OSCE preventive diplomacy in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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The international community can claim success in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It has helped this small country escape the turmoil of much of the rest of former Yugoslavia. The newly independent state represents a case study of the benefits of early action by international organizations — the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initially, followed quickly by the United Nations — to prevent spillover of the war in Bosnia and promote political stability. It may never be possible to demonstrate the precise degree to which the OSCE and UN made the difference. Nevertheless, the end results reflect a realization of basic international aims. FYR Macedonia has above all enjoyed peace. It boasts a democratically elected Parliament and President. It is moving deliberately toward a market economy. It has survived as a healthy, functioning multi-ethnic and multiconfessional state. Even the cowardly failed assassination attempt against President Kiro Gligorov on 3 October 1995 could not shake faith in the future. Although the country is still susceptible to outside pressures as well as internal tensions, prospects are now more favorable than ever to continued independence, democratic institutions, stability, and prosperity.

Timely intervention

The OSCE deserves credit for recognizing potential problems early and acting promptly. With the break up of Yugoslavia in 1991, FYR Macedonia declared independence in September of that year. Widely considered an ‘ethnic tinderbox’ Macedonia had not in modern times succeeded in establishing itself as an independent state, suffering instead the fate of a perennial territorial bone of contention among its neighbors. In this century alone, Macedonia had been divided, occupied, or otherwise victimized in five wars — the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the two World Wars, and the Greek Civil War of 1947-49.

Concern mounted within the international community during the summer of 1992 that conflict in former Yugoslavia, particularly the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, might spread into interethnic strife in Kosovo, spill over into Macedonia, and then spark a major regional conflagration. The intentions of Serbia were suspect — Belgrade refused to recognize FYR Macedonia or the other breakaway republics. Although the Yugoslav national army withdrew from FYR

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1 This article was written prior to the NATO action in Kosovo, I hope that the many years of patient endeavour by the OSCE, UN and other international institutions in Macedonia will not be undone by the current violence.

2 Biographic note: Norman Anderson, a former US career diplomat, headed the Skopje mission from March 1993 until November 1994. A specialist in Eastern European as well as Arab affairs, he has been US Ambassador to Sudan and has had postings in Sofia, Moscow, and several Arab capitals.

3 The Bosia settlement reached in Dayton, Ohio in November 1995 laid the groundwork for
Macedonia in March 1992, taking along all its military equipment, it could easily reoccupy on short notice. FYR Macedonia was left without an army or weaponry to protect itself.

As for other neighbors, Bulgaria pointedly refrained from acknowledging the Slavic Macedonians as a nationality separate from the Bulgarians. Albania maintained close links with the large ethnic Albanian community (officially 22% of the population) in FYR Macedonia, arousing fears of a 'Greater Albania.' Southern neighbor Greece refused to accept the new state, disputing its choice of the name 'Macedonia' and the use of the 'star of Vergina,' viewed as a Greek symbol.

It was thus evident in mid-1992 that international recognition and a significant international presence in FYR Macedonia would be delayed, perhaps endangering the sovereignty and independence of the incipient state. Furthermore, on the economic front, United Nations sanctions against the rump Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia/Montenegro) had curtailed trade across the northern border with Serbia, previously the principal trading partner. An oil embargo imposed by Greece had disrupted the southern border as well, menacing political and economic stability during the upcoming winter of 1992-1993. Still another worry in view of the weak economy and delicate ethnic balance was the arrival of some 65,000 mainly Muslim refugees from Bosnia.

The 'Spillover Mission' starts up
On September 10, 1992, the OSCE 'Spillover Monitor Mission' began its work in Skopje, with diplomats consulting President Kiro Gligorov and other leaders. This first direct activity stemmed from decisions taken in July 1992 at the Helsinki Summit of the OSCE to the effect that the international organization should become involved in preventive diplomacy. This decision was supported by the then US President George Bush, who, on August 6, proposed despatching OSCE monitors to FYR Macedonia, as well as to Kosovo, Sanjak and Voyvodina in Serbia. Formal approval of the mandate for the Skopje mission was given by the OSCE Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) on November 6, 1992, and by the host government the next day.

The OSCE mission thus became the first significant international presence in the newly independent state. The United States provided the head of mission and the bulk of logistical support. Manned by eight monitors (later joined by two monitors of the European Community Monitoring Mission — ECMM), the mission was mandated 'to monitor developments along the borders of the host country with Serbia and in other areas of the host country which may suffer from spillover of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in order to promote respect for territorial integrity and the maintenance of peace, stability and security, and to help prevent possible conflict in the region.'

'Articles of understanding' agreed between the OSCE and host government in November 1992 spelled out further the purposes of the deployment and the

FRY recognition of FRY Macedonia.