editor who knew that the vast bulk of their audience or readership had virtually no interest in the country at that point? Easy. By then the Balkans had experienced almost ten years of war, spreading south from Slovenia into Croatia, Bosnia and eventually Kosovo — "just look at the map, who's going to be next?" they said. "There's an ethnically-mixed population with plenty of grievances, it's another Kosovo waiting to happen." Add that to the ongoing Albanian guerrilla activity in southern Serbia and the editors were convinced. They agreed to pay the airfares and the hotel bills in return for the promise of good stories.

This is a rather over-simplified account but versions of this con-

versation, some more sophisticated, some less so, took place in newsrooms across the world that winter. And so editors and reporters went off with a story already in their heads – the next Balkan war. And Macedonians found it simplistic, offensive and wrong.

But is it really so strange that things should be this way? No journalist can be expected to carry around an encyclopaedic knowledge of the background of every issue on the planet. The diplomatic correspondent of the London-based *Sunday Times*, Tom Walker, candidly admitted at a seminar organised by the ‘Reporting the World’ group in April 2001 that, “those of us who didn’t really have a detailed knowledge of the history of [Macedonia] were in at the deep end, to a certain extent”. Good news organisations have researchers who can provide the key information – enough to understand the main points of any situation, but not so much as to drown the reporter in facts. After all, how much information can any reporter convey to their audience? A two-minute news story on radio or TV contains about 360 words: there’s not much space for background or history or analysis.

Conscientious journalists do try to include as much background as possible in their stories to explain the issues to their viewers, listeners and

readers who know almost nothing about them. Indeed, one of the main skills of journalism is to make complex stories simple enough for a mass audience to understand them. And they have to invite the mass audience to care sufficiently about the story to watch the news bulletin or buy the newspaper. In the harsh world of multi-channel television and a saturated newspaper market, news organisations have to attract their audience’s attention and then maintain it – and most people have better things to do than spend the required time getting to grips with the details of Balkan history.

There is therefore a basic conflict between the twin responsibilities of every journalist: to report the truth and to attract an audience. This conflict will never be resolved (unless reading or watching news becomes compulsory) but it can be monitored and managed. It does, however, mean we are condemned to live with a process of news production in which poorly-informed editors commission slightly better informed reporters to produce stories for largely ignorant audiences. It’s hardly surprising that issues become over-simplified.

So how can journalists explain difficult issues such as the roots of Macedonia’s crisis? The same way that anyone explains anything. We all understand the world through stories.

Conversations are not just assemblages of facts, they are narratives – discourses in which those facts are placed in context and through which we make sense of the environment around us. In normal speech we try to explain one situation by making comparisons with others and we rely on familiar themes: love, hate, jealousy, friendship etc. to comprehend and explain the things that happen to us and others.

Journalism may set out to be different, but it can't be because journalism is bound by the same conventions of language and springs from the same culture as the audience that it is speaking to. Many journalists may dispute this but the reporting of the Macedonian conflict seems to confirm it.

Perhaps the issue which most aggrieved Macedonians was the way so many journalists explained the crisis in their country by drawing parallels to the previous conflict in Kosovo. There were, of course, huge differences. But at the same time there was clearly one major similarity: the country had an ethnic-Albanian population with a sense of grievance against a state dominated by a Slavic-speaking population. This was clearly something that most Macedonians refused to accept and didn't want to hear – particularly from foreign media organisations.

The problem was two-fold. Firstly, Macedonians didn't like being accused of discrimination, even when the accusation could be justified. But some journalists made their lives more difficult by making lazy comparisons with other situations. In particular they relied too much on pre-existing narratives – of typically 'Balkan' ethnic tensions – to try and make sense of the situation. Tom Walker of the *Sunday Times* said, "A lot of us went there thinking that this was going to be another Kosovo in the make up of the players and I think a lot of us hadn't really been to Macedonia before. We were therefore initially surprised to find that it wasn't at all like Kosovo, there wasn't the massive police presence, there weren't checkpoints everywhere, the whole thing was rather more complex."

So why did so many journalists arrive in Macedonia with a particular story already in their heads? Some didn't properly research the situation, either because they were too busy or perhaps because they were too lazy. But even those who did do their homework tended to arrive with a less-than-perfect understanding of the situation. With some notable exceptions it was because they relied on the same simplifications that they in turn would later relay to their audiences. It was a vicious circle – journalists would read each others' work, which would

confirm their views of the situation and which they then repeated. This was particularly true of journalists based in newsrooms.

Newsroom-based reporters and editors are in a strange position – working with material gathered by other people: both colleagues and independent agencies. They are sitting in a comfortable environment hundreds or thousands of kilometres away from the action and relying on information transmitted to them through their computers or their telephones. They usually have no first-hand knowledge of the situation, yet their reports are expected to convey the same depth and understanding. But their role is crucial because, perverse as it sounds, they can set the agenda. If there's no-one 'on the ground' to contradict them, the newsroom reporter's view of the situation is much more likely to reflect the consensus view 'at home' and become increasingly divorced from the view of those people actually involved in the events. By way of example a photo on the BBC's online 'Timeline of the Macedonia Conflict' is captioned, "Racial conflict: A rebel fighting for ethnic Albanian rights wears the Albanian flag". That was almost certainly written by someone who has never visited Macedonia and who is very junior within the hierarchy of the newsroom, but who still has enormous influence over the way the conflict is viewed.

Once a consensus view has been reached, it can be extremely difficult to break. With so much reporting following the conventional wisdom, it's usually very difficult to convince editors that what they've been doing is wrong and that they need to change their opinions. Newsroom output has to be justified to those further up the management chain and once an idea achieves hegemonic status it can only be challenged with specific facts, which can be hard to come by when the issue is difficult and unfamiliar, particularly when working to a tight deadline.

It's much more likely that journalists will try to fit new information into a pre-existing narrative - and the narrative they had been living with for the previous ten years had been the story of the disintegration of Yugoslavia into ethnic fratricide. The narrative made sense in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. On the face of it why shouldn't it make sense in Macedonia too? There was plenty of evidence to back it up if one chose to look for it: a civil war seemed to be breaking out and Albanian rebels with apparently similar agendas were also stirring up trouble in Kosovo and southern Serbia.

Once a narrative is fixed in the minds of reporters and editors it tends to create expectations about how different kinds of people (for example

security forces and rebels) will behave; about which voices deserve to be heard; what kind of images are likely to be on offer and; which of them will be 'representative' of the situation. These expectations can become self-perpetuating as journalists go looking for more evidence to back up their version of what's happening.

This obviously doesn't apply to every journalist covering the crisis. Some arrived in Macedonia with virtually no understanding of the situation and left knowing little more. Others knew more but went with their thoughts about the conflict already formed. But there were some who either arrived with greater understanding or learnt more about the situation as they spent longer in the country. A colleague in the BBC's Macedonian language section noted that, "every ten days someone else comes to Skopje and they need to be briefed. For them it's difficult to understand local politicians who promise one thing to their diplomats and afterwards say completely different things in front of the local cameras". It's hard to build up a body of expertise when staff members are being rotated in and out of the country. Gradually, however, as the conflict developed, journalistic thinking about Macedonia became more sophisticated. But it took two or three months of experience and criticism for minds to change. Those reporters whose

thoughts about the situation differed from the prevailing view had to work extremely hard to displace the pre-existing narrative which, by then, had become entrenched in the minds and opinion columns of the world's media.

Why was it so hard to change the narrative? The issue seems to me to boil down to the question 'Why do journalists trust traditional authorities and respect conventional narratives more than they criticise those narratives and seek out dissenting voices?' I don't have the answer, but I think it can be explained by looking at, among other things, journalists' social backgrounds, the obligations of working in a corporate hierarchy and what the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci would call 'hegemony'.

I think it's also an unpleasant fact that many journalists aren't as committed to investigative journalism, or are as well read, as perhaps they should be. Everyone is pressured by lack of resources and time and we are all guilty of laziness and sometimes of being less informed of certain issues than we should be. In such circumstances it's much easier to go with the conventional narrative than to try and challenge it.

We have to remember that in the early stages of the crisis, very little was actually known about the National

Liberation Army. For a while we didn't know what their aims were, how radical they were, whether they were connected with the Kosovo Liberation Army or with Albanian political parties in Macedonia and exactly what their relationship was with smuggling and organised crime. In the absence of hard facts, journalists spoke to each other and to local analysts, forming their own opinions partly based what they had already learned about the Balkans. Thus they sometimes gave the impression that Macedonia's ethnic divide was as bitter and violent as the one in Kosovo, which it clearly wasn't.

But journalists didn't make this impression up on their own, they were given plenty of help by the Macedonian government and security forces. Throughout the crisis, the administration of Ljubco Georgievski – whether deliberately or accidentally – repeatedly provided ammunition for its critics. It wasn't too difficult to paint them as the 'bad guys' of the story when their public comments often made them appear like Hollywood villains. The bellicose nationalism of the Prime Minister and his Interior Minister might have played well to domestic audiences but to outside observers they appeared reckless and dangerous. Newsgathering depends upon trust. Every journalist needs reliable partners to work with: government

press departments, liaison officers from political organisations, academic experts and so on. In most situations official organisations are usually easy to find and they go out of their way to be helpful to media organisations. Representatives of dissident groups tend not to be so easily available. But in Macedonia the situation was reversed – it was the dissidents who built the trusting relationships not the establishment. The result was that even when the government told the truth, journalists didn't know whether to believe it or how to judge the significance of the information they were being offered. The government, and with it the Macedonian 'side' fought the entire conflict without the trust of the international media – the information war began with a structural bias in favour of the rebels already built-in.

One colleague explained to me that the government was just treating the foreign media like it treated the domestic media, "with utter contempt. If they weren't useful as a mouthpiece they were treated as the enemy and attacked for trying to ruin the country". As a result, relations between the government and the foreign media became worse and worse. While the Albanian guerrillas made a point of cultivating the media, the Macedonian government seemed to make a point of alienating it.

The security forces were, if anything, even more hostile. James Pettifer, who wrote for *The Times* and *The Economist* and who knew Macedonia very well, said at a seminar on the conflict in 2001, “what seems to me important about journalism in Macedonia is the single lack of respect the Macedonian government has for the basic norms of reporting. And this has coloured the criticisms they have made against the BBC and other organisations throughout this crisis. ... It was absolutely clear that the Macedonian army was breaking every rule in the book about access to and conduct towards journalists. Now, is it surprising when this happens that they get rather dodgy press?” Because journalists had first hand experience of abuses at the hands of the army and police, they tended to believe Albanians with similar stories and, by extension, with stories of other abuses too.

This had a serious effect on the ability of journalists to check their facts. Ethnic Albanians would often make allegations about the conduct of the Macedonian government or security forces. In the normal course of events every reporter would try to check them with the other side. But with the other side refusing to answer questions, and even threatening the people asking them, it became very difficult to do so. As a direct consequence there were occasions on which unsubstantiated

allegations or simple factual errors were broadcast or printed. Were the bullet holes in the side of a particular building caused by soldiers or guerrillas? If the villagers say it was the soldiers but the soldiers won't speak to you it's impossible to include their version of events in your story. And if the soldiers look like they've got something to hide and have a generally unpleasant manner, a journalist might conclude, on the balance of the evidence, that they were the responsible party.

It's every reporter's job to seek out as wide a range of views as possible, it's not their job to take sides. When the BBC's Athens-based reporter, Paul Wood, first broadcast his reports of the UCK's activities at the end of February and in early March 2001, mainstream Macedonian opinion was outraged. They accused him of being a mouth-piece for the guerrillas. But his report is still available on the BBC's online news site and it's clear that he attributed comments appropriately. For example the comment, “We're organised throughout the country. In seven days Skopje, Gostivar and Tetovo will all tremble” is sourced to a senior commander. I can't see anything wrong with including this statement in the report. It clearly shows the intentions of the guerrillas and Wood was neither supporting nor opposing their point of view. And with the

benefit of hindsight the contextual analysis he provided in the various pieces he wrote in those weeks appears broadly correct.

The problem for journalists working in controversial situations is that often people want the media to fight their battles for them. They find the opposing point of view so abhorrent that they can't bear to read or hear it and they expect the reporter to have the same opinion. A BBC colleague reported coming "close to being physically punched by Macedonians in Kumanovo because, as some of them put it, 'the BBC talks to the Albanian terrorists'". For these people it's not enough that the reporter confronts their interviewee with an opposing point of view, the partisan reader or listener wants the journalist to vanquish their opponent and dismiss their argument. In other words they want the journalist to take sides, but that's not a journalist's job.

The Macedonian government was particularly averse to hearing bad news. Mark Brayne, who was the European Regional Editor for the BBC World Service during the crisis argued that, "the BBC was reporting stories that were happening that the Macedonian government desperately didn't want to be true. They did not want to know that the NLA (UCK) was out there in the hills. We have to accept

that the Macedonians didn't like the fact that the BBC got the story and told the story very early on in the process." The Macedonian authorities responded by taking the BBC off the air in the country. It's often easier to blame the messenger than to listen to the message they're carrying.

## **Journalistic methods**

If understanding the crisis in Macedonia was difficult, explaining it to a mass audience was even worse. There clearly were issues and grievances among the population that needed to be addressed, the situation was getting worse and the consequences might have been horrendous. These were the main points that journalists felt they had to convey to the outside world. It was a difficult and highly controversial situation and sometimes, in an effort to explain the background to the crisis, journalists over-simplified it.

For example, journalists discovered that in Macedonia the Albanian language did not have the same status as Macedonian. This was something that annoyed the Albanian population and fed their sense of grievance. But rather than explain the details of the issue many journalists told their audiences that Albanian was not an 'official language' of the country, which wasn't true. Nonetheless, if the

audience had understood from the reports that language was an issue in the conflict, something that deserved to be highlighted, then perhaps those reports were successful pieces of journalism. The problem was that it was frequently done in a clumsy and inaccurate way, which undermined the credibility of the reporting in the eyes of many Macedonians.

The same was true of another aspect of reporting which most annoyed Macedonians – the tendency to refer to the majority population as ‘Slavic Macedonians’. The reasoning went like this: if the country is called Macedonia, then every citizen of it must be a ‘Macedonian’ and the conflict must be between two different kinds of Macedonians. One side call themselves ‘ethnic Albanian-Macedonians’ but we need a name for the others and the best we can come up with is ‘Slavic-Macedonian’. To people outside the country it seemed that if you allowed the majority group to enjoy a monopoly over the use of the word ‘Macedonian’ you were effectively agreeing that the state belonged to one particular group and that you were implicitly regarding the Albanian population as not being ‘proper’ Macedonians. The official term ‘ethnic Macedonian’ at first seemed to many observers to be a political invention since no-one could define precisely what it actually meant.

This was another case where, in order to make the situation more easily understandable to a general audience reporters took linguistic short-cuts. The conflict was defined as being between two kinds of Macedonian: ‘Albanian’ and ‘Slavic’ – just as the Bosnian conflict had been portrayed as between various kinds of ‘Bosnian’. This was one area though which did change during the course of the war, in response to protests from Macedonia and from such groups as Reporting the World in the UK. From about April 2001, the BBC told its staff not to use the phrase ‘Slavic Macedonian’ in its broadcasts. The BBC was perhaps ahead of its rivals in this respect, partly because its own Macedonian language section was a vocal lobby within the organisation. That’s not to say that the term wasn’t used on the BBC after that – it certainly was because it took time for the message to reach everyone – but its usage was dramatically reduced.

## **Temptations**

If journalists believe a story is important, they have to find ways to draw their audience’s attention to it and it’s difficult to persuade an audience to take an interest in strange faraway places by telling them that everything there is ordinary. Audiences want to know what is extra-ordinary. They’re

unlikely to be amazed by stories of Macedonians carrying on with life as normal. But if Macedonia is on the verge of civil war, that is genuinely abnormal and extra-ordinary. It's part-and-parcel of journalism, but the logical extension of it is that journalists have to find the most extraordinary story they can to present to their audience.

That can easily become a reason to talk-up a story, even to glamorise it. For example during the first armed clashes around Tetovo in March 2001, there were relatively small-scale episodes of firing. But long periods of inactivity don't look good on television, so in many cases these were just cut out, leaving just the fighting and the impression that a full scale war had broken out. That certainly helped push the story up the programme running order and into the headlines. But was it an accurate portrayal?

This kind of exaggeration becomes much more likely when one organisation, such as a picture agency, is doing the filming and then transmitting the 'best' pictures around the world to news organisations who don't have journalists on the ground. The receiving organisation then picks the most dramatic images to show to their viewers and the result is that a relatively insignificant incident can appear to be quite the opposite. As

budgets are cut and more and more newsgathering is subcontracted to agencies, this kind of reporting is going to become even more prevalent.

In an effort to portray the extra-ordinary, competition develops between news organisations as they try to find ever more dramatic pictures and stories so they can maintain their audiences. I have heard of cases where journalists refused even to leave their hotel to cover stories unless it was almost certain that they would be able to film dramatic violence.

There are two ways to look at this. One might be to say that since 99% of the country was at peace when the violence was being filmed, any report focusing upon it is unrepresentative. But the other is to say that the violence was so unusual and significant that it couldn't be anything other than the focus of the story. If you believe the former you're probably a peace activist, if you believe the latter you're probably a journalist. Mark Brayne believes that "there's something about how journalism, by focusing in on a small part of the story at a particular time, distorts beyond measure." It's an integral part of the profession.

But while some aspects of reporting can be explained by the structures of the news industry, others are due to the particular actions of individuals.

Some may have serious roots, such as failing to properly research a story, but others can be genuine mistakes. Mark Brayne again, “Journalists get things wrong all the time. They get the details wrong, they get the focus wrong, they get the balance wrong. And that’s why I say I think it’s a fantasy to say that western journalism presents an accurate picture of the world.”

And modern broadcast techniques make it all the more likely that mistakes will travel around the world before they can be corrected. Paul Taylor, Diplomatic Editor of Reuters, argues that, “the constraints of our job have got more difficult because of real-time television. There’s no doubt that it has changed the nature of what we all do since we entered this profession. Yes that increases the possibility of error because error is easier to commit live than if you have time to do more checking and so on. Those who are working for a daily newspaper will in some ways feel morally superior than those who have to go on in real-time.”

It would be wrong to think that journalists don’t think about these issues - they do. They also question them and try to correct them. Most journalists join the profession because they want to expose wrong-doing, support the little guy and hold the powerful to account. And that’s what they thought they were doing in Macedonia. There

were significant issues to be addressed and eventually they were covered. Looking back on the crisis I do believe that most of the media did a good job of grasping the essence of the story and conveying it to the wider world. But there was plenty of poor journalism along the way and there’s much to learn. Even so, a review of the archive material on BBC’s online news site, suggests little for anyone but the most partisan to be upset about.

The international media were at least *attempting* to report the truth in Macedonia, even if they sometimes failed. I believe that I’m justified in saying that this was in contrast to the reporting of much of the local media: both Albanian and Macedonian, where the basic tenets of journalism were often forgotten in the noise of nationalistic fervour. And they were operating on territory they knew extremely well. When local journalists criticise foreigners for misrepresenting their country I have to ask whether they would have been any better were they reporting, say, the conflicts in Northern Ireland or Kashmir? I believe they would fall into exactly the same traps which the international media fell into in Macedonia.

But as it turned out, the world’s interest was directed to the crisis and steps were taken to end the bloodshed. By comparison Congo, Colombia and

Algeria remained off the media agenda and to this day each country continues to suffer almost daily massacres. That's not to argue that media coverage is the factor which determines the course of each conflict, but it is striking that those wars which receive less coverage seem to have higher death tolls.

**‘Objectivity is not a state, it’s a goal’**

But given all of the above, what should we demand of our journalists? Firstly I would say don't expect them to be perfect. As Paul Taylor of Reuters notes, "Objectivity is not a state, is it? It's a goal, a process, a daily dialectic and we're constantly debating, as we should be — all of us. Are we using the right terminology? We debate and we go round the issues, it's a constant process — not a fixed state."

Some say journalism is about nothing more than presenting facts. But no journalist ever presents just facts; facts are always placed within narratives: "this happened, then that happened, it might lead to this and it all matters for the following reason..." Even the most basic news item has to be a 'story'. In BBC training we sometimes use this example to explain how to write a cue for a news report, "Something extremely interesting has

happened. Keep listening for a little longer and there's a good chance you'll find out some more details. This event is very important because of its relationship to other events in the same area. Details are still coming in. Correspondents say this is a very important event, and one which is extremely interesting."

The structure is obvious — we're constructing a narrative to help other people to make sense of events.

We can construct these public narratives only because we, as journalists and ordinary individuals, have already created our own private narratives. And this is the most crucial part of any journalist's job: formulating the best narrative to make sense of the apparent chaos around us. It's very far from simply lining up all the facts in a row. Where do we begin? Does the Macedonia story begin in 2001 or 1999 or 1945, 1912 or further back? Are there two sides to talk to, or more? Is this incident irrelevant or absolutely critical? Are things getting better or worse?

Some narratives will favour one side or the other, some will reassure the audience, some will upset it, some will emphasise violence, some will emphasise efforts to end violence and so on. We have to choose which narratives we use and we can't pretend that we're neutral observers in this. We have our opinions, our own personal narratives; we can't ignore or avoid them. Instead

we have to be always aware of them and constantly question them. We have to be fair and what we write or say has to be accurate, balanced and clear but whatever else we do we have to tell the story. The most crucial decision of the day is which narrative

to choose? Sometimes the decision's not made until the editor calls and asks, "what's the story?" because if you don't have a story, ultimately you don't have a job. The question we must all ask ourselves is what story we choose to tell and why? ¶



# **United Kingdom**

## **A British perspective**

*Paul Wood  
BBC Middle East correspondent covering the Arab world  
(37), British*



## A British perspective

*By Paul Wood*

It is a crisp, clear day high in the hills of northern Macedonia. There are patches of green visible beneath the melting snow and the mule I am riding veers off the path to stick his nose in the grass and munch on it greedily. Weighed down by a flak-jacket, I attempt to rein in the mule with one hand while holding my mobile phone in the other, carrying on a heated debate with the editor of the BBC's Macedonian language service. She felt very strongly that we should not be reporting on the emerging ethnic Albanian rebels, the National Liberation Army or NLA (UCK). "We cannot give a platform to terrorists," she said down the line from London as I fought with the mule. Many Orthodox Macedonians thought we were giving the rebels, or terrorists as they called them, a helping hand. NATO too was unhappy that our reports had exposed just how porous Macedonia's border with Kosovo was. But having sent out the first television pictures of the rebels, we were simply glad to have broken the story.

We got the pictures out because the NLA commander in charge of running guns and new volunteers into Macedonia from Kosovo was the same man who, as a member of the Kosovo Liberation Army, had taken me behind Serbian lines during NATO's air campaign. Many Macedonian Albanians joined the KLA to fight in the Kosovo war. With NATO established in Kosovo, these men turned their thoughts to their birthplace, Macedonia. In the months before the conflict began, these former KLA fighters from Macedonia congregated in places like the town of Vitina in southern Kosovo. They would meet in the Café Drenica, discussing their plans beneath a crude mural showing the distinctive bearded face of Adem Jashari, the martyred KLA guerrilla leader.

One evening we set off from the Café Drenica with a small group of these fighters. They stopped at a farmhouse on the border to pick up a group of about 40 volunteers and two mules, which were laden with Kalashnikovs. It was a six-hour walk using smugglers'

pathways across the hilly border area. From time to time the supply column would scatter, everyone running to hide as a US helicopter passed overhead. With the moon large and luminous, the last two hundred metres was a stampede over open, snow-covered ground as machine gun rounds fired by and the Macedonian police whistled overhead. The images from this journey went around the world: fresh NLA volunteers holding Kalashnikovs and crossing the Macedonian border like a line of ants.

There could be no doubt that the rebels made good copy, the images they provided were immensely attractive to a television journalist. Arriving in the rebel held village after crossing the border that night, we met the local NLA commander. He had no left hand; it had been blown off in the Kosovo war. Strapped to his black combat vest was an improbably large chrome-plated Magnum pistol; on his arm, the black and red patch and doubled-headed eagle of the NLA. "In seven days Skopje, Gostivar and Tetovo will all tremble," he declared, referring to Macedonia's capital and two biggest towns. The shooting started in Tetovo a week later.

That was early March 2001, when Macedonia was the only remaining former Yugoslav republic still untouched by civil war. There had been some fighting, in the tiny village of Tanusevci, but the country was not

yet at war. In the rebels' new headquarters, half a day's walk from Tanusevci, we met a fighter who had seen combat in both Croatia and Kosovo. "I've never been so happy as I am now, with a gun in my hand," he said. "We get on well here, these men are better than brothers. Every day more join us. We are fighting for our rights, not Greater Albania. We will not stop until all our demands are met."

The international community had tremendous influence over events in Macedonia throughout the conflict, but this was especially true at the beginning. The players calculated their every move with an eye to world opinion. The NLA remembered well the lessons of Kosovo. The Kosovo Liberation Army was the most successful guerrilla movement of modern times and yet it had *never won a single battle*. The KLA succeeded because with the unwitting help of Slobodan Milosevic it had managed to bring NATO into the conflict. This was the task the NLA's leadership now set themselves.

Before the conflict started, I remember sitting cross-legged on the floor of an Albanian house in southern Kosovo with a few of leading members of what was to become the NLA. They were plotting their strategy for the forthcoming war. One of them told me earnestly that it would only be a matter of time before NATO started bombing

the Macedonian Army. Then all Albanians could live in a single state, he said. But off course nothing was more likely to alienate western governments than declaring the goal of "Greater Albania" and the NLA quickly came to realise this. They understood that while the West would never support a war for territory it might support a war carried out in the defence of human rights.

Hence, in their first ever interview, the NLA's military spokesman told me, "The National Liberation Army is the product of ten years of oppression by the Slav Macedonian government. We do not want to endanger the stability and the territorial integrity of Macedonia. But we will fight a guerrilla war until we have won our basic rights, until we are accepted as an equal people inside Macedonia." The outside world didn't buy it and at the outset of the conflict the NLA found itself friendless, with even the former KLA in Kosovo wary of lending its support. Reporting by British and other journalists played a role in this. Our stories said that the Albanians in Macedonia had real grievances, but there had been no massacres: in other words, Macedonia was not Kosovo.

At the beginning of the war, the Macedonian President, Boris Trajkovski gave a speech to Parliament declaring that "not one metre" of territory would be surrendered to "terrorists and extremists." He

insisted that the NLA were nothing more than criminals and that the fighting had started because their smuggling routes were threatened. He said the NLA were ethnic Albanian fighters from another conflict taking place in Serbia's Presevo valley. Macedonia was being destabilised from outside, he claimed, the violence imported from Kosovo.

Our reporting in those early days of the conflict established different facts. The truth, it turned out, was far more dangerous for Macedonia. The NLA was a home-grown group with a small but determined base of support. Talking to NLA fighters in the hills, it was clear that many of them were young, fervent believers. They dreamed of dying a hero's death, which would be celebrated in songs for generations to come. They did not dream of getting rich from smuggling. In British newspapers, much of the editorial comment about the NLA was hostile. It was argued that the trouble in Macedonia had been started by Albanians, the very people NATO went to war to protect in Kosovo. After Kosovo, there was no appetite in western capitals for another Balkan intervention. A well known correspondent on a leading British broadsheet even nursed the private suspicion that newspaper editors in London were being put under pressure by the UK government to make sure that any reporting of Macedonia did

not lend weight to the argument for intervention. In the face of generally hostile international opinion, the guerrillas adjusted their aims. Instead of Greater Albania, they said they wanted unbiased outside mediation, international peacekeepers, including Americans, and a new Macedonian constitution, which would give greater autonomy to Albanian areas. In the end, they achieved much of this. But their real objective, the establishment of a single Albanian state, is, and will probably remain, unrealised.

Foreign journalists were not well liked by the Orthodox Macedonians. During a demonstration, a British colleague had his nose broken by an angry protester. After our footage of the NLA was broadcast, armed men stopped cars on the road to Tetovo, asking for me by name. Members of the Orthodox community were worried

that TV coverage of the rebels would bring them more recruits and turn warnings of imminent civil war into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Macedonians from all communities felt that they were at the mercy of forces beyond their control. Orthodox Macedonians, in particular, viewed the international media as part of some vast conspiracy that would destabilise their country. While the Albanian rebels were delighted to be covered by the BBC, the *New York Times* and *Le Monde* the Orthodox Macedonians were infuriated. The irony is that the reporting probably helped those it angered most – the Orthodox Macedonians – and undermined those it pleased – the ethnic Albanian rebels. Whether for good or ill, the speed and nature of foreign intervention in the crisis was shaped by the international media's coverage of the event in its early days. ¶

# **Ukraine**

## **War and Peace**

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# War and Peace

*By Andrei Tsapliyenko*

It's almost like coming home. The city of Tetovo is the most Macedonian of all Albanian cities and the most Albanian of Macedonian cities. It's been a long time since I was here last, in March 2001. It seems strange to see people going about their daily routines, strolling across central square, eating hamburgers. I feel the urge to shout to them, "Stick to the walls! Sniper on the hill!" But there are no snipers in the hills any more, there are no more mortars. Back in March 2001, four Ukrainian helicopters destroyed the guerrilla positions. The attacks took place around midday, several days in a row. I remember at the time a member of the UCK told me, "If I ever come across a Ukrainian I will drive my fingers into his neck!" The closest Ukrainian neck was just half a metre away. I was born in the Ukraine. I came to Macedonia on a Ukrainian passport.

This time in Tetovo, my Albanian guide is aware of my nationality. We talk about family, children, the problems of finding a decent school, about wives that nag for money' about

Liverpool playing worse than before, about the relative merits of Mercedes and Opel. We talk about the things that all men hold in common in spite of the colour of their skin or their nationality. We had this conversation sitting on the veranda of an Albanian café in the Albanian part of the city. Albanian policemen wandered about the streets, some looked familiar. They have strolled here before, in UCK camouflage, Kalashnikovs at the ready.

The policemen are clean-shaven, professional. Sitting at the tables next to us drinking green tea there is a group of bearded men in camouflage. But they are unarmed. Any one of them could be Commandant Lliri, the man I was hoping to interview.

Lliri and his detachment, the 112 Muidinaliu Brigade, which numbered about 500 soldiers, had attempted to capture the city of Tetovo by storm in March 2001. Six months after the attack, in September 2001, the guerrillas handed over several hundred Kalashnikovs at the village of Brodets as a sign of good faith and to cement

the ceasefire. The NATO officers overlooking operation “Essential Harvest” treated them as equals. They were satisfied with the outcome of the operation but the Hungarians that decommissioned the Kalshnikovs by sawing them into pieces could be heard to say to each other in private that the guerrillas only handed over their oldest weapons – amounting to just one tenth of the total. The rest were still in the hands of UCK combatants or headed for Kosovo.

In September 2001, I met a British soldier, Tom Smith, in Krivolak. Tom was 25. He seemed embarrassed as he tried to outline his vision of the political situation. For him the world was still clearly divided into goodies and baddies. It was the vision of a schoolboy. But Tom turned out to be something of an expert on the disarmament issue. We learned from him, that around Krivolak alone one could find almost every type of weaponry available to the Yugoslavian army. The arms were mostly Soviet made and designed: AKM and AK-47 submachine-guns manufactured during the 1960s and 70s in East Germany and China. Yugoslav made M-53 machine-guns; Russian SKS and SVD sniper rifles as well as PPSH “burp guns” dating from the Second World War were also readily available. It’s not difficult to work out how the UCK got their hands on the weapons.

The M-53s and sniper rifles were left in the mountains after the Yugoslav army fell apart. The Kalshnikovs came from Albanian army depots.

“What kind of rockets are these?” I asked Tom.

“SAGA-83, antitank guided missiles. They have a range of about 2,000 meters or 2,400 tops.” He replied.

“Where are they produced?”

“They look like Russian models,” he murmured.

“Is this a home made sniper rifle?” I asked.

“Yep. Great design. Very powerful shell. 12.7 mm calibre,” he replied with admiration.

“Is it really home made?”

“Look at it. The barrel and chamber are from a Mauser heavy machine-gun, they only added the breech mechanism. It’s a machine-gun converted into a rifle.”

The rifle was impressive. Perhaps it had been used in the city recently.

Back in the Tetovo café, I thought about Tom as I watched a man in camouflage take a brand-new grenade launcher out of the trunk of his Mercedes-280. I could have used his expertise.

“The interview will take place in the dining hall,” said a voice behind me. The speaker was a broad, unshaved man in a black turtleneck. He was a loyal foot soldier. He was not the Commandant. Not Lliri.

Lliri was waiting for us in an empty hall. The first thing that struck me about him was his age, he was just 35. There was nothing in his face to suggest he was a guerrilla. His blond hair was worn in a cut that wouldn't look out of place in an Amsterdam club. He was clean-shaven with piercing, almond shaped eyes and a broad mouth.

"Ukrainians?" he asked.  
"Yes we are Ukrainians," I replied, becoming suddenly aware of my own neck.  
"Then you must know your helicopters well. And the pilots too. In March 2001 they didn't cause us any damage at all. They shot at civilian homes. I took my men away successfully"

On March 25, 2001 Albanian guerrillas in the Kale fortress fired repeatedly at police posts in Tetovo. They were proving impossible to dislodge. At dawn, tanks entered the city. An old T-55 tore apart the asphalt of Marshal Tito Street as it headed for the mountains. The fight for position was over. The army attacked the villages of Gajre and Geramo where they met with heavy resistance. The army reservists recruited from all around the country, were stunned by the reality of warfare but morale recovered when they saw two Mi-8 helicopters rising above the Kale mountain. They approached the Albanian positions and opened fire.

The Albanian guns fell silent and the helicopters headed for Skopje. That evening, CNN reported, "Russian helicopters manned by Ukrainians attacked the Albanian rebels". But the helicopters were Ukrainian. Shortly before the attack, the Ukraine gave Macedonia four Mi-8s. It was the only country to offer military support. Although the Macedonian authorities claim the helicopters were flown by their own pilots, it is unlikely. Even at the time I believed that the necessary personnel were also provided by the Ukraine. The pilots had to be capable of carrying out highly technical manoeuvres, evading potential attacks from Russian-made PZRK "Strela" (Arrow) missiles used to shoot down aircraft. Later, when the fighting was over, seven "Strela" were found among the submachine-guns handed over by the Albanian guerrillas. The number left in the mountains is not known.

In 2001, the headquarters of the National Liberation Army, or *Ustrie Climentare Komptare* in Albanian, was located up in the mountains in the village of Radusha. At least one man from every family fought for the UCK, and at least one set of fatigues worn by the guerrillas during the war is kept in every house. Macedonians still steer clear of Radusha.

Neshet Bairami was in the detachment that the security forces tried to

dislodge from Radusha. He made a couple of raids on the side, where Macedonian snipers were located. Neshet doesn't want to talk about the Slavs he killed. "It was war," he says. "We were holding one side and the security forces were on the other. They couldn't dislodge us from our positions and we were afraid to enter the areas which they controlled. Then on March 25, around 11:00 or 11:30 we saw two helicopters flying low above the mountains, scattering flare rockets. The Mi-8s circled around twice and then hit our position with missiles. They levelled everything. There was nothing but debris everywhere. But there were no casualties, except for me. My leg was injured. Then the Mi-8s turned around and fired missiles at the mosque."

A second witness, an Albanian farmer Daut Kazimi, also described the attack. "I was standing at the bus stop, right here," he told me. "Suddenly I heard the dreadful noise of a powerful engine and I saw two helicopters rising up from behind the hill. They flew at a low height as if getting ready for an attack. We knew something serious was going to happen. I ran to the other side of the road – it seemed safer there – and the helicopter fired several times. There were many explosions in a row. I was covered in rubble. All I could see was smoke and fire. For three days I was totally deaf and nearly blind."

The Macedonian security forces and the Albanian guerrillas were positioned on opposite sides of a mountain river. Macedonian forces had also occupied the barracks of a refugee camp close to Radusha. It had not been an easy mission. The Kosovar Albanians holding the camp had put up a strong resistance. After two days of constant firing the security forces had encircled Radusha. But the soldiers' morale was low and they were unable to cross the river and capture the village. Morale on the Albanian side was enviable. Neshet Bairami attacked the Macedonian soldiers from behind. The soldiers just couldn't dislodge the guerrillas from their position. Helicopters fired on the bridge spanning the river to protect the Macedonian flank and isolate the guerrillas. Radusha residents are still using the metal aqueduct to visit each other.

The Macedonians lacked adequate intelligence about the movements of the Albanian forces who were receiving regular support from Kosovo, where they also evacuated their wounded and dead. They were convinced that they were fighting against a detachment of professional guerrillas in Radusha. The *nomme de guerre* of the Albanian commander was well known on the Macedonian side, everyone called him "Teacher".

Rafis Aliti is a respected politician. He's number two in the Democratic Integration Party, created to replace the UCK. He used to go by the name of Mesusi, Albanian for "Teacher". Mesusi worked in the school in Radusha and when the war started he formed his students into a small detachment. Back then it would have been extremely ill advised for any Ukrainian to attempt to locate him but things have changes. The only problem is, getting into Radusha is still difficult.

We met Mesusi in Tetovo. "You want to know how many of our soldiers were killed during the attacks?" he asked. "You won't believe me when I tell you, none. Seven men were wounded, and one lost a hand. All of the combatants were my former students. When we started to form the detachment there were just 10 of them were involved. After a month, the number grew to over 400."

\* \* \* \*

I wanted to uncover the truth. Who were the pilots that flew the helicopters over Tetovo and Radusha? The official Macedonian version stated that they were Macedonians who had been trained at a military base in the US. But if this were the case it would have made more sense for the government to have also purchased the helicopters from the US. As one

Ukrainian diplomat told me in confidence, jobless Serb pilots were invited to Skopje in return for citizenship and a high salary. Macedonia haunted me.

Several months after the meeting with Lliri, I found myself in Sierra Leone. There the African sky belongs to Slavs – Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians. We spent a lot of time with the pilots in the air and on the ground, often sharing the same table. One of them told me, "The Macedonian pilots are no worse than us." His name was Colonel Igor Shandrygin. He was a pilot and instructor with experience in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Africa. He had served in Macedonia for six months. I hoped he could answer some still unanswered questions.

"Did you fire at Gajre?" I asked him. "There was such a rumour", he replied. "We also heard them. The Albanians said any Ukrainian pilot that flew missions over Macedonia would be found hanging from the blades of his own helicopter."

The helicopters flew to Skopje from Kosovo to transport men and cargo for KFOR, the UN peacekeeping force in Kosovo. It was in Macedonia that the transport and cargo helicopters turned into assault aircraft. In 1999, when KFOR started to put their forces into Kosovo, Ukraine supplied the coalition with a helicopter detachment. These

machines reached the midway base point in the pouring rain. By a strange twist of fate my group was located at a former tank ground near Skopje, which became a temporary ground for the helicopters. Two years later, we saw these machines once again, but this time they looked much more menacing. They housed large-calibre machine-guns and suspension brackets with missiles. The gunners had masks on their faces. A Macedonian officer explained that they were afraid of revenge from the Albanians. He never told us who these masked men were.

The Macedonian Prime Minister had come to the airport in Petrovec, where the helicopters from Kosovo had landed. But we were interested in the Ukrainian military, not Macedonian politicians. Several metres away from where the youthful prime-minister performed for the TV cameras, Colonel Shandrygin was preparing his for flight. Was he a member of the crew that flew the assaults?

I told the colonel about my first Albanian guide and his desire to throttle Ukrainians. "What if you were to meet similarly minded Albanians, eager to get their hands on Ukrainians who had served in Macedonia during the war?" I asked him. "I think that an ordinary man wouldn't be so aggressive", he said, dodging the question.

"But I mean guerrillas, not ordinary men."

"Guerrillas? I could deal with a guerrilla. When I was young I fought in Afghanistan. I can take care of myself."

"Do you feel hatred towards them, the Albanian guerrillas?" I asked.

"No, there's no hatred. War is about politics and we are soldiers."

On June 16, 2001, there was a helicopter attack against the village of Arachinovo, which had been occupied by some 500 UCK guerrillas. It was easy to judge from the skill of the pilots that they were seasoned flyers. American soldiers ferried the UCK on tourist buses out of the besieged village to safety. According to a Macedonian military source, some of the Albanians carried American passports. This information was never confirmed.

"Which helicopters were used to carry out flights in Arachinovo, Mi-8 or Mi-24?" I asked Colonel Shandrygin.

"I can't tell you for sure, I guess both. But I was gone by that time, so I can't tell you who it was that attacked Arachinovo. Whoever it was, they protected their own interests" he said.

I wondered what Igor would think if he were to share a table with Commandant Lliri. The 35 year old guerrilla had had enough men to capture the capital. "My brigade," said Lliri, "had 1,100 automatic weapons. Yes, I

could have taken take Skopje with those submachine-guns! But I didn't. Because we are men of goodwill and we want political dialogue. We want peace in Macedonia even though the Macedonians continued to provoke us. They had created paramilitary formations they're called Macedonian "Tigers", and in order to allow us complete disarmament we demand their dissolution tool."

"But the UCK is also paramilitary", I couldn't help interrupting.

The interpreter looked unwell as he translated my remark. "We are a people's army" Lliri replied. "We express the interests of all Albanian people. People trust me, and if they didn't, I would have never acquired such a high position."

I knew the Tigers. Their local commander uses the *nomme de guerre* Zuika. He told me that every man in the Slavic districts of Tetovo had one or two submachine-guns., and showed me two well-oiled Kalashnikovs. "This is for self-defence," insisted Zuika. "They all came from Kosovo after all. They don't need an uncontrolled border, that's it. I am accomplishing my constitutional duty to protect the country from aggression, the aggression of the Kosovar guerrillas. And NATO supports them. First we will remove NATO, and then put everything else in order."

Ali Ahmeti, a former UCK leader and the immediate boss of Lliri, told me "If

those little Macedonian brains even dare to think of revenge...If they force NATO to leave, we'll sort them out our own way. They're in the wrong. All Albanians will unite against them. There was some truth in what Ahmeti said. In the Albanian villages the UCK was thought of as a liberating army. Blood speaks louder than reason. Edmond Limani from the village of Arachinovo told me he would never be able to forgive the Slavs: "I don't know of any friendship that could exist between Albanians and Macedonians. We had war, and it's not over yet. I don't know how long this peace will last. Macedonian and Albanian children now attend different schools. There's no love lost between us."

Lliri agreed to talk to me not because he sympathises or even understands Ukrainian or Slavic concerns. We eventually located him through a Serb businessman from Skopje. He didn't do it for nothing. "Money can buy anything in this world", he kept on saying on the way to Tetovo.

The war is now waged in a different way. And it's virtually impossible for the Macedonians to win. The Albanian districts belong to former UCK leaders. There are local police, soldiers and prisons, where hostages are kept all within a few hundred metres of the guards who earnestly check passing cars for weapons. They don't want to give their names. They're afraid of retribution. But their silence is useless.

The former guerrillas have found ways of accessing information. "Our men are everywhere," said Lliri. "Even in the police. We have a network of informants that cooperate with us. But now the UCK is demobilised, so we are short of soldiers."

However strange it may seem, the Chief of Police in Tetovo is also short of men in this complicated time. The problems facing those charged with keeping the peace are immense. But the fear is, that should the peace collapse there will be plenty of men ready to fight again on both sides.

The concrete walls of Macedonia's housing blocks are scrawled with slogans. "Satarite za shiptarite!" they say, "Knife the Albanians". In the Albanian blocks, drawings on the walls show security force soldiers hanging from gallows. Some choose the knife, others the rope. But both prefer submachine-guns.

In total, 1,271 firearms were decommissioned during the second phase of "Essential harvest". Slightly more than the Muidinaljui warriors brought down to Brodest. Meanwhile, in nearby Kosovo, Ukrainian peacekeeping forces witnessed huge numbers of new weapons coming in from Macedonia. "In 2001 the weapon were being transported from Kosovo to Tetovo," a commander of the Ukrainian-Polish battalion, Viktor Ganushchak, told me. "Now they're coming back."

In Draikovtsy, in Kosovo, soldiers from the same battalion detained an Albanian driver smuggling mortar shells in the trunk of his car. But there are fears that the driver and his truck were merely used as a decoy to the distract attention of the soldiers while a larger consignment of weapons was smuggled across the border.

"It's possible, that a caravan of trucks or vans smuggled weapons across the border", says Ganushchak. "They're moving all sorts of hardware from Macedonia; brand-new sniper rifles, mortar shells... They move the stuff by horseback, in carts. Some even carry it by hand. We have detained about 50 men and about a hundred guns. We use our own informants here in Kosovo but it would be more effective to have them on the other side."

Ganushchak and I met in September 2001. A year later, I was surprised to find out during an informal conversation with another Ukrainian officer from KFOR, that the volume of weapon being smuggled into Macedonia hadn't dropped. Disarmament is not yet a reality.

"We don't want any civilians to die. But this is war, and casualties are inevitable," says Lliri. His bodyguards lower their eyes as if mourning the loss of innocent lives. "Are you saying that the war is not over yet?" I ask.

The interpreter pretends to have missed the question. He looks uneasy, afraid of the Commandant's possible

reaction. Lliri takes advantage of the pause and stands up. “Welcome to Macedonia, Ukrainian, but only if you’re not flying in on a helicopter.” He smiles and stretches his hand. It’s a soft, elusive handshake. He has perfectly manicured nails. His Amsterdam cut ducks behind the wide, black clad

backs of his security guards and he disappears through the restaurant door. I manage to get outside in time to see him climbing into a black Mercedes, the very one I saw someone remove a grenade launcher from just half an hour earlier. ¶



**USA**

**The Macedonian Crisis in the American Media**

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# The Macedonian Crisis in the American Media

By German Filkov

Led by the *New York Times*, the US media gave a vast amount of space to covering events in Macedonia in 2001. The larger, quality broadsheets, such as the *Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* covered the crisis using their own correspondents. Other mass papers with a mass circulation, such as *USA Today*, and smaller, local press relied on agency reports from Reuters and the Associated Press. Although the dominant American news magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*, provide limited coverage of global events these days, the Macedonian crisis figured prominently in their pages. Rather than defining the US coverage as “good” or “bad”, this analysis will focus on the objectivity of the reports provided – or lack thereof. In this regard, the most significant failures of the American coverage were: lack of balanced sources; insufficient use of authoritative sources; superficial reporting; maintaining western stereotypes of under-

developed countries; and attempting to relate the wars in Kosovo and Bosnia to the conflict in Macedonia.

## How did it start?

On March 17, four days after the first clashes in Tetovo, the Macedonian crisis appeared on the front page of *New York Times*, under the headline, *The West is alarmed as fighting erupts again in the Balkans*. The subhead read, *Macedonia in flames*. The article stated that, “Fierce fighting has broken out in this Balkan nation, which until now has escaped the ethnic carnage of Kosovo to the north.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, from the very beginning, the US media tried to place the conflict in a wider Balkan context by stating that, for example, “heavy fighting” threatened to “create a new front in the years of ethnic fighting in the Balkans...”<sup>2</sup> Or this from the respected *Christian*

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<sup>1</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 17, 2001. *West is Alarmed as Warfare Grows in Balkans Again*. *New York Times*. A1.

<sup>2</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels' Tenacity*. *New York Times*. A1.

*Science Monitor*: “As ethnic-Albanian rebels face off against government troops in northern Macedonia, there is a growing realization that unfinished business from the Kosovo conflict is fueling this new Balkan war.”<sup>3</sup> In fact many other reporters also tried to explain the Macedonian crisis in terms of what they had learned from the Kosovo crisis. “The insurgents are trying to claim parts of Macedonia that are overwhelmingly Albanian, and the population is quickly dividing between Slavs and Albanians, just as in Kosovo.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise on April 2, *Newsweek* reported, “Relations between the two ethnic groups have long been hair-trigger tense, much like the antipathy between the Serbs and Kosovar Albanians. For years Macedonia’s Albanian minority was denied basic rights, including use of their own language in schools and other institutions.”<sup>5</sup>

In the following analysis, a *New York Times* journalist draws another general assessment that dates from the time of Yugoslavia. “Like almost everything in the Balkans, the roots of the conflict in

Macedonia are complex... The former nation of Yugoslavia was a mix of Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Slovenes and Albanians... When Yugoslavia fell apart in the early 1990s, these groups began to compete inside new, smaller units, sparking violence, especially in the ethnic stew of Bosnia. In Macedonia, the southernmost of the new Balkan countries, this meant that Slavic Macedonians – Orthodox Christians with their own culture and language – were suddenly in charge. And while there was a peace, there was also little argument that the new Macedonian state and its constitution denied the largest minority group, the Albanians, full rights – to education, to recognition of their language, to jobs in the civil service. For 10 years, the Albanians, who are mostly Muslim, pushed for greater rights, but, they argue, with little success.”<sup>6</sup>

In stark contrast, just one month later on the day the Framework Agreement was signed, the same newspaper reported that Macedonia, “once considered a model for a multiethnic state,” had slowly, “fallen apart over

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<sup>3</sup> Peterson, Scott. March 27, 2001. *Unfinished Business in Balkans*. *Christian Science Monitor*. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 17, 2001. *West is Alarmed as Warfare Grows in Balkans Again*. *New York Times*. A1.

<sup>5</sup> Hammer, Joshua. April 2, 2001. *In the thick of it*. *Newsweek*. 32-33

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, Ian. July 7, 2001. *Cease-Fire in Macedonia Stops the Guns but not the Ethnic Distrust and Bitterness*. *New York Times*. A3.

its founding concept, that it was fundamentally meant for the majority, Macedonians mostly of Slavic descent.”<sup>7</sup> At the end of March the *Boston Globe* wrote: “Even if some of the Albanian fighters in the hills did come from Kosovo, and even if some are smugglers and drug runners, the reality is that many of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia feel they are the victims of discrimination and therefore support the insurgents.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Who is fighting, and what are they fighting for?**

At the beginning of the crisis the American media struggled to work out who the rebels were and what was actually happening on the ground. As *Time* magazine put it: “Exactly who “they” are and what ultimately they hope to achieve remain a mystery”.<sup>9</sup> “Some want improved opportunities for ethnic Albanians in a united Macedonia, while others seek to merge

with Kosovo. Still others want Albanian autonomy within Macedonia.”<sup>10</sup>

Of course in the first attempts to explain the situation, the rebels were linked with Kosovo. “The rebels are an offshoot of the Kosovo Liberation Army, known as the National Liberation Army”, the *New York Times* reported on March 27, 2001.<sup>11</sup> But several days earlier, in its first report on the crisis, the same newspaper had written: “NATO secretary general, Lord Robertson, said the alliance would not allow “a small number of extremists” to destabilize Macedonia.”<sup>12</sup> In an similar editorial, the *Buffalo News* quoted the EU foreign policy chief, Javier Solana as saying, “It would be a mistake to negotiate... The terrorists have to be isolated. All of us have to condemn and isolate them. Nothing can be achieved through violence.”<sup>13</sup>

And yet, from the second week of the conflict, the American newspapers began to publish detailed lists of

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<sup>7</sup> Fisher, Ian. August 14, 2001. *Macedonia Peace Signed, but Soon After, Artillery Booms*. *New York Times*. A3.

<sup>8</sup> March 27, 2001. *Macedonian Flames*. *Boston Globe*. A12

<sup>9</sup> Purvis, Andrew. April 2, 2001. *Rebel Hell*. *Time*. 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> Hammer, Joshua. April 2, 2001. *In the thick of it*. *Newsweek*. 32-33.

<sup>11</sup> Erlanger, Steven. March 27, 2001. *Macedonian Forces Consolidating Control of Hill Towns*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>12</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 17, 2001. *West is Alarmed as Warfare Grows in Balkans Again*. *New York Times*. A1.

<sup>13</sup> March 22, 2001. *Combat in Macedonia*. *Buffalo News*. B4.

demands from the rebels, along with information about who they were and what they fought for. This was followed by field stories with descriptions illustrating the reasons for the conflict and justifying the rebels' demands.

"The National Liberation Army and some of its commanders have demanded that equality for ethnic Albanians be included in constitution, that Albanian be made an official language in Macedonia, and that Albanians have representation in government and police structures. The Albanians make up between 25 and 30 percent of the population, and Macedonian Slavs, approximately 70 percent."<sup>14</sup>

"The rebels, who have taken the name National Liberation Army, say they are fighting to end oppression of the country's Albanian minority by the majority Slav population."<sup>15</sup>

There were often contradictory statements within the same articles, as in this example. The text below quotes an NLA member as saying, "We want Macedonian forces to withdraw from our territories. I do not hate anyone, honestly. I am fighting for the liber-

ation of my territory."<sup>16</sup> This statement was immediately followed by an explanation from the journalist that said, "Statements from the rebels and their supporters have emphasized that they do not want to change borders, and they respect Macedonia's territorial integrity. But Mr Ahmeti admitted that he would like to see ethnic Albanians – who are scattered throughout the region in Macedonia, Kosovo, southern Serbia, and Montenegro, as well as Albania – live together."<sup>17</sup> Strangely, although the statement includes the words "our territories", and "liberation of my territories", the journalist, concludes that the rebels respect the territorial integrity of Macedonia.

Once such interviews were exhausted as a source of copy, there followed a wave of statements from Albanian politicians in Macedonia, for example this one from Arben Xhaferi:

"Albanian politicians like Arben Xhaferi, who is in the government, are pushing for a change in the preamble to the constitution that makes Mace-

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<sup>14</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels' Tenacity*. *News York Times*. A4.

<sup>15</sup> March 21, 2001. *U.S. offering intelligence to Macedonian officials*. *St. Petersburg Times*. 12A.

<sup>16</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels' Tenacity*. *News York Times*. A4.

<sup>17</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels' Tenacity*. *News York Times*. A4

donians the primary people here; for the use of Albanian as a second state language; for a state-supported Albanian-language university; and for an Albanian-language state television channel.”<sup>18</sup>

## Field stories

Many attempts to use specific situations on the ground to explain the overall situation were handled unprofessionally. The following refers to an event that occurred in Tetovo on March 22, when the police killed two people who were trying to throw hand grenades. This event was used to illustrate the general fear of the ordinary citizens.

“‘It is a catastrophe’, Agram Iseni, 22, a law student, said of the shooting at the checkpoint. He has already stopped attending his university courses in Skopje, the capital, for fear of running into trouble at police checkpoints, he said. ‘Today’s killing will encourage young people to leave the city and join the guerillas in the wooded hills,’ he said. ‘Today it was those guys, tomorrow it may be me,’ he said.”<sup>19</sup>

As soon as the key demands of the Albanian rebels had been presented, US newspapers began publishing stories from the field supporting those demands. Daily updates were provided about the ethnic Albanian population during the conflict, however similar information about other Macedonians was very, very rare.

The education issue was seized on as another reason for the conflict. The following is from the *Los Angeles Times*.

“Even today, despite an affirmative action program, only about 9% of the students at Macedonia’s two state universities, which teach in the Macedonian language, are Albanian. Albanian students there complain of Macedonian professors who test them unfairly or elicit bribes for passing grades.”<sup>20</sup>

There were similar descriptions of the socio-economic situation in Macedonia.

“Widespread poverty in Macedonia’s post-communist economy helps provide a breeding ground for hate, officials say. The average wage is no

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<sup>18</sup> Erlanger, Steven. March 27, 2001. *Macedonian Forces Consolidating Control of Hill Towns*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>19</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 23, 2001. *Rising Violence Polarizes Macedonians*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>20</sup> Boudreaux, Richard. April 7, 2001. *College Rivalry in Macedonian City Divides Ethnic Albanians*. *Los Angeles Times*. A8.

more than \$150 a month; unemployment rates outside a few large cities can exceed 60 percent. Many in the Slav majority, whose fortunes were closely tied to failed state businesses, resent the wealth of many members of the ethnic Albanian minority, which became more entrepreneurial after being shut out of state jobs and also receive income from relatives abroad.”<sup>21</sup>

Even the description of the area in which five Albanians in Skopje were killed on August 7 was made with an eye to the country’s socio-economic development.

“The raid occurred in a poor area in the ethnic Albanian section of Skopje. It is a warren of alleys and narrow streets leading to small houses with corrugated iron roofs and cramped courtyards, where laundry is strung and herbs are grown in metal cans.”<sup>22</sup>

And here we have yet another attempt to describe the situation:

“Despite the recent lull in the fighting, Macedonia is unraveling. In many ways it’s a wonder it hasn’t happened sooner. Unlike Bosnia, where Muslims, Serbs and Croats lived and

worked together and even inter-married, the Slavs and Albanians of Macedonia have always coexisted separately and uneasily. The Albanians, making up about a third of the country, are persecuted in myriad ways (their unemployment rate is a staggering 60 percent, twice that of the Slavs; the Army and police top brass are all Slavs; access to education is highly inequitable). Most Slavs speak of Albanians in deeply racist terms. Albanian involvement in crime and heroin trafficking doesn’t help the country’s image much. In other words, once lit, this tinderbox has plenty in it to keep the fire burning.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Who fights against whom?**

The American media offered a vast palette of names for the two sides involved in the Macedonian conflict. As the crisis continued, some media began to change the nomenclature they employed. At the beginning of the crisis, the “ethnic-Albanian rebels”, “ethnic-Albanian fighters”, “guerillas”, “militants”, “extremists” and “separatists” were fighting against “the Macedonian police” and the “Mace-

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, R. Jeffrey. May 15, 2001. *Two Friends Stand Against Forces Dividing Macedonia*. *Washington Post*. A12

<sup>22</sup> Rubin, Alissa J. August 8, 2001. *Macedonian Police Kill 5 Separatists in Raid*. *Los Angeles Times*. A3

<sup>23</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. April 2, 2001. *Breathing Room in the Balkans*. *Newsweek*. 36.

donian army.” While “the ethnic-Albanian rebels” kept the same names during the crisis, the “the Macedonian police” and “the Macedonian army” later became “government soldiers” and “government forces.” One month before the end of the conflict, on July 25, the Associated Press reported: “...fighting between ethnic Albanian militants and government security forces.”<sup>24</sup>

Besides this question about who was fighting against whom, the American newspapers also used several terms for the conflict itself. Most frequently it was referred to as a series of “battles” and “riots” or as a “rebellion” or a “mutiny.” It was rarely referred to as a “war”. The word “war” was reserved for something that could happen in the future, such as “on the edge of a civil war” or “one step from war of enormous proportion.”

“Sasha Sofronieski and Remzi Ramadani...both fear they will end up fighting on opposing sides in a bloody street war between Macedonian Slavs and ethnic-Albanians.”<sup>25</sup>

Then in the fourth month of the crisis the *Washington Post* opinion section described the armed clashes in Mace-

donia as: “...a dirty little war between criminalized Albanian guerrilla gangs and a depressingly weak Macedonian government.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Notes to NATO, Western Europe, and the US**

A significant part of the analysis provided about the conflict was used to convey messages, mainly to the US government, most urging the US, NATO or the EU to play an active role. “It might be better for Europe, the Balkans, and the United States if President Bush did not abdicate from America’s position as an indispensable peacekeeper on the European continent.”<sup>27</sup>

At the beginning of the crisis, calling upon previous experience in the Balkans, the newspapers called on the US administration to take action swiftly.

“The crisis demands quick and decisive action, but on the political front more than the military one... Currently, NATO forces plan to try to cut off the supply of ethnic Albania reinforcements from within Kosovo while

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<sup>24</sup> AP. July 25, 2001. *Macedonia slides toward civil war.*

<sup>25</sup> Farnam, Arie. May 21, 2001. *Macedonians grow more radical.* *Christian Science Monitor.* 6.

<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, Robert D. June 29, 2001. *Why Macedonia Matters.* *Washington Post.* A37.

<sup>27</sup> March 27, 2001. *Macedonian Flames.* *Boston Globe.* A12.

Macedonian forces try to quell the insurgency within their own country. That's the right approach.”<sup>28</sup>

There was also this from Newsweek: “But NATO has to ask itself, what are its longer-term political goals? Like the Ottomans and Habsburgs before it, it is now the dominant power in the Balkans. Also like those other empires, it preserves peace among dissenting nationalities. But in the process NATO has become the principal obstacle standing in the way of the national aspirations of virtually all its subject populations... And now the Albanians of Macedonia might well see NATO as standing between them and their desire for greater freedom... NATO should begin to think seriously about giving power to any community that wants it — in Bosnia, in Kosovo — and perhaps privately urge the Macedonian government to do the same. The Albanian enclave in Macedonia could easily be detached into its own entity. Then if the Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia want to stay separate or join hands, it's their choice... As long as it is done through negotiations and in peace, what difference does it make how many new states arise? All we need is a few new chairs at the United

Nations... NATO is now primarily a Balkan policing and reconstruction organization. The point is not that it needs an exit. The point is that it needs a strategy.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Introduction of “good” and “bad” through stereotypes**

From the beginning of the war, descriptions of “typical” Macedonians and Albanians were plentiful. The following extract from the *New York Times* refers to Sadri Ahmeti, a 28-year old spokesman for the rebels. “Mr Ahmeti is typical of the type of men taking up arms. He is from Tetovo and at the age of 16 was imprisoned for two years for painting the words “Kosovo Republic” on walls around the city in the Macedonian capital of Skopje. A trained teacher, he had no job and went to fight in Kosovo.”<sup>30</sup>

The descriptions of Macedonians are less direct, most publications preferring to portray them as seen through the eyes of their Albanian compatriots. ““You know the Slavs’, an old man named Azem told me. ‘They’re trying to destroy us’”.<sup>31</sup> In fact, there is not a single direct quote from any

<sup>28</sup> March 22, 2001. *Combat in Macedonia*. *Buffalo News*. B4.

<sup>29</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. April 2, 2001. *Breathing Room in the Balkans*. *Newsweek*. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels’ Tenacity*. *New York Times*. A4

<sup>31</sup> Hammer, Joshua. April 2, 2001. *In the thick of it*. *Newsweek*. 32-33.

Macedonian source in this entire *Newsweek* article.

The following description clearly divides the two sides to the conflict into “goodies” and “baddies”.

“We want the status we deserve. This is all we want. How democratic are Macedonian Slavs?’ Mr Ahmeti said. ‘I am sure if they were more democratic we would not have so many problems’.”<sup>32</sup>

A similar description was given by Bekir Shabedini, from Romanovce.

“There is a little bit of everything. We have Albanians, Macedonians, Serbs, Turks’. If people try, this village could be an example for good things’, he added. ‘If Macedonians don’t want that, this village could explode’.”<sup>33</sup>

In the following example, from the same article, citizens from both ethnic groups, the Macedonian and the Albanian, are quoted. Lidija, who did not want her full name to be used, says: “Three months ago I wouldn’t have believed it, but now I say that the only good Albanian is a dead Albanian.

I am a woman, but even I am prepared get a gun and fight for my country.”

Mr Ramadani, an unemployed teacher who decided to join to the NLA, says: “What else can I do?’ he asks, spreading his hands. ‘I have no work.’”<sup>34</sup>

A similar article using balanced sources but with a clear indication as to which group should be considered the “good” and which the “bad” was given by the *Los Angeles Times*. Quotes from two citizens of Gostivar were presented. Nasif Selimi refers to his son who had just joined the NLA, saying: “He came to me and said, ‘Father, I have no more friends here – they have all joined the NLA. I am going too’”.

Marijana Velickovski says: “I am scared. I don’t know why, but I am scared and I am ashamed of how Macedonian people are behaving”.<sup>35</sup>

This kind of ham fisted categorisation became more common during the second half of the crisis when “typical” members of the Albanian community were increasingly described as being

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<sup>32</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels’ Tenacity*. *News York Times*. A4.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher, Ian. July 7, 2001. *Cease-Fire in Macedonia Stops the Guns but not the Ethnic Distrust and Bitterness*. *New York Times*. A3.

<sup>34</sup> Farnam, Arie. May 21, 2001. *Macedonians grow more radical*. *Christian Science Monitor*. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Rubin, Alissa J. August 3, 2001. *A Battleground With Unmarked Front Lines*. *Los Angeles Times*. A1.

unemployed and poor, in spite of the fact that almost all of those referred to were students or educated people. If they are not unemployed or impoverished they were instead modest and peace loving subsistence farmers. The Macedonian population was described as privileged and educated. Those quoted were employed in good jobs and made predominantly nationalist statements.

Without exception, the rebels were portrayed in a sympathetic if not positive light. "The NLA soldiers appear well dressed, polite and clam... They shake hands politely and offer their guests Coca-Cola, which is surprisingly cold, even though there is no electricity on this side of the line".<sup>36</sup> Several reports also described ordinary citizens, particularly farmers, who had in one way or another suffered as a result of the conflict. "...A farmer from Opae named Salih, one of two brothers badly beaten by the police this week, sat hollow-eyed with fear considering a future without a home or an income. He recounted how he had gone to tend his cow at

dawn and been caught by the police. With four others, he said, he was beaten and interrogated while blindfolded and handcuffed for five days, before being dumped in the countryside on Tuesday miles from home... Recovering today at his sister's house, Salih said he saw television news footage that showed that his house had been destroyed by a shell."<sup>37</sup>

The following examples continue in a similar vein.

"Mr. Isufi's extended family, all shepherds, watched two of their houses burn in the shelling and many livestock die, he said. His brother Nexhmedin said he had narrowly escaped being killed when tanks shelled the hills where he was out with the sheep. He counted 54 sheep killed, before running back home."<sup>38</sup>

"Fadil Dehari, a 30-year-old Albanian from the town, looked up at the smoke from the main square in Tetovo. 'I think it's my house burning', he said as Katyusha rockets fired from a nearby hill fell into the town. He and his family left the house, built by his father, in March when fighting in area began."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Rubin, Alissa J. August 3, 2001. *A Battleground With Unmarked Front Lines*. Los Angeles Times. A1.

<sup>37</sup> Gall, Carlotta. May 18, 2001. *A Trail of Misery as Macedonia Fights Albanian Insurgency*. New York Times. A8.

<sup>38</sup> Gall, Carlotta. May 26, 2001. *Ethnic Albanians Flee Drive By Macedonia Against Rebels*. New York Times. A6.

<sup>39</sup> Fisher, Ian. June 26, 2001. *U.S. Troops Escort Rebels to Safety Inside Macedonia*. New York Times. A11.

## Description of politicians

The same approach was used to divide politicians into those that were to be considered “good” and those that were to be considered “bad.” Quoting western sources during the peace talks, the *Washington Post* reported as follows. “It’s a tragedy’... The Macedonians get almost everything they want and give up very little in return....’ At a meeting of political leaders and western mediators today, ethnic Albanian leader Arben Xhaferi walked out after listening to political attacks on himself and his community by Macedonian officials, sources said.”<sup>40</sup>

When it comes to descriptions of specific politicians in Macedonia, the DPA leader, Arben Xhaferi and the former Prime Minister, Ljubco Georgievski made the most frequent appearances. A few references to President, Boris Trajkovski, former Interior Minister Ljube Boskovski and the former rebel leader Ali Ahmeti were also made.

Ljubco Georgievski was always portrayed in a negative light as a hardliner. “...Yet Mr. Georgievski is known to have little patience with Albanian demands and has repeatedly called for a military solution.”<sup>41</sup> During the negotiations he was introduced as a “wild card...”,<sup>42</sup> on whom everything depended, but he was also “...the most hawkish Slav politician in the leadership...”<sup>43</sup>.

By contrast, Xhaferi was portrayed in a positive light, as a moderate politician and the best hope for peace. He was also the most quoted politician during the conflict.

“Arben Xhaferi, who is Macedonia’s top Albanian politician and best hope for peaceful reform, is already growing snappish.”<sup>44</sup>

“Since the guns erupted, more than a month ago, he has been pleading with all three sides – for the rebels to back off, the government to convene talks on bettering the status of minorities and the west to facilitate those negotiations and help make any agreement stick.”<sup>45</sup>

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40 Finn, Peter. July 19, 2001. *Peace Talks in Macedonia Appear to Be Near Collapse*. *Washington Post*. A20.

41 Gall, Carlotta. June 20, 2001. *Negotiations with Rebels In Macedonia At a Standstill*. *New York Times*. A7.

42 Gall, Carlotta. June 15, 2001. *Macedonia Seeks NATO Troops to Help Disarm Albanian Rebels*. *New York Times*. A7.

43 Gall, Carlotta. June 23, 2001. *Macedonia Launches an Offensive Against Albanian Rebels*. *New York Times*. A3.

44 Purvis, Andrew. April 2, 2001. *Rebel Hell*. *Time*. 30-31.

Elsewhere, Xhaferi was presented as a typical Albanian who had suffered alongside his people. "Like many Albanians here, Xhaferi has been hardened by suffering. His late parents, both tailors, were harassed by police, who repeatedly seized their sewing machines during the communist era".<sup>46</sup>

President Trajkovski was generally referred to as a moderate politician, although he was sometimes accused of siding with the Macedonians. However, descriptions of and quotations from him are significantly shorter and fewer than those from Xhaferi and Georgievski. The *New York Times* for example, described him as, "...the shaken President, who is considered a moderate..."<sup>47</sup>, and the *Washington Post* referred to him as, "President

Trajkovski, who has gained a reputation as a moderate in the Slavic camp..."<sup>48</sup>

Ali Ahmeti puts in more of an appearance during the second half of the crisis, when he is at first portrayed in a negative light. "The rebel leader, Ali Ahmeti, a 42-year-old former political prisoner, is the other doubtful element in the peace process."<sup>49</sup> Later however, Ahmeti comes to be seen as a positive force in the peace process. "From what we have seen so far Ali Ahmeti is a reliable partner who honors his word", said Hans-Jorg Eiff, the NATO representative in Skopje."<sup>50</sup>

There were also descriptions of the former interior minister, Ljube Boskovski, who was, without exception, portrayed as a "...hard-liner who would prefer to end the fighting by using military tactics against the guerillas rather than relying on a peace deal."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Boudreaux, Richard. March 30, 2001. *Macedonia Near Ruin, Albanian Politician Says*. *Los Angeles Times*. A14.

<sup>46</sup> Boudreaux, Richard. March 30, 2001. *Macedonia Near Ruin, Albanian Politician Says*. *Los Angeles Times*. A14.

<sup>47</sup> Fisher, Ian. July 7, 2001. *Cease-Fire in Macedonia Stops the Guns but Not the Ethnic Distrust and Bitterness*. *New York Times*. A3.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, Daniel. August 9, 2001. *Macedonians Agree To Sign Peace Deal*. *Washington Post*. A01.

<sup>49</sup> Gall, Carlotta. June 15, 2001. *Macedonia Seeks NATO Troops to Help Disarm Albanian Rebels*. *New York Times*. A7.

<sup>50</sup> Gall, Carlotta. July 23, 2001. *Rebels Secure a Base in Macedonian Town*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>51</sup> Rubin, Alissa J. August 8, 2001. *Macedonian Police Kill 5 Separatists in Raid*. *Los Angeles Times*. A3.

## Slavs and Slavic language

One of the most debatable elements in the reporting of the crisis was the frequent description of Macedonians as the “Slavic part of the Macedonians,” “Macedonian Slavs”, or simply the “Slavic part of the population.” The Albanian population was most often called “ethnic Albanians”, but rarely “Macedonian Albanians”.

One of the main recommendations for diversity reporting is not to label nations and ethnic groups with names that they themselves do not use and which are unacceptable to them. With the branding of the Macedonians as ethnic Slavs or just Slavs, the American media displayed a worrying degree of subjectivity in their reporting. The following is from the *New York Times*.

“‘Everyone is scared to say a wrong word,’ says Ruzica Mojic, 38, a Slavic restaurant worker. The Slavs in Tetovo, Macedonia’s second largest city, represent only some 20 percent of the city’s population and feel more insecure amid an increasingly resentful Albanian majority, despite

the heavy presence of predominantly Slavic troops.”<sup>52</sup>

There were practically no direct quotations containing the terms “Slavs”, “Slavic part of the population”, “Slav from Tetovo” etc, which indicates that the people in Macedonia do not use these terms themselves. Instead, all sentences in which the word “Slav” is used are presented in reported speech. The following example paraphrases a quote from the writer Meto Jovanovski. “Meto Jovanovski, a Slav who worked for seven years for Helsinki Human Rights Watch in Skopje...added that Slavs had also suffered at the hands of the police.”<sup>53</sup>

This oversimplified categorisation was also extended to describe all elements of the language and culture of the Macedonian majority. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to “Slavic-language newspapers...”<sup>54</sup> Of course the phrase “Slavic language” is used in this case to refer to what is in fact the Macedonian language. Such over simplification is not only insensitive but it also displays a remarkable

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<sup>52</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 23, 2001. *Rising Violence Polarizes Macedonians*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>53</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 23, 2001. *Rising Violence Polarizes Macedonians*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>54</sup> Boudreaux, Richard. March 27, 2001. *Both Sides in Macedonia Hold Out Hope for Peaceful End*. *Los Angeles Times*. A6.

lack of even the most basic knowledge of the region in which at least seven Slavic languages are spoken.

Throughout the conflict, few of the reports I have analysed used the term “Macedonians” and those that did appeared just before the end of the crisis. On July 30, the *New York Times* used the term on several occasions, although in the same text “Slav Macedonians” and “Macedonian Slavs” were also mentioned.

“On Saturday, the government accompanied about 350 Macedonians back to three villages, including Tearce... ‘Look what is happening’, said a 63-year-old Macedonian woman in Tearce, who would not give her name.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Mistakes with numbers**

The American media can also be criticised for its frequent failure to get the fact rights.

The *Christian Science Monitor*

reports: “Sofronieski must serve two years in the military after graduation, but this doesn’t bother him. ‘Many guys have volunteered to join the Army,’ he says. “If the situation gets worse, I would have to stop studying and go to fight.”<sup>56</sup> In fact in 2001, military service in Macedonia lasted for nine months. It is not clear in this case where the number of two years came from.

More serious were the frequent mistakes made in quantifying the various ethnic groups in Macedonia. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote, “This country’s population of 2 million is roughly one-third ethnic Albanian and two-thirds ethnic Macedonian Slav”.<sup>57</sup>

But the *New York Times* suggested, “The Albanians make up between 25 and 30 percent of the population, and Macedonian Slavs, approximately 70 percent.”<sup>58</sup>

The existence of other ethnic groups who were neither Albanian nor Macedonian was never mentioned. In fact, in most cases there was no room

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<sup>55</sup> Fisher, Ian. July 30, 2001. *Despite Truce and Talks, Pessimism Spreads in Macedonia*. *New York Times*. A3

<sup>56</sup> Farnam, Arie. May 21, 2001. *Macedonians grow more radical*. *Christian Science Monitor*. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Holley, David. May 29, 2001. *Fear Grows That Macedonia Strife may Hit Capital*. *Los Angeles Times*. A3.

<sup>58</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 20, 2001. *On the Front in Macedonia: A Show of Rebels’ Tenacity*. *New York Times*. A4.

left for anyone else in a population 100% of which was made up of Macedonians and Albanians. Also, the fact that the figures provided were at best approximate, especially when referring to the number of Albanians, was not highlighted. However, it should be said that some guesses did correspond to the results of the census. "Macedonia's ethnic Albanian minority, which makes up at least 23 percent of the country's population of 2 million".<sup>59</sup>

The following examples were furthest from both the official and approximate numbers. "Slavs are roughly two-thirds of the Macedonian population of 1.8 million..."<sup>60</sup>, the *Washington Post* reports. The *New York Times*, explaining the complexity of this issue, reported that: "...For people who have lived side by side for hundreds of years, and for decades in the multi-ethnic socialist state of Yugoslavia, there is an extraordinary disparity in their views of each other's situation. It begins with different views of the

population ratios. Macedonian Slavs say they make up 70 percent of the population and the Albanians between 25 and 22 percent. Albanians claim they represent anything from 30 percent to 47 percent. The truth is somewhere in the middle..."<sup>61</sup>

Over a period of three days, the same newspaper also published two different figures referring to the numbers of refugees. Both figures were presented as established facts. On July 2, the *New York Times* reported: "Some 100,000 people, mostly ethnic Albanian villagers, have been displaced since the conflict erupted. Albanians have gone abroad, while Macedonians have moved to the capital and eastern villages where they feel safer. More than 70,000 Albanians have gone to live with relatives and friends in neighboring Kosovo."<sup>62</sup> On July 5, the same newspaper wrote: "In the last few months, 68,000 Albanians have fled Macedonia, most to Kosovo."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Finn, Peter. August 14, 2001. *Peace Deal Signed in Macedonia*. *Washington Post*. A01.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, R. Jeffrey. May 12, 2001. *Macedonians Agree On 4-Party Government*. *Washington Post*. A20.

<sup>61</sup> Gall, Carlotta. March 23, 2001. *Rising Violence Polarizes Macedonians*. *New York Times*. A6.

<sup>62</sup> Gall, Carlotta. July 2, 2001. *Four Villages Are Seized By the Rebels in Macedonia*. *New York Times*. A8.

<sup>63</sup> Fisher, Ian. July 5, 2001. *Macedonia Peace Talks Are Revived, but the Fighting Rages On*. *New York Times*. A9.

Finally, one further comparison illustrates an obvious mistake. The *New York Times* referred to Tetovo as a “city of 80,000 people...”<sup>64</sup>, while the *Los Angeles Times* described a “...city of 200,000 people, unofficial capital of the country’s Albanian community,”<sup>65</sup>. The difference between these two numbers is 120,000 people, or 6% of the total population of Macedonia.

### **Lessons**

Bearing in mind that this analysis is intended to be a critical overview of US media coverage of the Macedonian crisis, it can be concluded that the American public was occasionally misinformed about certain situations and events.

It seems clear that in the future, greater care should be taken to provide more in depth reporting that presents a more balanced view of the situation. Numbers must be verified through consultation with reliable sources and facts cross-referenced, especially on matters that are known to be controversial. Greater respect for national sensitivities should also be a key element in the coverage of any similar crises. This certainly does not mean that events should not be placed within a regional context, but that contextualization must not be used to oversimplify or reinforce regional stereotypes.

To conclude, I hope that this analysis and its recommendations will be viewed as an attempt to raise the standard of journalism across the board. ¶

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<sup>64</sup> Fisher, Ian. July 27, 201. *Macedonia Tension Eases Slightly as Talks Are to Restart*. *New York Times*. A8.

<sup>65</sup> Boudreaux, Richard. April 7, 2001. *College Rivalry in Macedonia City Divides Ethnic Albanians*. *Los Angeles Times*. A8.

The book *Macedonia: The Conflict and The Media* is a result of the crosscutting project launched by the South East European Network for Professionalization of the Media (SEENPM) and the Balkan Human Rights Network (BHNR). The project: *Media Coverage of the Macedonian Conflict* was implemented jointly by the Macedonian Institute for Media (member of SEENPM) and the Association for Democratic Initiatives (member of BHNR).

The violent interethnic conflicts that erupted during the past decade in the former Yugoslavia have been entangled with an unprecedented involvement of the media, both locally and internationally. The interethnic military conflict in Macedonia once more proved that people who incite interethnic hate and atrocities--similarly to what happened during previous conflicts--turned out to have tremendous impact and control on the media.

The main objective of this publication was to contribute to the improvement of the quality of newsgathering and dissemination in times of conflict.

This book contains the personal views of 14 domestic and foreign journalists on the media coverage of the conflict in Macedonia in 2001. The articles present the experiences of journalists who covered the conflict in Macedonia and in-depth analyses of the media role during the crisis.

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