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**Multi-ethnicity or Bi-nationalism? The Framework Agreement and  
the Future of the Macedonian State**

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# **Multi-ethnicity or Bi-nationalism? The Framework Agreement and the Future of the Macedonian State**

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*This article critically evaluates the August 2001 Framework Agreement, the purpose of which was to end the six-month armed confrontation between the Albanian paramilitary force the National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian state. The author argues that there are several deficiencies in the Agreement, along with regional security concerns arising from organized crime and the unresolved status of Kosovo, which taken together pose a considerable obstacle to peace and stability in Macedonia. These deficiencies relate to problems of implementation of the Agreement, as well as to the question of what kind of Macedonian state it promotes. It is argued that the power-sharing provisions laid out in the Agreement pushes Macedonia closer to the creation of a de facto Macedonian-Albanian bi-national state, rather than promoting a civic-oriented, multiethnic state, and that the envisioned political decentralization undermines state capacity and authority, thus making the prospects for sustainable peace in Macedonia very precarious.*

## **I. Introduction**

Following a six-month armed confrontation between the Albanian paramilitary force the National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian state, international mediation between ethnic Macedonian and Albanian political leaders resulted in the signing of the Framework Agreement on 13 August 2001, which intended to put an end to the violent conflict by redressing some of the grievances of Macedonia's Albanian community. The present article seeks to critically evaluate this agreement, assessing, in particular, the prospects for promoting peace and ethnically inclusive plural democracy in Macedonia which it seeks to attain. It will be argued that there are several deficiencies in the Framework Agreement, along with unfavourable security conditions in the region arising from organized crime and the unresolved status of Kosovo, which combine to pose a serious challenge to peace and stability in Macedonia. These deficiencies relate primarily to problems of implementation and inclusion.

First, there are problems associated with the practical implementation of the Framework Agreement. To begin with, the lack of 'ownership' of the Agreement, that is, the widespread perception amongst ethnic Macedonians that was imposed on them by 'pro-Albanian' Western powers, negatively affects the willingness of the Macedonian factions in the parliament to ratify the Agreement without first making

amendments to it. Because implementation of the Agreement requires a series of constitutional and legislative measures, its success or failure, lies to a considerable degree in the hands of the Macedonian parliament. Furthermore, the NLA, despite being largely responsible for the fighting last year, was excluded from the peace talks. This omission is significant in so far as it not only undermines the relevance of the Agreement but also makes its success dependent on the willingness of the NLA, and its various offshoots, to refrain from further armed activities.

Second, an important question to be addressed is what kind of Macedonian state the Framework Agreement is designed to promote. This article suggests that while the power-sharing provisions laid out in the Agreement are meant to redress the asymmetrical power-relations between Macedonians and Albanians, little consideration is given to the interests of other ethnic communities in Macedonia. Thus, the implementation of the Agreement will effectively signify a move towards the creation of a *de facto* bi-national state in which Macedonians and Albanians constitute the country's two ethno-political elites, whilst other ethnic communities are largely relegated to the fringes of political life.

To conclude, the article considers the possible impact on the fragile Macedonian state structure of the provisions for power-sharing and political decentralization set out in the Framework Agreement, and argues that the implementation of these may in fact have the opposite effect to that intended, thus further undermining state capacity and authority, making the prospects for sustainable peace in Macedonia very precarious.

## **II. Ethnic Relations in the New Macedonian State**

Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 in a national referendum that was largely boycotted by the Albanian population. Instead the Albanians staged their own vote in which an overwhelming majority favoured territorial autonomy within Macedonia. Whilst in principle favouring an independent Macedonian state, Albanians objected to the question put forth in the referendum, which sought Macedonian independence but with the option of re-joining some federal arrangement with Yugoslavia in the future. Only too aware of Serbia's repressive policies towards the Albanians in Kosovo, however, Macedonia's Albanian population did not want to

be ruled by Belgrade again. Albanian non-participation in the referendum was also a protest against the failure of the Macedonian political leaders to clearly define the legal status of the Albanian population in an independent Macedonian state. Prior to the referendum, the leading Albanian political party at the time, the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), had issued a Declaration for the 'Equal Status of Albanians in Macedonia', and had made Albanian participation in the referendum contingent on Macedonian consideration of this Declaration. The Macedonian leaders, however, refused.

Albanian political leaders further rejected the 1991 constitution of the newly declared Republic of Macedonia on the grounds that it relegated the Albanians to the status of second-class citizens by treating them as a minority, which in turn went against the Albanian community's perception of itself as constituting not a minority but a part of another, Albanian, majority. To the Albanians, therefore, the Macedonian constitution of 1991 represented a step backwards in terms of their legal status. This can be contrasted to the 1974 constitution of Yugoslavia, which accorded equal rights to all ethnic units of the federation, of which the Albanian population was one. Nonetheless, in the years following Macedonia's split from Yugoslavia, a more moderate Albanian leadership emerged which confirmed its commitment to the unity of the Republic of Macedonia, whilst demanding measures to grant the Albanian community non-territorial autonomy in the political sphere (Ackermann 2000: 61-62). But as violence erupted in Macedonia in the spring of 2001, Albanian demands vis-à-vis the Macedonians again hardened, as did the Macedonian response, thus leading to a deepening of the rift between the two communities. Thus, although the Framework Agreement is intended to bring peace to Macedonia, it contains little by way of reconciliation between the two communities, which naturally complicates the promotion of peace and stability in Macedonia as the positions of the main antagonists remain polarized.

Throughout the 1990s, the relationship between Macedonians and Albanians remained tense, resulting in occasional violent confrontations. Nevertheless, in contrast to Kosovo and Bosnia, a full-fledged armed conflict was avoided. Even at the height of the Kosovo crisis, which led to a massive flow of Albanian refugees into Macedonia and put a severe strain on the country's resources and inter-ethnic peace,

Macedonia still managed to avoid the emergence of large-scale violence. The fact that peace prevailed throughout the 1990s has often been attributed to three factors: the leadership of the then president of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov; the deployment of a United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) whose primary task was to monitor the border between Macedonia and Yugoslavia in order to deter any potential act of aggression from Belgrade; and the diplomatic efforts of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoep, who played a pivotal role in mediating the dispute over Albanian-language education. In the latter case, the tireless efforts to bring about an agreement between Macedonians and Albanians on the issue of higher education in the Albanian language eventually resulted in the establishment of the trilingual (Albanian, Macedonian and English) South East European University in Tetovo. However, another factor that arguably contributed to the relative state of peace in Macedonia during these years was the fact that the country managed to make a transition to at least a procedural, if highly corrupt, democratic system, in which the Albanian community played an active part. Hence, on the top level, Macedonians and Albanians found themselves engaged in a continual political dialogue with a fair amount of cooperation across ethnic party lines. This arguably helped to defuse some of the tension between the two communities on at least the political level.

A further source of contention between Macedonians and Albanians throughout the 1990s was the Macedonian constitution and, in particular, the wording of the preamble. This explicitly declared the right of the Macedonian people to a state, envisaging the Republic of Macedonia as “a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanics and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia...”<sup>1</sup> Macedonian ‘ownership’ of the state was also implied in some of the articles of the constitution, including article 7, which declared the Macedonian language (using the Cyrillic alphabet) the official language of the state, and article 19, which made special reference to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. On the whole, however, the constitution embraced a liberal, civic concept of citizenship, providing for equal rights for all citizens of Macedonia regardless of

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<sup>1</sup> For the English text of the Framework Agreement, including the Preamble of the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, see for example, [http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/mk00000\\_.html](http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/mk00000_.html)

ethnic and/or religious affinity. Some have even suggested that the 1991 constitution also granted certain collective rights to minorities,<sup>2</sup> although a closer examination of the constitution reveals that those rights referred to as ‘collective’ were in fact reducible to the individual. In sum, the Macedonian constitution represented – at least on paper – a model of liberal values.

But whereas Macedonians regard the Republic of Macedonia as their nation-state, in which other ethnic groups are granted equal citizen rights, the Albanian elite has persistently demanded the creation of a bi-national state, in which the Albanian population would be recognized as a constituent nation on par with the Macedonian. Their claim is based on the observation that the Albanian community accounts for at least 25 per cent (and according to Albanian estimates perhaps as much as 35 to 40 per cent) of the total population of Macedonia, and that in some towns and villages Albanians outnumber Macedonians. Albanians do not, however, object to the name ‘Republic of Macedonia’, which they regard “as being territorial without any specific Slav connotations” (Poulton 2000: 187). Hence, in their view the name ‘Macedonia’ does not imply ethnic Macedonian ownership of the state. Instead, the conflict between Macedonians and Albanians over the last decade has tended to focus on the legal and political status of the Albanian population and on the political and cultural character of the Macedonian state. The Macedonian-Albanian conflict is, as a consequence, not merely over rights for the latter group in a country dominated by the former but, more fundamentally, about who controls the state and what kind of state Macedonia should be. Ultimately, then, the conflict between Macedonians and Albanians boils down to the question of who holds the power.

For all its flaws, the Macedonian state has nonetheless been more inclusive in terms of its non-Macedonian population than have most other former Yugoslav republics since 1991. Despite restrictions on the use of the Albanian language in higher education and political bodies, as well as *de facto* discrimination in employment, Albanians in Macedonia have by and large enjoyed extensive civil and political rights. Economically they have generally been better off than their kin in Albania and

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ljubomir Frčkoski (1998) *Model of the Interethnic Relations in Macedonia*, Skopje: Kryg, and Gjorgi Caca (2001), “Status and Rights of Nationalities in the Republic of Macedonia”, in James Pettifer, *The New Macedonian Question*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Kosovo, and they have suffered none of the political discrimination that Kosovar Albanians experienced under Milošević's rule. Although Macedonian politicians have dragged their feet over the years on many issues concerning the development of minority rights, there have been some, if slow, improvements. Hence, it is hardly warranted to talk of Albanian exclusion from Macedonian society or of a steady path of deteriorating ethno-political relations that eventually culminated in an Albanian rebellion last year.

### **III. War in Macedonia, 2001**

When fighting broke out in the Tetovo region of Macedonia in February 2001, the Macedonian government appeared to be caught by surprise. Initially, it was unclear what the objectives of the attacks by the NLA were, but eventually their demands "came to echo those of Albanian politicians – insisting that Albanian become an official state language and that Albanians gain equal status with Macedonians." (Perry 2001). The NLA thus effectively hijacked the political programme of the Albanian parties in Macedonia, prompting Albanian politicians to respond to the challenge to their authority and credibility by trying to coopt the armed struggle, seeking to become the political arm of the NLA in order to prevent themselves from being marginalized.

The international community treated the violent confrontation between the NLA and the Macedonian armed forces largely as a conflict arising primarily from Albanian frustration at their lack of equal rights, and the Framework Agreement was accordingly designed to redress those deficiencies. But the dispute over rights does not suffice as an explanation of the war in Macedonia. A contributing factor was the instability emanating from the still unresolved future status of Kosovo and, more specifically, NATO's failure to disarm the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and effectively police the border between Kosovo and Macedonia. Additionally, it has been suggested that last year's fighting was related to the extensive networks of organized crime and corruption that pervade both the Albanian and Macedonian communities, and the Balkans in general.



Since becoming an independent state, Macedonia has suffered from pervasive state corruption, fuelled by a political party system that is largely financed by illegal means. Also contributing to the weakness of the Macedonian state are factors such as continued opposition from Greece (which refuses to recognize its northern neighbour under any name that includes 'Macedonia'), patronising attitudes from Bulgaria (which maintains that Macedonians are nothing other than 'lost' members of the Bulgarian nation), fear of Serbian attack and the international community's initial failure to recognize the legitimacy of the Macedonia state, as well as the pervasive Albanian question. Efforts to build a sustainable peace in Macedonia are further obstructed by the political immaturity of most politicians as well as the lack of political leadership that has been on offer since Kiro Gligorov stepped down as President in 1999. And as long as the legitimate economy does not provide an alternative, organized criminal activity, which is closely linked to the kind of 'new wars' of which Mary Kaldor (1999) speaks, will remain an obstacle to peace.

In fact, it has become increasingly popular amongst scholars and journalists to look at last year's civil war as being directly linked to the growing problem of organized crime in the Balkans. The emergence of an Albanian-led mafia in the 1990s has been particularly singled out. According to Hislope, "a coalescence of interests between a national liberation movement and a narco-mafia was the enabling factor that made ethnic conflict possible in the Albanian-inhabited lands of Kosovo, southern Serbia, and Macedonia." (2001: 5). But in contrast to those who maintain that the sole cause of Macedonia's war was due to the interest of Albanian criminal networks to keep smuggling channels open, Hislope offers a more nuanced explanation, arguing that "[t]he top leaderships of the Albanian paramilitary forces have no identifiable participation in the drug trade", and that "[m]ost leaders of the Albanian paramilitaries are simply men sorely aggrieved by the plight of Albanians in the southern Balkans and have taken up arms to pursue their national cause." (2001: 24). The Albanian mafia thus provided the "logistical advantage" to the national liberation movements of Macedonia and Kosovo, and it was the attainment of weapons that ultimately compelled Albanian groups to resort to force. (Hislope 2001: 32,39). Mafia activity, as illustrated by the Italian case, can only work effectively in a climate of state-sanctioned corruption, and a weak, or even failing, a state such as Macedonia thus offers an optimal environment for an illicit economy.

#### **IV. The Fundamentals of the Framework Agreement**

The parties to the Framework Agreement, which convened in the Macedonian town of Ohrid last August, were the President of Macedonia and the leaders of the four main political parties in Macedonia, two of which are ethnic Macedonian and the other two ethnic Albanian. The signing of the Agreement was witnessed by the two international mediators, Francois Leotard, representing the EU, and James Pardew, the US representative. The overall objective of the Agreement is to “[secure] the future of Macedonia’s democracy and [permit] the development of closer and more integrated relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the Euro-Atlantic community.”<sup>3</sup> Rejecting the use of violence for political aims and affirming the territorial integrity and unitary status of the Republic of Macedonia, the Agreement envisages the “complete voluntary disarmament of the ethnic Albanian armed groups and their complete voluntary disbandment.”<sup>4</sup> The vague wording leaves ample room for differing interpretations, which is ever more significant given that the “ethnic Albanian armed groups” are not themselves parties to the agreement, which means that they cannot be obliged to abide by it. Security on the ground is of course a minimum requirement for the successful implementation of the Framework Agreement but there is a risk that since the NLA was excluded from the peace negotiations it has the power to undermine the Agreement’s legitimacy, thus retaining the option of further military actions, which might well lead to total state collapse.

Annex A of the Framework Agreement lays down a series of constitutional amendments aimed at enhancing the power-sharing mechanisms of Macedonia’s political system. The overall objective of these measures is to eliminate any structural, institutional and practical discrimination of Albanians in the social and political spheres. The fact that these amendments are subject to approval by a vote in the Macedonian parliament meant that, from the outset, the survival of the Agreement has been dependent on the members of parliament, many of whom oppose a number of the provisions set forth in the Agreement. Representatives of the European Union and

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<sup>3</sup> Framework Agreement, Ohrid and Skopje, 13 August 2001. The English text of the Agreement can be accessed under <http://president.gov.mk/eng/info/dogovor.htm> (16 August 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the United States have, therefore, exerted constant diplomatic pressure on Macedonia's political leaders to ensure that the Framework Agreement is ratified in full. The EU, for example, set as a condition for the organization of an international donors conference for Macedonia that the constitutional amendments set forth in Annex A as well as the revised law on local self-government must be passed by the Macedonian parliament in accordance with the Framework Agreement. Such a law, however, has long been the subject of contentious debate as many Macedonians believe that its implementation would effectively result in the fragmentation of Macedonia along ethnic lines, which ultimately might lead to the *de facto* secession of the Albanian dominated parts of Macedonia. But, bowing to international pressure, and in recognition of Macedonia's dire need of economic assistance, the parliament finally passed a new law on local self-government on 24 January 2002. A donors conference was subsequently held in Brussels in March.

In an effort to promote power-sharing arrangements, the Framework Agreement also establishes that the passing of certain laws and constitutional amendments relating to the law on local self-government as well as issues affecting culture, language and education shall require a "majority of the votes of Representatives claiming to belong to the communities not in the majority in the population of Macedonia". This effectively grants the Albanians a right of veto, even without the support of other ethnic minorities, given that the number of Albanian representatives in the parliament exceeds the total number of MPs belonging to non-Albanian ethnic minorities. In this regard, therefore, the Framework Agreement fails to promote a multiethnic plural democratic system as the power-sharing mechanisms designed favour only the Albanian community.

While reaffirming that "The official language throughout Macedonia and in the international relations of Macedonia is *the* Macedonian language",<sup>5</sup> the Framework Agreement establishes that "[a]ny other language spoken by at least 20 percent of the population is also *an* official language [...]".<sup>6</sup> Setting the linguistic contradiction aside in the English, official, version of the Agreement – the use of the definite article implying, semantically, that there can only be one official language – the new

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<sup>5</sup> Framework Agreement, paragraph 6.4 – emphasis added

<sup>6</sup> Framework Agreement, paragraph 6.5 – emphasis added

provision concerning language means that Albanian, the only non-Macedonian language spoken by more than 20 per cent of the total population, is made a second official language under certain conditions, whilst the use of other languages such as Serbian, Turkish, Aroumanian and Rom in municipal public affairs are subject to decision by the local authorities. According to Paragraph 6.6. of the Framework Agreement such decisions shall be made 'democratically' on the local decision-making level, which leaves ample room for discretionary interpretations by municipal leaders, and does little to protect the interests of the smaller minorities.

In sum, and as will be elaborated in the following section, rather than providing a comprehensive, inclusive framework for a non-discriminatory political structure, the Agreement seems designed mainly to redress Albanian complaints in order to avert further armed confrontation.

## **V. The Framework Agreement: A Problematic Blueprint for Macedonia**

A distinction, however, needs to be drawn between the conflict between the Macedonian and Albanian communities that has been latent since 1991 and the armed confrontation that occurred last year. Most Macedonians and a growing number of international analysts maintain that last year's mini-war had little to do with instituting rights for the Albanians. According to this view, the Framework Agreement fails to take into account the more immediate reasons behind the war, such as previously mentioned, organized crime and the question of Kosovo. Yet it would be misleading to deny that throughout the 1990s the conflict between Macedonians and Albanians did, at least in part, concern the question of rights. Thus, the Agreement does address some of the issues that divided the two communities during Macedonia's first decade of independence. As such, the Agreement represents an amendment to the legal structures of the Macedonian political system, aimed at creating more symmetrical power relations between the Macedonian and Albanian communities. Nonetheless, many Macedonians, as well as their politicians, harbour a deep dislike for the Framework Agreement, which they consider to be imposed on them by the international community in response to Albanian 'terrorism'. According to Aleksandar Damovski, editor of the Macedonian daily *Dnevnik*, the provisions set forth in the Agreement were legitimate, but not the means used to achieve them:

I find the constitutional changes that improve the civic character of our state necessary, and that they would have come into being even without the military pressure of the Albanians. The main problem is that it all happened as a result of the aggression by the Albanian terrorists in Macedonia, and therefore the agreement signed in Ohrid looks like the result of those terrorist activities. (South Slavic Report 2001: v. 3 no. 32).

Hence, there is a risk that Macedonian resentment towards the Agreement, and towards the Albanian population, might eventually prompt an aggressive backlash, which would further undermine the prospects for peace. Whether such a reaction from the Macedonian community occurs depends in part on whether it continues to perceive the international community as working against Macedonian interests.

In a report by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) several factors are identified that pose an obstacle to effective implementation of the Framework Agreement, including “[c]riminality and corruption that pervade the Albanian and Macedonian communities as well as the national government”, “[u]nderdeveloped political parties and immature political leadership”, poor economy, “[u]ncertainty concerning Kosovo’s final status”, Albanian and Macedonian diasporas that sponsor extremist factions in both communities, as well as an “international community that is overly anxious to claim success and declare victory.” (USIP 2001). Two of the factors above particularly condition the prospects for peace and stability in Macedonia, irrespective of whether they also contributed to the emergence of war in the first place. First, the instability emerging from Kosovo, which has arisen in large part as a result of the international community’s unwillingness to address the issue of the long-term political and legal status of Kosovo (the province), continues to affect the stability of Macedonia, thus threatening to undermine the peace and stability envisaged in the Framework Agreement. Second, Macedonia, as well as other countries in the region, is rife with corruption, organized crime and mafia rule, all of which constitute serious threats to peace and stability. The Framework Agreement, however, mistakenly assumes that Macedonia possesses the capacity to effectively deal with the instability caused by corruption and organized crime. Moreover, it does not take into consideration the whole political-security and socio-economic picture of the Balkans, and it is linked with EU support only in a negative sense, as illustrated by the provision that the organization of a donors conference was directly conditional on the

Macedonian parliament's approval of the new law on local self-government. Hence, by offering more sticks than carrots, the Agreement fails to motivate the people of Macedonia to commit to genuine peace-building. As previously noted, the Macedonian state today is dangerously weak, lacking any consolidated political capacity and the public confidence in the politicians, on both side of the ethnic divide, is extremely tenuous. International diplomatic intervention in Macedonia – characterized to a large extent by the setting of a seemingly endless number of conditions for Macedonia, some of which amount to sheer blackmail – has further undermined the capacity and authority of the state and its political leaders. The Framework Agreement promotes decentralization of the Macedonian state, under the (misguided) assumption that this will increase the effectiveness and equity of state structures. But, as will be elaborated on in the next section, decentralization of an already weak state can be a very destructive approach, and might well lead to the further weakening of the state, which could well result in the total collapse of Macedonia.

Implicit in the Framework Agreement is the objective of transforming Macedonia from an ethnic nation-state into a civic/multi-ethnic state by discriminating in favour of the Albanian population. Paradoxically, therefore, the Agreement seeks to promote the development of a civic state through ethnically defined measures. Subsequent amendments by the Macedonian parliament to some of its provisions have, however, undermined the move toward a civic state, and instead sowed the seeds for the development of a bi-national state. Neither Macedonians nor Albanians pay much attention to the interests of other ethnic groups in the country. These have largely been left out of the political equation, and thus the Agreement disqualifies as a blueprint for the development of ethnically inclusive, plural democracy. Rather, it is a framework for the creation of a *de facto* bi-national political system.

Despite calls from the Turkish community in Macedonia for a more inclusive inter-ethnic dialogue, the smaller minorities in Macedonia have also largely been neglected in the recent crisis. Instead, the debate has centred on the question whether Macedonia is or should be a mono-national or bi-national state, not a multi-national/ethnic state. As noted by the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights:

On the one hand, the events resulted in the Macedonian majority population's increased sensitivity to the Albanian issue, leading to overreactions, growing mistrust and fear of movements towards secession. On the other hand, the ideas of bilateral dialogue or bi-nationalism provoked reactions on the side of the other minorities in Macedonia – the ethnic Turks, the Roma, the ethnic Serbians and last but not least – the Vlachs. (Joint Statement 2001)

Furthermore, a report by Radio Free Europe draws attention to an opinion poll conducted after the conclusion of the Framework Agreement, which shows that as much as 50 per cent of Macedonia's Turkish population would boycott the parliamentary elections planned for 2002, indicating that "the Turkish minority, whose leadership backed the Macedonian side during the conflict, is very unhappy. Their disappointment presumably stems from the fact that, "of all the minorities in Macedonia, only the Albanians will benefit from the agreement." (RFE/RL Balkan Report 2001: v. 5 no. 60).

As suggested above, the conflict between Macedonians and Albanians is largely a struggle over the question of who controls the Macedonian state and what kind of state Macedonia should be. Under the Framework Agreement, the Preamble of the 1991 Macedonian constitution was to be changed, removing any mention of specific ethnic or national groups, and instead referring solely to the *citizens* of Macedonia. Thus, the new Preamble was to effectively mark "a change in the official character of the Macedonian state." Accordingly, the aim was "to transform Macedonia into a civil society of equal citizens, without reference to ethnic background." (RFE/RL Balkan Report 2001: v. 5 no. 58). This, however, failed, as the new Preamble agreed to in the Ohrid negotiations was subject to contentious debate between Macedonian and Albanian politicians, resulting in further revision before being passed by a vote in the parliament. The final version of the Preamble that was eventually adopted again makes reference to the ethnic and national groups of Macedonia, but elevates the Albanians to a higher status than the 1991 Preamble had afforded them. A comparison of the three different versions of the Preamble – the 1991 Preamble; the re-worded Preamble that the signatories to the Framework Agreement agreed on in Ohrid; and the version subsequently adopted by the parliament – illustrates the lack of will amongst the political leaders of Macedonia (Macedonians and Albanians alike) to commit themselves to a civic Macedonian state. As noted earlier, the 1991 Preamble

confirmed the Macedonian nation as the primary ‘owners’ of the Macedonian state, hence the *de facto* creation of an ethnic Macedonian nation-state. Paradoxically, the Framework Agreement initially produced a civic Preamble, whilst promoting special provisions that effectively ethnicized the constitution itself. This is markedly in contrast with the 1991 Preamble and constitution, where the former reflected a strong ethnic orientation of the Macedonian state, whilst the latter emphasized a civic approach to citizenship and rights. The final version of the Preamble that was adopted by the Macedonian parliament thus reintroduces the ethnic factor, referring to “The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian people, as well as citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Serbian people, the Romany people, the Bosniak people and others”.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the net effect is that Macedonia, through the Framework Agreement and its subsequent amendment by the Macedonian parliament, has been left with a constitution and Preamble that are both ethnic in character. This, of course, contravenes the intention of the international community, which was to promote a civic, non-ethnic yet multi-cultural Macedonian state.

## **VI. Power-Sharing and Political Decentralization: A Road to Peace in Macedonia?**

In a system of political power sharing “decision-making ideally occurs by consensus. All major ethnic groups in the country are included in the government, and minorities, especially, are assured influence in policy-making on sensitive issues such as language use and education.” (Harris & Reilly 1998: 139). Although decision-making by consensus was never a policy in Macedonia, every government since the country’s declaration of independence from Yugoslavia has been made up of a coalition between a Macedonian and an Albanian political party. It is commonly recognized that collaboration across ethnic lines on the top political level has been the norm since 1991. In its eagerness to hail Macedonia a successful case of interethnic coexistence, the international community has also encouraged power-sharing arrangements between Macedonians and Albanians in the belief that this would promote peace and stability. Efforts by the EU and the United States to promote a system of power

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<sup>7</sup> The English text can be accessed at <http://www.assembly.gov.mk/Eng/rule.htm#1>



sharing in Macedonia has been premised on the assumption that the conflict in Macedonia was rooted in Macedonian discrimination of the Albanian minority.

As Harris and Reilly point out, successful power sharing requires “a sufficiently strong core of moderates – including both political elites and the broader civil society – that seeks pragmatic coexistence in a multi-ethnic society.” (Harris & Reilly 1998: 143). But it is doubtful whether in Macedonia today such a moderate core exists on either side of the ethnic divide. The political will required by both Macedonians and Albanians to share power is lacking as both sides have become radicalized since the fighting erupted last year. Furthermore, power-sharing arrangements are generally thought of as constituting a “temporary measure to build confidence until more customary, sometimes-win-and-sometimes-lose democracy can be embraced.” (Harris & Reilly 1998: 143). But in the Macedonian case it seems that the international community envisages power-sharing mechanisms as a permanent solution to the Macedonian-Albanian conflict. Past experience with power-sharing arrangements in plural societies such as, for example, Lebanon and Malaysia, however, provide a strong indication that such arrangements tend to fail in the long run. Additionally, there is a risk that consensus-based politics across ethnic lines in Macedonia might effectively eliminate real debate as political leaders make deals behind closed doors. In a post-socialist country like Macedonia, this ‘old’ and familiar way of doing politics can seriously undermine the process of democratic learning.

The provisions for power sharing as envisioned in the Framework Agreement are in fact rather limited and to the extent that the Agreement includes such provisions they are targeted mainly at the Albanian community, aiming to redress the asymmetrical power base of the Albanians vis-à-vis that of the Macedonians. As critics of the Framework Agreement have noted, the principle of ‘double majorities’ required for certain legislation, “places undue emphasis on ethnicity and thereby runs counter to the aim of transforming Macedonia into a civil, non-ethnically based society.” (RFE/RL Balkan Report 2001: v. 5 no. 58). At the same time, the Agreement does little to redress the existing power asymmetry between all ethnic communities in Macedonia, as the power-sharing provisions set forth do not adequately incorporate the interests of non-Albanian minorities. In this respect, therefore, the Agreement falls short of developing an inclusive ‘consociational’ political system in Macedonia. As

was pointed out earlier, the Agreement effectively reinforces the ethnicization of Macedonian political life, rather than promoting a civic concept of the Macedonian state.

The Framework Agreement further envisions the promotion of peace and stability in Macedonia through the implementation of a new law on local self-government aimed at the decentralization of the Macedonian political system, whereby some of the political decision-making will be delegated to the local communities, many of which are dominated by either Macedonians or Albanians. The Macedonian parliament formally approved a new law on local self-government in January 2002, following months of contentious debate as well as pressure from the United States and EU. From an ethnic Macedonian point of view, however, the new law threatens to undermine the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the Macedonian state as, they contend, it makes it increasingly possible for Albanian dominated communities to effectively secede from Macedonia. Albanian politicians, on their part, maintain that the new law does not go far enough in granting rights to the municipalities (RFE/RL Balkan Report 2002: v. 6 no. 7)

The international community, including the OSCE, EU and international NGOs, has sought to promote political decentralization of Macedonia as a means of building peace and more equitable relations between Macedonians and Albanians. But, as Lake and Rothchild maintain, political decentralization “is likely to be most stable and effective when there are multiple regions or groups with numerous cross-cutting cleavages and relatively balanced capabilities. That is, decentralization is most viable when no one region or group is sufficiently strong that it is likely to achieve dominance.” (Lake & Rothchild 2001: 32). In Macedonia, however, cross-cutting cleavages are generally lacking, and territorial decentralization is likely to create communities in which either Macedonians or Albanians dominate, not communities where the power balance between various ethnic groups is symmetrical. Hence, decentralization will simply recreate spheres of political dominance by one group or the other, thus creating new possible arenas for conflict. Any genuine and ethnically inclusive power-sharing arrangement is thus unlikely to be effectively implemented.

## **VII. Conclusion**

This article has sought to highlight some of the problems, inconsistencies and paradoxes plaguing the Framework Agreement, as well as vague institutional provisions whose interpretation may well become subject to future disputes. Further, it has sought to demonstrate that the implementation of the Agreement is premised on the mistaken assumption that the Macedonian state is strong enough, and possesses the capacity as well as political will, to live up to the provisions of the Agreement in practice. Yet another problem with the Agreement is that it falls short of its intended purpose of promoting a civic concept of the Macedonian state, an idea that has been endorsed by an international community that lacks a proper understanding of the complexities of the Macedonian situation. Instead of promoting a multi-ethnic, civic, state, however, the Agreement sows the seeds for the creation of a bi-national, Macedonian-Albanian state, in which other ethnic communities remain marginalized in the political sphere. In addition, the Macedonian parliament's failure to adopt the Framework Agreement without forcing through amendments on several points is indicative of the unwillingness amongst political hardliners on both the Macedonian and Albanian side to subscribe to a civic notion of the state. The further revision of the new Preamble particularly illustrates the tug-of-war between Albanians and Macedonians over the control of the Macedonian state.

Significantly, the Agreement and its supporters (the international community in particular) also fail to take into account two essential factors that condition the prospects for peace and stability in Macedonia, namely, the unresolved issues concerning Kosovo, and widespread organized crime. Without addressing these two factors, the building of sustainable peace and stability in Macedonia is simply unrealistic.

On a final note, as George Schöpflin argues, “democratic nationhood is composed of three key, interdependent elements: civil society, the state and ethnicity.” (2000: 35). When civil society and the state are weak, as they are in Macedonia, ethnicity comes to dominate. For peace to be given a serious chance in Macedonia, the Framework Agreement should have included provisions outlining how to strengthen the Macedonian state and civil society. After over ten years of independence, state

institutions as well as civil society in Macedonia remain weak, leaving the country and its people vulnerable to ethnic chauvinism and criminal structures, which in turn makes the future of Macedonia very precarious.

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