

THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT IN MACEDONIA: SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION OR PRELUDE TO CONFLICT?¹

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Introduction

After decades of ethnonational tensions between Macedonians and Albanians, armed conflict broke out between Macedonian Government forces and the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA), a paramilitary group, in early 2001. Initially, it was difficult to determine the goals of the NLA as they varied widely from one “commander” to the next, ranging from outright independence, union with Kosovo or Albania, autonomy within a ‘federal’ Macedonia and greater collective rights within the existing Macedonian state.

Eventually, with the assistance of the European Union representative, Francois Leotard, the NLA focussed its goals on improved collective rights within the existing Macedonian state. This became the basis for the Framework Agreement, which was reluctantly agreed to by the two largest Macedonian political parties and the two largest Albanian political parties, under pressure from the United States and the European Union.² Following this, the Framework Agreement was quickly incorporated into the Macedonian Constitution as an amendment without public consultation and gradually implemented through various legislative reforms.

Ten years on, the ‘international community’ has lauded it as a model for conflict resolution. However, it can be argued that it has failed in its stated objectives in that relations between the two

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² A great deal of this reluctance was due to the Framework Agreement dismissing some of the core issues important to both communities, which are outside the scope of this paper.

groups have become further strained, the two communities have become more segregated and fundamental issues of importance to both communities have remained unresolved, leaving open the possibility for further armed conflict.

The Framework Agreement and its Impact

The Framework Agreement was signed on 13 August 2001. The authors of this agreement began from the presupposition that the conflict was the result of Albanians been denied certain collective political and cultural rights and that enshrining these rights into the Macedonian constitution and Macedonian legislation would resolve ongoing conflict between them and the Macedonian majority. The overriding objective was to ensure the territorial integrity of the Macedonian state, while integrating the Albanians into the Macedonian political community.

The Framework Agreement covers five issues, all pertaining to the rights of minority groups that account for 20 per cent or more of the total population in the country as a whole or at the municipal level. In reality, only the Albanian community meets this threshold nationally, while the Turkish community does so in two municipalities.³ The Framework Agreement includes agreement on the following:

- local self-government;
- proportional employment in public bodies;
- parliamentary veto powers;
- minority languages; and
- minority group identity.⁴

Local Self-Government

Camille Monteux notes that most arguments in favour of decentralisation in ethnonational states “centre on the ability to find a mechanism to distribute political power among the different segments of the society in an equal manner that is perceived as legitimate and just by the various factions”.⁵ The justifications for decentralisation include arguments that it limits the central authority through the redistribution of formal power, aims to enhance minority group participation

³ Centar Zupa and Plasnica in western Macedonia.

⁴ *Framework Agreement*, Sections 3-7, accessed 1 February, 2010, <http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2001/CDL%282001%29104-e.asp>.

⁵ Camille Monteux, “Decentralisation: The New Delusion of Ethnic Conflict Resolutions?”, *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 8:2 (2006): 164.

through enhancing their weight in the decision-making process to protect them from a so-called ‘dictatorship of the majority’, and it allows groups to deal with local issues at the local level.⁶

Monteux then counters these claims by arguing that decentralisation on an ethnonational basis, “reinforces and legitimises ethnic divisions instead of limiting conflicting antagonisms between groups”.⁷ Any new territorial divisions resulting from decentralisation will “inevitably create new numerical minorities which in turn will generate dissatisfaction towards the new political settlement”.⁸ Further, Monteux argues, devolution of too many powers from the central government to ethnically homogeneous territories could increase demands for succession.⁹

Increased decentralisation and the related re-demarcation of municipal boundaries has perhaps been one of the most controversial elements of the Framework Agreement, particularly for the Macedonian people. Although local self-government was supported in-principle by all Macedonian citizens regardless of ethnonationality or religion, the basis on which it was implemented fuelled suspicion against Albanian intentions and anger towards the Macedonian political elite for what was essentially seen as treason.

Rather than promote economically sustainable municipalities regardless of their ethnonational and religious composition,¹⁰ Macedonian and Albanian political elites conspicuously drew up new boundaries based solely along ethnonational lines, consolidating their own power bases in the process and further segregating the two communities politically and culturally. The entire process lacked adherence to basic principles of transparency and accountability and involved only a small circle of political elites from the ruling Macedonian and Albanian parties.¹¹

The fact that the demarcation of municipal boundaries failed to take into account local government efficiency and economic sustainability, is demonstrated in recent surveys. For example, nearly one-third of respondents to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study stated that they believe their local mayor and municipal council is inefficient.¹² In relation to the failures of the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 165.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ It should be noted that this in itself does not promote improved inter-ethnonational relations.

¹¹ Kamelia Dimitrova, “Municipal Decisions on the Border of Collapse: Macedonian Decentralisation and the Challenges of Post-Ohrid Democracy”, *Southeast European Politics* 5:2-3(December 2004): 174.

¹² Dimitar Eftimoski et al, *National Human Development Report 2004 – Macedonia* (United Nations Development Program, 2004), 103.

mayor, 34 per cent believe they are a result of residents' interests not being a priority.¹³ Further, half of all respondents stated that they are never informed of opportunities for direct participation in the governance of their municipality,¹⁴ while an equal number of respondents also felt that municipal council corruption existed.¹⁵ Another UNDP report notes that local governments are marred by a series of deficiencies relating to administrative capacity, transparency and corruption.¹⁶

Kreci and Ymeri, two Albanian academics from the South-East European University in Macedonia, note that there was an increase in the number of municipalities that are dominated by a single ethnonational group.¹⁷ For example, 93 per cent of all Macedonians in the country now live in a municipality where they constitute a majority.¹⁸ Similarly, 79 per cent of all Albanians now live in a municipality where they constitute a majority.¹⁹ In the case of the Albanians, this is an increase of 10 percentage points compared with the previous municipal boundaries.²⁰

It appears that ethnonational segregation since the implementation of the Framework Agreement is becoming institutionalised, particularly in the education system, where many schools in ethnonationally mixed municipalities hold classes in shifts. Here classes for Macedonian and non-Albanian minority students are held separately from classes for Albanian students.²¹ The purpose of separate classes has largely been to avoid physical fights between Macedonian and Albanian students,²² though many parents have also refused to allow their children to study together.²³ Even in schools where students attend ethnonationally mixed classes, "separation and lack of communication between different ethnic groups is the norm during breaks and extracurricular activities".²⁴ In some cases, entire schools have been physically separated along ethnonational lines, including the school administration, teachers and parents' councils.²⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje, *Decentralisation Survey 2009* (OSCE, December 2009), 15.

¹⁶ Awa Dabo et al, *Local Governance, peace building and state building in post-conflict settings* (United Nations Development Program, 2010), 13.

¹⁷ Veli Kreci & Bekim Ymeri, "The Impact of Territorial Re-Organisational Policy Interventions in the Republic of Macedonia", *Local Government Studies* 36:2 (2010): 275-276.

¹⁸ Ibid., 279.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Merle Vetterlein, "The Influence of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on the Educational Policy of the Republic of Macedonia" (paper presented at the 8th Annual Kokkalis Graduate Student Workshop, February 3, 2006): 16.

²² Ibid.

²³ Nadege Ragaru, *Macedonia: Between Ohrid and Brussels* (Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, September 2008), 24.

²⁴ Merle Vetterlein, "The Influence of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on the Educational Policy of the Republic of Macedonia", 16.

²⁵ Ibid.

A study completed by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on student attitudes towards ethnonational ‘others’ revealed that few Macedonian and Albanians students expressed positive feelings towards each other. Overall, only 13 per cent of Macedonian respondents felt positively towards their Albanian counterparts,²⁶ whereas 33 per cent of Albanian respondents felt the same towards Macedonians.²⁷ The report found large regional disparities, whereby respondents in ethnonationally mixed towns such as Struga, Gostivar, Tetovo and Skopje were more likely to have negative feelings for ethnonational “others”, while the opposite was true in towns dominated by Macedonians.²⁸ According to the report, students of ethnonationally mixed towns were much less likely to have contact with ethnonational “others”, preferring to socialise within their own community.²⁹

As a result, there is a growing trend where students belonging to minority groups, and in particular Albanian students, are not learning the Macedonian language and even resenting having to study the language of the ‘other’.³⁰ It is likely that this trend is also influenced by the newly acquired municipal powers under the Framework Agreement, whereby local authorities have more flexibility in developing their own curriculum. For example, Vetterlein reports that some Albanian teachers only speak between 1-4 hours per week in Macedonian to their students,³¹ hardly enough to gain proficiency. Interestingly, 65 per cent of respondents to an OSCE survey on decentralisation believe that the influence of politics on education has either remained the same or increased since the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the new laws on decentralisation.³²

The 2004 law on decentralisation and the law on the redistribution of municipal boundaries were strongly contested by the overwhelming majority of Macedonians.³³ A total of 41 local referendums took place in relation to the redistribution of municipal boundaries and all had rejected the new demarcations. However, the coalition government, consisting of former communists and the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), born out of the NLA, declared these local

²⁶ This was as low as 2.6 per cent in Struga, see OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, *Age Contact Perceptions: How Schools Shape Relations Between Ethnicities* (OSCE, January 2010), 10.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Merle Vetterlein, “The Influence of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on the Educational Policy of the Republic of Macedonia”, 16.

³¹ Ibid., fn. 55.

³² OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje, *Decentralisation Survey 2009*, 65

³³ Zoran Ilievski & Dane Taleski, “Was the EU’s Role in Conflict Management in Macedonia a Success?”, *Ethnopolitics* 8:3 (2009): 361.

democratic plebiscites unbinding.³⁴ A national referendum was also held in November 2004, however, it failed owing to low voter turnout (it did not meet the required participation rate of 50 per cent). This was a result of strong state pressure on citizens not to vote, including threats, intimidation and abuse.³⁵ In addition, there was an element of international manipulation, with the United States finally recognising Macedonia's state name three days prior to the referendum as a 'sweetener' for Macedonians not to participate in the vote. Of those that did vote, 94 per cent rejected the revised municipal boundaries.³⁶

The results of decentralisation over the past 10 years have been viewed by Macedonians, in general, as an exercise in carving out territory where Albanians would compromise a majority.³⁷ This is largely seen among Macedonians as a betrayal by their own political elite that will eventually lead to a Kosovo-style scenario where Albanians will have a defined territorial unit with administrative and institutional structures that they can use to justify secession from the Macedonian state.³⁸ On the other hand, Albanians hold the view that the decentralisation process did not go far enough, and that further power needs to be devolved to the local level.³⁹ It seems that even though the Framework Agreement explicitly rejected territorial solutions for ethnonationalist conflict as one of its basic principles, decentralisation has effectively accomplished just that.

Proportional Employment in State Bodies

Under the Framework Agreement, Macedonian politicians agreed to achieve proportional employment of minority communities in all central and local public bodies and at all levels of employment within such bodies.⁴⁰ In particular, the police force was signalled out as an area of

³⁴ This was a violation of Article 5 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which states that "changes in local authority boundaries shall not be made without prior consultation of the local communities concerned, possibly by means of a referendum where this is permitted by statute", see Council of Europe, *European Charter of Local Self-Government*, accessed 19 January, 2011, <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/treaties/html/122.htm>.

³⁵ It should be noted that polls leading up to the referendum consistently indicated high voter turnout with strong opposition to the new municipal boundaries, see Risto Karajkov, "Macedonia's 2001 ethnic war: Offsetting conflict. What could have been done but was not?", *Conflict, Security & Development* 8:4 (2008): 483.

³⁶ Zoran Ilievski & Dane Taleski, "Was the EU's Role in Conflict Management in Macedonia a Success?", 362.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 361-62.

³⁸ According to Brunnbauer, many Macedonians fear that the Albanians, "once in control of local governments with more powers, [will] start to sever the links to the central government, eventually pulling away from the Macedonian state", see Ulf Brunnbauer, "The Implementation of the Ohrid Agreement: Ethnic Macedonians Resentments", *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 1 (2002): 17.

³⁹ Jenny Engstrom, "Multi-ethnicity or Bi-nationalism? The Framework Agreement and the Future of the Macedonian State", *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 1(2002): 17.

⁴⁰ *Framework Agreement*, Section 4.2. The Framework Agreement actually states "equitable representation". However, "equitable" was never defined and in practice the Macedonian Government is recruiting state employees on a proportional system based on the percentage that each minority groups represents of the total population.

priority, based on Albanian arguments that they could no longer trust the institution unless they themselves were equitably represented.⁴¹

Development of recruitment targets and planning to ensure their gradual fulfilment has been largely ignored and instead a non-transparent and clientelist practice of recruiting high numbers of public servants, particularly Albanians, irrespective of the needs of the public administration and other state institutions has been undertaken.⁴² This approach has ensured that public servants from minority communities, the vast majority being Albanians, now account for 29 per cent of the total workforce.⁴³ However, even though proportional employment has been largely met for the Albanian community, there have been numerous reports of serious deficiencies in the competence of employees and the mechanisms of employment. These include:

- public servants failing to meet the selection criteria;⁴⁴
- public servants being employed through party affiliation;⁴⁵
- hundreds of these employees being requested to remain at home on full salary because of a lack of work and/or office space;⁴⁶ and
- many unable to speak the Macedonian language, making it impossible for them to undertake their normal duties.⁴⁷

Such practices have only incited further tensions between Macedonians who consider the practice as highly corrupt and a waste of public funds, and Albanians who consider state employment as an entitlement under the Framework Agreement, reflecting their newly found status as a co-constitutive people.⁴⁸ The European Union, which is the key international driver behind the implementation of the Framework Agreement through Macedonia's candidature for membership, certainly has not helped the situation. It initially criticised the Macedonian Government for not progressing this reform quickly enough and continually demanded that sanctions be established for

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² European Commission, *Macedonia: 2010 Progress Report*, 22, accessed 24 January, 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/progress_reports/index_en.htm.

⁴³ Figures as at December 2009 and increasing, see Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁵ European Commission, *Macedonia: 2008 Progress Report*, 20, accessed 24 January, 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/progress_reports/index_en.htm.

⁴⁶ Katica Cangova, *Koj gi odobruva ramkovnite vrabotuvanja?*, Utrinski Vesnik, 2 February 2010, accessed 24 January, 2011 <http://www.utrinski.com.mk/?ItemID=4A26DAAFB4815640911F608FC4DD3929>.

⁴⁷ Toni Angelovski, *Na "Ramkovnite" im trepaat preveduvaci*, Vreme, 14 August 2009.

⁴⁸ The new Preamble acknowledges all "peoples" as equal and co-constitutive nations of the state. In fact, it is not possible to determine how many 'peoples' are co-constitutive as the Preamble lists seven and then states "and others", see *Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia*, Amendment IV, accessed 24 January 2011, <http://www.sobranie.mk/en/default-en.asp?ItemID=9F7452BF44EE814B8DB897C1858B71FF>.

public bodies failing to reach recruitment targets. Pressure for Macedonia to rapidly recruit employees from minority groups in order to receive a favourable progress report with regard to EU membership, in part, contributed to the unaccountable practices that are now widespread in the country at both the national and local levels. Since then, the EU has reversed its criticism and is now reprimanding Macedonia for the issues outlined above.⁴⁹

There is, however, an element of hypocrisy to the Macedonian complaint that recruiting large numbers of Albanians when these employees are not needed is a waste of public funds. Macedonians themselves have historically relied on state employment and, under socialism, grew to consider it a birthright, by virtue of being a member of the titular nation. The Macedonian political elite have contributed to the problem by using it to reward political clienteles and assist friends and family. Regardless, in a country with scarce resources and high unemployment (officially at 33 per cent),⁵⁰ state employment can make the difference between living in poverty and supporting an extended family. In providing for proportional employment in public bodies, the Framework Agreement has introduced an element of zero-sum game.⁵¹ Macedonian resentment towards Albanians that they consider are ‘taking their jobs’ runs high.⁵²

Parliamentary Veto Powers

Under the agreement, minority communities were provided with veto powers in relation to a number of constitutional provisions and pieces of legislation. This veto power, known as the Badinter Principle, is effected through a double majority system:

- a) At the central level, certain constitutional amendments cannot be approved without a qualified majority of two-thirds of all votes, within which there must be a majority of the votes of representatives from minority communities.⁵³ This also applies to legislation with regard to local self-government and national symbols.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ See the European Commission Progress Reports for Macedonia for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/progress_reports/index_en.htm (accessed 24 January 2011).

⁵⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*, accessed 1 February, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html>.

⁵¹ Nadege Ragaru, *Macedonia: Between Ohrid and Brussels*, 14.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The Banditer Principle in this case applies to constitutional provisions dealing with the Preamble, language, religion, use of minority symbols and national identity, culture, the Public Attorney, the Committee for Inter-Community Relations, the Security Council, the Republican Judicial Council, the Constitutional Court, local self-government and the provisions dealing with constitutional amendments themselves, see *Framework Agreement*, Section 5.1 and Annex A.

⁵⁴ *Law on the Committee for Inter-Community Relations* (2007), Clause 11 (1) and (2), accessed 20 January 2011, www.pravo.org.mk.

- b) At the central and municipal levels, legislation affecting culture, language, education, personal documents, the use of minority symbols, local finances, local elections, the City of Skopje, and the boundaries of municipalities,⁵⁵ must receive a majority of votes, within which there must be a majority of the votes of representatives from minority groups.⁵⁶

The Badinter Principle, developed by Robert Badinter who presided over the Arbitration Commission of the Conference on Yugoslavia in 1991, was designed to redistribute parliamentary power between the Macedonian majority and its minority groups. In practice, it is a veto mechanism for the Albanian community (from which the great majority of minority representatives come from) to protect constitutional provisions and legislation that they deem of ‘national’ importance to themselves.⁵⁷ However, because the Badinter Principle also applies at the municipal level, other minorities, along with the Macedonians where they constitute a minority, can take advantage of it.

Although some argue that such a distribution of power is necessary to protect minority rights, and indeed it is an effective method of doing so, it is also a power which can be abused to pursue nationalist and party political interests, creating an arena for conflict and competition rather than forming the basis for cooperation. Further, the Badinter Principle presupposes that individuals belonging to minority groups will automatically support their representatives enforcing a veto, just because they belong to the same ethnonational group. This ‘ethnicised collectivism’ undervalues the primacy of the individual as a free and equal citizen and indirectly violates their freedom of choice to not support a particular point of view that may be prominent among their own ethnonational group.

It only took a few years for the Badinter Principle to be grossly misused for party political advantage. In every election since independence, the victorious Macedonian party has formed a coalition government with the Albanian party that has received the highest number of seats in Parliament. However, after the 2006 elections, the winning Macedonian party (VMRO-DPMNE)⁵⁸ formed a coalition with the electorally smaller Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), instead of the

⁵⁵ *Framework Agreement*, Section 5. The Law on the Committee for Inter-Community Relations identifies 44 specific pieces of legislation to which the Badinter Principle applies, see *Law on the Committee for Inter-Community Relations* (2007), Clause 11 (1), (2) and (3), accessed 20 January, 2011, www.pravo.org.mk. These were agreed to by the ruling Macedonian and Albanian parties at the time.

⁵⁶ *Framework Agreement*, Section 5.2.

⁵⁷ Representation in the Macedonian Parliament of other minorities has fluctuated between one and four elected members, making their influence marginal at best.

⁵⁸ Named after the legendary Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The current Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) has little in common with the republican ideals of the original beyond sharing its name and claiming to be a successor of that movement.

larger Democratic Union for Integration (DUI).⁵⁹ DPMNE did so because it shares similar ideological and economic platforms with the DPA. They also led a previous coalition government together. The loss of executive power was unacceptable to DUI, which had until then governed in a coalition with the Macedonian Social Democrats.

Given its numbers in Parliament, DUI was able to block all legislation requiring passage through the Badinter Principle, which it did as a response to not being invited to form a coalition government with VMRO-DPMNE. In addition to creating obstructions at the central level, it ignored the observance of the Badinter Principle at the local level where it held control of municipal councils.⁶⁰ DUI only unblocked this legislative impasse after it had secured an agreement with the new Prime Minister on a number of key issues that formed a part of its own political platform and blackmailed its way into government.⁶¹

Misuse of the Badinter Principle has not been limited to the Albanian political parties. The Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia has also threatened to withdraw support for legislation requiring the Badinter majority unless its own demands are met, though this would only be a symbolic measure considering their small number in Parliament. These include guaranteed seats for the Serbian community and the creation of a Ministry for Minority Rights.⁶²

The two largest Macedonian parties, the VMRO-DPMNE and the Social Democratic Alliance for Macedonia (SDSM), have at various times argued that Albanian domination over the veto power is untenable and unfairly locks out smaller minorities. They have attempting to diminish this domination over the veto power by proposing guaranteed Parliamentary seats for non-Albanian minorities.⁶³ There is a great deal of self-interest involved in this proposal in that guaranteeing Parliamentary seats for non-Albanian minorities, which normally support the Macedonian majority over the Albanian minority, the Macedonian ruling elite could much more easily gain a double majority and push through controversial legislation. Regardless, this proposal has also been

⁵⁹ The Democratic Union for Integration is generally considered to be a left-leaning party sharing ideological similarities with the Macedonian Social Democrats.

⁶⁰ Katica Cangova, "Vo Cair namerno ne go pocituvame Badinter, velat od DUI", *Utrinski Vesnik*, 16 October 2006, accessed 26 January, 2011, <http://star.utrinski.com.mk/?pBroj=2157&stID=74931&pR=2>.

⁶¹ This is the so-called 'Skopje Agreement' containing five key issues that were agreed to. Prime Minister Gruevski later denied that any such agreement existed, claiming that the document made public by the leader of DUI, Ali Ahmeti, was merely 'minutes of the meeting'.

⁶² Radio Free Europe, *Obezbeduvanjeto na Badinterovo Mnozinstvo e Vklucen Problem, Velat Ekspertite*, 9 January, 2007, accessed 25 January, 2011, <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/1481963.html>.

⁶³ See EReporter, *SDSM: 10 Pratenicki Mesta za Turci, Srbi, Romi, Bosnjaci i Vlasi*, 15 May 2010, accessed 25 January, 2011, <http://www.ereporter.com.mk/mk-mk/Details.aspx?Title=8624> and Nova Makedonija, *Nema Pratenici za Pomalite Bez Viza od Albancite*, 27 May 2010, accessed 25 January, 2011, <http://daily.mk/cluster3/fdaf7e66bb22abf88d8ff8d984a540c2/252047>.

supported by the smaller communities, which have been effectively locked out of utilising the Badinter process, due to their smaller numbers.⁶⁴ Although DUI supports guaranteed seats for the smaller communities, it vehemently opposes the idea that these representatives should be part of the Badinter process, openly arguing that the Albanian community would lose its domination over the veto power.⁶⁵

In addition, the Badinter Principle has the potential to cause serious tensions between Macedonians and Albanians in a number of areas to which it applies. One of these is the laws covering state symbols, including the flag, coat-of-arms and national anthem. Although only symbolic, these are highly sensitive issues, particularly for the Macedonians whose very identity is being attacked and denied by its neighbours.⁶⁶ For example, in 1995 the then Macedonian Government capitulated to a Greek demand that it change its national flag (among other demands) which had been freely chosen by the Macedonian people. To this day, the event has left deep psychological scars for the Macedonian people, in addition to the very real violation of their national sovereignty. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see the tensions surrounding the national coat-of-arms, which continues to remain unchanged from socialist times. For the past two decades, Macedonians and Albanians have been unable to agree to a new coat-of-arms.⁶⁷ Although the two largest Macedonian political parties disagree on the exact symbol, anecdotal data reveals that many Macedonians see the stylized double-tailed gold lion on a red shield as the ‘true’ Macedonian coat-of-arms, dating back to at least the 16th century. Albanians on the other hand, argue that is a Macedonian symbol unrepresentative of the Albanian community. Now that any new symbol requires passage through the Badinter Principle, the replacement of a symbol that neither community associates with seems like an impossible exercise, which has caused serious tensions in the past.

Minority Languages

Under the Framework Agreement, minority group languages are official, in addition to the Macedonian language, at both national and municipal level if they are spoken by 20 per cent of residents at their respective levels of government.⁶⁸ In addition, local authorities may decide to

⁶⁴ Vecer, *Ahmeti ne go dava Badinter*, 23 December, 2010, accessed 26 January, 2011, <http://daily.mk/cluster3/98f5386d9e6f0cc8299cef1347f7409c/521127>.

⁶⁵ Vecer, *Ahmeti ne go dava Badinter*, 23 December, 2010, accessed 26 January, 2011, <http://daily.mk/cluster3/98f5386d9e6f0cc8299cef1347f7409c/521127>.

⁶⁶ Stemming from their respective 19th century expansionist designs, Greece refuses to accept the name ‘Macedonia’ and ‘Macedonian’ in an attempt to deny the existence of a large Macedonian minority within its current borders, Bulgaria claims that Macedonians and their language are really Bulgarian, a position with clear territorial pretensions and the Serbian Orthodox Church refuses to recognise the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

⁶⁷ The only change has been a minor one and that was to remove the socialist ‘red star’ from the coat-of-arms.

⁶⁸ Macedonian remains the only official language for international relations and use in the armed forces, see *Framework Agreement*, Section 6.

make a minority language official even if the 20 per cent threshold is not met. The Framework Agreement also stipulates that primary and secondary education will be provided in the students' own language, while state funding will be provided for tertiary education in the languages spoken by at least 20 per cent of the national population.

Language in Macedonia is highly politicised and considered as a marker of identity and group loyalty rather than a skill that can and should be utilised to pursue career and social objectives. There are relatively no occasions where language acquisition is upheld as an advantage or virtue, rather it is perceived in terms of differentiation and separation.⁶⁹ 'Forcing' others to learn your language can be seen as a sort of weapon used to demonstrate dominance and ownership in a particular region. Although the view that one should not learn other languages spoken within Macedonia is much more prevalent among Macedonians (69 per cent), a similar trend is rising among Albanians (11 per cent opposed learning another language spoken in Macedonia in 1995, while post-Framework Agreement this figure rose to 39 per cent).⁷⁰

Currently, Albanian school children are not required to learn Macedonian until the fourth grade. In January 2010, the Macedonian Government proposed further reforms in which Albanian children would begin learning Macedonian from the first grade. The Albanian reaction was immediate, with threats from the key Albanian political parties and the association representing former NLA veterans.⁷¹

Some of the issues pertaining to segregation in primary and secondary education were discussed above. These trends are similar to those at tertiary level. Here, the two communities essentially attend rival universities, whereby the vast majority of Albanians study at the private Southeast European University (located in Tetovo) or the State University of Tetovo and Macedonians generally attend various other state and private universities, included the largest University of SS. Kiril and Metodi in Skopje and the St. Clement of Ohrid University in Bitola. There are some smaller private universities such as the International University of Struga and the FON University where the student body has a greater ethnonational mix. In addition, the vast majority of Macedonians and Albanians are diametrically opposed on the question of whether there should even

⁶⁹ Armend Reka, "The Ohrid Agreement: The Travails of Inter-ethnic Relations in Macedonia", *Human Rights Review* 9 (2008): 65.

⁷⁰ Frosina Tasevska Remenski, *Albancite i Makedoncite: Etnickata interakcija vo Republika Makedonija, pred i po konfliktot od 2001 godina* (Stip: 2-ri Avgust C, 2007), 322.

⁷¹ For example, Fazli Veliu, President of the NLA Veteran's Association, Parliamentary Member for DUI and uncle of the DUI President, Ali Ahmeti, warned the Macedonian Prime Minister that he would suffer the same fate as the late President of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, see Vecer, *Veliu: Gruevski ke zavrsi kako Milosevic*, 26 January, 2010, accessed 30 January, 2011, <http://daily.mk/cluster3/078cc730b0e0c0580f5ad188ba39779f/103549>.

be an Albanian language university.⁷² Similar views were expressed in relation to the provision of public funding to the recently legalised State University of Tetovo.⁷³

Minority Group Identity

Finally, the Framework Agreement provides for the expression of ethnonational identity by the various communities, particularly the display of symbols that represent the community in the majority within the municipality.

The post-Framework Agreement period has provided for the growth of great social and political distance between the two communities. Macedonians and Albanians possessed incompatible worldviews before the 2001 war, which was a core source of conflict. However, the Framework Agreement, rather than integrating the Albanian community into wider Macedonian society, has only provided more room for the two communities to pursue their separate nation-building projects at the local level using state funding.

Again, education is a key example. Whereas Macedonian school children learn about Macedonian ethnonational history, Albanian school children learn about the history of Albania and the Albanian people living in Kosovo and Macedonia as a version of their own ethnonational historiography. Quite telling is a textbook for learning the Albanian language in the fourth grade, funded by the Macedonian Ministry of Education. This textbook, in addition to containing various Albanian stories, poems, and the history of famous Albanian writers, also provides information about important historical Albanian heroes and events and the national anthem of Albania itself.⁷⁴ Further, while the Macedonian language textbooks teach the history and dispersion of the Macedonian language, Albanian language textbooks do the same for the Albanian language. Here we see competing accounts as to the geographical dispersion of their respective speakers and in the Albanian language textbook, a map showing the geographic dispersion of Albanian dialects that virtually coincides with what Albanians consider to be 'Greater Albania'.⁷⁵

⁷² Eight-one per cent of Macedonians are opposed to the idea of an Albanian language university, while 96 per cent are in favour, see Frosina Tasevska Remenski, *Albancite i Makedoncite*, 315.

⁷³ Ibid., 317. The State University of Tetovo was established in 1994, but was considered illegal until 2004. It was the scene of a number of violent exchanges between Albanian nationalists and Macedonian Government forces, resulting in a number of deaths and imprisonments.

⁷⁴ Rita Petro & Natasha Pepivani, *Gjuha Shqipe* (Tetovo: Shtepia Botuese Albas, 2009).

⁷⁵ Various territories that this map identifies as containing Albanian language speakers bears little resemblance to historical or actual reality, see Asllan Hamiti & Ismail Hamiti, *Gjuha Shqipe: Per Klasen VI*, (Skopje: Ministry of Education).

Outside of the education system, various grandiose building projects with nationalist tones have been announced, including two competing city squares within the capital Skopje. The first, announced by Macedonian authorities will redesign the city centre, known as Macedonia Square, by providing it with a Baroque facelift and including a number of statues of historical Macedonians such as Alexander the Great and Macedonian revolutionaries from the 19th and 20th centuries. It is also planned to build a large Orthodox Cathedral and various ‘triumphal arch’s’ named after historical battles and places. To rival this project, the Albanian populated municipality of Cair, located within the City of Skopje, has embarked on its own reconstruction project. The Cair authorities plan to extend the Skanderbeg Square,⁷⁶ making it the largest in the capital. The inclusion of a large statue of Skanderbeg on horseback, which travelled through Albanian populated towns in Macedonia on its way from Albania to Skopje, has become a centrepiece of the square.

These projects are not limited to the capital, they extend across the country and of particular note are the number of new mosques being built in Albanian populated towns and large crosses being erected in Macedonian populated towns. Although they are of important religious significance, they also send a strong political message – ‘this town belongs to us’.

Conclusion

From the outset it became clear that neither the Macedonian nor Albanian communities considered the Framework Agreement a final settlement.⁷⁷ This was largely a result of their specific concerns been deemed as too difficult to deal with by the European Union and the United States, who pushed through a largely flawed agreement. As such, the agreement itself appears to have created more problems rather than solve existing ones. The level of social distance between the two communities is increasing, particularly as a result of creating more ethnonationally dominant municipalities. In addition, institutional segregation has been implemented, for example, in the education sector. Proportional employment in state bodies has not solved tensions surrounding the distribution of state resources; rather, it has exchanged ‘winners’ for ‘losers’ and vice versa. Parliamentary veto powers and minority languages have increased tensions and the separate development of incompatible ethnonational identities and ideologies has contributed to these tensions.

⁷⁶ Albanians consider Skanderbeg a national hero.

⁷⁷ Albanian politicians and intellectuals have continually expressed the view that the Framework Agreement is only provisional and that a final settlement still needs to be determined. Details of such a settlement vary from one proposal to the next, but generally include the demand that the Macedonian constitution formalise Macedonia is a bi-national state of Macedonians and Albanians rather than the multi-national formulation agreed to in 2001-02. The view that the Framework Agreement is unacceptable as a final settlement for the Macedonian state is also expressed by many influential Macedonians, including politicians, intellectuals and community leaders, albeit with different outcomes in mind. Of particular interest are the views of the former Prime Minister, Ljubco Georgievski, see Eben Friedman, *The Spectre of Territorial Division and the Ohrid Agreement* (European Centre for Minority Studies, July 2003).