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## MACEDONIA: FILLING THE SECURITY VACUUM

This briefing paper continues ICG's analysis of the Macedonian crisis. It covers the period from the signing of a political agreement by the contending parties on 13 August 2001 through the start of the NATO mission to collect NLA arms, to the 6 September 2001 agreement by Macedonia's parliament to begin consideration of the promised constitutional and legislative reforms. It focuses on the still tangled and unsettled internal Macedonian political scene and on the international community's need to address the dangerous security vacuum that will arise unless an adequate follow-on force can be agreed once NATO's limited present mission is completed.

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### OVERVIEW

The war option has, for the moment, been checked, but Macedonia is very far from being at peace. Neither the agreement signed on 13 August 2001<sup>2</sup> by the four Macedonian governing parties – two ethnic Macedonian, two ethnic Albanian – nor the subsequent limited NATO deployment, nor the first-stage approval of necessary constitutional amendments by the Macedonian parliament on 6 September have yet given anyone confidence that peace is sustainable. The parliamentary vote, for example, came only after an acrimonious debate in which markers were laid down that ultimate approval of the legislative package could not be taken for granted.

Over the next three weeks, there is much that has to happen - with no mistakes of substance or slips in timing - if the agreement is to survive, and a ceasefire is to mature into lasting peace. Within the terms of the existing agreement the key tasks are these:

- The NATO mission (Task Force "Essential Harvest") has to complete the collection of the weapons voluntarily turned in by the ethnic

Albanian rebels of the self-styled National Liberation Army (NLA).

- Parliament has to pass multiple constitutional amendments and new laws granting more political rights and local control to the ethnic Albanian minority.
- The international community has to deploy hundreds of civilian monitors and police advisers to assist in the return of tens of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to scores of villages where control is still contested.<sup>3</sup>
- The international community has to prepare for – and be prepared to deliver at – a donors conference promised to follow shortly after the collection of weapons and passage of the legislative package.

But this does not exhaust the list of what urgently needs to be done. For example, there has been no agreement at all yet – as there needs to be – on a plan for removing weapons from the estimated 3,000 well-armed ethnic Macedonian paramilitaries.

Above all, however, there has to be a decision soon on the extension and definition of a follow-on military mission. As matters stand, NATO is to leave Macedonia around the end of September, after collection of some 3,300 NLA weapons and

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<sup>2</sup> The text of this agreement can be found at [www.usip.org/library/pa/macedonia/pa\\_mac\\_08132001.html](http://www.usip.org/library/pa/macedonia/pa_mac_08132001.html)

<sup>3</sup> Some 200 villages are considered in dispute. Approximately 90 are considered to have displaced persons problems.

the expiry of the mission's stated 30-day time limit. Even under the best of circumstances – achievement of all the other steps listed above – this would leave a serious security vacuum, and one that would probably condemn the 13 August agreement to early failure. NATO's sheer presence has been critical in maintaining a precarious cease fire: there have been hundreds of incidents in the past month which could have escalated into major conflict but did not. If NATO leaves, no other force is ready or able to play an equivalent stabilising role or, more specifically, to ensure protection for vital international civilian officials.

International thinking is changing rapidly. Officials on the ground in Macedonia appear to be significantly in advance of their governmental masters, but the latter, too, are increasingly acknowledging that some kind of follow-on force and new mandate will be needed. The question is whether it will be adequate to the task. At this point it is the Macedonian government itself which is most adamantly opposed to any expansion of the NATO mission.

Reaching agreement on a new NATO mission equipped with a sufficiently vigorous mandate will, more than any other single factor that can be influenced by the West, determine whether there is to be war or peace in Macedonia. The clock is ticking on that challenge.

## I. THE CONTEXT

The Framework Agreement was negotiated over seven gruelling weeks and signed in Ohrid on 13 August 2001 by representatives of Macedonia's four main political parties.<sup>4</sup> The negotiators created a concurrent two-track strategy to end hostilities and commence a reform process. Ethnic Albanian armed groups would voluntarily surrender their weapons to NATO and disband, while the parliament – dominated by the ethnic Macedonian majority – adopted a series of constitutional amendments and two laws granting ethnic Albanians substantially more rights and local authority, as well as an amnesty for fighters who had disarmed.

Within days of signing, the parties and NATO, EU and U.S. negotiators had refined the sequence:

- Following collection of one-third of the weapons, Macedonia's president would request the start of the constitutional amendment process, and parliament would so vote.
- Following collection of two-thirds of the weapons, parliament would provisionally approve the proposed changes.
- Following collection of the final third of weapons and by 27 September – 45 days after signature of the 13 August agreement – parliament would definitively adopt the full legislative package.

No timeframe has been specified for parliament to pass the amnesty provision though President Trajkovski has issued a statement of intention.

On 15 August NATO approved a limited, preliminary deployment to confirm that a "genuine ceasefire" was in place and sent troops in quickly to conflict areas to liaise with the forces on the

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<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister Lupco Georgievski signed for VMRO-DPMNE and former Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski for SDSM. These are the country's two main ethnic Macedonian parties. Arben Xhaferi signed for DPA and Imer Imeri for PDP. These are the country's two main ethnic Albanian parties. Together the four parties represented in the 13 August agreement constitute the coalition "unity" government that was formed under strong Western urging in the spring.

ground and urge restraint. The formal deployment decision followed on 21 August with the balance of the force being deployed that week. While some exchanges of fire continued, particularly around Tetovo, the ceasefire has held and NATO has convinced the sides to pull back to positions held when the 5 July ceasefire initially entered into force. The Macedonian security forces withdrew their heavy weapons.<sup>5</sup>

NATO officials reached a technical agreement with the NLA that specifies the number of weapons to be collected and the process. A key element of the technical agreement is that NATO is to collect only weapons that the NLA voluntarily hands over. It is not, in other words, to search for weapons that may be held back or hidden. The chief NATO envoy, Peter Feith, conveyed to Macedonia's president, Boris Trajkovski, a written declaration in which the NLA political leader, Ali Ahmeti, stated that the NLA "accepts demilitarisation". President Trajkovski then announced on 15 August his support for the granting of amnesty to members of the NLA except the "extremists that committed crimes during the six-month conflict, for which the Hague Tribunal is responsible, and those that refuse to hand in their arms".<sup>6</sup> Trajkovski also offered insurgents the right of reintegration into Macedonian society after a review of whether the NLA had actually demilitarised. As noted above, however, the amnesty still requires approval by parliament.

Ali Ahmeti held his first press conference in the primary school at the village of Sipkovic on 18 August. While he offered assurance to the international community that the NLA would cooperate fully with NATO, Macedonian leaders and journalists objected strenuously to the display of an Albanian flag alongside the NATO flag. The flag of Macedonia was conspicuously absent.

On the same day, displaced ethnic Macedonians constructed a roadblock that denied access to Kosovo at the Blace border crossing point. Their self appointed spokesperson stated that transit to Kosovo would be cut until they could return safely to their homes and the NLA released their

"kidnapped" relatives and neighbours. The border closure has caused problems for KFOR troops and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which rely upon Macedonia as a logistical base, and if it continues it will affect the general populations in Kosovo and Macedonia as well, according to an UNMIK spokesperson.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most controversial events of the past weeks has been the destruction on 21 August 2001 of the fourteenth century monastery in Leshok, north of Tetovo, which is revered as a treasure of Macedonian spiritual and cultural history. Responsibility for the destruction is disputed. The predominately ethnic Macedonian village had been under NLA control since the 5 July 2001 ceasefire. Macedonian security forces and media accused the NLA, and Macedonian-language news reported that all icons and other priceless objects were lost forever. Archbishop Stefan of the Macedonian Orthodox Church said in a press statement: "This is an attack on religion, orthodoxy, the peace agreement. I appeal to all international organisations to stop those evil people. People of all religions should be respected, and horrible things like this must never happen again". More provocatively, Metropolitan Kiril called the destruction an "atrocious act done by Islamic fundamentalist bandits. They will be cursed by God."<sup>8</sup>

Macedonian media also blamed the international community for allowing the destruction. The country's leading newspaper editorialised:

My dear readers, now you see what asses we are expected to build peace with in our native country. Wouldn't you rather die first? Foreigners or local people who are worried about the threatened peacemaking process have asked me why *Dnevnik* has apparently altered its policy and advocated war instead of peace. Dear respected readers, do not let such tales deceive you. Do not allow such fools to convince you that you were deluded, that you have started to hate someone and become militant overnight only

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<sup>5</sup> Two Macedonian tanks remain blocked near Tetovo, however, by local citizens who fear a full withdrawal will leave them vulnerable.

<sup>6</sup> Reported in all press on 15-16 August 2001.

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<sup>7</sup> News conference 20 August 2001 by Susan Manuel of UNMIK, Pristina, Kosovo. Manuel added that the closure had impeded UNMIK police rotations and could affect the shipment of medical supplies and slow the return of ethnic Albanian refugees to their homes in Macedonia.

<sup>8</sup> Utrinski Vesnik, 21 August 2001.

because you, the same as we, have become agitated, disappointed and angry seeing how they attempt to impose a shameful defeat on us instead of an honest and fruitful peace. No, you and we are not the same. We have not changed and we are not deluded. That is for sure. And we have definitely not altered policy. However, something *is* different from yesterday, something *has* changed and that is the appearance of our favourite Monastery of Leshok – part of it does not even exist now.<sup>9</sup>

An NLA commander, Mujdin Aliu, known as Commander Leka, denied responsibility:

I still do not have accurate information that Lesak [Leshok] Monastery was destroyed. Even during [military] offensives we have undertaken [in the past], religious sites were not subject to attack. Therefore, we want to show them we are not what they think we are, or like those who conduct propaganda through media. On the contrary, during all these hardships, our side preserved monasteries.<sup>10</sup>

Against this backdrop NATO approved the full deployment of 3,500 troops (later increased to 4,500) for Task Force Essential Harvest (TFH). British soldiers make up more than 40 per cent of the multinational force and include the brigadier general in command.<sup>11</sup> France, Italy, and Greece are also providing battalions. The U.S. has detailed only a handful of personnel but provides much of the helicopter lift support and medical facilities.

TFH's weapons collection mission began inauspiciously. The NLA declared that it possessed and would voluntarily turn over 3,300 weapons. On 26 August, NATO enraged many ethnic Macedonians by vouching for this figure, which the Macedonian government and ethnic Macedonian media derided as ludicrously low. One official later insisted that the NLA in fact had an arsenal more than twenty times this figure.

On that same day, a motel belonging to Macedonians in the mixed village of Celopek was

blown up, and grisly images of the remains of two Macedonians found in the rubble were shown frequently on television. Later that evening, Macedonian youths threw a hard object (most likely a piece of concrete) into a passing British army vehicle, killing one soldier. Angry Macedonians reportedly threatened an American serviceman who rendered assistance.

Nevertheless, TFH started its mission on 27 August and within a week had picked up 1,210 weapons<sup>12</sup> at three collection sites near Kumanovo, Tetovo, and Gostivar. NATO declared success but admitted that some 30 per cent of the weapons were not in working condition. In an effort to maintain a delicate balance between military and political steps necessary to achieve implementation of the 13 August agreement, it then stated that it would not set up any more sites or collect further weapons until parliament approved the first stage of the procedure for changing the Constitution.

Prime Minister Georgievski derided TFH's initial achievements, calling the mission "Museum Harvest" in reference to the age and conditions of many of the weapons. The director of the national history museum publicised a request that NATO donate some to the museum as historical items.

More than a dozen bombs have exploded in Skopje, Tetovo and Tearce since the signing of the peace agreement. Reportedly, ethnic Macedonians and Albanians are more frequently being kidnapped, beaten or simply harassed. Adding to the atmosphere of violence and uncertainty, there are increasing claims of attacks against ethnic Albanian villages by a Macedonian paramilitary group known as the "Lions". An eyewitness to one such incident told ICG:

Yesterday a new group of special forces of Ljube Boskovski [interior minister in the government], the so-called 'Lions', tried to enter Pallatica village, south-east of Tetovo. First in the morning I saw them on the entrance of the road that brings to Pallatica, they were stopping everybody. Later they

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<sup>9</sup> Editorial by Branko Geroski, *Dnevnik*, 22 August 2001.

<sup>10</sup> KosovaLive, 21 August 2001.

<sup>11</sup> The overall commander of Task Force Harvest is the Commander of KFOR Rear, a Danish two-star general.

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<sup>12</sup> This included: 944 assault rifles (e.g. AK-47s), 69 support weapons (including mortar and antitank), 194 machine guns, three air defense weapons, 627 mines and grenades, 36 kilograms of explosives, 207 units of ammunition for support weapons, and 118,212 rounds of small arms ammunition.

tried to enter the village but villagers stopped them. The Lions tried to scare people by shooting at them but by luck no one on either side was injured. The NATO forces came immediately with helicopters and other vehicles as a result of the conflict. The Lions returned back to their positions. They later kidnapped one Albanian policeman. They put a mask on his head and brought him to Skopje to beat him, and then they left him free. They also damaged his car with Kalashnikov rifles.<sup>13</sup>

## II. POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Since the signing of the Framework Agreement, two troubling political trends have developed. Many of the country's politicians appear to view the document as no more than a tactical element to be supported or opposed as calculations for political advantage suggest in the planned January 2002 parliamentary elections – rather than as Macedonia's last chance for peace. Members of VMRO-DPMNE have attempted to portray themselves as defenders of the "Macedonian nation" and to distance themselves from the proposed constitutional amendments, the adoption of which is an integral part of the 13 August agreement. Such political stratagems have the potential to derail the peace process and spark renewed fighting.

Macedonian public opinion may be hardening in opposition to the Ohrid agreement. The country's leaders made no effort to present or explain the terms of the agreement, even after it was published on 13 August. Macedonian-language media opted to fan anti-NATO sentiment. Ethnic Macedonians increasingly insist that they will not countenance fundamental constitutional changes until they see positive, tangible results from the 13 August agreement. What they mean by this is that a large number of ethnic Macedonian refugees and displaced persons, perhaps as many as 40,000, must first return to their villages,<sup>14</sup> destroyed homes must be rapidly reconstructed, and Macedonian security forces must re-enter villages currently controlled by the NLA. If the public does not see demonstrable evidence that these things are

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<sup>13</sup> ICG interview on 5 September 2001 in Poroj. See, in this context, the report by Human Rights Watch on abuses by Macedonian police against ethnic Albanian villagers: *Crimes Against Civilians: Abuses by Macedonian Forces in Ljuboten*, August 10-12, 2001, available at [www.hrw.org/reports/2001/macedonia](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/macedonia).

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<sup>14</sup> The precise number of refugees and displaced persons is difficult to determine. According to the UNHCR, a total of 74,500 persons are currently displaced inside Macedonia, of whom an estimated 60 per cent – something over 40,000 persons – are ethnic Macedonians. The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation and the Red Cross have told ICG, however, that they believe the figure for displaced ethnic Macedonians has been inflated by the government, and the more accurate current figure is about 20,000. According to UNHCR, a further 59,000 persons have become refugees outside the country, of whom some 43,000 are in Kosovo. While there has been no significant new displacement of ethnic Albanians since 13 August, ethnic Macedonians have continued to be displaced. UNHCR estimates that some 22,000 of the 74,500 internally displaced persons became homeless since the start of Operation "Essential Harvest".

at least beginning to happen, in particular that the government is regaining control of all the country's territory, it is likely they will reject the agreement. Thus far, events on the ground are not building ethnic Macedonian confidence. UNHCR reports that displacement of ethnic Macedonians has continued in conflicted areas since the signing of the 13 August agreement and the NATO deployment.<sup>15</sup>

A perceptibly growing siege mentality is behind these attitudes of politicians and average citizens. Until now, the division of the country into ethnically pure areas has had little support among ethnic Macedonians other than nationalist hard-liners in the security forces. As Macedonians conclude that they are threatened, however, they look to the military and police for security. This, in turn, strengthens those who want to push ethnic Albanians into the smallest slice of western Macedonia possible, rather than share power in a genuinely multiethnic state.

As ethnic Macedonians have come to feel that they are cornered and fighting for survival, the international references to their identity have taken on inflated importance. Every reference to them as "Slav-Macedonians" rather than "ethnic Macedonians" is viewed as further confirmation of their diminished and endangered status as a nationality.

Likewise, the long-standing feud with Greece regarding recognition of the constitutional name of the country – "Republic of Macedonia" – has also assumed new psychological importance. Ethnic Macedonians argue that international recognition of their constitutional name rather than "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" or "FYROM" would make acceptance of the proposed constitutional changes easier. The government has stated that it can even accept the use by Athens of "Upper Macedonia" provided Greece lifts its opposition to recognition by other states of Macedonia's constitutional name.<sup>16</sup>

Ethnic Macedonians have little faith that the West will help them through what they see as their national crisis because they believe that the West created that crisis by how it has handled the Kosovo question. Indeed, Macedonian sympathy for the West has been declining since the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999. While Macedonia's government supported that intervention, it was unpopular among most ethnic Macedonians. The country ultimately hosted more than 400,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees, causing a severe strain on resources and damage to infrastructure for which Macedonia has not been fully compensated. Macedonians believe that their reservations have been justified by subsequent events. Specifically, they and their leaders accuse NATO of failing to prevent the export of weapons and ethnic Albanian fighters from Kosovo into Macedonia.

In fact, a substantial number of weapons and fighters do originate from Kosovo. While most ethnic Macedonians do not believe the West actively desires the destruction of their country, they believe it has facilitated its destabilisation because NATO countries with troops in Kosovo are afraid to risk casualties by aggressively blocking Kosovo Albanians from entering or exiting Macedonia. One of the interests at stake in the fate of the 13 August agreement, therefore, is whether Macedonia retains a Western orientation and continues to see its future in European integration.

## A. PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

In this unsettled environment, parliament will play a major role over the next month. Under the terms of the 13 August agreement, it is required to pass a series of major constitutional amendments and laws within 45 days (e.g., by 27 September) that, taken as a whole, are meant to provide greater rights and protections to the ethnic Albanian

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<sup>15</sup> See footnote 14 above.

<sup>16</sup> ICG recommended in June 2001 that "The EU, NATO, UN and U.S. should encourage Greece to accept the international recognition of Macedonia under its constitutional name as The Republic of Macedonia". (See ICG Balkans Report No. 113, *Macedonia: The Last Chance for Peace*, 20 June 2001, p.iii.) In this context, as has been remarked by Nicholas Whyte, it is encouraging

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that the 13 August agreement "refers throughout to 'Macedonia', not 'FYROM'. After almost ten years of humiliation for a country that has been recognised under a fictional name, it is significant that European and U.S. negotiators have decided to simply ignore the issue". (Centre for European Policy Studies, *Europa South-East Monitor*, issue 26, August 2001, p.2.) Far from protesting, Greece contributed to the NATO mission deployed on the basis of the 13 August agreement. This door seems to have been quietly unlocked; it should now be pushed open.

minority. The first stage of this process has been successfully navigated with the vote on 6 September affirming, in general terms and by the necessary two-thirds majority, the need to accept changes to the Constitution. But simple majorities now have to be found for all the individual amendments, and a two-thirds majority again delivered for the final total package. If the parliament fails to deliver, the peace agreement will collapse, and there is every possibility of serious urban guerrilla warfare at least, and a slide into full-scale civil war at worst.

The parliament has 120 seats, but four are presently unoccupied. The two ethnic Macedonian and the two ethnic Albanian parties that make up the coalition government and signed the 13 August agreement together control 89 seats.<sup>17</sup> However, party leaders have made clear that members will be free to vote their own beliefs. Moreover, as noted above, there will be a delicate interplay of military, political and parliamentary activity over the coming weeks. What ultimately happens depends upon many complicated matters being done right simultaneously or sequentially, with no margins for error.

Introducing the debate on 31 August, President Boris Trajkovski made several bold admissions. He stated that the country's security forces were inadequate, and not even present throughout Macedonia. "We all know", he said, "that in some parts of our country the legal state was not functioning." He said, too, that interethnic political questions had been swept under the carpet: "For many years in the past, Macedonia's politicians did not want to publicly discuss and resolve these truly sensitive issues." In sum, he argued, the alternative to the agreement signed in Ohrid "is a division in all aspects, civil, interethnic, political, and division of generations. The alternative to peace is war."

Trajkovski's frankness was drowned out in the ensuing debate. Speaker of Parliament Stojan Andov, who has wide procedural powers under the rules of parliament, gave members free rein in the

initial debate. The two main ethnic Macedonian parties have adopted strikingly different strategies. The first to take the rostrum were prominent VMRO-DPMNE leaders, Gjorgji Kotevski and Filip Petrovski. Kotevski clearly stated that he would vote against the agreement and blamed President Trajkovski for his "incompetent" handling of the crisis. The speech of Petrovski, a former student leader, can fairly be labelled racist in its characterisation of Albanians as "gangs [the Macedonian word was more derogatory] who would liquidate the ethnic Macedonians".

The decision to launch the debate with such speeches must be viewed as an attempt to inflame the political environment and force emotional reactions from other parliamentarians. The strategy seems designed either to lay the groundwork for rejection of constitutional changes (though perhaps only later in the month) or to make campaign propaganda for January 2002 elections. At the least, the largest ethnic Macedonian party, VMRO-DPMNE, is playing to the fears of its rank and file by portraying a key element of the 13 August agreement as an attack on Macedonian identity, cultural heritage and sovereignty. Current head-counts suggest approximately half of the party's members in parliament oppose the 13 August agreement while half support it.

The other major ethnic Macedonian party, SDSM, briefly occupied the high ground with an impressive speech by the party vice-president, Radmila Sekerinska. She reviewed the events leading up to the crisis and placed a share of the blame on VMRO-DPMNE by a selective summary of that party's speeches and parliamentary votes that had "compromised the security of the nation".

In the event, parliament voted positively on the need to accept changes to the constitution on 6 September. The 91 positive votes were set against nineteen negative votes and two abstentions. NATO announced immediately after the vote that the second phase of weapons collection could begin as early as 7 September.

The corresponding second phase of parliamentary activity is likely to be more contentious. It will involve a reading and adoption of 30 proposed amendments. At this stage, approval requires only a simple majority or 61 votes. Individual parliamentarians' views about specific changes to

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<sup>17</sup> Party distribution in the parliament is as follows: VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM (both ethnic Macedonian) have 46 and 24 seats respectively, while PDP and DPA (ethnic Albanian) have 10 and 9 seats apiece. Two small ethnic Macedonian parties, VMRO-VMRO and DA, have 6 and 5 seats each. A further 16 seats are distributed among smaller parties or independents.

the constitution will be extremely revealing of how each member fundamentally feels about inter-ethnic relations and the future course of the country. It may prove very difficult for many ethnic Macedonian members to approve, in particular, the changes to the preamble, the new minority veto voting mechanism and the increased capacity of the parliamentary inter-ethnic relations committee.

The understanding of international negotiators involved in the process is that the constitutional changes agreed at Ohrid should be adopted as a package, without amendments. There are growing concerns, however, that numerous amendments may be offered that would fundamentally alter the meaning and significance of the peace agreement.

Members of VMRO-DPMNE and of smaller parties opposed to the agreement may also try to delete some of the proposed constitutional changes or to modify the wording of the new preamble to the constitution. VMRO-DPMNE may well calculate that if it can successfully change in parliament the terms of what was accepted on 13 August at Ohrid, the party will be in a stronger position to sell the overall agreement to its constituents for two reasons. First, its stand will be viewed as a victory against international pressure, and secondly, it will be able to portray its major political rival, SDSM, as willing to capitulate to excessive Albanian demands. Whether such a revised legislative package would be taken as grounds for the ethnic Albanian parties, not to speak of the NLA, to walk away from the 13 August agreement is another matter.

Even more difficult calculations will have to be made before it is possible to predict with any confidence the outcome of the third and conclusive stage of parliamentary consideration, which will again require a two-thirds majority to adopt all the new constitutional and legal measures.

## **B. REFERENDUM**

There is increasing speculation in Skopje's political circles, however, that the ultimate decision over the fate of the political provisions of the 13 August agreement may be taken out of the parliament's hands. Prime Minister Georgievski has suggested on several occasions that the decision should instead be taken directly by the

citizens in a public referendum. The referendum concept has some precedent. It was by a referendum that Macedonia chose in 1991 to leave the Republic of Yugoslavia and become an independent state. The calling of a referendum, however, could also postpone the adoption of constitutional changes for at least three, and perhaps as long as ten, months. A number of inconsistencies in the law could pose additional hurdles and tie up the whole process in courts for an indefinite period. The implications for the security situation in the country are highly problematic.

The 1998 law on Referendum and Civic Initiatives provides for several types of voting mechanisms either to enforce adoption of legislation or to reverse legislation that has already been adopted. The process is as follows: 1) parliament announces the referendum based either on its own initiative or on the collection of 150,000 signatures of registered voters; 2) the state electoral commission administers the referendum process; 3) results of the referendum are presented to parliament for review; 4) for a referendum to be valid and to pass, a simple majority (50 per cent plus one person) of those eligible to vote must do so, and a simple majority of participants must vote in favour.<sup>18</sup>

The minimum timeframe within which a referendum can be proposed and held at the initiative of parliament is three months. For a referendum on the initiative of citizens, the law allows six months for the gathering of 150,000 signatures. Parliament has 30 days to debate and render a decision regarding the legal grounding of a referendum initiated by citizens. Such a referendum should then take place within 60-90 days. The announcement of the results by the state electoral commission must follow within fifteen days, after which a report is submitted by parliament.

The movement for a referendum is growing. Former parliamentary speaker Savo Klemovski from the small Democratic Alternative (DA) party gave an effective speech in parliament on 5 September that was widely interpreted by journalists and television viewers as an endorsement for a referendum. Klemovski is a

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<sup>18</sup> Summary of law with special reference to articles 22 and 27.



university professor of constitutional law so his remarks carry significant weight. He said the 13 August document was an “undefined hybrid agreement” that was not acceptable. He admitted that the constitution could benefit from some amendments but insisted that the Framework Agreement imposed legislative deadlines that could only be set by parliament itself. It was also unlawful, he added, to present parliament with ready-made amendments that pre-empted its legislative responsibility. Klemovski said it was paradoxical that the four party leaders who signed it did not themselves believe in the Ohrid Agreement and expected parliament to “cover up their lies”.

### III: THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

For the international community, two sets of tasks flow from the 13 August agreement. The political or civilian tasks related to assisting implementation of the reforms defined in the agreement are being coordinated by the European Union. The security tasks are being addressed by NATO through “Essential Harvest”.

#### A. POLITICAL OR CIVILIAN TASKS

An overall coordinating body to assist implementation of the Ohrid agreement has been formed under the chairmanship of the special EU envoy, François Léotard. This body includes the senior representatives of NATO, OSCE, UNHCR, the European Commission (EC), and the U.S. It has formed four working groups:

- *Returns, chaired by UNHCR.* UNHCR has worked with the government to identify immediate priority areas for the return of ethnic Macedonians to the villages north of Tetovo and to Aracinovo. It is also considering how to encourage the continued return of ethnic Albanians
- *Reconstruction, chaired by the European Commission.* The EC and UNHCR, along with local non-governmental organisations, are developing an assessment of damaged housing.
- *Police/Monitoring, chaired by OSCE.* The OSCE mission in Macedonia is preparing a request to its Permanent Council in Vienna for an as yet undetermined number of international police advisers and trainers as well as international monitors. Discussions are continuing with the Macedonian government on this issue.
- *Legislation, chaired jointly by OSCE and the Council of Europe.* The OSCE is convening meetings to consider aspects of the two laws (Local Self-Government and Financing of Local Self-Government) that are to be part of the constitutional and legislative package designated for approval within 45 days of 13 August, that is, by 27 September

In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched a campaign to increase public awareness of and support for the 13 August agreement. Television and print advertisements have been funded, as well as two web sites, containing information and advancing the theme “It’s our future. Let’s support it”, and “Let’s agree to talk”. The campaign is run with local advertising agencies and non-governmental organisations. USAID has also earmarked a substantial block grant to the local branch of the Open Society Institute to facilitate a more substantive public debate on the 13 August agreement.

## B. NATO AND “ESSENTIAL HARVEST”

Within two days of the signing of the 13 August agreement in Ohrid, NATO had approved dispatch of a limited, preliminary deployment of troops to confirm a “genuine ceasefire”. NATO forces quickly deployed to conflict areas, liaising with and urging restraint on local combatants. On 21 August, NATO’s North Atlantic Council approved the full deployment of 3,500 troops (later increased to 4,500) to conduct “Essential Harvest.” The formally successful initial stage (collection of one-third of the weapons that the NLA has agreed to turn over) is described in Section II above.

### 1. Assessing Progress

NATO constantly reiterates the limited duration of its mission (a mere 30 days of weapons collection and full withdrawal within 60 days), its narrow mandate (weapons collection and nothing else), and its success in fulfilling that mandate.

Undoubtedly the NATO deployment has stabilised the situation. No one expects an imminent return to fighting, before NATO’s current mandate expires. Although security remains uncertain in conflict-affected areas, particularly for ethnic Macedonians, the overall situation has much improved since 13 August. Ethnic Albanian refugees have returned in large numbers to their villages, directly attributable to the NATO deployment.<sup>19</sup> Freedom of movement has

improved not only for Macedonian citizens of both ethnic communities, but also for non-governmental organisations and agencies such as UNHCR that are now better able to identify the needs of displaced persons, returnees and isolated minorities. This has all been achieved without NATO assuming a buffer or interpositional posture.<sup>20</sup> Primarily by conducting vigorous, agile liaison with the parties at all levels – and by dint of its reputation as a force not to be trifled with – NATO continues to prevent flare-ups in areas where tensions are still high.<sup>21</sup>

The respect (not to be confused with affection) felt by Macedonian officials toward NATO is something that the organisation itself seems to underestimate, and hence to undervalue. It was underscored – ironically – after the killing of the British soldier on 26 August, when anti-NATO rhetoric in the media and by government figures was immediately, if only temporarily, suspended.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of this success, the dread in some NATO capitals that Essential Harvest might evolve into an “MFOR” (Macedonia Force) has forced the mission to adhere strictly to its narrow weapons collection mandate. After NATO soldiers accompanied a successful convoy visit of ethnic Macedonians returning to Leshok, a village in territory controlled by the NLA, spokesmen were forced to deny “mission creep”. They insisted instead that the TFH presence had been coincidental, and reiterated that TFH would not take on responsibilities outside weapons collection.<sup>23</sup> TFH units have refused to get involved in removing civilian blockades. In short, NATO’s rigid focus on weapons collection keeps it from taking limited but important and effective

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<sup>20</sup> NATO planners appear well aware that an interpositional force with a mandate only to keep the hostile parties separated would, by freezing the confrontation line, effectively confer a territorial victory on the NLA.

<sup>21</sup> According to NATO officials, only 200 officers are deployed as liaison officers.

<sup>22</sup> This response contrasts sharply with the indifferent reactions in Croatia and Bosnia when the early United Nations missions in those countries were targeted and suffered casualties.

<sup>23</sup> This was clearly not the case as was obvious to ICG, journalists, the Macedonian visitors and returnees, and NLA soldiers watching the event from a position in the hills above. The British unit left when the visit was complete driving out with the convoy of buses.

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<sup>19</sup> According to UNHCR, almost 35,000 ethnic Albanians refugees returned to their homes in the period from 13 August to 3 September. Many reportedly stated that their confidence in NATO had led them to return.

steps such as the occasional escort that would gain ethnic Macedonian support.<sup>24</sup>

The weapons collection mission alone is insufficient to convince large segments of the public either that the NLA has forsworn war, or that NATO is truly impartial. The success of “Essential Harvest” cannot be assessed mathematically by summing up the weapons it collects from the NLA, or even by the parliament’s timely adoption of constitutional changes. The fact is that on 27 September – regardless of whether NATO will have collected 3,300 weapons – the NLA will not have been neutralised. And that fact is not lost on the ethnic Macedonian public.

## 2. Majority Perceptions

NATO entered Macedonia in August 2001 with a local reputation of bias in favour of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Many ethnic Macedonians believe that international arm-twisting denied Macedonian security forces the opportunity to “deal with the terrorists” by force. Hence it has been a simple matter for the government to encourage public distrust towards Task Force Harvest. The government levels two criticisms at TFH. First, it claims that the NLA is submitting mainly antiquated weapons to NATO while hiding its more modern weapons. Secondly, it charges that the NLA’s actual total of weapons is far greater than the 3,300 figure endorsed by NATO.<sup>25</sup>

On the first issue, NATO concedes that about 30 per cent of the weapons collected are not serviceable. Nevertheless, the largest single category of weapons collected is assault rifles in working order, including the almost indestructible AK-47.

Macedonian scepticism about the number of weapons surrendered, as well as about the slow progress of NLA units toward disbanding, appears

better founded. While overt NLA presence has diminished in places like Tetovo, NATO can provide few indicators of progress towards disbandment. Some 300 presumed NLA fighters have been detained by KFOR crossing into Kosovo from Macedonia, “a figure indicating that the NLA may have scaled down activities, but not gone out of business.”<sup>26</sup> KFOR continues to interdict and observe two-way movements along the border. Indeed, KFOR units found themselves under fire from persons crossing into Kosovo last week – hardly the sign of intent to disband.<sup>27</sup>

The relaxed demeanour of NLA soldiers itself is an indicator of how incomplete the disarmament process is likely to be. While NLA soldiers express keen interest in the amnesty provision (as a reassurance against being arrested by police), few show any worry about being left defenceless once NATO leaves. *Jane’s Defence Weekly* estimates that the NLA in fact had between 6,000 and 8,000 assault rifles alone on 13 August: more than twice the overall total of weapons that the NLA has declared to NATO. Observers believe that the NLA’s nucleus of hardened, experienced fighters will not surrender the weapons they need to remain the hidden backbone of an effective force.<sup>28</sup>

## 3. Filling the Security Vacuum

Despite the impressive achievement of a ceasefire that is holding, a consensus has emerged among the international community in Skopje that the conflict-affected areas face a security vacuum. Macedonian police – whom many ethnic Albanians fear and despise – are unable to patrol in areas of high NLA presence, leaving ethnic Macedonian minorities frightened and isolated. Indeed, UNHCR reports that since the signing of the 13 August agreement, the number of ethnic Macedonians fleeing their homes has actually increased.<sup>29</sup> Even in the urban centre of Tetovo,

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<sup>24</sup> Gaining Albanian trust is not an immediate NATO priority for two reasons: first, NATO already has it; and secondly, it is the Macedonian public that needs to be brought around to the conviction that the 13 August agreement and NATO presence are both in their interests.

<sup>25</sup> Although NATO has stated that it was only transmitting the NLA’s self-declared figure of 3,300 weapons, the Secretary-General and other officials have gone on record as vouching for the NLA figure as “in line with NATO’s estimates.”

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<sup>26</sup> ICG interview with *Jane’s Defense Weekly* correspondent on 5 September 2001.

<sup>27</sup> According to NATO, on 28 August 2001, KFOR was fired upon and returned fire to a group of persons who had crossed into Kosovo and then returned, evidently armed, to Macedonia. KFOR has impressively stepped up its control efforts since June on the Kosovo side of the border

<sup>28</sup> ICG interviews in Skopje with *Jane’s Defence Weekly* correspondent, and other international observers.

<sup>29</sup> ICG interview with UNHCR on 3 September. Reportedly 22,000 Macedonian citizens, predominantly

UNHCR reports the phenomenon of “micro displacement”, involving moves by residents to parts of town where they feel less threatened. The same pattern has been noted in Skopje.

Extreme nationalist elements are attempting to exploit the plight of the displaced for political ends. Blockades, arrests and incidents have already triggered acts of retaliation, which can spin out of control at any time. A spate of recent bombings in Tetovo and Skopje also does not augur well for stability after 27 September, unless a follow-on force is deployed.

The Macedonian government, however, argues that no such force is required. On the contrary, it says that following NATO’s departure, Macedonia’s own security forces should regain control over the “occupied territory”, accompanied by nothing more than unarmed international monitors whose safety they would ensure.<sup>30</sup>

The current security problem is more a policing problem than a strictly military issue. The solution is not to ask NATO to perform police work, but rather to have it available to provide a security umbrella for the monitors and international police advisers that are called for in the 13 August agreement and other international civilian officials like those from UNHCR.<sup>31</sup> However, there has so far been little movement towards meeting this provision of the agreement. The special EU monitors (EUMM) have increased to 29, and OSCE will shortly expand its total of monitors by 25 to 43. These increases are nominal and far short of the “hundreds” that international officials in Skopje tell ICG will be needed if the agreement signed in Ohrid last month is to be implemented.<sup>32</sup>

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ethnic Macedonians, have become displaced since 13 August.

<sup>30</sup> This, according to information available to ICG in Skopje, was the thrust of discussion at a National Security Council meeting on 6 September.

<sup>31</sup> Annex C, paragraph 5.3 of the 13 August agreement states, “The parties also invite the OSCE, the European Union and the United States to increase training and assistance programs for police, including ... deployment **as soon as possible** of international monitors and police advisers **in sensitive areas**”. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>32</sup> Reportedly irritated that the OSCE had apparently been marginalised by NATO, Russia delayed its approval of an increase in the number of monitors until 6 September. Reportedly, the lack of a clear, NATO follow-on force to provide security to unarmed monitors has also deterred some countries from supporting calls for further increases.

Of particular concern is the absence of international police advisers. Their critical function has so far, inexplicably, appeared to receive little attention in Western capitals. A policing prescription for re-establishing mixed communities is available from Bosnia, where it has been applied successfully: ethnically mixed police patrols under the stewardship of international police advisers, backed up by NATO’s “area presence”. Ethnic Albanian leaders, including Arben Xhaferi and Imer Imeri, have confirmed to ICG that they could accept such an arrangement even though it would involve the return of uniformed Macedonian police to areas where they have not been present for several years. Xhaferi maintains that adequate numbers of ethnic Albanian police are presently available to take part in such mixed patrols.<sup>33</sup> Ethnic Macedonian leaders react less favourably to this proposal, but were not hostile in discussions with ICG.

For its part, the Macedonian government insists that NATO can be adequately replaced after 27 September by unarmed civilian monitors. These monitors would, the argument goes, be protected by the Macedonian security forces. While it is reasonable to doubt that international monitors could really be safeguarded by Macedonia’s own security forces, there is another reason why the international community should press Skopje to accept an international force to follow on from Essential Harvest. The country’s own security forces would be incapable of quickly assuring the ethnic Albanian community that it had nothing to fear from NATO’s withdrawal.

#### 4. Returning Those Displaced

It follows that the current emphasis in the international community on deploying unarmed civilian monitors to the conflict-affected areas, while important, is somewhat off the mark. Monitoring is no substitute for policing. Monitors can only provide a presence and report, and therefore are of limited value in providing displaced persons the confidence to return to their homes – probably the key occurrence needed to

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<sup>33</sup> Xhaferi states that there are 70 Albanian regular police officers in Tetovo and 160 overall (out of the 6,000 total number of regular police in Macedonia.) He estimates that within 24 hours another 500 Albanian police reservists (some of whom have already been screened for additional police training) could be available for mixed patrols.

swing ethnic Macedonian opinion behind the peace process.

Only police can give isolated minorities a sense of security. While the recruitment and international training of new local police remain high priorities, this should not be used as a reason to wait before reintroducing Macedonian police and mixed police patrols with appropriate international accompaniment. This is especially the case since the immediate deployment of international police is called for in the 13 August agreement.

However, even before the arrival of police advisers and more monitors, NATO should embrace every opportunity to assist ethnic Macedonians with return visits – as it did successfully in Leshok.<sup>34</sup> These steps would not “suck NATO in”. Rather they would ease the political process that NATO is so dependent on for its success. Nor should NATO shy away from selectively demanding that blockades be opened since freedom of movement can reasonably be construed as essential to accomplishment of its mission.

### 5. Beyond “Essential Harvest”

The conflict-affected areas remain tense, and the first phase of implementation (disarmament and constitutional reform) will not in itself remove Macedonia from a war footing. The NLA will remain capable of military action, while government hard-liners may well be spoiling for a fight.<sup>35</sup> International monitors and police advisers will be ineffective and unsafe unless international forces are present – not just to “rescue” them in extremis, and certainly not as a buffer, but to provide a visible, mobile and robust presence while maintaining contact with both sides.

NATO is only just beginning to acknowledge that it is considering some possible further role after “Essential Harvest”.<sup>36</sup> It is clear both that an international security presence will be essential, and that Western governments are increasingly

disinclined to deny this, though they remain understandably reluctant to make open-ended troop commitments.<sup>37</sup>

The key to stabilising the situation in the mid- and long-term is to recognise the security and political interests of both sides. For ethnic Albanians, the primary threat is posed by Macedonian police and paramilitaries, rather than by the Macedonian army. For ethnic Macedonians, particularly those having fled from or still living in areas with a high NLA presence, the primary problem is vulnerability to anyone with a gun. The return of police and control over the border would also send signals that “occupied territory” had been recovered.

The following steps would go a long way to address and resolve these concerns:

- *Accelerated Amnesty for ex-NLA soldiers.*

Now that parliament has approved the preparation of constitutional amendments, international attention should refocus on the amnesty issue concerning which there has been no action since President Trajkovski’s statement of intent on 15 August. The more time that passes without an amnesty, the more ethnic Albanians are convinced that the Macedonian authorities are biding their time for a crackdown when NATO leaves. A conditional amnesty squeezed out of the government under intense and visible international pressure – as happened, for example, in Croatia in 1996 – would do little to allay these fears.

- *A NATO Follow-On Deployment.*

While Skopje remains hostile toward NATO, it is

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<sup>34</sup> See Section Two above.

<sup>35</sup> See, in this context, the report by Human Rights Watch on abuses by Macedonian police against ethnic Albanian villagers: *Crimes Against Civilians: Abuses by Macedonian Forces in Ljuboten*, August 10-12, 2001, available at [www.hrw.org/reports/2001/macedonia](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/macedonia)

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Judy Dempsey, “NATO Seeks New Military Plan”, *Financial Times*, 7 September 2001.

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<sup>37</sup> Indications of a shift in Western readiness to consider post-Essential Harvest deployment have been given in recent days by, inter alia, U.S. envoy to Macedonia, James Pardew, UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder; see Michael R. Gordon, “After NATO, a Vacuum in Macedonia”, *The New York Times*, 4 September 2001, and Keith B. Richburg, “Foreign Troops May Be Needed in Macedonia Past 30 Days”, *Washington Post*, 6 September 2001. The Russian foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, has also indicated his country’s support in principle for some type of international protection force to provide security for monitors although it remains to be seen whether this would extend to a continuing role for NATO. See Interfax News Agency, Daily News Bulletin, 6 September 2001.

not in a position to be indifferent to serious international pressure for an extension. The international community possesses the resources to persuade the government to reconsider, especially if the follow-on presence is accompanied by the reintroduction of uniformed Macedonian police throughout the country (by means of mixed patrolling in some areas, as discussed above), accompanied by international monitoring.

A new NATO mandate should be linked to a UNHCR-endorsed agreement for a strict timetable to return displaced persons and refugees. Just as the weapons collection process was a test of NLA good will, so a displaced persons return plan would be a further test of this good will at a time when laws granting new rights to ethnic Albanians are meant to be passed in parliament. Meeting agreed benchmarks for the return of displaced persons would help keep the tortuous parliamentary process on track. Given the situation in Macedonia – in which war has not been ended, merely averted – the imperative to work fast and under deadlines is great.

UNHCR, NATO and others may resist a strict timetable, but experience from the Balkan wars in the 1990s suggests that minority return is difficult to achieve. Without the discipline of an agreed target and timeframe, it is unlikely that the necessary policing, reconstruction, and political pressure can be undertaken and coordinated in a timely fashion. A strict timetable would put the international community at risk of provocations designed to thwart the process. However, this risk will be present in any event.

The new mandate could also contain a commitment to deploy, even if only in select locations, on Macedonia's borders with Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. Macedonian officials continue to request this,<sup>38</sup> and ethnic Albanian leaders have

said that they could accept such a NATO role in the context of an overall security mission.<sup>39</sup> Deployment along the borders would diminish the arms flow (or potential arms flow) back into Macedonia, thereby dissuading any ethnic Albanian elements that may be tempted to take up arms. It would also reassure both ethnic communities that a quick resort to war was less likely, and show Macedonians in particular that NATO was not working against their interests.

In principle, NATO should not be the only candidate for a security role in Macedonia after "Essential Harvest". In practice, there are no serious alternatives.<sup>40</sup> NATO is already deployed in Macedonia and in-theatre, so critical time would be saved. It possesses unique credibility with and knowledge of the local actors. And it ensures that the U.S. – the ultimate source of credibility – is part of the equation, regardless of whether American forces are deployed as part of the mission, or even whether they continue, as at present, to provide most of the helicopter and medical support.

The United Nations is popular in Macedonia thanks to the UN preventive deployment mission, or UNPREDEP, that helped maintain stability and security from 1992 until 1999. However, it would be a less satisfactory organisation to deploy a security force in present circumstances, primarily because time would likely be lost in agreeing and deploying troop contributions, command structures and logistical arrangements already in place under NATO. (This is not to suggest that meeting those requirements would be without difficulty for NATO itself in agreeing an extension.) Political guidance might also be more problematic than in the case of a NATO force. All that said, there

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<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the government spokesman is on record as having stated that there would be "no problem with a continuation of the NATO mission" provided that it deployed on the border. KFOR's impressive recent activity is an example of how effective such efforts can be. Since June; KFOR has detained and screened nearly 800 persons on the Kosovo side of the border and seized 729 assault weapons, along with mortars, grenades, mines, and ammunition. This total approaches what NATO has collected inside Macedonia in the first phase of Essential Harvest.

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<sup>39</sup> ICG interview with Arben Xhaferi on 5 September 2001.

<sup>40</sup> In recent remarks to the press, EU envoy Léotard expressed confidence that the EU countries could readily muster a follow-on force of 1,500 or 2,000 troops to protect EU and OSCE observers. See "La UE puede ganar el liderazgo militar en Macedonia", *El Mundo*, 5 September 2001, and "Special Envoy Seeks EU Force for Macedonia: Plan for Troops to Follow NATO Mission", *Financial Times*, 6 September 2001. Léotard's confidence may owe more to traditional French ambitions to build up European defence and security capacity than to realistic assessments of what is possible in Macedonia in 2001. Early indications are that his "initiative", if such it was, is falling on deaf ears within the EU.

would be political benefit if a NATO follow-on presence were to be endorsed by the Security Council.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In the three and a half weeks since the Framework Agreement was signed, Macedonia has pulled back from the brink of war thanks to a swift NATO deployment. Nevertheless, a security vacuum has been revealed: who – if anyone – will protect and assist the hundreds of monitors, police advisers and other international officials whose active presence throughout Macedonia is required if the country is not to slip back into conflict?

In summary, the ethnic Albanians need a thick international presence to provide assurances against the police harassment and paramilitary violence they fear. The ethnic Macedonians need the same to provide assurances that they can return swiftly to the homes they fled during the fighting. International officials themselves need guarantees and assistance so that they can safely and effectively perform their vital functions. If the security vacuum is filled only by ethnic paramilitaries and rebels, the progress that has been made will be quickly forfeited. A residual but more active NATO or equivalent force will be needed long after the narrow mandate for a 30-day NATO weapons collection mission has expired.

There are many worrying signs of instability and tension. These include a spate of apparently ethnically-motivated bombings, tit-for-tat blockades and arrests in the Tetovo area, the continuing widespread presence of armed Albanians and Macedonian paramilitaries, and the ongoing blockade (at Blace and near Kumanovo) of KFOR's main logistics routes from Macedonia to Kosovo. Both sides continue to demand release of "kidnapped" persons. Bellicose statements are still being issued by hard-liners in the Macedonian government.

Doubts about the viability of the 13 August agreement remain widespread, and are probably growing, in both the ethnic Albanian and, especially, the ethnic Macedonian communities. NATO's collection of a first tranche of NLA volunteered weapons has not convinced the ethnic Macedonian public and politicians that the NLA will really disarm and disband. Nor has the political activity in and around parliament persuaded many ethnic Albanians that ethnic majority representatives intend to follow through on the commitments made at Ohrid.

There is considerable tumult – and narrow, partisan posturing – as the focus of activity turns away from inter-ethnic negotiation to the political process of lining up ethnic Macedonians behind the 13 August agreement. The fact that the political aspects of the peace agreement are, in essence, a package of concessions to the Albanian minority has not been lost on the public. Polls suggest that backing for the accord among ethnic Macedonians is no more than 43 per cent. Even this support is thin, however. With suspicions of Albanian aims as high as they are, it could easily evaporate in the wake of a single incident. Whether parliament will adopt the full package of constitutional amendments and new laws by 27 September, as it is obliged to by the 13 August agreement, remains uncertain.

In the brief period since the 13 August agreement was signed, there has been significant new recognition by international community representatives in Macedonia that a vigorous follow-on security force to Operation “Essential Harvest” – almost surely a NATO force for want of a plausible alternative – is essential to prevent a return to violence. This consensus has begun to form despite the clear misgivings and suspicions of capitals about prolonging NATO’s deployment. Indeed, there appears to be an important perception gap between many international representatives in the field and their governments. The latter’s thinking has evolved also, but only to the point of accepting the need to supplement the original NATO mission with a new, narrowly drawn mandate to protect the lives of international civilian officials in the field.

At this point, the peace process faces two immediate and linked imperatives. Macedonia’s parliament needs to be persuaded not to scuttle the 13 August agreement by failing to pass the stipulated constitutional and legislative package. But at the same time Macedonia’s government and key NATO capitals alike need to be persuaded not only that a follow-on NATO mission is essential but that it must be equipped with an adequate mandate.

Such a mandate should be broad enough to provide active assistance, not just protection and rescue services, for the international civilians – primarily monitors and police advisers – engaged in the day-to-day activities that will determine whether the 13 August agreement can truly bring peace. For

example, unless a meaningful number of displaced ethnic Macedonians swiftly return to their homes, ethnic Macedonian politics will likely be increasingly dominated by hard-line elements sympathetic to further turbulence and even forcible partition of the country. Those displaced persons will almost surely not be able to go back home safely without the assistance of UNHCR and local non-governmental organisations. However, UNHCR and others will not be able to provide that assistance unless their officials are both secure and able to call upon troops as needed to help them through roadblocks and otherwise back them up.

Macedonia has been a learning process for all concerned in the international community. Western governments are willing to do more now and for a longer time than they were even a few weeks ago because they have seen the stark alternative: a still threatening civil war that would carry major risks for Western interests throughout the Balkans, indeed for the coherence and relevance of NATO itself and the feasibility of ambitious EU plans for European integration. The learning process must continue rapidly this month, however, if NATO’s next mission in Macedonia is to be designed not for failure, but success

**Skopje/Brussels, 8 September 2001.**