

PART FOUR

MUDDLING THROUGH:

*EFFORTS AIMED AT RECOGNITION
OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN MACEDONIA*

CASE STUDY: THE INTER-ETHNIC PROJECT IN GOSTIVAR

By Albert van Hal

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CASE STUDY: THE INTER-ETHNIC PROJECT IN GOSTIVAR

By Albert van Hal¹

In Gostivar, Macedonia, where interethnic relations were already tense before Macedonians and Albanians were divided by the 2001 war, working to bridge the gap between ethnicities is a daunting task. Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar (IPG) has achieved an impressive amount of success in improving relations between the major ethnic groups in the municipality: Albanians, Macedonians, Roma and Turks.

As in much of Macedonia, the various ethnicities of the municipality of Gostivar live in relative isolation from one another. Although their neighborhoods may be integrated, contact between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians are infrequent. Relations between the two groups deteriorated in the city in July 1997, when the popular mayor, an ethnic Albanian, flew the Albanian flag over town hall. The mayor was arrested, and in the demonstrations and clashes with police that ensued, several Albanians were killed.

The large influx of ethnic Albanian refugees fleeing war in Kosovo added to the interethnic tensions in the area, as did Macedonia's own war in 2001.

To help alleviate these tensions, IPG has worked to fund activities that bring various ethnic groups together. The organization undertakes its own activities and also funds projects undertaken by others. The main stipulation for any activity to receive funding from IPG is that it must involve members of more than one ethnic group.

So far, IPG, along with a variety of local partners, has implemented about 35 different multiethnic projects in the municipality of Gostivar. These activities have varied, from humanitarian aid for refugees, to a multiethnic and multi-lingual local newspaper, to cooperation between the Christian Orthodox and Muslim communities in Gostivar.

The results of these efforts have been admirable, and they provide an excellent example for similar municipalities and organizations to follow. By carefully working to eschew politics, and by insisting that all its work be carried out in a multiethnic atmosphere, IPG has earned the respect of local citizens and helped to encourage interethnic cooperation in Gostivar.

The first couple of sections in this chapter briefly present the situation in Macedonia and Gostivar, explaining the development of interethnic relations in the municipality. Then there

¹ The author worked for Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar as international adviser from August 2000 until May 2002. Since June 2002, he has worked for the Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV) in The Netherlands as a project manager for Macedonia. The author would like to thank his colleagues in Gostivar for their help in preparing this chapter.

is a section explaining how IPG works, the strategy it has chosen and the problems it had to overcome in beginning its work. The next section gives detailed descriptions of a few projects that were either undertaken or funded by IPG. Then there is an assessment of the organization's work and its results. The chapter concludes with a list of recommendations for the future of IPG and a list of the lessons that IPG has to teach to similar organizations.

1. General Facts About Macedonia

Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia until 1991, when it became an independent republic. Macedonia is a country of almost 2 million inhabitants, representing a wide variety of different ethnic groups. The breakdown of ethnic groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Macedonia

Ethnic group	% of population
Macedonian	66.5
Albanian	22.9
Turks	4.0
Roma	2.0
Serbs, Vlachs, other	4.6
Total	100

Source: National Institute for Statistics, Skopje, 1994

The two largest ethnic groups in the country are the Macedonians and the Albanians. According to the official census of 1994, Macedonians make up about two thirds of the population, while Albanians account for just less than a quarter of the population. But many question the figures given in the census, and there is much controversy over how the census was carried out. Representatives of Albanian political parties in Macedonia claim that Albanians make up 40 percent of the country's population. The International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based think tank that analyzes conflicts, suggests that it is more realistic to say that Albanians comprise 30 percent of the population.²

The two main ethnic groups have a difficult relationship. To put it very simply:

Albanians claim that the Macedonians treat them as second class-citizens. Albanians want more employment in the state administration—in the police force and in the different ministries. Albanians also want Albanian-language university education. And they want Albanian to be an official language in the administration of the country.

Meanwhile, Macedonians claim that the Albanians are not loyal citizens of the country and do not respect the laws of the country. Macedonians also claim that Albanians want to break off part of the territory of the country to unite it with a new, "Greater Albania."

² The International Crisis Group, *Macedonia's Ethnic Albanians: Bridging the Gulf*, August, 2000.

2. Gostivar: General Facts and a Description of Interethnic Relations

Gostivar is located in the Vardar River Valley, 60 kilometers southwest of the Macedonian capital of Skopje. This is in the western part of the country, close to the borders with Albania and Kosovo, where most of the Albanians of Macedonia are concentrated. Gostivar has 45,000 inhabitants, and it is the second largest city in western Macedonia, the largest being Tetovo.³ Gostivar has a wide range of ethnic groups, as Table 2 indicates.

Table 2: Ethnic Groups in the Municipality of Gostivar, According to the 1994 Census

Ethnic group	% of population
Albanian	55.07
Macedonian	29.54
Turks	9.79
Roma	4.12
Other	1.48
Total	100

Source: National Institute for Statistics, Skopje, 1994

The various ethnic groups do not live in different parts of the city, but are more or less physically integrated within Gostivar. One exception is the Roma community, the majority of whom live separately from the rest of the population, in the so-called “Ciglana” district.

Although Gostivar’s two main ethnic groups, Albanians and Macedonians, are not physically separated, they still live as if segregated from each other. Contacts between these groups usually only happen when it is strictly necessary, for example in the work place. Usually, the Albanian and the Macedonian population have few common activities. Albanian and Macedonian school children have separate classes in their own languages. In some schools, Albanian and Macedonian school children have classes in separate shifts, or on separate floors, to minimize any contact and avoid problems between them. Albanians and Macedonians have their own television stations and newspapers in their own languages. They frequent their own restaurants, have their own cultural groups and political parties, etc. Often local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that claim to be open to all nationalities actually only work for one nationality.

The difference between Albanians and Macedonians is not only ethnic, but also religious. Albanians are mostly Muslims, while ethnic Macedonians are generally Christian Orthodox. Exceptions do exist, and there are some Macedonian Muslims and a small number of Albanians who are Orthodox or Catholic in the Municipality of Gostivar. Table 3 has more details.

³ The city of Gostivar has 35,000 inhabitants. In the surrounding five villages that are part of the municipality of Gostivar, there are another 10,000 people. That makes the total number of inhabitants of the municipality of Gostivar 45,000.

Table 3: Religions in the Municipality of Gostivar

Religions	% of population
Muslim (Albanians, Turks, "Macedonian Muslims")	68.11
Orthodox (mostly Macedonians)	28.62
Protestant (mostly Macedonians)	1.09
Catholic (mostly Albanians)	0.14
Other	2.04
Total	100

Source: National Institute for Statistics, Skopje, 1994

The separate lives of the different ethnic groups, and the lack of contact between them, lead to prejudices, fear, and misunderstanding. This can easily result in interethnic problems. The relations between Albanians and Macedonians in Gostivar reached an all-time low on July 9, 1997. After the Albanian flag was hoisted next to the Macedonian flag in front of Gostivar's city hall, the very popular Albanian mayor was arrested.⁴ Thousands of angry Albanians demonstrated in the streets, demanding the release of the mayor. The demonstrations ended in a violent confrontation with the Macedonian police. Several Albanians were killed and hundreds were wounded. This conflict severely worsened interethnic relations in Gostivar, and the local government has not taken any concrete actions to improve these relations.

The Kosovo crisis of 1999 led to further deterioration in the relations between Albanians and Macedonians. Most Macedonians were upset about the NATO attacks on Serbian targets. They sympathized with Serbs, because both countries have large populations of Albanians who are seen as a threat to the territorial integrity of their respective states.

Another reason why the war in Kosovo put a strain on interethnic relations was the estimated 35,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees who came to Gostivar, where they were hosted by private families. An additional 42,000 refugees were accommodated in Cegrane refugee camp, 12 kilometers from Gostivar. This huge influx of Albanians in and around the city was threatening for Macedonians, who already felt like a minority in Gostivar.

The war in Macedonia began in March 2001, when the so-called National Liberation Army (NLA)—a group of armed Albanians demanding more rights for Albanians in Macedonia—engaged the Macedonian security forces in combat. The war came close to Gostivar, but never reached the city. Nonetheless, the spread of violence around the coun-

⁴ For the Albanians in Macedonia, the Albanian flag is the main political symbol of their national identity. When Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia, the so-called "nationalities," which in Gostivar meant Albanians and Turks, were granted the right to use the Albanian and the Turkish flag by the authorities at that time. After independence, the new constitution of Macedonia did not include the right for "nationalities" to use their flags. This once again opened the very sensitive political debate concerning the right to use the flag. Albanians demanded legislation on the use of the Albanian flag in Macedonia. For the Macedonians, flying the Albanian flag is representing another state. They consider the use of the Albanian flag as a sign of irredentism and lack of loyalty to the Macedonian state.

try clearly made the situation in Gostivar tense. The streets were empty because people stayed inside, or left Gostivar for safer locations. Contact between Albanians and Macedonians ceased almost entirely. Sympathy for the NLA increased among Albanians in Gostivar. Meanwhile, many ethnic Macedonians tended to blame the whole Albanian population for the acts of the NLA. Rumors played a major role in setting the general atmosphere in the city.

The violence ended in August 2001, with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The agreement was brokered by the international community, which applied pressure to the main Albanian and Macedonian political parties.⁵ The Framework Agreement strengthens local government, ensures equitable representation of all ethnic groups in the state administration—especially the police force—enables wider use of Albanian language in state administration, and enables state-funded university education in the Albanian language. The still uneasy peace in Macedonia has been monitored by NATO soldiers and observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union.

The constitutional changes necessitated by the Ohrid Framework Agreement were approved by the Macedonian parliament in the beginning of November 2001. In the meantime, the NLA was officially abolished and transformed into a political party, called the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). The Ohrid Framework Agreement also included an agreement for new, early elections in January 2002, but due to security problems, they were postponed until September 2002. The two main Macedonian parties fighting for the Macedonian vote were the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Social Democrats League of Macedonia (SDSM). DUI and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) were the main rivals for the Albanian votes for parliamentary elections in September 2002.

During the election campaign, VMRO-DPMNE and DPA, both of which scored low in the opinion polls, tried to increase their popularity with nationalist rhetoric. International players sought to encourage more moderate behavior, to maintain stability and avoid violence as much as possible. A few violent incidents did occur, but generally speaking, inter-ethnic relations remained relatively calm. With the help of around 800 monitors from the OSCE and EU, as well as NATO soldiers, election day passed without serious problems. The nationalistic campaigns by VMRO-DPMNE and DPA achieved poor results. Of course international pressure played a role in discrediting the nationalists, but it seems that voters were really swayed by the deplorable economic situation and the constant accusations of corruption directed at VMRO-DPMNE and DPA. It is clear that the electorate had lost faith in the governing politicians and wanted change. One reason for the Albanian electorate to back the DUI was the success of the disbanded NLA. From the perspective of many Albanian voters, NLA achieved more for the Albanians of Macedonia in six months of fighting than all the other Albanian parties could achieve in 10 years of being coalition partners in Macedonia. The new government coalition of SDSM and DUI has a comfortable majority in the Macedonian Parliament.

⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the Framework Agreement, see the contribution of Renata Treneska in this volume.

The results of the parliamentary elections are an encouraging sign of improving interethnic relations, but these relations remain on poor footing after the recent war. It is, therefore, vital to undertake efforts to improve interethnic relations in Gostivar, and Macedonia in general.

3. Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar: Establishment, Institutional Structure, Strategies

IPG (Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar) was started in 2000, after citizens from the city asked a Dutch organization, the Inter-Church Peace Council (also known by the Dutch initials IKV), to help improve interethnic relations in Gostivar.⁶ The request came in particular from Albanian and Macedonian teachers from the Workers' University in Gostivar, an institute for adult education. These teachers were involved in some small-scale activities designed to improve interethnic relations. There were two reasons for their request: First, after the confrontation between police and demonstrators in July 1997, these people felt interethnic relations in Gostivar needed improvement; and, second, the citizens of Gostivar complained that international support always remained in Skopje—and never reached Gostivar itself.

Before IPG opened its office, the Inter-Church Peace Council invested a lot of time in assessing interethnic relations in Gostivar and in building local support for this initiative. IKV raised the funds for IPG from the Dutch donors Hivos and Novib, to support a preparatory phase of assessment and identification. During the preparatory phase, the director of the Inter-Church Peace Council undertook several visits to Gostivar, to meet representatives of the municipality, state institutions, and civil society in Gostivar. The Inter-Church Peace Council and the municipality of Gostivar together organized a two-day workshop, with around 20 participants, representing civil society, the municipality, state institutions, and the media, to identify possible activities and partners. A board and an assembly representing the main ethnic groups in Gostivar—Albanians, Macedonians, Roma and Turks—were established. At the end of the preparatory phase, the Inter-Church Peace Council sent its donors a 60-page project proposal, analyzing the interethnic situation in Gostivar, listing possible partners and activities to improve interethnic relations, and explaining the organizational structure of IPG. The document contained a budget proposal and a request for funding.⁷ The Inter-Church Peace Council also sent an international adviser to Gostivar, to help establish the organization.

IPG is a local NGO, registered with the Gostivar court. It is rooted in Gostivar society through a multiethnic local staff, including a director, a board, and an assembly. The 15

⁶ The Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV) is an organization based in The Hague, The Netherlands. It promotes peace in areas of conflict, like South-East Europe, the Southern Caucasus, North Africa, Kashmir, and the Middle East. The Inter-Church Peace Council has vast experience in multiethnic cooperation in South-East Europe.

⁷ IPG's main donors, Hivos and Novib, approved the proposal and decided to finance the project until December 2002. At a later stage, other donors were found, including the OSCE Mission to Skopje, IOM-Confidence Building Initiative and the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Skopje.

assembly members represent the four main nationalities living in Gostivar, Albanians, Macedonians, Roma, and Turks. The assembly members are all respectable active participants in their community, and they were asked to join the assembly by the staff of IPG. The assembly members take part in different activities of IPG and are well-informed about its work. The assembly decides on the general policy of the organization, and it also chooses the other bodies of the organization, such as the monitoring board and the executive board. The assembly officially meets at least once a year. The monitoring board has five members. Four members represent the major nationalities in Gostivar. The fifth member represents the Inter-Church Peace Council as a partner organization of IPG. The monitoring board monitors the work of the executive board and informs the assembly about the work of the organization in between assembly meetings. The monitoring board meets at least every three months. The executive board consists of the staff members of IPG. The executive board does the daily work of the organization.

As has already been pointed out, the ethnic groups in Gostivar all live in their own so-called “pillars,” with hardly any mutual contact. To improve interethnic relations, IPG chose a strategy of seeking to intensify contacts between different ethnic groups, through concrete activities based on common interests.

Citizens and local organisations can submit projects for funding to IPG.⁸ The two main criteria for funding are that the proposed project must involve more than one ethnic group and involve a concrete activity in the interest of the City of Gostivar and all its inhabitants. The message of IPG is that citizens of the city can receive help to improve their life as long as they want to help themselves—and as long as they want to work with others outside of their own ethnicity.

IPG produced an application form—available in local languages and in English—which the local partners should fill out when applying for a grant. Once their project is approved, the applicant can receive a grant of up to a maximum of EUR 13,000.

IPG organized two training seminars about project proposal writing and project management, to raise the capacity of the local partners. A total of 40 representatives of local partners, from all the major ethnic groups, took part in these seminars, which lasted three days each. Seminars were given by two experienced trainers from Gostivar, one Macedonian and the other Albanian. The participants drafted project proposals in small groups. Because all participants stayed in the same hotel, far away from Gostivar, a lot of time could be spent on creating an informal atmosphere, networking, and building motivation. To ensure that the participants could express themselves in their own language, IPG hired interpreters for the Albanian, Macedonian, and Turkish languages. Along with offering workshops, the staff of IPG also spends a lot of its time talking to representatives of local partners, to help them with their ideas.

IPG is not only financing activities that are designed and organized by local partners. The organization also carries out its own projects, which often involve local citizens and citizens' groups.

⁸ Local organizations can be humanitarian organizations, schools, women's groups, youth groups, media, sports clubs, cultural organizations, religious communities, local authorities, etc. As long as they have ideas for activities that can improve interethnic relations, they can approach Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar.

4. Projects Supported by Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar

What follows is an overview of a just a small selection of approved and implemented projects. The types of projects undertaken illustrate the way in which IPG tries to work. As has already been mentioned, there are two basic kinds of projects: those submitted and implemented by local partners, with financing by IPG, and those that IPG creates and implements itself. In most of the latter types of projects, local partners help with implementation.

4.1. *Projects of Local Partners Supported by Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar*

4.1.1. *Cleaner Vardar*

The project called “Cleaner Vardar” changed an unofficial garbage belt in the city center, along the banks of the Vardar River, into a park. Two local partners, Permaculture & Peacebuilding Center, an Albanian NGO, and Denica, a Macedonian women’s organization, implemented the project jointly in June 2001.⁹ Initially, the Permaculture & Peacebuilding Center, an organization specializing in similar activities, approached IPG to seek support for this project. IPG liked the idea, but insisted on a multiethnic component, such as the involvement of school children. Permaculture & Peacebuilding Center identified a Macedonian partner experienced in working with youths, and together they visited the office of IPG to discuss the idea. Subsequently, the two organizations applied for funding and implemented the project together. An Albanian-Macedonian management team became responsible for implementation.

Unemployed workers from all ethnic groups collected 40 truck-loads of garbage. Then they sowed grass, planted trees, and installed benches. School children from different ethnic groups “adopted” the park, and they made it their project to keep it clean on a regular basis. This project was a very visible example of multiethnic cooperation. Its implementation effectively challenged some established prejudices: first, that different groups are not ready to communicate and work together; second the idea that donors are not spending money on anything useful for the people of Gostivar.

4.1.2. *Humanitarian Aid for Refugees*

Humanitarian Aid for Refugees was organized in September 2001 by five humanitarian organizations—representing Albanians, Macedonians, Roma, and Turks—from Gostivar. This project is an excellent example of the strategy of IPG. An Albanian humanitarian organization came to IPG with the idea of giving humanitarian aid to refugees who had fled the violence in the Tetovo and Kumanovo areas and were temporarily living in

⁹ After the refugees from Kosovo left camp Cegrane (close to Gostivar) the international relief agency *Care International* also left. Its local staff established an NGO called Permaculture & Peacebuilding Center. The first job of this organization was to rehabilitate the former camp site. The Permaculture & Peacebuilding Center specializes in ecology. “Permaculture” refers to a new ecologically responsible technique of cultivating the land.

Gostivar. IPG supported the idea, but on the condition that it be jointly implemented by organizations from different ethnicities—and that the beneficiaries be from all ethnic groups.¹⁰

IPG invited representatives of all ethnic groups to its office to discuss the project—right after the war, when tension was still high in the city. All five different humanitarian organizations, representing different ethnic groups, had a list of refugee families from their ethnicity who needed humanitarian aid. There were some disagreements about the criteria for receiving aid, especially on the topic of the number of beneficiaries per ethnic group. Because IPG insisted on a consensus of all organizations, a commission, with two representatives from each humanitarian organization, was formed, to draft a list of beneficiaries and solve all disagreements. After several meetings, attended by the director of IPG, the commission agreed on how to implement the aid for refugees and also agreed on the most controversial issues, the list of beneficiaries and the division among the different ethnic groups. An office was rented, and the refugee families from all ethnic groups were invited to come during specific hours, when representatives of all five humanitarian organizations were present. Because all ethnic groups were represented during the distribution of aid, any of the refugees could speak their native tongue. After the refugee families signed the list of beneficiaries, the humanitarian aid was distributed to them. The refugees received food, hygiene parcels, and school material for their children.

When word about this project got out, many more refugee families from remote villages came to Gostivar to ask for aid. The five humanitarian organizations looked into the requests and decided to waive the reimbursement of their organizational costs, so that they could help more families. Again, after some negotiations, all members of the commission agreed on the number of families from each ethnicity that would receive aid.

The project proved very successful: A total of 320 refugee families received assistance and the inter-ethnic cooperation went smoothly—especially considering the tense atmosphere in Gostivar around that time. Furthermore, this inter-ethnic cooperation received a lot of media attention. The five implementing organizations were very satisfied with the project. Most of them continued their cooperation in other activities.

4.1.3. Handball School

The Gostivar Handball Club 2000 organized a handball school. Three times a week, 40 young boys from all major ethnic groups took part in a handball school. In Gostivar, there are few opportunities for young people to get involved in sports. Most of the time young people in Gostivar sit around in bars. This project gave young people from all ethnic groups the opportunity to play sports, to meet each other and to have fun together. Initially, this project had serious problems, because almost all the participants were Macedonians. IPG discovered this problem when monitoring the project, and the monitors demanded changes. The project was opened for extra participants, and an extra Albanian trainer was hired. With intensive recruiting, the organizers found enough Albanian participants, as well as participants from other minorities. After the changes, the project was implemented

¹⁰ Up until then, during the conflict in Macedonia, Albanian organizations gave aid to Albanian refugees and Macedonian organizations gave aid to Macedonian refugees. This was only underlining the ethnic divide.

well, in a healthy, interethnic atmosphere. The project ended with a tournament. In the meantime, a handball club for girls has been established. It submitted a similar project proposal to IPG and that project was subsequently approved and carried out.

4.1.4. *Respecting Differences*

Petre Jovanoski Primary School developed a special program for children, designed to help them to respect differences by teaching them about other cultures. Every Saturday morning, two psychologists, an Albanian and a Macedonian, used various games to teach 35 children, aged 10 and 11, to respect each other.¹¹ During the classes, the children could speak their native language. Because of the interactive teaching methods and the informal atmosphere, the children followed the program with great enthusiasm.

4.2. *Projects Implemented by Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar*

The following projects were initiated and implemented by IPG itself:

4.2.1. *Message for Peace*

In April 2001, during the war in Macedonia, IPG produced a video clip that presented four children from different ethnic groups—Albanian, Macedonian, Roma, and Turkish—building a house of toys together. The children's ethnicities were recognizable because they had their names on their T-shirts. On the screen, the message, printed in four different languages, read: "It's in our hands to build or to destroy. Let's listen to our children." At the end of the clip, the children said "peace" in their own language. The video clip was shown many times on all local television stations in Gostivar and was very popular. All television stations contributed to the project by broadcasting the video during prime time, for no charge, in the months of April and May 2001. The video clip was repeated again in July 2001, when the conflict was at its peak.

4.2.2. *"Gostivar Voice"*

Since October 2001, IPG has been publishing a local newspaper called "Gostivar Voice," which is printed monthly. The paper is published in the four local languages of Gostivar: Albanian, Macedonian, Romani, and Turkish.¹² Each language has a separate issue, but all have identical content. There are 1,500 copies of "Gostivar Voice" printed in Albanian, 1,000 copies printed in Macedonian, and 500 copies each printed in Turkish and Roma. The newspaper is distributed for free. The publication is designed to allow every citizen of Gostivar to read the local news in his or her own language. It also means that every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, is reading the same news. That is something new for news-

¹¹ The children do not meet during the regular school hours because the Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish school children have classes separately in their own language. The Roma children do not have class in their own language and therefore don't have separate classes. In this project, children from the four main ethnic groups in Gostivar took part.

¹² "Avazi Gostivareso" is the name in Romani, "Gostivarski Glas" is the name in Macedonian, "Gostivarin Sesi" is the Turkish name, and "Zeri i Gostivarit" is the Albanian name for the newspaper.

papers in Macedonia, where Albanian-language papers and Macedonian-language papers often print completely different stories in describing the same event. This subjectivity in most newspapers means that different ethnicities all receive their own, differing, versions of the truth. With “Gostivar Voice,” this is not the case. By bringing local news, “Gostivar Voice” seeks to stimulate a sense of community in the city. The newspaper tries to make it clear that, even though different ethnicities live in Gostivar, they all live in the same city, with common interests and problems.

“Gostivar Voice” is also a channel of information through which members of the different ethnic groups can learn about each other. There are articles about Albanian, Macedonian, Roma, and Turkish culture or traditions, and these articles can be read by all inhabitants of Gostivar in their own language. For instance, the paper published a serial about wedding traditions of these four ethnicities. And religious traditions, like Orthodox Easter or Muslim Bajram, were explained. Furthermore, there were articles about a Roma singer, a Turkish poet, a Macedonian basketball club, an Albanian tennis player, etc.

Because the newspaper seeks to bridge gaps between ethnic groups, topics perceived as divisive are avoided. History and party politics are prime examples. Still, this does not mean that political issues are not to be found on the paper’s pages. By publishing articles about the NGO sector, “Gostivar Voice” stimulates local citizens to become active in their community. The newspaper also critically follows the work of the municipality and other authorities. For instance, it printed articles about a Roma quarter in Gostivar, showing the bad living conditions there and urging the authorities to undertake proper action.¹³

IPG has employed a team of very young and independent journalists, from the four main ethnic groups in Gostivar, who are eager to do their jobs. The organization chose not to hire experienced journalists, because many of them lack independence and have ties to political parties. IPG and Press Now organized a one-week training for the 15 young journalists on the newspaper’s staff.¹⁴ An experienced journalist from the Netherlands taught the staff members basic journalism skills, with an emphasis on investigative journalism.

A research institute in Skopje distributed a questionnaire among 600 members of the target audience of “Gostivar Voice” right after the fifth issue. The results were encouraging for this new initiative: Two-thirds of the respondents knew about the newspaper, and one third said they read “Gostivar Voice.” Almost all respondents knew that “Gostivar Voice” is published in four languages. Those surveyed said it was a good idea to improve interethnic relations. Generally, the people seem to appreciate a local newspaper and said they would be interested in a bi-weekly issue. It was especially encouraging for IPG to hear that the majority of the respondents are reading about the culture and traditions of the other ethnic groups. Based on the results of the questionnaire, the editorial board of “Gostivar Voice” made some policy changes. From January 2003 onwards “Gostivar Voice” is no longer published in Romani. In the course of the project it became clear that hardly any Roma in Gostivar was reading the Romani version. The Roma journalists continue to be part of the team of journalists and issues important for the Roma readers are still

¹³ The authorities responded to the publication of the article by saying that there is no money available to solve the problem.

¹⁴ Press Now (based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands) supports independent media in South-East Europe.

included in “Gostivar Voice.” Starting in January 2003, “Gostivar Voice” was to be published every two weeks.

4.2.3. *Drug Prevention*

IPG, in partnership with local NGOs, teachers, students, the police, the municipality and the health and social sector, created and implemented a project called “Drug Prevention and Reduction of Drug Use in Gostivar.” Drug use is rising rapidly in Gostivar, especially among high school students. When IPG started working in Gostivar, representatives of many different organizations and institutions explained that they considered drug use to be one of the biggest problems in the city. A steering group was established with representatives of the municipality, the police, the social and medical sector, NGOs and parents. Of course, the participants were from different ethnic groups. The steering group gives its experience and expertise to the project.

Through this project, teachers, psychologists, students, and NGO representatives are trained as prevention workers in anti-drug activities. Students from different ethnic groups and high schools in Gostivar have established a student club. They attended workshops on the problem of drugs, peer education and HIV/AIDS. Workshops were given by expert organizations from Skopje and from the city of Breda, the Netherlands.

4.2.4. *Religious Cooperation*

In spring 2002, IPG began seeking cooperation of the two main religious communities, Christian Orthodox and Muslim, on the reconstruction of a cemetery in Gostivar. Because the two main ethnic groups in Gostivar differ in their religious affiliation, IPG considered it important to establish a good relationship between the two religious communities. Staff members of IPG met several times with representatives of both communities, always separately, to discuss possible joint activities that would stimulate cooperation between the two religions. After some initial hesitation, both the Orthodox priest and the Muslim mufti supported the idea of joint activity.

At a joint meeting in the office of IPG, the priest and the mufti agreed on a plan to rehabilitate the big cemetery just outside the city. This meeting was the first direct contact between the representatives of the Christian Orthodox and Muslim communities of Gostivar in many years. It was a big step forward, especially because relations between the two religious communities had deteriorated due to the war in Macedonia. The implementation of the project was launched through a joint ceremony by the priest and the mufti.

Both the Orthodox and the Muslim community bury their dead at this cemetery. The two sections are divided by a path. Because visitors to the cemetery complained about the lack of facilities there, water taps and benches were installed. After the rehabilitation of the cemetery, it now is easier for visitors to care for and visit the graves of their loved ones. The rehabilitation of the cemetery is coordinated by a Macedonian-Albanian management team that is in daily contact with representatives of the Orthodox and Muslim communities. Furthermore, the project hired three previously unemployed workers, an Albanian, a Macedonian, and a Turk, who care for the maintenance of the cemetery.

5. Evaluation of the Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar's Activities

Two years after its inception, it is clear that the strategy of IPG is bearing fruit. IPG now has a strong basis in Gostivar society. The number of projects initiated, by local partners and by the organization itself, is growing rapidly. Not only the local elite, but also more and more local partners from primary schools, handball clubs, culture houses, women's leagues, etc., find their way to IPG's office to submit their ideas for multiethnic activities.

Organizations representing one major ethnic group continue to work together with organizations representing the other major ethnic group after completion of a particular project. Multiethnic organizations are being established, and they contact IPG, asking for help and advice. Multiethnic student clubs are very active in both the drug prevention project and the ecology project that were organized by IPG. Trainers coming from Skopje, to give workshops to student clubs in Gostivar, were very surprised to see young people from different ethnic groups working so well together.

When IPG started in August 2000, its approach was completely new to the citizens, local government, and NGOs in Gostivar. Every group in Gostivar wanted to build houses, schools, hospitals, radio stations, and sports facilities, and they all expected money from IPG.¹⁵ After a long process of explanation, the organization succeeded in convincing people that they should take the initiative in proposing and implementing projects—and that these projects should be multiethnic. The work of IPG started going well after the first few projects were finished, and people saw with their own eyes that they can really do something that is in the interest of their community.

But the new approach of IPG was not the only hindrance to progress. There were some other problems hampering the organization's work. For one thing, IPG itself suffered from very serious internal problems, which made it difficult to function. The original board of IPG, composed of members of political parties, often tried to obstruct the staff and take over the organization, so they could exploit IPG for their own private advantage and party interests. The crisis was solved through intervention of the donors. Since then, IPG has stayed far away from any political party in Gostivar. Its new board members have no connection with any political party.

Another serious hindrance to the work of the IPG was external conditions—especially the war in Macedonia. People in Gostivar were primarily concerned with mere survival, and the fallout from the war posed a very obvious threat to the small degree of interethnic cooperation that had previously been achieved. The fact that IPG continued its activities, albeit on a much smaller scale, and maintained communication with all ethnic groups, was crucial for its credibility. More importantly, by continuing its activities, IPG was able to preserve a minimum of interethnic cooperation and tolerance in the city. This work helped to prevent interethnic clashes in Gostivar. During the war, IPG continued with the Vardar River project, the International Students Conference, Summer School 2001, and the video clip for peace. A major success during the war was IPG's second "Capacity

¹⁵ This attitude was encouraged by the main political party in Gostivar. During the campaign for municipal elections in September 2000, this party claimed that it brought IPG to Gostivar. The party claimed that Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar will build sports halls and will give money to all sports clubs in Gostivar.

Building Seminar.” This seminar, for local partners, was organized in June 2001, right after the second set of riots broke out in the city of Bitola in southern Macedonia. One day before the seminar was to start, IPG decided to cancel it because of the tensions. But when all participants were phoned, they made it very clear that they wanted to continue. Although the tension in Macedonia was high, almost all invited representatives of local partners, from all ethnic groups, left Gostivar to take part in the seminar in Struga. The atmosphere at the seminar was so good that, upon their return in Gostivar, the participants continued their discussions all afternoon in a local restaurant. The contacts between the participants of the seminar remain excellent, even now.

Right after the signing of the Ohrid agreement, at a time when tension was still running high, representatives of local organizations came to the office of IPG to discuss ideas for multiethnic activities. Examples of their ideas include the distribution of humanitarian aid to refugees and the handball school.

6. Conclusions: Recommendations and Lessons

An analysis of the two years of experience that IPG has gained in working to improve interethnic relations in Gostivar provides some useful lessons. Here they will be grouped under two headings: recommendations for future activities by IPG and lessons that other multiethnic communities can learn from the experiences of Gostivar.

6.1. *Recommendations for Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar*

Some changes or improvements that IPG might consider include the following:

- IPG should try to emphasize and support long-term interethnic cooperation. Right now, interethnic cooperation is too often limited to the specific period of a project's implementation. After a project is completed, and the funding is spent, organizations, faced with financial constraints, have a hard time continuing with interethnic activities. For instance, the handball school for boys, which lasted three months, could evolve into a multiethnic youth handball club, which could continue for many years. Along similar lines, a multiethnic kindergarten might be a good idea.
- The number of new multiethnic organizations is slowly growing, especially among youths. But still, most local partners who work with IPG are in reality mono-ethnic groups. IPG should encourage the establishment of multiethnic organizations and strengthen their capacities.
- IPG should involve more of Gostivar's ordinary citizens in multiethnic activities. Outreach is an important way to make life together more inclusive and participatory. IPG should therefore strengthen public relations efforts.
- IPG and its local partners should broaden the scope of their work. Local partners tend to focus all their activities on youths. The elderly are completely forgotten, and IPG could also do more to strengthen the position of women in Gostivar. Furthermore, activities on very sensitive issues, like religious cooperation and cooperation with the police, should be further developed.

- Based on the results so far, IPG may decide that it no longer needs to limit its activities to the municipality of Gostivar. It might decide to expand its activities outside of the municipality, to other villages that are also in urgent need of the kind of services IPG provides.
- Improving inter-ethnic relations is a long-term process. To make sure it can continue its activities, IPG should actively search for ways to achieve long-term financial security.
- If IPG grows stronger over the course of time—and achieves more visible results, thereby strengthening its reputation—it will contribute to the development of civil society by acting as a countervailing force to the country's omnipresent political parties. Because political parties too often rely on mobilizing inter-ethnic tensions during their election campaigns, to gain votes and to hide their own weaknesses, they are a root cause of interethnic tension. That's why a strong independent civil society, including IPG, is a necessary component of Macedonia's transition processes.¹⁶

6.2. *Useful Lessons Learned*

The Gostivar experience can offer several lessons for other multiethnic communities. What follows is a short summary of those aspects of interethnic cooperation in Gostivar that could be of general interest to other communities:

- The strategy of IPG is to intensify contacts between different ethnic groups through cooperation based on the joint interests of all citizens. The only condition is that the citizens of Gostivar must show initiative and work together. The staff of IPG makes it very clear that, if an activity is not multiethnic, then IPG is not financing it. After some time and a lot of effort by IPG, this approach is accepted and understood by the citizens of Gostivar.
- In the first year, most of the time of IPG staff was spent on building relations with local partners. Consequently, the number of activities in the first year was small. It takes a lot of time and patience to build credibility and a good reputation in such a sensitive area.
- Visible, concrete activities financed by IPG have built a reputation for IPG in Gostivar. This good reputation is very important for the future, especially when IPG attempts to get involved in sensitive activities, like religious cooperation.
- A strong, independent local staff, with no connection with political parties, has helped the organization build credibility. The local staff of IPG was capable of developing trustworthy relations with all its local partners, regardless of their ethnic background. A careful selection process for choosing staff proved to be very worthwhile.
- The Inter-Church Peace Council and the staff of IPG were too naïve the first time they selected board members for IPG. This turned out to be a costly mistake, which

¹⁶ As a new organization, working on a very sensitive issue in a complex environment, Inter-ethnic Project Gostivar is, at the moment, too fragile to fulfill that role. Pressure by omnipresent and very powerful political parties, and the media that are under these parties' control, would immediately destroy the reputation of IPG the moment it started criticizing or challenging political parties.

took a lot of time and effort to correct. Having learned its lesson, IPG, as an NGO in a completely politicized society, is doing everything it can to stay away from political parties. In order to keep its independence and credibility, IPG only works with a small number of trustworthy local politicians, and it does not give them any power to determine the policy of IPG. That IPG managed to survive an attempted coup by members of political parties was very important for the organization's credibility among the citizens of Gostivar.

- IPG has made clear to the citizens of Gostivar that a strong civil society can take the initiative and show a sense of responsibility to improve community life in the municipality. Because citizens can take their own initiatives, and no longer need to work through corrupt political parties, the project is working to improve the political culture in Gostivar and strengthen democracy. IPG has shown both citizens and political parties in Gostivar that there is space for a new, more democratic political culture.
- The international support from an international adviser and from the Inter-Church Peace Council was very important. The local staff of IPG has been wrongfully accused of ethnic bias, nepotism, and having connections with political parties. The local staff was also pressured by powerful people to give grants. The international support protected the local staff from wrongful accusations and undue pressure, thus ensuring the survival of IPG. It was essential to continue this international support during the war.

CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTER IN KUMANOVO HELPS KEEP PEACE BY ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION

By Kristina Hadži-Vasileva

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CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTER IN KUMANOVO HELPS KEEP PEACE BY ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION

By Kristina Hadži-Vasileva

During the military crisis that occurred in Macedonia in 2001, tensions increased dramatically between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, leading to a situation where the ethnically mixed town of Kumanovo could easily have slipped into war. Peace in that municipality was secured, in a large part due to the efforts of local officials, who received important support from a project called the Citizen Information Center of Kumanovo.

The center was funded by the United States Agency for International Development and was based on a similar projects that served municipalities around the region during peacetime. Although the center's main mission is relatively simple—keeping citizens informed and receiving their complaints about government services—it proved to be an invaluable aid during a time of crisis.

While it is clear that a well-functioning democracy requires an informed populace and responsive local government, these democratic values can tend to be forgotten during a crisis. But, as this case study shows, the work that the center did to encourage communication between local government and citizens was vital to maintaining peace in Kumanovo. By treating all citizens equally, and keeping the lines of communication open, the center helped reduce ethnic tensions on the local level.

In this paper, we will look at how a donor-driven project like the Citizen Information Center of Kumanovo can be incorporated into the strategy of the local government's efforts to keep peace. We will also look at how the center managed to assist in crisis alleviation. First we will present the basic situation of Kumanovo municipality. Then we will discuss the Local Government Reform Project, which established the Citizen Information Center in Kumanovo. Next we will describe the objectives and functions of the center and analyze the implementation of the project. The chapter concludes with a summary of the good practices that were followed and a set of policy recommendations.

1. Kumanovo: General Facts and Introduction

The City of Kumanovo is located 40 kilometers northeast of Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. It has a population of 95,000 residents, making it the second largest city in Macedonia. Kumanovo is one of the 40 Macedonian municipalities with an ethnically mixed population. The municipality consists of the city of Kumanovo and several smaller suburban areas. The major ethnic groups that make up Kumanovo's population are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Ethnic Breakdown of Kumanovo's Population

Macedonians	56,801	60.10%
Albanians	23,526	24.90%
Serbs	9,937	10.50%
Roma	3,118	3.20%
Total (incl. others)	94,589	100.00%

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Macedonia

In terms of religious affiliation, the majority of Kumanovo's citizens—71.9 percent—are orthodox Christians. Muslims make up 28.1 percent of the municipality's population.

In terms of representation in the local government, the ethnic structure of the municipal powers roughly corresponds with the ethnic structure of the population. Macedonians have 78.25 percent representation, Albanians have 17.4 percent representation, and Serbs have 4.35 percent representation.

Kumanovo is the economic, trading and cultural center of northern Macedonia. However, because of the strains of transition to a free-market economy, the municipality's living standard has deteriorated significantly. The town has witnessed the decline of its traditional industries: metal processing, tobacco, footwear and textiles. In this unfavorable economic context, the municipality is hard-pressed to respond to the needs and interests of the people. Today Kumanovo is dependent on financial assistance from the central government.

In addition to economic difficulties, the municipality is confronted with a general climate of interethnic tensions and mistrust, caused by lack of interethnic tolerance and entrenchment of ethnic stereotypes. Nonetheless, when interethnic violence struck parts of Macedonia during 2001, Kumanovo remained relatively peaceful. During the six months of fighting, which divided ethnic Albanians and Macedonians, Kumanovo had every opportunity to slip into violence—but it did not. Instead, its inhabitants and political elite worked together to reject violence and manage their common problems in the spirit of compromise. This chapter will look at how one project helped maintain this peaceful environment.

2. The Local Government Reform Project: Its Programs, Objectives, and Strategies

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been implementing various projects in Macedonia for several years. The Local Government Reform Project was set up by USAID in 1999, after an assessment determined that a critical component of local government reform in Macedonia is the development of regular, transparent, and two-way communication between local government and citizens. The general objective of the current program is to assist local public administration and to work toward reform of the local policy framework in Macedonia, in order to make local governments more

responsive, accountable, and effective. Within this general framework, the Local Government Reform Project is undertaking several activities. These activities are grouped into the following four interrelated programs:

- **The Policy Reform Program:** This program brings together international and domestic experts, as well as representatives of the respective ministries, in order to assist with drafting municipal legal acts and implementation of both municipal and state legal acts. One of the most important achievements of this program was the assistance it gave in drafting the new Law on Local Self-Government in Macedonia, which was adopted in January 2002. More recently, the program has been helping with the preparation of the new draft Law on Local Government Finance.
- **The Association Development Program:** This program works towards strengthening local citizens' associations, and thereby civil society. The program undertakes various activities that will help increase the associations' ability to become competent, relevant actors in policy making and policy implementation processes at the local level.
- **The Municipal Management Program:** This program works with municipalities on finding best ways for using their resources when managing local affairs. Through this program, local governments receive technical assistance, which is intended to help them improve their financial management and operation of public enterprises.
- **The Citizen Participation Program:** This program is designed to improve communication between the local government and citizens—and to find ways for local governments to expand and improve information services to citizens. One of the most important activities of this program has been the establishment of Citizen Information Centers in the municipalities.

3. The Citizen Information Center Project and its Establishment in Kumanovo

The Citizen Information Centers (hereafter "CICs") in Macedonia are based on similar institutions that achieved good results in the Central and Eastern European countries of Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria in recent years. The CICs serve a particular purpose of political education: Given the reality of governments in transition, and changing functions at all levels of government, there is widespread confusion among citizens as to which competencies are performed by which level of government. The paradox with Macedonia is that, under socialism, the state went through decentralization, which secured a wide range of competencies and financial responsibility for the municipalities. When the Macedonian state gained independence from the former Yugoslavia, in 1991, the process was reversed, for fear that the country might come apart. Currently, the country has a highly centralized state apparatus that gives very little authority to the municipalities. In this situation, the CICs have been very successful in guiding citizens through the complexities of the early post-socialism separation of powers.

The CIC in Kumanovo was established in the summer of 2001, but due to the crisis in Macedonia, there was no official opening ceremony. This meant that the Local

Government Reform Project could not help the City of Kumanovo conduct initial publicity and outreach efforts—to inform citizens that there was a new office to support their information and service needs. The official opening was left for better times, and the center started working in the end of July 2001.

The center only began operating after several months of preparatory work, which included development and installation of a special database, hiring and training of staff, and establishment of partnerships between the CIC staff, citizens, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of regional ministries.¹

The CIC in Kumanovo consists of an office in city hall that informs citizens about their local government, facilitates solutions to problems citizens have with the delivery of public services, and acts as a center for collecting citizens' initiatives and complaints. The CIC also provides information about local NGOs, schools, region-related international projects, regional fairs and exhibitions, regional educational opportunities, etc. In short, the general mission of CIC is to provide more transparent and efficient municipal services by improving the information flow between citizens and their local government.

The objectives of the CIC project in Kumanovo are:

- to begin the process of empowerment of the citizenry by providing them with information about the functioning of their government;
- to help citizens in addressing their interests, problems, and concerns;
- to provide information so that transparency can be achieved and the citizens can better understand the government and how the citizenry can influence it—thereby creating a situation that enhances the responsiveness of local government;
- to increase citizen awareness of their rights and involve them in the municipal decision-making processes;
- to increase the responsibility of local government officials.

Through its two offices, the Information Center and the Complaints Center, the CIC performs two basic functions:

The **Information Center** provides information on:

- the responsibilities of each department of the municipality;
- the authority and responsibilities of city hall;
- information on the city council;
- information available to citizens about decisions and activities of the main departments;
- information on local NGOs and businesses;
- information about the city, including maps, statistical data, etc.

¹ The existence of the regional ministries just confirms the level of centralization that continues to exist in Macedonia. These regional offices, located within the town hall, represent the central government ministries at the local level. They issue various kinds of documents and licenses that fall within their competencies. For example, the regional Ministry of Interior issues identity cards and other identification documents. Sometimes it is necessary to acquire documents from different regional offices, and then the citizens realize how very bureaucratized and poorly coordinated these offices are. According to the new Law on Local Self-Government, the competencies of these offices will become part of the local government and of the services of the CICs.

The Information Center has also created a database, with information on various aspects of city life, which is made available to citizens. Some specific information that this database holds is:

- general information relating to cultural events, regional fairs, regional business conferences;
- procedures for registering a new business;
- international projects in Macedonia;
- educational opportunities/application procedures for higher education;
- wholesale prices for food products;
- documents and information required for obtaining business/tourist visas for other countries;
- information on securing credit lines.

At the **Complaints Center**, citizens who have complaints about the local government can complete a form outlining their grievances. The staff of the center is responsible for recording the complaint and delivering it to the appropriate local government department. The respective department is obliged to address the complaint by a specified date. The response is either sent by mail or addressed through personal communication, depending on the issue.

A computer program was created to record all the complaints received at the Complaints Center. This information serves the following two basic purposes:

- Collecting data about all the citizens entering the center, for the CIC's own informational needs. Every month the center prepares a report highlighting the number of citizens visiting the center, the departments that had the most visits and some of the main areas of concern for citizens.
- Collecting and keeping track of the complaints of the citizens. In order to make citizens believe that the city cares about their complaints, it is important that the CIC not only receives complaints, but also tries to solve them. This information can be entered in the computer and followed by the staff—until the date when the citizen has been asked to come back for a response.

4. Implementation and Development of the Kumanovo Project

The decision to open a CIC in Kumanovo was not reached easily. As the crisis in Macedonia escalated, American personnel from most USAID projects, including the Local Government Reform Project, were evacuated from the country, leaving the local staff to deal with the issues at hand. While it was obvious in 2001 that something had to be done in the region to assist local governments and their citizens—both of whom were affected by the military crisis—most of the immediate aid efforts in Macedonia were aimed at providing shelter, food, and clothes for displaced persons. The idea of opening a CIC seemed like an unnecessary luxury.

Nonetheless, after many long discussions with the mayor of Kumanovo, it became obvious that one of the weaknesses of the local government was that it was not able to provide useful and timely information to citizens. With some doubt, and a lot of hope, the Local Government Reform Project staff were eventually allowed to open the CIC.

Normally, the decision to open a CIC has to be approved by the local city council. In this case, in order to speed the process, the mayor was the one who adopted the decision, after brief consultation with his advisors. The first step in the implementation of the CIC was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Local Government Reform Project and the Kumanovo local government. The memorandum lists the project's specific responsibilities for running the CIC. These include providing technical assistance, purchasing computers, purchasing software and other office equipment and furniture, as well as covering the costs of initial Internet access. The city agreed to provide the CIC with the office space, and upgrade it as necessary, and also to provide on-going operating expenses, supplies, and equipment maintenance. While it is the usual practice that staff salaries are provided by the local government, in the Kumanovo case—due to the financial difficulties of the local government in time of war—the Local Government Reform Project decided to make an exception and pay the employees. The objective of the Local Government Reform Project is to provide sufficient technical and financial assistance to get the CIC operational, and to secure its future stability.

As a second step, the Local Government Reform Project and city officials worked together to appoint and train the CIC staff. While the choice of the CIC staff is up to the mayor, the Local Government Reform Project provided assistance, by pointing out the type of skills that will be required of the staff. In coordination with the project, the mayor appointed three persons to work in the CIC. The staff members included one employee of the local government and two other people who had the necessary qualifications. On the recommendation of the mayor, two Macedonians and one Albanian were chosen for the staff—in order to acknowledge the ethnic diversity of the municipality and to enable communication with all citizens.

After the staff was chosen, it was time to install the standard CIC database, which provides information on local government bodies and regional offices of the ministries, local NGOs and local public enterprises. This last category is important because, in other cities with a CIC, most of the complaints coming from the citizens refer to public services delivery.

Once opened, the center immediately responded to local needs. Because of the specific conditions caused by the outbreak of the 2001 military crisis, there was practically no time for the normal training period for CIC staff at the Kumanovo center. Furthermore, the situation in Macedonia dictated that the “normal” agenda of the center had to be changed from typical CIC operations, in order to respond to the immediate, on-going crisis. Instead of the sort of questions that are usually posed in other CICs—about urban planning, building permits, competencies of the mayor and taxi licenses—the center in Kumanovo had to address citizens' crisis-related concerns.

One of the most significant activities that the mayor undertook was to calm tensions by walking the city—together with one of his advisors, who is an ethnic Albanian—meeting citizens and publicly declaring that violence will not achieve anything. As soon as the CIC was established, the mayor immediately put it to use in this field. On a regular basis, he issued public appeals asking citizens of the municipality to stay calm, not allow themselves to be provoked, and trust in the ability of state security forces to deal with the situation. The center was a hub where all these pleas were compiled and translated into the languages of the minorities by the staff. They were then printed in the form of leaflets and

distributed by the staff to all inhabitants. These activities, which were conducted by the mayor with the support of the CIC, helped secure the stability of Kumanovo.

The local government also established and activated a Civil Protection Headquarters (CPHQ), headed by the council chairman. This office consisted of members of different ethnicities and various institutions relevant to the management of the crisis, including: local government officials; representatives of displaced Albanians and displaced Macedonians; and representatives of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Interior. The mayor appointed a member of the CIC staff to the CPHQ. The work of the CIC became closely linked to the work of the CPHQ.

In this period, military activities forced many people to leave their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. The houses they left behind were burned, destroyed or ruined. In their uncertainty, these people turned to the CIC for help, requesting daily information regarding the possibility of returning to their homes. Because meetings of the CPHQ kept security issues high on the agenda, and because it received information on a weekly—and sometimes daily—basis from the Ministry of Interior, the CIC used this data to keep the displaced persons, and the families sheltering them, informed about the situation.

Some of the citizens wanted to know how severely their property had been damaged and asked whether their cattle were alive. The CIC staff worked toward obtaining first-hand information regarding estimates of damage to houses and helped direct the displaced persons to the institutions in charge. In addition, the CIC informed citizens about the full procedure for obtaining assessments on their houses, belongings, and property.

In some cases, displaced persons had left behind identification papers when leaving their homes, and they needed new ones. Replacing papers was complicated by the fact that these documents are issued by the Ministry of the Interior, located in the capital, Skopje. The CIC staff offered help by contacting the regional unit of the ministry in Kumanovo, and by compiling a list of the necessary papers to be submitted in order to be able to apply for identification documents. Here, the CIC staff again served as a mediator through which the concerns of the citizens were transferred, not only to local government officials, but to all officials responsible for managing the problem. The CIC played a major role in posing questions of interest to citizens and getting responses.

The CIC also established contacts with international organizations, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union monitoring mission and many local humanitarian organizations. The aim was to obtain direct information about what was going on in the villages and to be able to give displaced persons the information they needed. The CIC compiled a list of all displaced persons, including those staying in collective centers and those staying with families, friends, and relatives. It offered this list to all international organizations that were distributing humanitarian aid or were involved in the process of reconstruction of the crisis region. In addition, it also informed these organizations about the activities of the local government, contacts with the political parties in Kumanovo, etc. The CIC was used as a place where relief packages and one-time financial assistance was distributed. The need for precise information about what was happening on the ground necessitated weekly co-ordination meetings among the actors mentioned, and the CIC staff was present regularly at these meetings. The CIC took over the role of disseminating information about the local gov-

ernment and meeting the needs of the citizens, and it sought feedback from other organizations. The political and military situation, as well as issues of safe return, were discussed at these meetings.

The CIC also assisted the work of the CPHQ. The majority of the displaced persons were gathered in collective centers administered by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, and the CPHQ was responsible for dealing with these displaced persons on the local level. The CIC worked together with these two institutions. It prepared the necessary documents for individuals and submitted them on their behalf to the office in Skopje. In addition, it supported the CPHQ by acting as its public relations department. The staff helped in the preparation of extremely sensitive press releases and decisions about public relations.

During the crisis, the CIC staff also extended their activity to areas outside the municipality of Kumanovo. Since the neighboring municipality of Lipkovo was heavily affected by the war, the majority of the displaced persons that came into the Kumanovo municipality were from there. At one point, the CIC received information that skin diseases were spreading in a village in Lipkovo that was practically isolated by the military operations. After much effort, the staff received confirmation of the problem and relayed it to the international monitoring organizations working in the region. International relief organizations managed to mobilize their medical teams and get approval to enter Lipkovo. As a result, help reached the threatened village.

The CIC staff was involved in documenting the state of certain facilities of importance to the community, such as schools and hospitals, in order to be able to assess the initial damage situation. The facilities were photographed and records were archived, for use when eventual reconstruction would take place.

Together with the mayor and the council chairman, the CIC organized a meeting of all local NGOs and citizens' associations. As a result, a co-coordination body, consisting of 11 to 15 members, was formed, to facilitate communication with the local government and share useful information.

A similar body was organized for the Kumanovo municipality's 45 settlements, whose presidents had a meeting with the mayor and the CIC staff and briefed them on conditions in their villages.

During the months of the crisis, the CIC directly served over 200 citizens in need, regardless of their ethnic origin, religious or political affiliation. The CIC distributed information and directed assistance to people in the collective centers and other citizens in the municipality, including those who were not registered in the CIC database. This assistance reached thousands of people. The staff accepted the position taken by the mayor of Kumanovo, that everyone in the community should work towards keeping the peace. They did everything in their power to reduce ethnic tensions, by holding almost daily meetings with each other and by directly rushing to the scene of any emerging conflict to talk to both sides on the spot. They also helped reduce tensions by providing citizens with timely information about events that concerned them.

The end of military activities did not bring an end to the work of the CIC. The Ministry of Transportation organized an on-line catalogue with information about damaged houses in the crisis region. Assistance with construction materials was distributed based on the photos and descriptions in the catalogue. Citizens from the region began coming to

the CIC, to inquire if their houses were included in the catalogue and to add their own photos and descriptions of damage. The staff assisted citizens in these efforts.

Today the CIC continues its work. The payment of staff salaries, as well as other operating expenses, has been taken over by the local government, thus providing sustainability for the center.

Part of the CIC's work is still crisis-related. Not all displaced persons have returned to their villages, and the security situation is still an issue. The CIC continues to support the mayor's efforts to solve the existing problem of displaced persons by providing information on the competencies of various ministries related to post-crisis reconstruction. For example, displaced persons have to apply to the Ministry of Transport and Communications for assistance in housing re-construction, while most other assistance—including replacement of animal stables, farm machines, etc.—is under the competency of the Ministry of Agriculture, and thus requires different procedures. The CIC also provides information about the work of the ethnically mixed police patrols. These patrols were developed according to a government plan, which envisions the mixed police forces entering villages in the crisis region in stages—and gradually taking over control of security.

Furthermore, the CIC is still working to assist the mayor in organizing joint meetings with the municipality of Lipkovo, as well as several other neighboring settlements from the two municipalities.

The CIC has also pledged to assist in the evaluation of damage to the property of displaced persons, by ensuring that those who have not returned to their homes are registered. These people's contact information is being kept, so that they can be notified when final evaluation of the damage to their houses is done.

And the CIC is continuing coordination of local and international donor assistance to the region.

5. Conclusion

The work of local governments is very important in preserving a country's good inter-ethnic relations. During the crisis in Macedonia, the municipal authorities had a major role in relaxing the tensions that arose between ethnic groups. One vital element of the work to reduce tension, as this case study shows, was a concerted effort to keep citizens informed about the situation and the events taking place. Furthermore, by staying informed about citizens' needs in periods of crisis, authorities were better equipped to react properly.

As the activity of the Kumanovo CIC demonstrates, people in need should be treated as equal, regardless of their ethnic origin. By contributing to the peaceful management of the crisis, the CIC has developed a reputation among citizens as more of a local institution than a donor project. The Local Government Reform Project positioned itself in the role of a partner with the city, so that the CIC was shaped by the city and its citizens, in accordance with their needs.

Other lessons learned from the project include the following:

- Local officials' support, and appreciation of the benefits, of the CIC was crucial to the center's success.

- Constant communication with citizens, using every possible means—especially the CIC—ensures that their concerns are taken into account.
- It is important to build trust among members of the local government—just as it is important to build trust between the local government and its citizens.
- Being mobile and ready to immediately go to the scene of events helps decrease tensions and conveys the message that the local government is concerned about the well-being of all its citizens, regardless of ethnic origin.
- Having a well-trained, multi-lingual staff from different ethnic backgrounds ensures that people entering the CIC will be comfortable and will seek assistance.
- By offering printed materials in several languages, the CIC is able to quickly disseminate relevant information.
- It is important to coordinate the various entities working on crisis management.

The basic conclusion is that the future of Macedonia must be built on trust and understanding. Today we see that communities can build a better future by being sensitive to differences, while working together on issues of common interest.

MULTIETHNIC COEXISTENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE CONFLICT OF 2001

By Renata Treneska

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The 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia, which destroyed the unique peace that the country had been able to preserve during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, resulted in changes to the constitution. While the amended constitution seeks to improve ethnic relations, it may actually create new problems.

In legal terms, the situation of ethnic minorities in Macedonia never appeared problematic. The framers of the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia took great pains to accommodate the multiethnic structure of the population. Even the preamble of the constitution stressed the need to create a space in Macedonia for all “nationalities,” thus treating Macedonians and minorities equally.

But the reality of Macedonia was, and is, different from the harmonious coexistence envisioned in the 1991 Constitution. Albanians and Macedonians often live in separate communities, completely isolated from one another. In 2001, armed rebels began a war, which initially appeared to be aimed at dividing the country but was later painted as a struggle for the rights of Albanian Macedonians.

To meet the rebels’ demands, the government agreed to add amendments to the constitution. These amendments effectively made Albanian an official language in the country. The amendments also sought to increase consociational democracy by giving minority members veto rights on certain issues, insuring that the minority has a place in the government coalition, insuring appropriate representation in civil service positions and insuring autonomy for the various segments of society.

But the efforts to alter the constitution were hasty and appear incomplete. The amendments seem to raise as many questions as they answer.

Still, the main obstacle to peaceful coexistence is not the constitution, but the reality of the situation. Since the war, many villages that had Albanian majorities are now “ethnically cleansed,” and the non-Albanians who fled those villages put their lives at risk if they seek to return. Albanians in these villages live according to their own laws, essentially ignoring the laws of Macedonia.

In such a setting, consociational democracy will not work. Instead of building toward increased harmony, Macedonia’s new constitution seems to be setting up a situation where ethnicity will play a greater role in the running of the country.

The first part of this chapter explores constitutional rights of the national minorities in the Republic of Macedonia between 1991 and 2001. This will be followed by a survey of the actual situation in the country and a description of the war and the changes it

brought about. The latter sections of the chapter include an analysis of the constitutional amendments and the new Law on Local Self Government, followed by a description of the reality of the current situation. This will lead us to the conclusion that, even though the 2001 amendments to Macedonia's Constitution were based on a spirit of tolerance, they may not be sufficient to hold the country together in the face of the broad divisions that exist.

1. Legal Rights of National Minorities in Macedonia from 1991 to 2001

1.1. Basic Provisions of the 1991 Constitution: Definition of State and Minority Rights

The framers of the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia¹ were aware of the need to accommodate the multiethnic structure of the population through strong legal provisions. Macedonia is home to several large ethnic groups, and minorities together make up more than 30 percent of the country's population. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the ethnic composition of the population of Macedonia.

Table 1: Population in the Republic of Macedonia According to the Censuses in 1991 and 1994

Ethnic origin	1991	1994
Macedonians	1,328,187	1,295,964
Albanians	441,987	441,104
Turks	77,080	78,019
Roma	52,103	43,707
Vlachs	7,764	8,601
Serbs	42,755	40,228
Others	84,070	38,309
Total	2,033,946	1,936,877

Instead of using the term “national minorities,” the Macedonian Constitution mentions “nationalities”²—in order to emphasize the equality of minorities and ethnic Macedonians. The protection of the rights of all nationalities is one of the goals of the constitution, as the preamble states:

“Taking as starting points the historical, cultural, spiritual and statehood heritage of the Macedonian people and their struggle over centuries for national and social freedom as well as the creation of their own state ... and the historical fact that Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as

¹ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 51/1991.

² The Constitution does not provide definitions of the terms “minority” and “nationality.”

citizens and permanent coexistence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia ... the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia adopts the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia.”

Like most constitutions, the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia contains a reference to the historical continuity of the state. But, unlike most other such documents, the preamble of Macedonia's constitution also refers to minorities, or “nationalities,” and stresses the principle of equality and the intention to establish a peaceful common home for both the Macedonian people and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia.

The equality of all Macedonia's citizens is expressly guaranteed in the constitutional definition of the state: “The Republic of Macedonia is a sovereign, independent, democratic and social state.³ ... Sovereignty in the Republic of Macedonia derives from the citizens and belongs to the citizens.”⁴

These passages indicate an attempt by the drafters of the Macedonian Constitution to provide for an inclusive concept of citizenship while remaining sensitive to different group identities. The sensitivity to the needs of different nationalities in Macedonia is also expressed in the constitutional provisions guaranteeing special minority rights. These rights expressly recognize that the members of the national minorities need protection of their identity. Identity, in its essence, is cultural, and it demands not only tolerance, but also a positive attitude from the state toward cultural pluralism. To protect minorities' identity, the state should refrain from policies aimed at assimilation by the dominant culture. The essential safeguards of a minorities' identity include the right to organize as a group; the right to use their own language; the right to protect, continue, develop, and foster their culture; the right to influence the education of their future generations, etc. These and other rights were guaranteed to national minorities in the 1991 Constitution.

In Macedonia, deciding to declare membership in a national minority is a matter of individual choice, which does not imply unwarranted harmful consequences or privileges.

The specific rights of minorities are closely associated with the general right to live free from discrimination. Citizens of Macedonia are to be considered equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of sex, race, color of skin, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property, and social status. Following the general principle of equality before the law, Article 9 of the Constitution expressly forbids any discrimination on the grounds of national origin, or any other individual or group-specific feature.

The general right of non-discrimination provides the basis for specific minority rights, such as affirmative action programs. The aim of these programs in Macedonia is to decrease the disproportional representation of minorities in those spheres of social life that are important for protection and development of their identities. For example, minority members were granted special quotas for enrollment in universities, which meant they had a better chance of admission than ethnic Macedonians.

³ The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 1 (1).

⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 2 (1).

1.2. Specific Minority Rights in the 1991 Constitution

Along with affirmative action programs, minorities in Macedonia enjoy certain specific rights that are expressly guaranteed in the Constitution.

Article 48 of the Constitution states that members of national minorities in the Republic of Macedonia have a right to freely express, foster, and develop their identity and national attributes. The republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity of the nationalities. Members of national minorities also have the right to establish their own institutions for culture and art, as well as to establish scholarly and other associations for the expression, fostering, and development of their identity.

Some of the other specific minority rights are outlined in more detail below.

1.2.1. Right to Information in a Minority Language

The Constitution guarantees nationalities the right to receive information in their own language. Specifically, minorities have the right to use one of the national radio and television channels for a set amount of time, in order to produce programs in their own language.

Broadcasting of the Albanian-language program on Macedonian Television (MTV) started in 1967. Today, MTV broadcasts three hours of daily programming in the Albanian language, including news, documentaries, a musical program, a program for children, etc. Macedonian Radio started broadcasting in the Albanian language in 1945, and today the radio broadcast in this language lasts eight hours and 30 minutes per day.

Turkish language broadcasts on MTV began in 1969. Since 1996, the daily Turkish-language broadcast lasts one hour and 30 minutes on MTV and five hours on Macedonian Radio.

In 1990, MTV started broadcasting in the Romani language two times a week for 30 minutes. This program contains information, music, and programs connected with the language, culture and traditions of Roma. The Macedonian radio program in Romani started one year later, in 1991, and today it is broadcast 30 minutes a day.

Also in 1991, MTV and Macedonian radio began broadcasting a program in the Vlach language, which lasts as long as the program in Romani.

A Serbian-language program, lasting 30 minutes, has been broadcast twice a week since 1994.

It should also be noted that programs in national minority languages are broadcast by the public local media in municipalities where the minorities constitute a large segment of the local population. For example in Tetovo, where the Albanian minority is the dominant population, the majority of the programming on public local radio—a total of 240 minutes a day—is broadcast in Albanian. The Macedonian language program in Tetovo lasts 180 minutes a day; the Turkish-language broadcast lasts 120 minutes a day; and the Romani broadcast lasts 30 minutes a day.

In Macedonia, there are also private TV channels and radio stations that broadcast in minority languages. Private local TV and radio stations that broadcast in the Albanian language operate in the cities of Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, and Struga. There are also private TV and radio stations that broadcast in the Serbian and Romani languages.

There are two daily newspapers financed from the state budget that publish in minority languages: “Flaka” publishes in Albanian and “Birlik” publishes in Turkish.

National minorities also have theatres in Macedonia. A state-financed theatre for nationalities in Skopje offers Albanian and Turkish drama. There are also some cultural-artistic associations financed by the state, including eight for Albanians, four for Turks, and one for Roma. In addition, some amateur theater groups and cultural-artistic groups exist for minorities in Macedonia.

1.2.2. Education Rights

In the field of education, minorities' concerns generally center around the desire for education in their own language and the instruction of this language. The Macedonian Constitution deals with the first concern in Article 48(4), which proclaims that the various nationalities have the right to instruction in their own language in primary and secondary education. In schools where education is carried out in the language of a nationality, the Macedonian language is also studied. This provision of the constitution offers higher standards for protection of the rights of minorities in the field of education than those contained in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted by the Council of Europe.

Table 2: Number of Students in Primary and Secondary Education in the Language of a National Minority in 1998/99—and the Number of Schools Offering those Programs.

Language of education	Students in primary education	Schools in primary education	Students in secondary education	Schools in secondary education
Macedonian	172,374	795	73,566	92
Albanian	76,099	284	12,973	22
Turkish	5,990	54	584	4
Serbian	687	14	—	—

The right to higher education in the languages of the nationalities is not mentioned in the constitution. But Macedonia already has an Albanian language faculty of pedagogy, where students can obtain diplomas as Albanian-language teachers in primary and secondary schools. In 1995, professors who used to teach at the University of Pristina in the province of Kosovo, which was closed down by the totalitarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic, sought to open an Albanian language university in Mala Recica, Macedonia. But there was no legal basis for establishing a private university in the country at that time, and the school did not receive legal recognition. This lack of recognition led to a clash between demonstrators and the police, in which one Albanian was killed and 30 people were injured.

The lawful context for establishing private universities was not laid out until the Law of Higher Education⁵ was adopted in 2000. From the very beginning, the terms of this law were negotiated with the active participation of the representatives of the international community and the legally elected political representatives of ethnic Albanians in

⁵ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 64/2000.

Macedonia. The law, which defines conditions for accreditation of a university in Macedonia, complies with the regulations of the Council of Europe. The institution in Mala Recica has still not fulfilled these conditions for accreditation and its “diplomas” are not legally recognized.

The first lawful private university in the Albanian language was opened in 2000 in Tetovo, with expert and financial assistance from international actors—including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United States. The high commissioner for national minorities of the OSCE, Max van der Stoep, was the head of the initiating committee for establishing the South East European University in the Albanian language. The university was broadly accepted by Albanian political representatives in Macedonia as an adequate and satisfying solution for this educational problem. The Macedonian government has also supported this university, by providing the location and granting the land. Since it has fulfilled the conditions required by the law for the establishment of an institute of higher education, this university has been registered and its diplomas are legally recognized and valid.

It would appear that the problem of higher education in the Albanian language had been adequately addressed in Macedonia in 2000. The need for change in this area was not mentioned as a cause for the armed conflict in 2001. Furthermore, questions on the issue were not raised in negotiations aimed at ending the conflict, in Ohrid.⁶ Consequently, the framework agreement that came out of Ohrid contains no reference to the issue of minority education.

1.2.3. Linguistic Rights

Like many states, the Republic of Macedonia recognizes the freedom of the individual to use the language he wishes in the private sphere, even if this right is not expressly stated. The more important issue for the protection of the rights of minorities is the use of language in the public sphere.

According to Article 7 of the original text of the constitution, the official language in the Republic of Macedonia is Macedonian, written in the Cyrillic alphabet. But, in a unit of local self-government where 50 percent or more of the inhabitants belong to a national minority, the minority language and alphabet must also be used officially, along with Macedonian, in manner determined by law. In the units of local self-government where at least 20 percent of the population belongs to a national minority, their language and alphabet must be used officially if the local council decides this should be the case, according to the 1995 Law on Local Self-government.⁷

The 1997 Law on Criminal Procedure⁸ states that a Macedonian citizen who belongs

⁶ This opinion is shared by independent international experts: “The main issue that had threatened peaceful coexistence after 1991, namely that of higher education, seemed close to a solution of some sort, with the Max van der Stoep proposal.” See: Kristina Balalovska, Alessandro Silj, and Mario Zucconi, “Minority Politics in Southeast Europe: Crisis in Macedonia,” *Ethnobarometer*, Rome, 2002, p. 9.

⁷ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 52/1995.

⁸ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 15/1997.

to a national minority and is involved in a criminal procedure has the right to use the language and alphabet of his minority. The court must provide an interpreter free of charge. A minority member also has the right to submit his applications and other court documents in the language and alphabet of the minority to which he belongs. In such cases, the court translates the documents and sends them to the other parties involved in the procedure.

But some other provisions of this law that were designed to help minorities were reversed by the Macedonian Constitutional Court in 1999. The high court repealed Article 9, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Law on Civil Procedure, according to which court summons would have to be written in the language of a national minority member. Article 138, Paragraph 3 of the law,⁹ which would have allowed for minority language use in certain procedures, suffered a similar fate. The Constitutional Court ruled that, during official procedures, courts could not use languages and alphabets that are not official languages in the Republic of Macedonia.

2. The Actual Situation of National Minorities from 1991 to 2001

The position of national minorities in the Republic of Macedonia during the period from independence in 1991 until 2001 was better than that required by international acts for national minorities' protection. The people and the political actors in Macedonia were aware that the existence of national minorities—especially Albanians—was a fact of life. Consequently, all governments formed after 1991 were coalition governments, in which the second major partner was made up of Albanian political parties.

In the 1990 elections, for example, out of a total 120 representatives in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, 27 belonged to a national minority. Twenty-three were Albanians, two were Roma, one was Turkish, and one was Serbian. The number of members of parliament belonging to a national minority after the parliamentary elections in 1998 was similar: There were 28 minority members, including 25 Albanians, two Roma, one Macedonian-Muslim, and one Muslim. The two biggest political parties in Macedonia—the Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)—both chose parties of ethnic Albanians when they were forming coalitions. The same coalitions existed on the local level in the municipalities.

Attempts were also made to achieve proper representation of the minorities in public administration and the courts.

Despite this minority representation, minorities expressed dissatisfaction with the situation in Macedonia during the 1990s. A demand that Albanian be used as an official language in the work of the parliament has been a sticking point that has prevented the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly from being adopted. Since 1990, the major political parties, SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, had the majority required to push this act through without a clause mentioning the Albanian language. But the big parties chose not to pass the Rules of Procedure without a multiethnic consensus.

⁹ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 33/1998.

Although the political elites of the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians share similar economic interests and sit together in coalition governments, outside of parliament, most Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia live separately, in two parallel worlds. Many ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, a group that includes a significant number of naturalized immigrants from Kosovo, often appear as if they have not accepted Macedonia as their homeland: During public events, Albanians in Macedonia often fly the Albanian flag, instead of the flag of the Republic of Macedonia. In areas where Albanians represent the majority or a significant number, they sometimes evade paying taxes, and in some areas they have organized their own paramilitary forces. Some ethnic Albanian factions have sought recognition as a separate “people” in Macedonia, which would mean, under international law, that they would have the right to self-determination that a minority does not have.

Serbs in Macedonia have also raised concerns about the treatment of minorities in the country. One source of tension has been the Serbs’ demand to be recognized as a nationality by the Macedonian Constitution.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 1996 Annual Report, the situation of Roma in Macedonia is better than in any other state in the Balkans. The Roma founded their own political party, which has consistently been represented in the parliament and has always supported the government, regardless of changes in the ruling coalition.

Although interethnic tension did exist, it can be said that members of national minorities in Macedonia were not subject to political pressure between 1991 and 2001. Their constitutional rights were guaranteed, and there were many mechanisms for minority protection in place. But these conditions were obviously not sufficient to prevent conflict, and serious friction boiled over in 2001.

3. Events of 2001: From ‘Oasis of Peace’ to ‘Wild West’

For almost 10 years after its independence in 1991, Macedonia was considered an “oasis of peace,” in war-torn former Yugoslavia. As independent international observers wrote: “Macedonia was a good example of a functioning multiethnic democracy, especially bearing in mind the regional turmoil it had managed to survive,”¹⁰ but, “There were however situations that represented potential threats to the stability of the country and should have alerted both the Macedonian authorities and the international community, but were not dealt with. One was the participation of ethnic Albanians from Macedonia in a number of meetings, most of them in Kosovo but some also in Macedonia, that were in part related to the activities of the KLA¹¹ and PMBLA¹² in Southeastern Serbia’s Presevo Valley and, more generally, the problem of pan-Albanian extremism. The other one was the presence of deposits of weapons on Macedonian territory. Some action was taken ... but there were omissions too, and in the case of deposits of weapons, the problem was not so much lack of attention as much as the individuals in the Macedonian government coalition who were linked to the arms traffic and therefore interested in keeping things as they were.

¹⁰ See: Kristina Balalovska, Alessandro Silj, and Mario Zucconi, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹ Kosovo Liberation Army (Albanian abbreviation: UCK).

¹² Presevo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac Liberation Army (Albanian abbreviation: USPMB).

The lack of attention was justified with claims that the weapons were intended for either Kosovo, or later, southern Serbia.”¹³

Those who were arming obviously had sympathizers among the local communities. Apparently many Albanians in Macedonia were not happy with their situation.

The war in Macedonia began in January 2001, when three attacks were made against police and shots were fired at a train. The National Liberation Army (NLA) claimed responsibility for these attacks and issued four communiqués with territorial claims. But shortly after the communiqués, on Feb. 4, 2001, these territorial claims were abandoned and the fighting continued under the banner of a “struggle for human rights.” The conflict grew more serious in February 2001, after a TV story reported that the village of Tanusevci, which is on the Macedonian border with Kosovo and is inhabited by ethnic Albanians, was under control of smugglers and armed people in strange uniforms. A team of journalists was attacked by these unidentified people. The police, under public pressure, sought to reestablish control over the territory around the village, only to face armed resistance. This event occurred a few months after the Macedonian media had reported that armed groups were crossing the Macedonian border with Kosovo, establishing bases in Macedonia—reports that were firmly denied by the Macedonian Government.

After the first armed conflict around Tanusevci, some political parties representing ethnic Albanians and some non-governmental organizations held peace rallies in Macedonia.¹⁴ During one such rally, in March 2001 in Tetovo, someone started shooting from the old fortress above Tetovo. The participants in the rally, who were protesting for peace, reacted by applauding the shooting.

The armed conflict continued. There were guerilla attacks against the Macedonian police and military troops, kidnapping and torturing of civilians, looting and destruction of houses of people who were not ethnic Albanians and destruction of Christian religious and historical buildings. In Kumanovo, a town of about 100,000 inhabitants, attackers occupied a water spring, leaving the entire town without water.

¹³ Kristina Balalovska, Alessandro Silj, and Mario Zucconi, *op.cit.*, p. 10. As external factors that helped trigger the conflict, these authors point to the smuggling and trafficking of arms in and out of Kosovo and the lesson that “violence pays,” learned from the crisis in Kosovo. According to the authors, the conflict was further triggered by a concurrence of several events that took place, coincidentally, in the same period, namely: the agreement reached by Belgrade and Skopje on the demarcation of the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia; the events in Presevo Valley in Southeastern Serbia (negotiations between NATO, Belgrade and PMBLA resulting in Serbian troops being authorized to enter the buffer zone between southern Serbia and Kosovo); and the fact that Albanians who fought in Kosovo and Southeastern Serbia and belonged to a generation that has known only armed conflicts, were now “unemployed”—they had weapons and the only thing they knew how to do was fight. See: Kristina Balalovska, Alessandro Silj, and Mario Zucconi, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴ At first, major political parties of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia tried to distance themselves from NLA. For example, Menduh Thaci said of the NLA: “They are traitors to the Albanian cause in Macedonia. Any government should exert its power in the entire region it governs.” Quoted in: Kristina Balalovska, Alessandro Silj, and Mario Zucconi, *op.cit.*, p. 20. On March 20, 2001, the major political parties of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia: PDP-NDP (the governing party) and RDP (the party in opposition) signed a joint statement, pledging themselves to peace and calling on the NLA to lay down their arms.

The rebels, who initially seemed to want to carve off their own territory, eventually claimed that they only wanted equality. They complained that their rights were hindered, and pointed to the preamble of the Macedonian Constitution and then the constitution itself. Their criticism ran counter to positive assessments—by international experts in constitutional law and international human rights organizations, like the Council of Europe—in which the Constitution was seen as a liberal-democratic document that offered satisfactory guarantees for human rights and minority rights.

The rebels wanted to change the Constitution so that it recognized Albanians in Macedonia as a separate “people” with a right to self-determination. Alternatively, if Macedonia’s Constitution did not mention a special status for Albanians, then the rebels wanted to delete the reference to the Macedonian people and define Macedonian people in the Constitution as a community living in Macedonia. The rebels also wanted introduction of a second official language in the country; introduction of special parliamentary procedures, such as a veto, in deciding certain issues; proportional representation of the Albanian minority in all state institutions and bodies; and broad decentralization.

Negotiations on these issues were organized between the leaders of the major political parties: Two representatives came from Macedonian parties, the VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, and two representatives came from the Albanian parties, the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) and the Albanian Party of Democratic Prosperity-Popular Democratic Party (PDPA-NDP). Negotiations between these representatives were facilitated by envoys from the EU and the U.S., as well as the president of Macedonia. As a result of these negotiations, the “Ohrid Framework Agreement,” written in English, was signed on Aug. 13, 2001 in the Macedonian town of Ohrid.

The framework agreement is based on several fundamental principles, including the recognition that the multiethnic character of Macedonian society must be preserved and reflected in public life—and that the development of local self-government is essential for encouraging the participation of citizens in democratic life while promoting respect for the identity of communities. The implementation of this Framework Agreement is to proceed in several steps. The first step is revision of the 1991 Constitution through the adoption of amendments. The next step is adoption of the new Law on Local-Self Government, which would reinforce the powers of elected local officials and substantially enlarge their competencies. The changes to this law would be in conformity with the amended constitution and the European Charter on Local Self-Government—to reflect the principle of subsidiarity already in effect in the European Union. The other legislative modifications that should be adopted involve the: Law on Local Finance, Law on Municipal Boundaries, Law Pertaining to Police Located in the Municipalities, Laws on the Civil Service and Public Administration, Law on Electoral Districts, Rules of the Assembly, Law Pertinent to the Use of Languages, Law on the Ombudsman and others.

4. Constitutional Amendments of 2001

The constitutional amendments adopted in 2001¹⁵ changed the previous constitutional definition of the Macedonian state. These amendments make nationalities, now referred

¹⁵ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 91/2001.

to as “communities,” an important factor of political decision-making. The amendments also introduce elements of consociational democracy. Changes were made in the Preamble of the Macedonian Constitution¹⁶ and in 14 articles of the normative text.

The term “nationalities” used in the 1991 Constitution, was replaced with a new, less precise, term “communities,” which denotes not only national minorities but the Macedonian people as well. The constitutional amendments do not give a comprehensive definition of the scope of the use of the term “communities,” a situation that further increases room for confusion. But it is implied that the term refers mostly to ethnic groups.¹⁷ In some amendments it was impossible to avoid singling out the category of “communities that do not represent the majority of the Republic of Macedonia.”

The amendments did not make essential changes in the cultural and educational rights of national minorities. Only the terminology in these articles was amended, to use the term “communities” instead of “nationalities.”

More essential changes involved amendments on the official use of languages and the introduction of elements of consociational democracy in the Macedonian constitutional and political system. Detailed explanations of these changes follow.

4.1. *New Linguistic Rights*

According to Amendment V, the official language in the entire territory of the Republic of Macedonia, and in its international relations, is Macedonian, using the Cyrillic alphabet. But the amendment contains a provision that any other language spoken by at least 20 percent of the citizens becomes an official language as well. The weaknesses of this provision is that it does not refer precisely to the mother tongue of a given minority group. Therefore, the phrase “another language spoken by at least 20 percent of the citizens”

¹⁶ Amendment IV changed the Preamble of the Constitution. The new Preamble reads: “The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, Macedonian people, as well as the citizens who live within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, Turkish people, Vlach people, Serbian people, Roma people, Bosniak people and others, taking the responsibility for the present and the future of their fatherland, aware and grateful to their predecessors for the sacrifices and dedication in their endeavors and struggle to create an independent and sovereign state of Macedonia, and responsible to future generations to preserve and develop everything that is valuable from the rich cultural inheritance and coexistence within Macedonia, equal in their rights and obligation toward the common good of the Republic of Macedonia, in accordance with the tradition of Krushevo Republic and the decisions of ASNOM and of the Referendum of September 8th, 1991, have decided to constitute the Republic of Macedonia as an independent, sovereign state, with the intention of establishing and strengthening the rule of law, guaranteeing human rights and civil liberties, providing peace, coexistence, social justice, economic welfare and prosperity in the life of the individual and the community, and in this regard through their representatives in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, elected in free and democratic elections, they adopt this.”

¹⁷ In the comparative constitutional legislation, the term community, but with the specific reference to the character of communities, can be found in Belgium (for linguistic communities), Spain (territorial communities) and Cyprus (Greek and Turkish community).

could be interpreted, for example, to mean English, which is spoken by more than 20 percent of Macedonia's citizens.

The personal documents of citizens who speak an official language different from Macedonian are issued in Macedonian and also in the citizen's second official language, in accordance with the law.

The linguistic rights of national minorities are broadened in the municipalities where the minorities represent at least 20 percent of the citizens. These minority members have the right to use their own language in communication with the local departments of the central government's ministries.¹⁸ The local departments in those municipalities must be able to respond to citizens in both the Macedonian language and in the local minority language.

In the local self-government units, the threshold for official use of the language of the minorities has been lowered to 20 percent. This means that the language and alphabet used by at least 20 percent of the citizens becomes an official language, alongside the Macedonian language. When it comes to languages spoken by less than 20 percent of the citizens in a given municipality, a decision on making that language official can be taken by the municipal council.

4.2. New Elements of Consociational Democracy

The constitutional amendments made an essential change in the position of the national minorities in the Republic of Macedonia by introducing certain elements of consociational democracy. According to Arend Lijphart's "Democracy in Pluralistic Societies," consociational democracy is marked by four characteristics: 1) mutual veto for all the major segments of a society; 2) proportionality as the fundamental measure in appointing civil servants and allocating public funds; 3) the government is formed out of a coalition of political leaders of all the more significant segments of the pluralistic society; 4) a high level of independence for the various segments of society in resolving their interior issues.¹⁹ What follows is a point-by-point assessment of how these characteristics are incorporated into the political system of the Republic of Macedonia.

4.2.1. Veto Rights

In the Republic of Macedonia, the members of the minority communities have *veto rights* in deciding on certain matters and electing candidates for certain positions. These votes can only be passed by a so-called "special majority"—an overall majority and more than 50 percent of the minority representatives.

For example, according to Amendment X, when passing laws that refer directly to the culture, use of languages, education, personal documents, and use of symbols, approval

¹⁸ In order to be closer to the citizens, the ministries (central government) establish its local departments in the municipalities. These local departments are detached units from the ministries. They are not part (bodies) of the local self-government, but of the central government located in the municipalities.

¹⁹ Arend Lijphart, *Demokratijata vo pluralnite opshtestva [Democracy in Pluralistic Societies]*, STEP, Skopje, 1994, p. 25.

must be given by the majority of members of parliament and by a majority of members of parliament who belong to minority communities.

This provision raises several problems. For one thing, the category of laws that must be passed by a special majority is not precisely defined. The provision merely states that it should be applied in votes on laws that directly tackle certain areas. This wording leaves room for disagreement in interpreting whether or not a given law falls into a category that allows for a minority veto. Another problem is the requirement that members of parliament be distinguished on the basis of their ethnic origin. All democratic systems guarantee citizens the right to freely choose the national ethnic group to which they belong. This implies a right to express ethnic membership—and also the right to not claim membership in any ethnic group. Because the amended constitution demands a special majority for adoption of some decisions, it could be interpreted as imposing an obligation on members of parliament to state their ethnic origin. Furthermore, some members of parliament may want to change their statement of ethnicity during their mandate. If, for example, a member of parliament decides that s/he does not feel like a member of the Macedonian people any more, but prefers instead to be Vlach, should s/he be deprived of the right to free expression of ethnic membership? Or, in another example, if the member of parliament comes across new information about his/her family origin, it is not clear what ethnic origin that person should claim to represent. The constitutional amendments do not regulate these issues.

The constitutional amendments give special status to laws regulating local self-government. These laws must be passed by two-thirds of the total parliament and more than 50 percent of the members of parliament who belong to the communities that do not represent a majority in the Republic of Macedonia. The laws on local financing, local elections, municipal borders, and laws affecting the city of Skopje must be passed by a majority of parliament and more than 50 percent of the votes of members of parliament who belong to a minority community.

Amendments to the constitution's preamble, or amendments to constitutional provisions involving the rights of the members of national communities, need a two-thirds majority and more than 50 percent of the votes of members of parliament who belong to a minority community.

The “special majority”—which includes the majority of parliament and the majority of the members of parliament who belong to a minority community—is also required when electing the ombudsman, three of the members of Macedonia's Judicial Council, and three of the judges for the Constitutional Court. In the past, it was political practice to ensure that the Judicial Council and the Constitutional Court had three members belonging to minorities. The constitutional changes now formalize this convention, while also giving minorities an opportunity to block the election of the members of these bodies.

4.2.2. *Proportionality in Appointing Civil Servants and Allocating Funds*

Amendment VI at least partially addresses another element of consociational democracy: *proportionality* in appointing civil servants and allocating public funds. This amendment introduces “appropriate and just representation of the citizens who belong to all the communities in the state bodies and the other public institutions on all levels,” as a new fundamental value of the constitutional order, among the others enumerated in Article 8 of

the Constitution. However, the phrasing “just representation” is not precise. And it is debatable whether this requirement for representation of the communities in public institutions has general value for the constitutional order—in other words, whether this requirement deserves to be placed among the fundamental values.

To implement this new fundamental value introduced by Amendment VI, Amendment XI obliges the ombudsman to monitor the fair and non-discriminatory representation of the various communities in state organs, the organs of local self-government and public institutions and services. With this, the ombudsman is burdened by an atypical duty. In consequence, the ombudsman’s office is likely to face difficulties in meeting its prime task: protecting citizens’ rights against violations by state administration organs or other organs and organizations that dispose of public powers.

4.2.3. *Ensuring Broad Representation in Government Coalitions*

The Committee for Intercommunity Relations represents an attempt to provide another element of consociational democracy: ensuring a *coalition* of political leaders from the significant segments of society. The 1991 Constitution had created the Interethnic Relations Council, the main task of which was to review issues related to interethnic relations in Macedonia and to provide opinions and proposals for the management of these issues. This body was founded and elected by the parliament of Macedonia. The president of the parliament was also the president of the Interethnic Relations Council. The council was composed of two Macedonians, two Albanians, two Turks, two Vlachs, two Roma, and two members from other national groups.

With the constitutional amendments, this body was replaced by the Committee for Intercommunity Relations. The committee consists of 19 members, including seven Macedonian members of parliament, seven Albanian members of parliament, and one member of parliament per nationality representing the Turkish, Vlach, Roma, Serbian, and Bosniak communities. It is not clear what criterion is used to come up with these numbers within the committee. The distribution of representatives does not express the proportion of the communities in the population of the Republic of Macedonia or give parity representation to the communities. It is hard to explain why those who were complaining of discrimination conditioned the passing of this provision on the structure of the committee, which discriminates against the members of the other communities in Macedonia: Turks, Vlachs, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks, etc. It seems to be a poor solution, which abandons the parity structure that is important for the management of interethnic relations.

Even more problematic is the provision which states that, if any community does not have members of parliament, the ombudsman should nominate the appropriate representatives for the Committee for Intercommunity Relations, based on consultations with relevant representatives from those communities. It is not clear who would be “relevant representatives” of the minorities. It is also unusual to have the ombudsman making the appointments. With this provision, the ombudsman’s office is given another authority that has nothing to do with the essence and character of this institution. A better solution would be to establish a special ombudsman for protection of the rights of the communities. There should also be clearer criteria for appointment of members to the committee.

The constitutional amendments also do not regulate the question of who will be the president of this committee. And the committee seems to have undue authority in voting

on laws that require a majority of the votes of minority members of parliament. Under the current system, an issue involving minorities that 120 members of parliament quarrel about will sometimes be decided by a select group of 19 members of parliament. It would have been better if this responsibility was given to the Constitutional Court.

4.2.4. Segmental Autonomy

The fourth feature of consociational democracy, *segmental autonomy*, gets a boost in Macedonia from the territorial concentration of the Albanian minority community. Widening the authorities of the local self-government automatically increases the independence of the Albanian segment of society. One problem in this regard is that local government regulations are all created by the “special majority,” which has certain faults that we have analyzed above.

5. The Local Situation, Legally and in Reality

The leaders of major Macedonian and Albanian political parties were aware that municipalities are the places where ethnic groups most often interact and communicate among themselves. For this reason, adoption of the new Law on Local Self-Government²⁰ was seen as the first legislative step that needed to be taken after constitutional reform. The above-described special majority needed for adoption of this law speaks for the mutual understanding of the importance that management of local self-government has for ethnicities in Macedonia.

The new Law on Local Self-Government was adopted in January 2002. It introduced enhanced competencies for the municipalities in the areas of urban and rural planning, environmental protection, local economic development, culture, local finances, education, social welfare and health care. The idea of the law is not only to enhance the competencies of the municipalities, but also to enhance their independent exercise of these competencies.

Under the new law, municipalities have enhanced competencies and influence over the local police. The Council of the Municipality elects the local head of the police. Each local head of the police reports regularly, and upon request, to the municipal council. The council may adopt an annual report regarding matters of public security. This report will be addressed to the minister of the interior and the ombudsman. The council can make recommendations to the local head of police about matters pertaining to public security and traffic safety.

These provisions are based on the principle of power-sharing between the central bodies and bodies of the local self-government in the area of public security. The principal aim of enhancing local competencies in the area of security is to promote trust in the police among national minorities, especially ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. For this purpose, mixed police patrols have been formed for ethnically mixed villages. But the presence of the mixed patrols has been postponed in many villages because ethnic Albanians do not allow them to enter.

²⁰ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 5/2002.

Most of the ethnically mixed villages in which ethnic Albanians were a majority are now ethnically “clean” because the non-Albanian population is prevented from returning to their homes. Many Macedonians, Serbs, and Roma who used to live in these villages were displaced from their homes under the pressure of Albanian terrorist groups. Their homes were robbed and destroyed. Because there are no effective police patrols, no one can guarantee residents’ safety if they want to return. In these municipalities, none of the country’s laws are respected, and the state does not exercise real authority. No signs or symbols of the Macedonian state are present, and the only flag flown in these villages is the Albanian flag. Journalists who want to enter these villages are either warned that it is better for their security not to do so, or they are followed by people who tell them where they can go, what they can record and with whom they can speak.

But even in the villages where there are police patrols, the security of the non-Albanian citizens is not guaranteed. Non-Albanians who fled certain villages are being prevented from return through violence and fear. One Macedonian was killed by a bomb planted next to the door of his brother’s house in Arachinovo, a village near Skopje that was ethnically mixed, with ethnic Albanians as the dominant population.

Many municipalities where ethnic Albanians are the dominant population have been practically ethnically cleansed, and citizens from other ethnic origins are prevented from returning to their homes. There have even been initiatives from government ministries to build new villages, in which the Macedonians from Arachinovo will be permanently settled.

In other municipalities, where there is a balance between ethnic groups or Macedonians are the dominant population, the positive trend of multiethnic coexistence that existed before 2001, is being gradually re-established.

6. Conclusion

The legal position of national minorities in the Republic of Macedonia from 1991 till today has been on a higher legal level than that required by the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted by the Council of Europe in 1995. Furthermore, all Macedonian governments elected after 1991 included representatives of national minorities.

Nonetheless, ethnic fissures in Macedonian society widened to the point of open conflict.

The 2001 constitutional amendments, which were intended to ensure better ethnic relations in Macedonia, closed the doors on the civic concept of the state in favor of deeper ethnicization of political life. Under the country’s new regulations, ethnic origins are given greater importance.

With these constitutional amendments, the Republic of Macedonia effectively became a consociational democracy. This arrangement is not necessarily appropriate to the conditions that exist in the country. According to Lijphart, favorable conditions for introducing consociational democracy include: division of society into three or more segments, which are similar in size, so that all segments are a minority; a “multiple balance of powers”; a country with a small territory; a tradition of political accommodation and tolerance; gaps among the segments, but also gaps that overlap; cooperation among the elites;

and stable support from the masses.²¹ Out of all these conditions, it can only be definitively stated that Macedonia fulfills the size requirement: It is a small country. Otherwise, Macedonia is ill-suited to consociational democracy. In fact the country's situation is much closer to Cyprus and Lebanon than it is to Switzerland.

Another important element for this type of democracy, according to Lijphart, is that leaders need "to feel loyalty towards the maintenance of the unity of the country and towards the democratic regime."²² If this loyalty for the country does not exist, if the leaders and the general population are not eager to encourage effective cooperation, consociational democracy will only be a factor leading to widening gaps between various segments of society and further weakening of the cohesion of the state.

With the latest constitutional changes, with the Law on Local Self-Government and the Law on Amnesty, the Republic of Macedonia has again shown that it chooses tolerance and respect for rights of national minorities as tools for protection of political stability of the country. But unless national minorities are prepared to view themselves as citizens of the country, as well as members of an ethnic group, the political stability of the country will remain at risk.

²¹ Arend Lijphart, *op.cit.*, pp. 53-101.

²² Arend Lijphart, *op.cit.*, p. 53.