Post-Conflict Developments and Decentralization in Macedonia

I. OHRID AND BEYOND: THE ETHNO-POLITICAL CONFLICT PARADIGM

The aim of the article is to examine the development of the 2001 conflict, post-conflict period and the processes of decentralization in the Republic of Macedonia. The shift of the understanding of the conflict’s causes is necessary in order to generate a long-term, viable resolution. The current solution, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, represents the termination of violence; however, it does not fully address the issue of minority and human rights necessary to produce sustainable, positive peace and development. The second part of the article examines the processes of decentralization in Macedonia and the notion that decentralization in Macedonia was seen as a way to reduce ethnic tension. The theoretical framework will be taken from two groups of political science literature: general literature on ethno-political and group conflict, to assess the situation in Macedonia prior to the 2001 armed conflict, and literature on normative principles for managing ethnic diversity.

When the Ohrid Framework Agreement * was signed in August 2001, Robert Badinter, former president of the French Constitutional Court commented: “The current trend in Europe is towards compromise, and no agreement could be signed here without a compromise. Compromise requires concessions. The alternative to voting for an agreement is war.”

The Ohrid Framework Agreement is not a security document

* The author is a researcher at the think thank Centre for Regional Policy Research and Cooperation (CRPRC) STUDIORUM in Macedonia (http://www.studiorum.org.mk). She is a University College London Alumni and a Chevening scholar, and can be reached at ivana@studiorum.org.mk.
per se; however, it was created because of security.\textsuperscript{3} One can argue that the overall flaw of the Framework Agreement is that “the new amendments rather put the emphasis on the collective worth of individual citizens […] stressing the rights of individuals as member of groups, rather than as individuals per se.”\textsuperscript{4} It would not be correct to completely criticize and dismiss the Framework Agreement because it does address some of the claims of the Albanian population and corrects the structural deficiencies regarding their representation.\textsuperscript{5} However, one needs to acknowledge that neither language nor religious difference prove sufficient for understanding the feelings of (human) insecurity in Macedonia. In a society in which everything is securitized (i.e., the problems that are not necessarily threats are treated as such and are put into security context), the real security issues are not discussed publicly.\textsuperscript{6}

The second part of the article examines the processes of decentralization in Macedonia including the legal framework adopted and somewhat implemented after the year 2001. Many political actors in Macedonia have embraced decentralization in Macedonia as a way to reduce ethnic tension, and further moves were made to increase powers of local self-government. One can argue that decentralization has been a bargaining tool (rather than a means for democratization of the country) for local political actors (both from Albanian and Macedonian ethnic groups) to increase their powers and to give them more room for manoeuvring. The current circumstances in Macedonia demonstrate that granting local authority to ethnic groups (in this case ethnic Albanians in Macedonia), i.e., to ethnic leadership, acted as a compromise solution to granting territorial autonomy or even federalization, especially in a case when federalization is not desirable (because of the county’s sustainability factors in regards to the economy, security and social security). The question that remains to be answered is the one that the citizens, regardless of their ethnic background, are mostly concerned about: the level of quality of services that the local self-government can provide.

The topic possesses contemporary relevance because of its implications for development and security, both for Macedonia and the broader region. The circumstances are suitable for assessing the level of minority governance in Macedonia. Namely, there was a reasonable time interval between the 2001 conflict and the present time. Furthermore, the process of decentralization in Macedonia is at a substantial stage of implementation, which enables, for example, the examination of the participation of minorities at the subnational government (local self-government) level.


\textsuperscript{5} For the purposes of this analysis, I shall examine only the effect of decentralization on the Albanian and Macedonian communities.

\textsuperscript{6} Biljana Vankovska, \textit{Current Trends of the Circumstances in Macedonia. Efforts for Peace, Democratization and Security}. (Open Society Institute, Skopje, 2003), 56. Excerpts were translated from Macedonian.