

Saferworld

and Bonn International Center for Conversion

Macedonia:

Guns, policing and ethnic division

**Anna Matveeva**with **Duncan Hiscock**, **Wolf-Christian Paes** and **Hans Risser****October 2003**

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OCTOBER 2003

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Acknowledgements

This report was produced as part of Saferworld's small arms project in South Eastern Europe. Saferworld is grateful to the UK Government for funding their small arms programme.

Saferworld would like to thank Larry Attree, Chrissie Hirst, Zoran Jachev, Aleksandar Matovski, Dana Plavcova and Trpe Stojanovski for their respective contributions to the report. Thanks also go to Henry Bolton, Kim Benedict Johnsen, Edward Joseph, Ann Rogers and Simon Rynn for their comments and feedback.

Acronyms

ABB	Army Border Brigade
ANA	Albanian National Army (<i>Armata Kombëtare Shqiptare – AKSh</i> in Albanian)
APC	Armoured personnel carrier
ARI	Army of the Republic of Ilirida
ARM	<i>Armija na Republika Makedonija</i> (the Armed Forces of the Republic of Macedonia)
BCP	Border check point
BCPR	UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
BICC	Bonn International Center for Conversion
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DPA	Democratic Party of Albanians
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration (<i>Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim – BDI</i> in Albanian).
EAR	EU European Agency for Reconstruction
EUFOR	European Union Force
FRY	Former Republic of Yugoslavia
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
JNA	Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija (Yugoslav Peoples' Army)
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army (<i>Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës – UÇK</i> in Albanian)
KPC	Kosovo Protection Corps
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoI	Ministry of the Interior (<i>Ministerstvo za vnatreshni raboti – MVR</i> in Macedonian)
MPRI	Military Professional Resources Incorporated
NCB	National Co-ordination Body
NDP	National Democratic Party
NLA	National Liberation Army (<i>Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare – UÇK</i> in Albanian)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PDP	Party of Democratic Prosperity
PfP	NATO Partnership for Peace
RPG	Rocket propelled grenade
SACIM	Small Arms Control in Macedonia
SADU	UNDP Small Arms and Demobilisation Unit
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SDSM	<i>Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija</i> (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia)
SECI Center	Southeast European Cooperative Initiative Center for Combating Cross-Border Crime
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SEESAC	South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
UÇPMB	<i>Ushtria Çlirimtare e Preshevës, Medvegjës dhe Bujanocit</i> (Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNPREDEP	United Nations Preventive Deployment Force
VMRO-DPMNE	<i>Vnatreshnata makedonska revolucionerna organizacija – Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo</i> (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity)

Preface

THROUGHOUT THE 1990s, Macedonia was held up as an oasis of peace and stability whilst conflict affected most of South Eastern Europe, although by 1999 the consequences of the conflict in Kosovo were beginning to exacerbate tensions between the two communities in Macedonia. However, overt armed conflict did not appear until 2001, when Macedonia became the next link in a chain of conflicts that had accompanied the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The easy availability of arms contributed to instability and created a strong temptation to use violence to settle political scores. In an impoverished and poorly functioning economy, the line between political and criminal activity became increasingly blurred. When fighting broke out in 2001 between rival Macedonian and Albanian communities, the international community machine that was engaged in nearby Kosovo was again galvanised into action to broker a peace agreement and help plot the way forward.

Despite continued instability, the peace process has been gaining momentum, and the country's prospects for developing a viable state and a functioning economy have improved with a return to comparatively stable and responsible governance in September 2002, in contrast to the political adventurism of the previous administration. However, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) inside the country and the high level of smuggling across Macedonia's borders remain significant problems and continue to endanger peace. The political crisis in 2001 broke the taboo against the use of violence, and today arms are more visible, and more likely to be used than before the conflict. In such circumstances, collecting weapons and introducing effective gun control measures form an important pillar of the conflict prevention agenda. Now that there is a new government in office and the political tension has lessened, this is an opportune moment to address the issue of SALW in Macedonia, both by exploring the dimensions of the SALW problem itself, and by assessing national and international policies in the field of human security.

The report seeks to explore the prospects for weapons collection programmes and the introduction of effective gun control measures in the current security environment in Macedonia. With the government weapons amnesty due to start on 1 November 2003, the report takes a timely look at its chances for success – and considers the possible implications if the amnesty does not go as planned.

The chapter on 'Sources and Scale of Arms Proliferation' was written with valuable input from Zoran Jachev, Trpe Stojanovski and Aleksandar Matovski.¹ The report is based on two fact-finding missions undertaken in July 2002 and January 2003, surveys of openly available sources, and conclusions and observations drawn from

¹ In January 2002 Saferworld commissioned Forum – Center for Strategic Research and Documentation to produce a background research report on SALW in Macedonia. Parts of the report were used to prepare the current publication.

Saferworld's and BICC's other activities in the region. The report first analyses the nature of the problem of SALW proliferation by asking the following questions: how was the present situation arrived at? How did the initial armament take place? Who are the groups holding weapons and how do they operate? Why does the population continue to hold on to their guns? It then goes on to assess national and international measures that have so far been undertaken to tackle the problem, i.e. political commitments to disarmament, police reform, steps to revise the law and address cross-border crime, and public attitudes and the role of civil society. It concludes with an outline of the pros and cons of various disarmament options, and the implications that their implementation might have in Macedonia.

The main argument of the paper is that the problem of SALW proliferation in Macedonia is a question of both politics and policing, resulting both from internal challenges and from the country's vulnerability to outside influence within its turbulent neighbourhood. Therefore, measures to tackle the problem have to combine increased confidence among citizens in the political process with building public support for disarmament without letting criminal groups benefit from more humane approaches. The international community has expressed its willingness to help. The question now is how this willingness will be utilised by political forces in Macedonia.

Executive summary

THIS REPORT IS CONCERNED with the issue of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation in Macedonia. Before the 2001 crisis, when fighting broke out between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, most people in the country did not consider SALW proliferation to be a serious problem. This has now changed, and the government that was elected in September 2002, made up of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), concerned that the large number of illegally-held guns could act as a further catalyst for violence, has placed measures of weapons control and collection high on its agenda. This report assesses the scale and causes of SALW diffusion, considers the national and international efforts that have been taken to build security and reduce SALW proliferation, and suggests possible paths that future disarmament initiatives could take.

SALW proliferation – sources and causes

It is estimated that there are well over 100,000 illegal weapons in circulation in Macedonia. The conventional wisdom among ethnic Macedonians holds that all the guns in the country came from Albania when about 650,000 weapons were looted from arms depots during the political turmoil in 1997, and that this was a major cause of the 2001 crisis. Though it is clear that many of the weapons used in the conflict were of Albanian/Chinese origin, the true picture of the sources of SALW proliferation is more complicated.

When Macedonia gained independence in 1991, private citizens possessed 52,000 officially licensed firearms and probably an equal number of illegal, unlicensed weapons. The disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) released large quantities of arms from the stores of the former Yugoslav army onto the regional black market. The end of wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina meant more weapons became available. This is indicated by the amount of illegal small arms seized by the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) in Macedonia. In the two years before independence (1989–1990), there were only two convictions relating to illegal arms possession; in 1992, 220 pieces of SALW were seized, and by 1996 the figure was 1,103. These figures grew further in the late 1990s: for example, 2,610 weapons were seized in 1999.

The causes of the 2001 crisis are much debated, but it seems clear that one catalyst was the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999. Ethnic Macedonians were disappointed that the international community did not appear to heed their concerns about a new influx of ethnic Albanian refugees, while some Albanians took the lesson that armed resistance could be a successful political lever. The National Liberation Army (NLA) began an insurgency campaign against the Macedonian state that borrowed much from the

experience of Albanian rebels in Kosovo and South Serbia. In seven months of low-level fighting, at least 70 people died and 170,000 were displaced. The Macedonian government maintained that the NLA held about 50,000 weapons, though NATO estimates were lower.

During the crisis, the Macedonian authorities distributed arms to reservists and civilians. Though the MoI claims that some of these weapons were returned immediately after the conflict ended following the signing of the internationally-brokered Ohrid Agreement in August 2001, many remained in the hands of reservists. Moreover, it is not clear whether the amount of weapons distributed and collected have been properly recorded. In any case, this has been a major cause of tension among ethnic Albanians, who feel that Macedonians were able to obtain weapons by legal means, while they were not.

Another problem is that the porous borders to the west and north-west of the country are difficult to control given current resources, resulting in significant smuggling, including arms trafficking. Arms can easily flow over the borders between Kosovo, Macedonia and South Serbia, complicating attempts to combat illegal proliferation. It is estimated that there may be as many as 700,000 pieces of arms in the above region, most of which are not under control.² It seems that increasingly weapons are also being smuggled into Macedonia from Bulgaria, though little data is available on the quantities involved.

Members of all Macedonia's ethnic communities hold weapons, but it appears that illegal possession may be more common among members of the Albanian community. The high level of mistrust between the ethnic Albanian community and the state means that Albanians have had little incentive to register their weapons or acquire them legally, and a large number of weapons remain uncollected following the 2001 crisis.

It is clear that fears for individual and collective security remain one of the main reasons why people continue to hold weapons. Police, even with multi-ethnic patrols backed by the new reformist interior minister, fail to bring a sense of law and order to much of the former crisis areas. Kidnappings, bombings, spates of murders and armed robberies are frequent occurrences, with the culprits often evading capture.

Currently, the prevailing lawlessness is a key reason why people continue to keep weapons. The absence of law and order in the recent past also explains why many civilians acquired arms in the first place. As police performance has undergone little improvement despite much acclaimed international effort and, in some instances, even suffered setbacks, many people feel that official law-enforcement structures are not capable of providing adequate protection from crime and that they have to take the law into their own hands. As long as such thinking remains widespread and the policing problem acute, the chances for effective weapons collection initiatives will be reduced.

SALW proliferation in Macedonia is both a political and a policing problem, resulting both from internal challenges and from the country's vulnerability to outside influence within its turbulent neighbourhood. In some areas, particularly in the north-west of the country, crime also plays a role: organised criminal groups use weapons to protect their operations, and even trade arms, while ordinary villagers hold guns to defend themselves as they do not believe the state can do so. In some areas, these concerns act to strengthen a traditional 'gun culture', where possessing a weapon is a symbol of manhood and authority.

² Forum – Center for Strategic Research and Documentation background research report on SALW in Macedonia, October 2002.

Measures to combat SALW proliferation

The SDSM/DUI coalition government that has been in power since September 2002 is avoiding the nationalist appeals of its predecessor as its leaders work closely to address key ethnic issues. However, the government has only slowly implemented key sections of the Ohrid Agreement, including decentralization and equitable representation of Albanians in government. The goal of building such equality by 2004 is particularly hard to achieve, as it requires integrationist policies and the promotion of Albanians to positions in administration at all levels. Albanians constitute only 10.2 percent of employees in the state administration. However, an increase in ethnic representation faces significant obstacles, such as the need to lay off ethnic Macedonians to create jobs for Albanians in the civil service, the lack of professionals among the Albanian community with the skills to be nominated for senior appointments, and the decentralisation of local government, which may drive communities further apart.

These difficulties are compounded by the continued lack of capacity in government institutions. The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), which were formed from the regional branches of the SFRY federal ministries, have had to develop counter-insurgency and border management capacities and establish special forces, but still lack the experience to tackle highly organised and cross-border crime effectively. The MoD has had to build up an army virtually from scratch, and has recently faced the further challenge of re-organising its forces to be more suitable for accession to NATO.

Inter-agency co-operation has also been problematic, particularly on the border. The National Border Police and Customs control the Border Check Points (BCP), and have authority within 250 metres of the checkpoints; the regular police have general authority, but do not patrol the border, and the Army Border Brigade patrols between the BCPs. The poor communication between these bodies helps smugglers and hinders cross-border co-operation.

Nonetheless, the government has made some progress on combating cross-border crime. It has established better relations with its neighbours, having signed a co-operation agreement with Serbia and Montenegro, although at the price of angering Kosovo Albanians, and improving co-operation with KFOR and, to a lesser degree, UNMIK in neighbouring Kosovo. Discussions on improving control of the Albanian-Macedonian border are also underway. Moreover, the Army Border Brigade and the National Border Police functions will both be assumed in their entirety by 31 December 2005, by a new National Border Police Service which will come under MoI control. This new organisation will be the centrepiece of a new, integrated border management strategy aimed at improving inter-agency co-operation.

With strong support from the international community (in particular the OSCE Mission in Skopje and the EU's European Agency for Reconstruction), significant efforts have been made to reform the police to make it more effective and more acceptable to both communities. Some areas populated by ethnic Albanians have seen virtually no police presence since independence. Attempts to introduce multi-ethnic, community-based police patrols were generally positively received. However, only 6 percent of employees in the MoI were Albanian as of January 2003. Training of ethnic Albanian recruits by the OSCE under the Ohrid Agreement ended in July 2003, and training of further new recruits will take time. Furthermore, the police as a whole lack the analytical, investigative and planning capability required to combat more serious crime. Albanian themselves are conscious of the ineffectiveness of the multi-ethnic patrols, often urging the police to send better-equipped and trained units to tackle criminals.

An important precondition for any successful disarmament campaign is sufficient political will. The government has demonstrated the importance it attaches to this by approving two new laws relating to weapons possession. The first is the Law on the Supplying, Possession and Carrying of Weapons, passed in June 2003, which updates

and improves procedures for the legal acquisition and ownership of firearms. The second is the Law on the Voluntary Surrender and Collection of Firearms, Ammunition and Explosive Materials and the Legalisation of Weapons. This prepares the ground for the launch of a 45-day weapons amnesty from 1 November 2003. It will be possible either to surrender weapons voluntarily or to register them. The amnesty is being planned and coordinated through a working group run by Gezim Ostreni, a former NLA commander who is now general secretary of the DUI and chairman of the national coordination body established to oversee the collection. But there are fears that the amnesty is being introduced too hastily. The UNDP has recommended that from a technical viewpoint it would be better to delay the amnesty period, originally proposed by the government to start on 1 October, until spring 2004. Furthermore, as SALW proliferation is very much a political issue in Macedonia, there are fears that an unsuccessful campaign could be highly politically damaging. To counter this, the government argues that disarmament initiatives were promised even under the previous administration, and that further delays would undermine its credibility in the public's eyes. It also argues that it would be unwise to wait for a significant improvement in the general security situation – illicit weapons constitute a security threat in themselves, and the sooner they are collected the better.

There is also concern that the public attitude towards weapons possession is not fully conducive to disarmament. Certain sections of society consider weapons a status symbol, not a threat. The mass media is deeply politicised, and tends to report SALW stories in a biased and inflammatory way. There are few non-governmental organisations with much experience or capacity to work on arms issues. Most NGOs are mono-ethnic, are often closely linked to particular political figures and generally lack wider support from society.

Recommendations

Measures to tackle the problem of SALW proliferation have to combine increasing confidence among citizens in the political process with building public support for disarmament, while avoiding being 'soft on crime' and letting criminal groups benefit from more humane approaches. The following steps could help to facilitate this process:

- **Political commitment to disarmament** – Political parties, in government and opposition alike, must express publicly their commitment to disarmament. This is important not only at the highest level, but also at the regional and local level (eg mayors), to ensure that disarmament initiatives are not undermined by a lack of support within certain sections of society.
- **Open debate on SALW in Macedonia** – More honesty and transparency is required if practical disarmament measures are to succeed. Given the fragility of interethnic peace since the 2001 crisis, this will need to be done very sensitively; nevertheless, such a public debate is essential.
- **Continuation of police reform efforts** – Such a reform should make pro-active, intelligence-led policing more effective. Creating a multi-ethnic police force that is acceptable to all Macedonian citizens will be a long process, and it is essential that this is recognised both within Macedonia, and by the international community – and that resources are provided accordingly. The tasks of establishing full police control over all rural areas and of destroying the organised crime networks in the country are only possible if the police are better equipped and trained. It is also important that human rights awareness is integrated into police training, to ensure that the police do not lose their legitimacy among sections of the population.

- **Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes** – All ethnic communities would benefit from a DDR programme for ex-combatants from groups such as the NLA, and also for former police and military reservists. International organisations with experience in DDR should work together with the Macedonian government to develop such a programme.
- **Weapons collection initiatives** – Weapons collection programmes can succeed, providing a number of factors are taken into account. These include an awareness of how the programme will be perceived by both communities, and the need to distribute benefits fairly; a commitment to ensure that appropriate logistical and technical arrangements are made; and consideration about how the programme will fit into the wider developmental framework and actually provide some benefit and security to all citizens of Macedonia. Though it is acknowledged that a traditional ‘gun culture’ can act as another reason for weapons possession, the existence of such a ‘gun culture’ does not make it impossible to bring weapons under legal control.
- **Improvement of border controls and cross-border co-operation** – Despite recent positive steps, borders remain porous, and border guards are poorly trained and badly paid. Information exchange with neighbouring countries regarding law-enforcement matters should be deepened, in order that resources can be utilised more efficiently. Border patrol teams should be ethnically mixed, so that they are more acceptable to the local community, and the international community should supervise border controls to help to minimise corruption.
- **Enhanced capacity to combat organised crime** – The Macedonian law-enforcement agencies need to improve their capacity for surveillance, intelligence gathering and taking pre-emptive measures. It is also necessary to strengthen systems of inter-agency and regional co-operation and information exchange. The international community should provide technical and financial assistance for this work.
- **Tackling lawlessness** – Lawlessness initiated weapons acquisition, and remains key to their retention. An honest evaluation of police performance, its effectiveness in fighting crime and a degree of cooperation with the communities is needed. It is equally important to assess the impact of the international efforts at police reform, training programmes on offer and the reasons why progress has been so slow.
- **Improvement and implementation of gun control laws** – The new law on domestic gun possession is welcome. It is very important that this law is now implemented effectively. The government should make a candid assessment of where the difficulties in implementing this law may lie, and if necessary, seek international support in building its capacity to act.
- **Capacity building for civil society** – The capacity of civil society organisations, in particular NGOs and the media, to work effectively on SALW issues needs to be strengthened. This is especially true outside the major urban centres. Both NGOs and the media should be encouraged to become less politicised. International NGOs can play an important role in this capacity building for local civil society through co-operation and sharing of experience.

1

A recent history of Macedonia³

Macedonia after independence

THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, internationally referred to as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) because of a name dispute with Greece⁴, emerged from the remains of the SFRY on 17 September 1991. The only Yugoslav republic to secede without violence, the country was hailed as an example of a stable, functioning multi-ethnic state in a troubled neighbourhood. In 1992 the UN deployed a preventative peacekeeping mission (the UN Preventive Deployment Force – UNPREDEP) to monitor developments on the borders – principally, the threat from Slobodan Milosevic’s Serbia – that could undermine Macedonian security. The former director of the OSCE Spillover Mission in Macedonia, the US diplomat Norman Anderson, described the country in 1999 as an example of preventive diplomacy at work, arguing that Macedonia had ‘survived as a healthy, functioning multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state’.⁵

Despite this peaceful façade, tensions between ethnic Macedonians, which form the majority group, and the growing minority of ethnic Albanians, which constitute an estimated 20–25 percent of the population⁶ – the size of the Albanian minority is itself a highly political issue – have been simmering since the break-up of the SFRY. The origins of these tensions can be traced back to the foundation of ‘Macedonia’ as a constituent republic within the SFRY. Compared to other ethnic groups within Tito’s realm, such as the Serbs and Croats, Macedonians could claim little in terms of a state tradition, with parts of the country being eyed by Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece after the end of the Ottoman Empire. When the ‘Socialist Republic of Macedonia’ was founded after World War II, this move had the dual aim of frustrating Bulgarian and Greek designs for the territory. Macedonia was designed as the ‘homeland’ of ethnic Macedonians, with the Macedonian language and culture being promoted at the expense of the non-Macedonian minorities within the republic, which were under-represented within the state bureaucracy. This situation was sustainable until the break-up of the SFRY, as Kosovo and especially the Albanian-language University of

³ This section was written with contributions from Wolf-Christian Paes.

⁴ For more information on this dispute, which continues up to the present day, see International Crisis Group (ICG): ‘Macedonia’s Name: Why the dispute matters and how to resolve it’, Skopje/Brussels, 10 December 2001 (*ICG Balkans Report* no 122), pp 11–17. This report will use the term ‘Macedonia’ rather than ‘FYROM’ in order to make the text more reader-friendly.

⁵ Anderson N, ‘OSCE Preventive Diplomacy in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’, *Helsinki Monitor*, 2/1999, p 49.

⁶ Based on the census of 1994, the ethnic break down was as follows: 66 percent Macedonians and 21 percent Albanians, small groups of Turks, Serbs, Vlachs and Roma. The precise ethnic breakdown of the Macedonian population is heavily disputed, as Albanians claim that in fact their group constitutes up to 40 percent of the total population, arguing that the results of the 1994 census represent an attempt at ethnic gerrymandering by the Macedonian government. The results of the most recent census, conducted in November 2002, are likely to be equally controversial. See <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2003/01/08012003161005.asp>

Pristina served as a safety valve for politically ambitious young Albanians from other parts of the federation.⁷

However, after the secession of the Republic of Macedonia, when the new constitution formally reduced the status of Albanians in the republic, tension rose over issues such as minority rights, access to Albanian-language tertiary education and representation in local government, and contributed to the long held and widespread feeling of 'second-class' citizenship among Albanians within the Macedonian state. Even well-educated Macedonian Albanians began to question the nature of the relationship between their ethnicity and their nationality. Whereas Albania's descent into anarchy in 1997 made it an unattractive model for ethnic Albanians outside of it, a liberated and possibly independent Kosovo was quite a different matter and fuelled nationalist sentiment.

Signs of this emerging Albanian nationalism, manifest in such things as the flying of the national flag of Albania over town halls in majority Albanian villages, began to inflame fears among ethnic Macedonians that the Albanian minority harboured ambitions towards a 'Greater Albania' that could ultimately lead to the partition of the state. Meanwhile, biased policing and growing repression of Albanian national symbols, combined with the success of the KLA – whose ideology and fighters both moved freely across the borders – nurtured the growing estrangement between the two communities.

The struggle for a patrimonial state – the 2001 crisis

Violence in Macedonia escalated towards war between January and August 2001. By the end of August 2001, the conflict had claimed the lives of 58 members of the security forces and wounded 269, according to official statistics. In the same period, 10 civilians were killed and 75 injured in attacks organised by the National Liberation Army (NLA; *Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare* – UÇK in Albanian). The fate of 12 abducted Macedonians is still unknown.⁸ According to the UNHCR, roughly 170,000 people were displaced by fighting during the Macedonian crisis, of which some 10,000 were still to return as of 1 April 2003.⁹

The fighting started in earnest after a grenade attack on a police station in Tearce on 22 January, killing one policeman and wounding three others. The NLA claimed responsibility for the attack and announced its intention to fight for more political rights for the Albanian population. In the following months, the NLA successfully copied the strategy of fellow Albanian insurgents in Kosovo and Southern Serbia by attacking isolated police stations and military patrols, as well as 'liberating' villages in the remote mountain ranges of northern and western Macedonia. These predominantly Albanian areas, which straddle the border with Kosovo, Albania and Serbia, had been difficult for the Macedonian authorities to penetrate even before the conflict. Now they served as staging posts for arms supplies from neighbouring countries and as bases for recruitment.

The NLA could draw on the resources of both the KLA, which had only partially been demobilised in the summer of 1999,¹⁰ and on the remnants of the defunct UÇPMB (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Preshevës, Medvegjës dhe Bujanocit* – Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac), which had waged an unsuccessful battle for secession in South Serbia since January 2000. In June 2000, the Serb army was allowed to re-enter the Presevo area, which has been off-limits as a border buffer zone to keep Serbian forces away from Kosovo. The action may have pushed rebels and arms into

7 Paes W-C, Schlotter P, 'EU in heikler Mission – Mazedonien zwischen Krieg und europäischer Zukunft', Schoch B et al. (eds.): 'Friedensgutachten 2002' (Münster: LIT), pp 236–237.

8 Official statistics of the Ministry of Interior, Republic of Macedonia, published in *The White Book* Skopje, 2001, pp 139–153.

9 UNHCR, 'Global Appeal 2003: FYR of Macedonia', Geneva, December 1, 2002.

10 Heinemann-Grüder A, Paes W-C, 'Wag the Dog: The Mobilization and Demobilization of the Kosovo Liberation Army', Bonn, BICC brief no 20 (2001).

Macedonia, which was trying to secure the area from the south. The links between Albanian armed groups in Kosovo and Macedonia, and with criminal structures, are well documented.¹¹ Although the causes of the conflict are multiple and include unresolved grievances of Albanians in Macedonia, there is some support for the view that the 'proximate cause' of the conflict was indeed an insurgency launched with support from Kosovo, following the collapse of the Presevo-UCPMB uprising a few months earlier. Initially, the NLA numbered not more than a few dozen fighters, isolated from mainstream Albanian politics in Macedonia, and the international community initially considered the insurgents 'thugs'.¹²

The Macedonian security forces, remnants of the dissolved Yugoslav structures, had little experience or training in counter-insurgency operations and so their responses were both inappropriate and ineffective. The indiscriminate shelling of Albanian villages during the early months of 2001 and cases of human rights abuses by Macedonian police against Albanian civilians¹³ galvanised support for the NLA among the Albanian population; meanwhile, the international media, viewing the conflict in broadly the same terms as it had the Kosovo war, began to focus on the Albanians as victims of ethnic repression. The international community continued to downplay the violence throughout the spring, with NATO unwilling to countenance another difficult involvement, although KFOR did step up efforts on its side of the border to cut off rebel supply lines. But as the situation failed to stabilise, and fears grew that this could become the fourth Balkan war in a decade, the international community finally accepted the need for more decisive action. Bouts of intense diplomatic efforts by senior US, NATO and EU officials followed. NATO became involved on the ground in June 2001, when its forces moved in to disarm the rebels from Aracinovo, ending an intense battle with Macedonian security forces. Finally, that summer the European Union and NATO brokered a peace accord known as the 'Ohrid Framework Agreement' and agreed a military deployment to disarm the insurgents.

The Ohrid Agreement, which was signed on 13 August 2001 by the four main political parties (the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), the SDSM, the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)), addressed most of the constitutional grievances of the Albanian minority by providing for a complex power-sharing arrangement between the two ethnic groups that includes substantial autonomy for local governments, veto rights for minority representatives in parliament, and the right to use the Albanian language and national symbols in public. While Albanian politicians, including the NLA leadership, were quick to embrace this plan, Macedonian politicians were more reluctant and agreed only after intense pressure was applied by the international community. Many believed that the international community rewarded Albanian radicals for their insurgency with concessions, while Macedonians lost influence in their own state for playing by the rules. In the words of one international analyst: 'the Agreement requires the Macedonian majority to cede its monopoly on the character of the state (...). The outrage among Macedonians at the Agreement was therefore not so much at the gains by Albanians in the Agreement, as at the losses to Macedonian identity'.¹⁴

11 Hislope R, 'Organized Crime in a Disorganized State. How Corruption Contributed to Macedonia's Mini-War', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol 49, no 3 May/June 2002, pp 37–39.

12 International Crisis Group: 'The Macedonian Question: Reform or Rebellion', Skopje/Brussels: ICG Balkans Report no 109, 5 April 2001.

13 Human Rights Watch documented the operation of Macedonian police against the Albanian village of Ljuboten from 10–12 August 2001 which left ten villagers dead and more than one hundred in custody, despite the absence of reliable proof of NLA positions in the settlement. See further: Human Rights Watch: 'Crimes against civilians: Abuses by Macedonian Forces in Ljuboten, August 10–12, 2001', vol 13, no 5 (2001). On abuses committed by members of both communities see Petrusseva A, Devaja S, 'War Crimes and the Hague', in *Ohrid and Beyond: a Cross-ethnic Investigation into the Macedonian Crisis*, IWPR, Skopje, 2002, pp 83–93.

14 International Crisis Group: 'Moving Macedonia Towards Self-Sufficiency: A New Security Approach for NATO and the EU', Brussels/Skopje, 15 November 2002 (ICG Balkans Report no 135), p 2.

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Security challenges in the new state

The context

WHEN ASSESSING THE EXTENT AND CAUSES of gun proliferation in Macedonia, and the capacity of the state to deal with the problem of arms control effectively, it is very important to understand the political and security context. The section below analyses how the state functions in Macedonia, considers how it relates to the two main ethnic communities, outlines the economic situation and describes the extent to which the country is hostage to its turbulent regional setting and vulnerable to outside influences.

The role of political parties

Although the Macedonian majority holds most reins of political power in the Republic of Macedonia, members of both communities participate in political process through the party system. This is a thorny process, complicated both by the country's multi-ethnic character and intra-community power struggles. Unlike in many emerging democracies, where the executive dominates the political process, parties are strong in Macedonia and act as pillars of the political system. This makes politics more competitive, but also obstructs the creation of a sense of national unity. Moreover, adherence to a party reflects deeper social affiliations, such as regional, family and clan loyalties, with parties playing a paternalistic role looking after their supporters. Party branches often serve as support networks helping with access to jobs, information and other opportunities. Hence support for a party often reflects a vested economic interest.

Macedonia is a parliamentary democracy in which the president, Boris Trajkovski, plays a representative role as head of state, and also acts as a convenor of policies rather than their initiator. Executive power lies with the prime minister, nominated from the winning party, currently Branko Crvenkovski, who heads the government. The cabinet is formed by the winning parties according to their relative strength in parliament. After the September 2002 elections, the current ruling parties are the SDSM and the DUI. The SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) has its roots in the SFRY era, but underwent a major transformation towards liberalism as Macedonia gained independence. It was the governing party from 1991 to 1998, but was voted out because of corruption and economic mismanagement. It won a landslide victory in the 2002 elections and currently holds 60 seats in the 120-seat parliament. Its counterpart on the ethnic Albanian side is the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI or *Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim* – BDI in Albanian). It is led by Ali Ahmeti, a former rebel leader turned politician who commands much respect among the Albanian

community, but his and his comrades-in-arms' recent past provokes much distrust among ethnic Macedonians.

Though it is often assumed that the main division in the country is along ethnic lines, both the Macedonian and Albanian communities are equally divided within themselves, each represented by a number of parties that are constantly locked in bitter struggles with one another. The story of how the DUI was created provides a good example of this intra-communal dispute. When the 2001 conflict ended, the leaders of the NLA, including Ali Ahmeti, expected that all Albanians would unite around the existing political structures within the Albanian community. At first, Ahmeti suggested this could be done by gathering everyone together in a Co-ordinating Council of Albanian parties and using this body to push for the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.¹⁵ Yet after protracted negotiations it became clear that the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), who were part of the government coalition at the time, was not interested in the initiative, and the various Albanian groups and parties decided to go their own way. Therefore, just months before parliamentary elections were due to be held, Ahmeti and his associates, who had never initially intended to create their own political party, set about establishing the DUI and began trying to attract Albanians from the diaspora and intellectuals from inside the country to stand as candidates. The founding session of the DUI was held in Tetovo on 5 June 2002.¹⁶ In the run-up to the elections, some of its most prominent members had to operate underground, as they were former NLA activists and were concerned for their safety since the conditions of the amnesty for those who participated in the fighting in 2001 were not clear.¹⁷ Nonetheless, for a party that was established only three months prior to the elections the DUI did very well, winning 16 seats in the new parliament. It currently holds the posts of Minister of Transport and Communications, Minister of Education, Minister of Health, and Minister of Justice, as well as one Deputy Prime Minister post.

The previous government

The four-year rule of the previous coalition government, led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) in coalition with the DPA, left a heavy legacy for the country. To some extent, it would have been a turbulent time for Macedonia regardless of who was in power, given NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999; nor can that government carry all the blame for the 2001 crisis. The previous government, led by the SDSM and Crvenkovksi, had been dogged by complaints of corruption and inefficiency as it struggled to transform Macedonia from a poor socialist entity into a modern capitalist state: the VMRO-DPMNE administration, instead of grappling with these issues, merely exacerbated them. The governing process grew excessively politicised, and was particularly evident in the rivalry between the MoI and the MoD on how to prosecute the counter-insurgency. The attitudes and behaviour of some of the security structures provoked fear and resentment among members of the public, Albanians and Macedonians alike, and expectations of violence during the September 2002 parliamentary elections were high.

Essentially, the VMRO-DPMNE/DPA coalition was an alliance of two nationalist parties who on the one hand paid lip service to the ideas of integration and respect for the unity of the Republic, while on the other exploited nationalist sentiment on both sides to gain electoral support. The rhetoric adopted by both the VMRO-DPMNE and the DPA often worsened interethnic relations and outside observers wondered how the two managed to co-exist in the same government. Despite their public stance, however, co-operation between the two parties was generally reasonably smooth,

¹⁵ Interview with Agron Buxhaku, then DUI party spokesman, Tetovo, July 2002.

¹⁶ The city of Tetovo has a population of 75,000, with a 70 percent Albanian majority. The greater Tetovo area includes the city and 9 rural municipalities, and is home to 220,000 inhabitants.

¹⁷ The amnesty was to cover all NLA fighters who took part in the 2001 fighting, except for those being investigated for war crimes. However, the amnesty does not cover the period prior to the 2001 crisis.

facilitated no doubt by agreements on how to share the profits from the lucrative sources of income to which they had access.¹⁸ To some extent, this collaboration between elites is a tradition that dates back to the SFRY, when representatives of all ethnic groups were promoted through party ranks to positions of power and their allegiance to their own ethnic group was weakened. Yet this should not be exaggerated: the SFRY period was too short to produce an identity that fully overrode traditional ethnic boundaries. Besides this, relatively few Macedonian Albanians were joining the political elite in Macedonia, as Kosovo, and particularly its capital Pristina, acted as the main centre for Albanian scholarship. Access to power and opportunities for Albanians in Macedonia were much more limited.

While the international community pressured the government to work towards the multi-ethnic state envisioned by Ohrid, segments of the VMRO-DPMNE/DPA government apparently agreed that the two ethnic communities could not co-exist and that division along ethnic lines and even having parts of the country join their ethnic kin across the border was the only viable solution. The publication in May 2001 of a proposal by the president of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Georgi Efremov, for a territorial and ethnic division of the country added fuel to political passions. The Academy later denounced the proposal as an individual political document, but both Prime Minister Ljupco Georgievski and Parliamentary Speaker Stojan Andov, both VMRO-DPMNE party members (though Andov had previously been the leader of a more moderate party that contested the 1998 elections), were among the few politicians who refrained from denouncing the plan.¹⁹ Both Albanian parties in parliament at the time, the DPA and the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP), were united in criticising the proposal.²⁰

The government's troubles over continuous insecurity and the failing economy were not helped by the VMRO-DPMNE's relations with the international community. The government had reluctantly co-operated with the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo. With the country already worried about the rising Albanian population, the subsequent arrival of thousands of Kosovar refugees was a considerable strain. The carrot of a faster track to EU entry initially encouraged patience among Macedonians. However, they soon found themselves relegated to the back of the queue. The Ohrid Agreement was seen as a further example of the international community's double standards being forced on the region, and thus was strongly criticised by VMRO-DPMNE sympathisers.

For its part, the international community was frustrated by the chaos within the government, a sense that the reform process lacked direction, and the government's inability to engage constructively with international actors. Furthermore, as both sides were locked in their conflicting perspectives as to whether the Kosovo insurgency represented a step towards the construction of a modern, multi-ethnic Yugoslav state or a mono-ethnic Albanian one, their dialogue revolved mainly around the question of who was to blame.

One thing for which the VMRO-DPMNE/DPA coalition government does deserve credit is its dignified, non-violent exit from power. As noted above, many observers thought it likely that both parties might make use of paramilitary loyalist groups in the run-up to the election. Yet the leaderships of both the VMRO and the DPA apparently believed – rather naively as it turned out – that they could win a 'clean' victory, as they misjudged the degree of popular disillusionment, and this meant that they did not resort to force to ensure their re-election. When the polls returned a crushing defeat – under the eye of international monitors – there were no options left and the two parties bowed out gracefully. This transfer of power opened the way for a break with the past, bringing new hopes for a more stable future.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, 'Macedonia's Public Secret: How Corruption Drags the Country Down', 14 August 2002, ICG Balkans Report, no 133.

¹⁹ Interview with Emil Kirjas, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, Skopje, July 2002.

²⁰ Latifi V, 'Storm over Macedonian partition plan', Institute for War and Peace Reporting, BCR no 253, Skopje, 6 June 2001.

The SDSM/DUI government

On a positive note, popular attitudes towards the state, and expectations that it can improve the life of its citizens, have been encouraging. Political participation in Macedonia, unlike in neighbouring states, was relatively high: 73 percent of the population turned out to vote in the parliamentary elections. No significant violence has occurred. As a DUI spokeswoman put it, 'people expressed their trust in the institutions of the state on 15 September 2002 by voting in large numbers in the [parliamentary] elections'.²¹ Most people among both Macedonian and Albanian communities expect the state to take responsibility and to work more effectively in their interest, and prefer this to creating alternative arrangements of their own in fields such as security and to attempts to break away altogether. This is an encouraging start, but it places a tremendous burden on the government to deliver.

The outgoing government left a great deal for its successor to do. Current priorities include the fight against corruption, which started with high-profile arrests in January 2003; implementation of the Ohrid Agreement²²; security sector reform; SALW control measures; and economic regeneration. The most difficult challenge of all is to revive the multi-ethnic nation of the Republic of Macedonia.

These are not easy tasks. Expectations have been raised significantly, and every delay by the government is seen as unwillingness to confront difficult issues. Popular patience is low and results are expected quickly. Action on high-level corruption has already helped. Although it will take years, or even decades, to eradicate corrupt practices lower down the chain, so far the leadership has been setting a positive example. Implementing the Ohrid Agreement by 2004, as the government wishes, is particularly hard, as it requires integrationist policies and the promotion of Albanians to positions in administration at all levels. At present, Albanians constitute only 10.2 percent of employees in the state administration. However, an increase in ethnic representation faces significant obstacles, such as the need to lay off ethnic Macedonians to create jobs for Albanians in the civil service,²³ the lack of professionals among the Albanian community with the skills to be nominated for senior appointments, and the decentralisation of local government, which may drive communities further apart.

What are the chances of success? The government is trying its best, though progress is somewhat handicapped by the fact that the DUI was formed less than two years ago and has little political experience. This leads to hesitation and deliberation over decisions, hindering progress. For many ethnic Macedonians, the U-turn which saw NLA fighters transform into DUI peacemakers was too quick to be credible, and there is apprehension that old habits still linger and may re-emerge, adding to the fragility of the interethnic accord. For the former fighters, the risk is that some of its constituency will lose patience and become attracted to more extreme agendas.

However, the main challenges currently lie not in inter-ethnic relations, but in solving a number of issues within the two main ethnic groups. On the Macedonian side, the SDSM has taken action over the paramilitary structures created by the previous regime, while for its part, the DUI is attempting to reconcile or suppress various Albanian groups it does not directly control. At the same time, the government as a whole has to address the issue of SALW proliferation in the hands of armed groups and individuals, both those associated with the state and those acting against it. Former KLA and NLA military commander Gezim Ostreni, now the DUI's General Secretary and its Representative in parliament, is to head a 45-day weapons amnesty scheduled to begin in November 2003. The choice of Ostreni will make the amnesty a test case for the extent of the DUI's influence within its ethnic Albanian constituency, particularly in a context where other Albanian political parties are reviving their

²¹ Interview with Ermira Mehmeti, DUI party spokeswoman, January 2003, Tetovo.

²² On progress see Saskova E, Janeva J, 'Macedonia: Ohrid Accord Breakthrough: The Skopje authorities aim to have peace deal in place by 2004', IWPR BCR, no 396, 9 January 2003.

²³ In Kumanovo (60 percent Macedonian, 25 percent Albanian, 11 percent Serb) there are only 4 Albanians out of 30 employees of the local administration. However, to increase their share, Macedonians will have to be laid off, some of whom have long held jobs in the administration. The fear is that attempts to balance representation quickly will exacerbate rather than mitigate ethnic tensions: interview with Slobodan Kovacevski, mayor of Kumanovo, July 2002, Kumanovo.

efforts to discredit the Ohrid Agreement. Berating the failure of the Ohrid Agreement in April 2003, Arben Xhaferi stepped down as DPA leader and declared his support for an ethnically divided state. Re-elected as party chairman at a weekend congress on 12–13 July 2003, Xhaferi then announced that the DPA would invoke self-determination if Ohrid were not implemented soon.²⁴

The economic and social situation

These challenges must be faced while also dealing with the dismal economic situation. Macedonia ranked second bottom (to Montenegro) in terms of social and economic standards among the republics of communist Yugoslavia. Many state industries have collapsed since independence and agriculture cannot compete with produce from more developed neighbours. Wine production and tourism have potential, but this requires major investment, which in turn depends on a vast improvement in security. As a transit country on a major route to Western Europe, considerable revenue could be generated from taxes, but tax collection is undermined by corruption and smuggling across porous borders. Questions have been raised about whether customs duties are the best potential source of state revenue, given the seemingly insurmountable obstacles and the investment required to build border infrastructure.²⁵ Corruption and financial mismanagement by previous governments further exacerbated the situation²⁶: according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Macedonian Ministry of Finance, in 2002 the hole in the budget amounted to 3.5–4 billion denars (\$55–65 million) due to ‘unplanned expenditures by the former government’. According to the IMF, GDP growth in 2002 amounted to only 0.3 percent.²⁷ The trade deficit is \$800 million and is expected to rise to \$1 billion.

The World Bank and the IMF have recently embarked on a three-year privatisation project. It is hoped that a more vibrant private sector will absorb workers made redundant by the public sector, especially as a result of implementing the Ohrid Agreement.²⁸ However, the IMF also criticised the decentralisation envisaged by the Agreement. It feared such decentralisation would weaken the country’s struggling economy, which is in bad need of reform that would have to be centrally initiated and administered. Moreover, trusting money for projects to local municipalities before they are ready to absorb it can bring chaos to the financial system.

Some experts in Macedonia believe that the international community has concentrated on security, justice and human rights at the expense of reviving the economy, creating jobs and bringing investment. They regard this as the wrong set of priorities, because most of the country’s problems stem from poverty.²⁹ In some mountain villages in border areas there is ‘nothing but sheep and smuggling’, as one international aid worker put it. A functioning economy would mean jobs, and jobs would mean a farewell to arms. Murtesan Ismaili, the mayor of Tetovo, suggested that if politicians cannot promise jobs for young men from their own community, these men would not be willing to give up weapons,³⁰ thus undermining the significance of politicians for effective disarmament. In the meantime, as the economy fails to deliver jobs, the temptation to turn to crime only increases.

The paradox is that amid profound insecurity, attracting investment or running a business safely is impossible. Moreover, the first jobs that are likely to be created would

²⁴ This is sadly true for opposition parties from both communities: VMRO-DMPNE and DPA both stepped up pro-partition rhetoric in 2003. See Geshakova J, ‘Macedonian opposition plays up ethnic division’, RFE/RL, 21 July 2003; Geshakova J, ‘Macedonia: Ethnic Albanian Party Reopens Division Debate’, RFE/RL, 15 July 2003.

²⁵ Discussions held during the ‘Lessons Learnt in Conflict Prevention in the Balkans’ conference, organised by the Foreign Ministry of Greece and ELIAMEP, Athens, 5–6 May 2003.

²⁶ International Crisis Group, ‘Macedonia’s Public Secret: How Corruption Drags the Country Down’, 14 August 2002, *ICG Balkans Report no 133*.

²⁷ ‘Macedonia – IMF negotiations’, 27 November 2002, www.csees.net/news

²⁸ For more information on privatisation in Macedonia, see the website of the Privatisation Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, <http://www.mpa.org.mk/>

²⁹ Interview with Jovan Donev, Euro-Balkan Institute, January 2003, Skopje.

³⁰ Interview with Murtesan Ismaili, mayor of Tetovo, January 2003, Tetovo.

be low-paid manual work, which would hardly be attractive to those who make their living by smuggling and racketeering.

Regional setting

A relatively small country of 25,700km sq and 2 million people,³¹ Macedonia is a hostage to its turbulent regional setting. None of its neighbours is an easy partner, with Kosovo a particular concern. Macedonians regard Kosovo, with some justification, as a launch pad for radicals determined to destabilise Macedonia in their drive to create a Greater Albania, and also as a safe haven for criminals. Co-operation between the VMRO-DPMNE government and the Kosovo Protection Force (KFOR) and the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) were marred by political tensions. However, the present government is developing a much better relationship with actors in the region, and indeed is seen as a potential broker in relations between, for example, Belgrade and Pristina.

Albania is also an uneasy neighbour, as the border remains *de facto* open. The 1997 Albanian crisis, provoked by the collapse of financial pyramid schemes, resonated powerfully in Macedonia, as stolen weaponry from army barracks started to appear on the black market in the west of the country. However, the governments and militaries have recently made significant efforts to work together to defeat criminal and extremist groups. For example, there have already been two sets of joint military exercises with Albania in 2003. Macedonian liaison officers also co-operate with their Albanian counterparts through the regional Southeast European Co-operative Initiative (SECI) Regional Centre for Combating Trans-border Crime.

The continuing security vacuum in Southern Serbia, with all the tension provoked by its ethnic mix of Serbs and Albanians, and its proximity to Kosovo has allowed a 'Bermuda triangle' to emerge between Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Western Macedonia, where murky dealings and criminal networks flourish. Moreover, Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and Montenegro, was once the capital of the SFRY and is regarded as a former master, leading to chronic suspicion about its intentions, as well as concern about its political and economic stability. Macedonia's proximity to conflict zones such as Croatia, Bosnia-and-Herzegovina and Kosovo are also seen as having contributed to the presence of arms in the republic.

As its people are closely related to Macedonians in ethnic terms, Bulgaria is reluctant to accept them fully as a separate group with their own distinct language. Though Bulgaria has recognised the independence of the Macedonian state, it neither accepts Macedonians as a separate nation or people, nor the presence of a Macedonian minority within Bulgaria. Greece has been similarly reluctant to acknowledge that there is a Macedonian community on its territory and has refused to recognise the name 'Republic of Macedonia', even imposing a blockade on the country between 1992 and 1995. While these disputes rumble on, there is a growing awareness that Macedonia, whatever it is called, is here to stay, and a stable state is preferable to a failing one. For example, the head of the northern Greek prefecture of Pieria suggested in July 2003 that visa restrictions should be eased to encourage more Macedonian tourists.

Security actors

Historically, people in the region have mostly had to rely on themselves to provide security. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, two Balkan wars and two World Wars fought on its territory all helped to reinforce traditions of self-defence, such as the formation of partisan movements and reliance on community networks to mobilise in the event of emergency. In the past, communities in remote areas used to

³¹ 2,058,000, according to the October 2002 census.

pay some of its members to act as private guards. People normally refrained from travelling after dark, fearing crime on the roads.

Life in the SFRY altered these patterns to an extent, when the state sought to establish, in Weberian terminology, a 'monopoly on violence'. This was largely successful in the lowlands and in urban areas, where the population grew accustomed to relying on the state to provide security and saw no need to keep guns, but less so in the mountains and in predominantly Albanian areas, where the police were never able to penetrate deeply into the local community. Even if security had improved, people still avoided travelling after dark. Overall, the SFRY experience was too short (less than 50 years) to change people's attitudes to security entirely, particularly as older generations still remembered the freedom from the state and its policing powers. After the break-up of the SFRY, the old habit of self-reliance made a relatively quick comeback. The crisis in 2001 exposed the laxity of the policing of these areas since independence.

State actors

One of the challenges facing Macedonia after independence was to build the capacity of the government agencies. Most of the new Macedonian ministries were formed out of the regional Macedonian branches of the SFRY federal ministries, which were based in Belgrade, and their capacities had to be expanded to enable them to perform as independent ministries. The two exceptions were the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), where the local branches already had a fairly large number of employees and capabilities. The Macedonian branch of the Yugoslav MoI employed between 6,000 and 7,000 people, while the Macedonian office of the MoD was home to the general staff of the Third Army. Nonetheless, the new Macedonian state also had to create a counter-insurgency capacity, special forces and border management capabilities.

Ministry of the Interior (*Ministerstvo za vnatreshni raboti*)

The Ministry of the Interior (MoI) has emerged as a relatively powerful body on the political landscape and played an important, if controversial, role in the 2001 crisis. The then Minister of the Interior, Ljube Boskovski of the VMRO-DPMNE, founded an armed unit within the Ministry, the Lions, which had uncertain loyalties and operated on the borders of legality.

Officially, as the government agency responsible for policing and maintaining internal security, the MoI has the legal authority to use armed force while carrying out its lawful duties, since the Macedonian Army is forbidden by law from operating outside the 100m border zone, except in a state of emergency. The MoI presides over a police force of some 6,000 uniformed officers and 1,500 detectives serving in various special units.³² Three groups deserve special attention: the Tigers, the police reservists, and the Lions.

The Tigers, a special police unit that currently has about 200 members, was the first special unit to be created during the SDSM government, which ruled from 1991 to 1998.³³ It serves as a police anti-terrorist task force against armed threats within the country and is capable of combating gangs engaged in serious crime, including cross-border crime. It has one significant drawback, however: it is almost exclusively ethnic Macedonian. Many ethnic Albanians serving in the MoI left the Ministry during the 2001 crisis, some of them becoming NLA fighters. The predominantly Macedonian commanders are currently reluctant to accept these people back into the Ministry, concerned that their loyalty to the state will always be open to question. Meanwhile, powerful criminal gangs continue to operate throughout the country, particularly in

³² Ordanoski S, 'Macedonian police caught in the middle', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 November 2001.

³³ Ordanoski S, 'Lions and Tigers: the militarisation of the Macedonian right, in *Ohrid and Beyond: a Cross-ethnic Investigation into the Macedonian Crisis*, IWPR, Skopje, 2002, pp 35–48.

certain former crisis regions, where the majority of the country's Albanian population lives, and which are still only loosely policed. Such criminal gangs can only be successfully tackled by a police force consisting of representatives of their own ethnic group, as this would be more acceptable to the local population, which would then be more likely to co-operate. However, it will take considerable time to train new Albanian recruits – who would not have the same compromising links to the past – to the necessary high standard.

Police reservists can also possess guns legally. They received much attention during the 2001 crisis, when many of them took arms on behalf of the state, though they were barely involved in the fighting. Instead, they manned checkpoints, set up roadblocks and occasionally engaged in drunken 'community policing', intimidating both Albanian and Macedonian villagers. It is not certain exactly how many police reservists there are, although most have now been demobilised, with those still engaged in policing duties now numbering in their tens, rather than hundreds as was the case in 2001 and 2002.

The most controversial unit of all was the now-disbanded Lions. Created by the then Minister Boskovski in summer 2001, the Lions were a rapid reaction force of police reservists whose legal status was never entirely clear. Though the decision to establish the Lions in addition to the existing forces was signed by the president, and ratified by the government on 12 June 2001,³⁴ and employment contracts for the Lions were signed by the MoI leadership when the unit was created, it seems that many of these contracts did not follow appropriate procedures.

The Lions were formed when the existing Special Task Force, composed of highly professional career police officers, was supplemented by reservists and regular police officers drawn from local police stations, who were invited to volunteer to join the newly created unit. A total of 7,000 reservists had their names added to the lists. At the same time Boskovski's messengers visited local Ministry of Defence (MoD) headquarters, requesting that the names of military reservists who volunteered for the Lions be removed from the military register, as they would serve in the new unit (which was, unlike the army, under Boskovski's control). These were members of the VMRO-DPMNE and some were known offenders with criminal records.³⁵ The official inauguration of the Lions took place on 2 November 2001 when they joined regular police at a demonstration exercise at the Krivolak training facility.³⁶ The Lions were also reportedly very well paid.

At the peak of their strength, around 10,000 people were in some way associated with the Lions. A further source gives a more modest breakdown: four battalions had 250, 964, 200 and 200 members respectively; beyond this, there were reservists who numbered no more than 3,000. Only a small proportion of these were ever actually mobilised.³⁷ After the conflict, they were scaled down, as the force sought a legitimate role within the security apparatus. One year after their creation, the Lions had around 1,150 official members,³⁸ though the MoI operated with the figure of 1,250. When the Lions were later downsized, over 8,000 individuals – including not just Lions personnel but all reservists – were dismissed, but often kept their weapons. The large number of 'unofficial' Lions, who were still armed but had been dismissed to join the ranks of police reservists, created a problem, though the official Lions attempted to distance themselves from these elements.

Opinions varied on the professionalism and behavioural standards of the Lions. Some observers dubbed them 'virtually useless in conducting the rapid intervention

³⁴ Ordanoski S, 'Lions and Tigers: the militarisation of the Macedonian right'.

³⁵ 'Macedonia: "Lions" representatives deny members have criminal records', http://www.csees.net/news_more.php3?nid=13218&cld=5

³⁶ Ordanoski S, 'Macedonian police caught in the middle', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 November 2001; Ordanoski S, 'Reading Between the Lions', *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, BCR no 278, Skopje, 10 September 2001.

³⁷ Interview with Skopje based international official, July 2002.

³⁸ Ibid.

or counter-terrorist operations³⁹ and called for their disbandment, as did the US government.⁴⁰ Others thought that although their discipline and command structure left much to be desired⁴¹, the unit included a fair number of skilled and courageous officers with good tactical sense. In 2002, the UK government started a low-level training programme for Macedonian counter-insurgency units, including the Tigers, Wolves (MoD) and Lions, in exchange for reform of the latter's command structure and operational procedures. However, when it emerged that genuine reform was not on the agenda, the training programme was terminated.⁴² In the run-up to the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Lions were often viewed as a paramilitary unit of the VMRO-DPMNE, yet widespread fears that the Lions would be used to disrupt the elections by intimidation and violence largely did not materialise.

The new Minister of the Interior, Hari Kostov, a businessman without much political or police experience, was determined to push for positive change. Action to bring the Lions to order, long demanded by the international community, started in November 2002 with the disbandment of the 4th Battalion, responsible for administrative, logistic and medical support. In January 2003 their commanding general, along with 14 other commanders, was dismissed, and steps were taken to disband the unit. However, the remaining Lions were determined not to go without a fight. A syndicate of junior officers was elected to represent the unit's interests and under their direction roadblocks were set up on the main Skopje-Blace road, where members of the unit dug in and were reportedly prepared to storm Skopje if their demands were not met. Police reservists came to their aid. After a tense stand-off with the authorities lasting two days, a settlement was reached: 600 out of 1,200 remained in the police, while the unit itself was transformed. All members who had a regular contract of employment were to be reassigned to other positions in the MoI. A joint commission between the Lions and the MoI was established to explore individual cases, dismiss those accused of criminal activity and consider integrating those without proper contracts but with appropriate skills into the MoI or the reformed Army Border Brigade. The Lions' representatives agreed that those implicated in serious crimes should not be part of the unit's transformation. Nevertheless, the Lions requested an amnesty for less serious crimes, a call rejected by Minister Kostov.⁴³ The unit was finally disbanded in April 2003. MoI sources put its strength at the time at 930 men.

Significantly, the SDSM leadership was determined to keep the DUI, its Albanian counterpart, out of negotiations with the Lions. As a result, the DUI criticised the government's decision to redeploy some of the Lions into the army and the police, since some interpreted the Ohrid Agreement to mean the disarmament and disbandment of all armed groups created during the 2001 crisis. While former NLA fighters had to disarm, many of the Lions were incorporated into the security apparatus and thus became legitimate. The DUI regarded this as unfair.⁴⁴

Ministry of Defence

Macedonia's independence left the Armed Forces (*Armija na Republika Makedonija*, or ARM) in a weak position. As part of the negotiated independence agreement, which included an agreement on the division of SFRY property, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (*Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* or JNA) withdrew from the territory of Macedonia

³⁹ International Crisis Group Report on 'Moving Macedonia', p 6.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Burns, the US Ambassador to NATO, said that the US government believed that the Lions should be disbanded, a statement rejected by the Macedonian MoI on the grounds that 'The Republic of Macedonia is not a protectorate', and that the future of Lions is a question for the institutions of the Macedonian state: 'Macedonian ministry rejects US call to disband Lions special police unit', 10 October 2002, www.cesses.net/news

⁴¹ One Lion member had 133 criminal charges, mostly for robberies, another killed two people, for which he was convicted, other cases included rapes, serious assault of a police officer, drug smuggling and desertion from ARM: report by Macedonian A1 TV on 29 January 2003, cited by www.cesses.net/news, 'Most special police members have criminal record', 29 January 2003.

⁴² Interview with a Skopje-based UK official, January 2003, Skopje.

⁴³ 'Lions will be transformed in antiterrorist unit', 29 January 2003, www.cesses.net/news

⁴⁴ 'Macedonian Albanian party demands disbandment of Lions special police unit', 27 January 2003, www.cesses.net/news; 'Macedonian Albanian official demands to disband Lions police unit', 28 January 2003, www.cesses.net/news.

with all military assets Belgrade deemed necessary, as its own wars loomed. Reportedly, the JNA appropriated most of the combat-ready equipment, including 55 combat aircraft, over 450 armoured vehicles and tanks, ammunition stockpiles and even light fixtures and door handles from the barracks.⁴⁵ This division of military property left the fledgling Macedonian Army with a bare minimum of arms, 40,000 obsolete repeating rifles and 5,000 Kalashnikovs which were the property of the Territorial Defence Force. The Army possessed no heavier equipment than 120mm mortars and five T-34 tanks of Second World War vintage.⁴⁶ The JNA withdrawal left the country with 50 combat pilots but only three Zlin 242 trainer aeroplanes.⁴⁷

Unfortunately for the Macedonian government, the UN arms embargo on the states of the former Yugoslavia (UN Security Council Resolution no. 713, 25 September 1991) hampered attempts by the Ministry of Defence to rearm. Macedonia's own military and defence industry was far from sufficient in providing a domestic source for rearmament. The two main defence manufacturers, *11 Oktomvri Eurokompozit* and the *Suvenir* metal products equipment factory, produced ammunition of various kinds, including that for small arms, artillery, landmines, anti-tank weapons, grenades and body armour, while textile companies produced military uniforms.

The Prilep-based *11 Oktomvri Eurokompozit* has 550 employees and produces special products for the military, as well as law enforcement and civilian products. These products include: rocket launchers (RBR-120mm M90, RBR-90mm M79, and the RBR-64mm M80), personal ballistic protection equipment (helmets, bulletproof vests, riot shields), mortar shells, bayonets, and magazines for automatic rifles. Civilian products include various tubes and cylinders, moulding compounds and safety helmets for industry, mining and construction.⁴⁸

The second domestic producer is the company *Suvenir*, which has a factory in Samokov, near the capital Skopje. *Suvenir* supplies small arms ammunition and explosives to the Macedonian Armed Forces and ministries. Its explosive experts produced landmines and products such as a rifle-mounted 40 mm grenade launcher.

This was clearly insufficient for defence needs, and the ARM remained dependent on foreign grants and procurements for any real defence capabilities. Before the end of the embargo only a tiny amount of small arms and Mi-8 'Hip' helicopters were procured from Eastern European sources.

UN Security Council Resolution 1021 of November 1995 officially ended the arms embargo on the states of the former Yugoslavia. The ARM was able to receive weapons from neighbouring countries, sometimes as donations, but arms were not acquired in significant numbers until 1999, when the Kosovo crisis unfolded. Neighbouring Bulgaria emerged as a primary source of weapons, followed by Ukraine. *Jane's Intelligence Review* reported that in 1999 'Bulgaria provided almost 200 T-55 main battle tanks, BTR-70/80 armoured personnel carriers, BRDM scout cars, D-30 122mm and D-20 152mm artillery, as well as ammunition for all these weapons, while Germany donated M1122 and TM-170 armoured personnel carriers.'⁴⁹ However, the '108 pieces of M1938 (D-30) 122mm howitzers' donated by Bulgaria in 1999 proved to be 'obsolescent'.⁵⁰

Amid mounting insecurity, the Macedonian government decided to purchase more weapons. In 2000 it allocated a budget of \$77million to the MoD for military procurement.⁵¹ Macedonian military expenditure totalled \$76.3million or 2.17 percent

45 Kusovac Z, 'Macedonia teeters on the brink of disaster', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol 13, no 6, June 2001, p 17; Ripley T, 'Insurgency in Macedonia drives Balkans arms trade', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2001.

46 Kusovac Z, 'Macedonia teeters on the brink of disaster', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol 13, no 6, June 2001, p 17.

47 Kusovac Z, 'Macedonian army steps up arms procurement', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, vol 35, no 18, 2 May 2001, p 12.

48 11 Oktomvri Eurokompozit website, www.eurokompozit.com.mk

49 Ripley T, 'Insurgency in Macedonia drives Balkans arms trade', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2001.

50 Kusovac Z, 'Macedonian army steps up arms procurement', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, vol 35, no 18, 2 May 2001, p 12.

51 Ripley T, 'Insurgency in Macedonia drives Balkan arms trade', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 7 July 2001.

of GDP in the fiscal year 2000–01.⁵² Apart from four Mi-17 ‘Hip’ assault and transport helicopters, twelve BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers and a battery each of 105mm howitzers and 128mm multiple rocket launchers, the equipment which was used during the conflict was donated primarily by Bulgaria and other East European countries.⁵³ The 2001 conflict began when the ARM was still in the process of procuring arms and reforming to meet the requirements of NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme. Macedonians claim that advisers from Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI), a US security consultancy, gave them recommendations that were tactically and strategically wrong, as these only weakened their military capabilities to fight the NLA insurgency.⁵⁴

The March and summer 2001 offensives against the rebels severely depleted ammunition stockpiles and resulted in the loss of equipment, while one Mi-17 helicopter was lost near Tetovo in March during a landing incident.⁵⁵ The Ministry of Defence sought to compensate for these losses with new purchases. Its defence expenditure grew: according to one estimate, in 2001 the Macedonian government spent approximately 5.4 percent of its GDP on weapons procurement.⁵⁶ In March 2001 Ukraine delivered the first in a series of shipments that added six Mi-24 ‘Hind’ attack helicopters and six Mi8/17 ‘Hip’ assault and transport helicopters to the Macedonian Air Force. Later in June, the Ministry of Defence purchased four *Sukhoi* SU-25 ‘Frogfoot’ aircraft, thus providing the first jet fighters to the Macedonian armed forces since the withdrawal of the JNA.⁵⁷ In this period, various shipments of small arms, artillery, armoured personnel carriers, 31 T-72 main battle tanks and ammunition were delivered from Croatia, Ukraine and Bulgaria to bolster the offensive capability of the Macedonian Army. T-55 main battle tanks and BTR-series Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC) were also shipped by the MoD to Ukraine for upgrades, including new diesel engines and vision systems.⁵⁸

Post-conflict, as the ARM reorganises itself to prepare for NATO entry, much of this equipment will be shed, including the SU-25s and the outdated T-55s. The ARM hopes to replace at least some of its helicopters with more up-to-date western equipment, as the current helicopters have proved costly to maintain. With NATO encouragement and training, the new orientation is towards special forces, useful both in the counter-insurgency operations the ARM is likely to face on its home territory, and for deployment to support international operations such as in Iraq. Macedonia faces no classical exterior threat which might require the use of heavy armoured troops.

The Army Border Brigade

Responsibility for border security is to be handed over to the MoI in the near future. Currently, however, in addition to the regular forces, the MoD comprises the 1st Army Border Brigade (ABB), along with the *Scorpions* counter-insurgency unit and the *Wolves* Special Forces. The ABB’s function is to act as border guards, protecting the border zone (100 m deep). Each battalion is responsible for its own sector. The ABB continues to suffer from outdated doctrines and restrictions, in addition to possessing weak tactical capabilities.⁵⁹ According to its mandate, it is supposed to hand over responsibility to the police when criminals are inside Macedonian territory. In some sensitive areas on borders with Albania, Kosovo and Southern Serbia, its responsibility

⁵² According to the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook 2001.

⁵³ Kusovac Z, ‘Macedonia teeters on the brink of disaster’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol 13, no 6, June 2001, p 17; Kusovac Z, ‘Macedonian army steps up arms procurement’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, vol 35, no 18, 2 May 2001, p 12.

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group Report ‘Moving Macedonia’, p 8. The Macedonians believe this was done on purpose.

⁵⁵ Kusovac Z, ‘Macedonia teeters on the brink of disaster’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol 13, no 6, June 2001, p18; Kusovac Z, ‘Macedonian army steps up arms procurement’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, vol 35, no 18, 2 May 2001, p 12.

⁵⁶ Jane’s Information Group, ‘Corruption in Macedonia’, *JIR Foreign Report*, 7 February 2002.

⁵⁷ Ripley T, ‘Croatia bolsters Macedonian forces’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 12 September 2001; Ripley T, ‘Macedonia talks peace but prepares for war’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol 13, no 9, September 2001, p 3.

⁵⁸ Ripley T, ‘Macedonia talks peace but prepares for war’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol 13, no 9, September 2001, p 3.

⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, ‘Moving Macedonia Toward Self-Sufficiency: a New Security Approach for NATO and the EU’, *Balkans Report no 135*, Skopje/Brussels, 15 November 2002, p 7.

had been extended to a depth of 10 km. Its heaviest presence is in the areas of Tetovo and Kumanovo, but more in stationary duties, i.e. manning watchtowers. The maintenance of security is hampered by the fact that different entities are responsible for controlling the border: the National Border Police and Customs man the Border Check Points (BCP), but have authority within 250 metres of the BCPs; the regular police have general authority, but do not patrol the border, and the ABB patrols between the BCPs. There is little interfacing between these bodies, helping smugglers and hindering cross-border co-operation with KFOR. This was particularly the case under the previous government, as the already complicated relationship between these agencies was exacerbated by party politics, with the relevant ministers belonging to different parties within the coalition government and often being unwilling to work efficiently with one another.⁶⁰ As a result, the Macedonian authorities often failed to act on KFOR intelligence, which caused frustration and tension between them and KFOR; the situation would have been worse had sympathetic members of the international community not acted as a liaison between the different Macedonian agencies on occasions when quick action was needed.⁶¹

Non-state actors

The National Liberation Army (NLA)

As Iso Rusi has noted, the early origins of the NLA remain an enigma.⁶² Its first actions took place in January 2001 with an attack on the Tearce police station in the Tetovo region. A subsequent communiqué spelled out the NLA's goal for Macedonia to become a constitutionally Macedonian-Albanian – or Albanian-Macedonian – state while stressing its wish to preserve Macedonia's territorial integrity and respect for NATO and US interests. Xhezair Shakiri, aka Commandant Hoxha, claimed that in 1999 Ali Ahmeti, the future leader of the NLA, believed that armed actions in Macedonia could not start earlier than in 2003 or 2004, having made this assessment after NATO forces entered Kosovo. What made Ahmeti change his mind and launch attacks earlier is unclear. Reportedly, in this early period the NLA leadership maintained close contact with the National Democratic Party (NDP), an Albanian political party in Macedonia. However, there was also frustration with the Albanian political parties in Macedonia 'who tend to look after their own interests' and neglect the plight of their own community. Official cooperation with Albanian political parties began with the signing of the Prizren Declaration in May 2001 between the NLA on the one side, and Imer Imeri, the leader of the PDP and Arben Xhaferi of the DPA on the other. The Prizren Declaration stipulated that there would be no ethnic division of the territory of Macedonia.

The NLA movement has been strongly linked with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA – *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës in Albanian*) and the Albanian struggle for the 'liberation' of Kosovo from Yugoslav rule. In November 2001, Ahmeti told Timothy Garton Ash that the Kosovo conflict had helped to spur a similar movement in Macedonia: 'after the West had come in to Kosovo and – as most Albanian Macedonians saw it – the KLA had "won" as a result, there were enough people ready to heed the call to arms in Macedonia'.⁶³ The 2001 NLA insurgency was largely directed by fighters from the KLA and the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac (UÇPMB).⁶⁴ Prominent NLA leaders, such as Ahmeti, Gezim Ostreni (who held a senior position in the Kosovo Protection Corps, or KPC), Fazli Veliu and Commander Hoxha, had all

⁶⁰ During the previous government, the position of the Minister of Interior was always held by VMRO-DPMNE. The position of Minister of Defence changed parties a number of times. First, the MoD was headed by VMRO-DPMNE, then the Minister of Defence position was allocated to SDSM during the 'Grand Coalition.' During the SDSM's control of the MoD, rivalry among the parties caused problems with the MoI still headed by VMRO-DPMNE. After the collapse of the Grand Coalition, the Minister of Defence was appointed from the smaller Liberal Party (LP).

⁶¹ Interviews with a Skopje-based international official, July 2002.

⁶² The description in this paragraph is based on Iso Rusi, 'From Army to Party: The politics of the NLA', in *Ohrid and Beyond*, IWPR, Skopje, 2002, pp 19–34.

⁶³ Garton Ash T, 'Is there a good terrorist?' in *New York Review of Books*, vol 48, no 19, 29 November 2001.

⁶⁴ Barnett N, 'Balkans Facing Uncertain Future', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, May 2003, p 49.

fought with or helped to finance the KLA. Many young Albanian males from Macedonia took part in the fighting in Kosovo at the time. NLA members who started operations in Macedonia were recruited from among former KLA fighters from Prizren, Ahmeti's main stronghold outside Macedonia.

The confrontation in the Skopje suburb of Aracinovo between NLA and Macedonian army and police in June 2001 demonstrated that the NLA had experienced and well-armed fighters, some of whom had first-hand combat experience in previous Balkan wars, including as members of the KPC. It turned out that the Macedonian army and police had neither the training nor the tactical doctrine to combat the NLA effectively.

The NLA claimed to have six brigades operating inside Macedonia. The 111th, 113th and 114th Brigades operated in the Crna Gora region, while the 112th Brigade controlled a number of battalions in the Tetovo area. The 116th Brigade was responsible for the area around Gostivar, and the 115th Brigade was located in areas north west of Skopje including Radusa.⁶⁵ Ali Ahmeti claimed that the NLA numbered 5,000 during the crisis, including those providing logistical support.⁶⁶ In other sources, the NLA claimed to have the potential to field a much larger force, of up to 16,000,⁶⁷ perhaps seeking to inflate numbers to intimidate the government, while the Macedonian government maintained that there were about 7,000 rebels.⁶⁸ Kusovac offers a more conservative estimate of 2,000–2,500 'full-time' combatants. However, the NLA could also count on a larger 'second echelon' of supporters carrying out tasks such as reconnaissance, patrols, communications and logistics.⁶⁹ Full-time combatants would be well armed, while the second echelon would have fewer weapons per person. The approximate numbers of combatants help to estimate their array of weaponry. The issue of how large the NLA's stockpiles were is still sharply debated and became a bone of contention in the aftermath of NATO's voluntary weapons collection programme from NLA fighters, Operation Essential Harvest (see below on 'the Role of the International Community').

With an imprecise number of combatants, estimates have varied regarding the number of weapons the NLA had in its stockpiles (see **Table 1**). The Macedonian government maintained that the rebels held about 50,000 weapons,⁷⁰ while NATO estimates were more conservative.

Table 1: Estimates of NLA arms stockpiles

Type of weapon	Quantity
Rifles	5,000–8,000
Heavy machine guns (mostly .50-calibre)	150–250
Sniping rifles (including some .50-calibre anti-materiel rifles)	100–200
Shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles	20–50
Shoulder-launched anti-tank launchers (reloads not included)	200–350
Mortars (60mm, 80mm and 120mm)	100–200
Anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines	5,000+

Source: *Jane's Defence Weekly*⁷¹

The NLA was known to have a fairly sophisticated array of light weaponry from various sources, including: 9M32 Strela-2M (SA-7B Grail Mod 1) man-portable surface-to-air missiles; 120mm and 82mm mortars; rocket-propelled grenades and light anti-tank rockets; 12.7mm heavy machine guns; as well as assorted light machine guns and

⁶⁵ Ripley T, 'Intentions unclear as NLA hands over arms', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 October 2001.

⁶⁶ Ordanoski S, 'Lions and Tigers: the militarisation of the Macedonian right', IWPR, 2002, pp 35–48.

⁶⁷ Kusovac Z, 'How Many Weapons in Macedonia?' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 29 August 2001.

⁶⁸ 'How many groups, how many guns?', *The Economist*, 25 August 2001, pp 26–27.

⁶⁹ Kusovac Z, 'How Many Weapons in Macedonia?' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 29 August 2001.

⁷⁰ Fisher I, 'NATO in Macedonia: Splendid Little Disarmament', *The New York Times*, 27 August 2001 p A8, Col.1.

⁷¹ Kusovac Z, 'How Many Weapons in Macedonia?' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 29 August 2001.

Kalashnikov assault rifles.⁷² During a July 2001 visit to a rebel-held village, a *Jane's Intelligence Review* correspondent found rebels armed with AK-47s, AKM and AK-74 assault rifles, M76/77 sniper rifles, M59/66 carbines and M84 machine guns.⁷³

However large the NLA stockpiles were at any one time, it is clear that connections to former KLA stockpiles and an extensive and active funding network provided them with many sources of weapons when need. Funding for the NLA came from the same war chest that the KLA had used to finance its insurgency.⁷⁴ The same *Homeland Calling Fund* that financed the KLA during the 1998–99 Kosovo war provided funding to the NLA and access to covert arms dumps in Kosovo and Albania that the Fund controlled. The National Freedom Fund (*Liria Kombetare*) later replaced *Homeland Calling* as the NLA's main financial source. The two funds collected money from the Albanian diaspora in North America and Western Europe and funnelled it to the NLA. During the six months from May to October 2001, the NLA amassed a war chest of \$60 million to fund the struggle in Macedonia.⁷⁵

There are many allegations of Albanian mafia ties to the NLA funds. In an interview with MSNBC.com, Ali Ahmeti conceded that some of the rebels' funding might come from narcotics trafficking and a flourishing sex slave trade in the region. Ahmeti defended the NLA, claiming that although it attempted to vet all incoming money, the volume of donations to the rebel movement made it impossible to check their origin.⁷⁶ In February 2002, Skopje media claimed that money from the sale of heroin was used to buy \$7 million worth of arms from dealers in Switzerland, Macedonia, Belgrade and Bulgaria. The amount of weapons would have been enough to equip a force of 2,000 men.⁷⁷ Robert Hislope, who studied the role of organised crime in the Macedonian crisis, claims that 'the NLA's ties to the Mafia are not as obvious as those of the KLA,' but that 'the Mafia was one among several sources of funding and weapons procurement.'⁷⁸ Commander Hoxha of the NLA admitted that it bought weapons from the mafia, but explained that arms dealers and illicit traffickers are not from a single ethnic group or region. 'It's not true that all our weapons came from Kosovo; we found a great number in Macedonia and Serbia as well... The mafia only cares about money. If you have the money, you get the weapon.'⁷⁹

Although at first the international community turned a blind eye to the links between armed Albanian groups in Kosovo and those in Macedonia, the US finally acknowledged the NLA's connection to the former KLA and to Kosovo when US President Bush issued Executive Order no. 13219 on 27 June 2001 in an effort to halt funding to the NLA and other rebel groups threatening to destabilise the Western Balkans. The executive order froze the financial assets of some 25 people, many of whom had close connections to the former KLA and UCPMB, while five were active members of the KPC.⁸⁰ In July 2002 three more individuals were added to the US 'Watch List' of persons responsible for destabilising the Balkans. Ali Ahmeti was removed from the list in late 2002.

After the dissolution of the NLA, its network of commanders – powerful people who enjoy authority within their community – did not disappear, even if they are not engaged in any disruptive activity. Even internationals in the west of the country

⁷² Ripley T, 'Intentions unclear as NLA hands over arms', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 October 2001.

⁷³ Ripley T, 'Insurgency in Macedonia drives Balkans arms trade', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2001.

⁷⁴ Doole C, 'The Albanian fund-raising machine', BBC News, Geneva, 28 May 2001. Available online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1356196.stm>

⁷⁵ Ripley T, 'Intentions unclear as NLA hands over arms', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 October 2001.

⁷⁶ Binder D, Mendenhall P, 'Sex, drugs and guns in the Balkans', MSNBC, August, 2001. www.msnbc.com/news/667790.asp

⁷⁷ Dnevnik, 'Daily Claims Albanians Buy \$7 Million Worth of Arms With Heroin Money', 21 February 2002, p 2, FBIS Doc: EUP20020221000116.

⁷⁸ Hislope R, 'Organized Crime in a Disorganized State', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol 49, no 3 May/June 2002, pp 33–41.

⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, 'Macedonia's Public Secret: How corruption drags the country down', *ICG Balkan Report no 133*, Skopje/Brussels, 14 August 2002.

⁸⁰ United States Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, 'What you need to know about U.S. Sanctions: Balkans', Executive Order 13219. Available at www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/sanctions/t11balk.pdf

privately admit that if they need a decision on a local issue quickly, they go straight to former commanders rather than employ official channels.⁸¹

The Albanian National Army (ANA)

After the Ohrid Agreement and the *de facto* inclusion of the NLA into the legitimate political process in exchange for laying down arms, more extreme groups have started to appear – or reappear, as in the case of the Albanian National Army (ANA – *Armata Kombëtare Shqiptare* (AKSh) in Albanian), which in one form or another actually predates the KLA.⁸² In a communiqué released in February 2000, the ANA claimed responsibility for the 13 January 2000 attack on a Macedonian police station in Aracinovo that resulted in the death of four police officers.⁸³ Reportedly, the ANA took responsibility for a bomb blast on 31 October 2002 outside the parliament building, on the day of the parliamentary vote for the new government.⁸⁴ The ANA has also claimed responsibility for a number of other bloody incidents, including the single deadliest attack on Macedonian security forces during the conflict: the 8 August 2001 ambush on the Skopje-Tetovo Highway that resulted in the death of ten soldiers.⁸⁵

Following an attack on a railway bridge in northern Kosovo in 12 April 2003,⁸⁶ the international community has moved from closing its eyes to the existence of the ANA to naming it as a terrorist organisation. On 3 July 2003 the US Department of State said that the ‘so-called Albanian National Army directly undermine[s] regional stability and pose[s] a threat to US military forces currently deployed in the region’ and placed ANA spokesman Gafur Adili on its watch list.⁸⁷ Adili has since been arrested.

Unlike the NLA in its heyday, the ANA does not appear to attract much popular support. Nor is it clear exactly who its members are. One suggestion is that some of the more radical fighters from the NLA felt that former senior commanders were enjoying their new life as politicians too much and at their expense, spurring them to join the ANA. Another theory is that members of the ANA are mainly criminals from Kosovo who flee KFOR’s attention when the going gets tough, since it is easier to avoid the attention of the police in Macedonia. At any rate, men believed to belong to the ANA appear in western areas of the country when the general security situation deteriorates, sometimes wearing uniforms of some description, often black. According to *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, the membership of the ANA is estimated at about 200 within Macedonia and up to 2,000 in the Balkans as a whole.⁸⁸ The ease with which they can slip over the border makes it difficult for any of the national or international security forces to control them.

Other groups

Other groups likely to possess arms in any sizeable quantity include a mixture of groups of party activists, criminal groups (though there is often a fine line between the two), former self-defence groups which can be mobilised if the need arises, and employees of private security agencies.

Members and supporters of the political parties believed to possess arms are generally either bodyguards responsible for the personal security of politicians and their property, or activists who were supplied with weapons due to their contribution to their political party. It is important to note that most of their weapons are possessed legally, since when the political parties were in power they could provide licences to their

⁸¹ Interviews with international staff based in Tetovo, July 2002.

⁸² On ANA ‘Internet offensive’ see ‘Albanian rebels warn of ‘hot spring’ in fight for unification, KosovoLive cited by www.csees.net/news, 27 December 2002.

⁸³ Lipsius S, ‘Wer ist die AKSH in Makedonien?’ *Südosteuropa*, vol 50, 10–12/2001, p 474.

⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, ‘Moving Macedonia Toward Self-Sufficiency’, p 5.

⁸⁵ Latifi V, ‘Albanian Divisions Threaten Accord’, *IW/PR*, BCR no 271, Skopje, 14 August 2001.

⁸⁶ <http://www.balkanpeace.org/hed/archive/apr03/hed5654.shtml>

⁸⁷ <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/02070306.htm>

⁸⁸ Rogers A, Hill J, ‘Testing times ahead for Macedonia’s tenuous security’, in *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, July 2003.

supporters, often without respecting licensing procedures.⁸⁹ Among them are individuals with criminal backgrounds, or at least individuals who had been refused a licence for legal reasons. There are no differences in the ethnic distribution within these categories, because all the ruling parties followed the similar practice of giving licences to their members or supporters.

Under the previous government, individuals were known to have bought (legal) weapons with privileges rather than money. The VMRO-DPMNE and the DPA are believed to preserve armed groups of loyalists, as various incidents during the electoral campaign have indicated, and 'each will likely maintain the ability to carry out violence' in future.⁹⁰ The March 2002 attack on the NLA headquarters (between 10 and 35 people killed) indicated that there are political groups capable of serious violence and that even Ahmeti is not 'untouchable'.

On the Macedonian side an ultra-nationalist group called the 'Macedonian National Front' is believed to exist. It claimed responsibility for the bomb outside parliament on 31 October 2002, but its very existence is obscure. The 'Army of the Republic of Ilirida' (ARI) is an equally obscure set-up on the Albanian side. In 1993, the Macedonian authorities arrested several people accused of being part of a group called 'Ilirida' (the name refers to a region of Western Macedonia that is populated largely by ethnic Albanians). Among those arrested for allegedly aiding the group were the then Deputy Defence Minister, Hisen Haskaj, and the Deputy Health Minister, Imer Imeri.⁹¹ The ARI is currently thought to have about 200 members, many of them ex-NLA fighters.⁹²

Members of private security agencies can also carry legal or illegal weapons. In the last ten years the number of agencies rose sharply. Their level of professionalism varies greatly, as does the manner in which they acquire and use their weapons. Some of them are linked to organised crime or at least include individuals connected to it.⁹³

Sources and scale of arms proliferation⁹⁴

From independence to the 2001 crisis

The conventional wisdom among ethnic Macedonians holds that all guns came to the country from Albania when arms depots were looted in 1997, unleashing the 2001 conflict. One interviewee expressed a widespread conviction that the 'massive spread of guns started the war, otherwise interethnic tensions would not have escalated to overt violence'.⁹⁵ There is some truth in this argument, but the wider picture is far more complicated. The section below seeks to shed some light on the history of recent weapons acquisition, without claiming to provide definite answers.

At independence in 1991, private citizens in Macedonia possessed 52,000 officially licensed firearms and probably an equal number of illegal and unlicensed weapons.⁹⁶ Seizures of weapons and arrests for illegal possession by the police over the past decade illustrate the dramatic increase in illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons. According to the MoI, in 1989–90, before independence, there were only two convictions related to illegal weapons on the territory of Macedonia. In the three years following independence alone, there were 159 convictions related to illegal weapons possession and 420 weapons were confiscated (see **Table 2**).

⁸⁹ There is an unconfirmed, but widespread story heard from a number of independent sources among the Albanian community that the previous government handed over 5,000 firearm permits to the DPA to legalise illicit weapons among Party members: interviews in July 2002.

⁹⁰ International Crisis Group Report, 'Moving Macedonia toward Self-Sufficiency', p 5.

⁹¹ Makedonski, Informativen Centar, *Vesti*, Skopje, 10 November 1993.

⁹² Rogers A, Hill J, 'Testing times ahead for Macedonia's tenuous security', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 2003.

⁹³ Background report prepared by FORUM.

⁹⁴ This section was written with contributions from Zoran Jachev, Aleksandar Matovski, and Trpe Stojanovski.

⁹⁵ Interview with Saso Klekovski, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Skopje, January 2003. Similarly, the mayor of Vratnica felt that illegal SALW were one of the main factors behind the escalation of the crisis.

⁹⁶ Interview with former MoI employee, Zoran Jachev, July 2002.

Table 2: SALW and ammunition confiscated by Macedonian authorities, 1991–2001.

Year	Pieces of SALW	Pieces of Ammunition
1991	48	No record
1992	220	38,000
1993	152	8,532
1994	59	4,000
1995	76	15,269
1996	1,103	26,936
1997	1,725	70,442
1998	1,274	100,253
1999	2,610	127,113
2000	1,514	158,738
2001	3,278	No record
Total		<i>(excluding 1991 & 2001)</i>
1991–2001	12,059	549,283

Source: Ministry of the Interior⁹⁷

Though fewer weapons were seized in 1994–95, by the mid-1990s it was already clear that weapons proliferation was a growing problem for Macedonia. The disintegration of the SFRY had released large quantities of arms from the arms stores of the former JNA, which ended up in the hands of the local population and combatants in South Eastern Europe and found their way onto the black market. There were several prospective customers for such items in Macedonia. For a start, some radical groups, dissatisfied with the outcome of the dissolution of the SFRY, were apparently seeking guns in preparation for potential future struggles. More generally, organised crime was burgeoning, especially in the west of the country, where some areas were virtually beyond state control. With the growth of organised crime came an increase in the illegal use and possession of small arms. The ending of conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-and-Herzegovina in 1995 created a further source of weapons, some of which found their way via the black market into Macedonia, as indicated by the sharp rise in confiscations of weapons and ammunition in 1996.

All of the above suggests that there were already significant numbers of weapons in Macedonia, mostly of Yugoslav origin, before 1997. Altogether, in the period 1991–96, the Macedonian authorities seized 1,658 pieces of SALW and 92,737 pieces of ammunition, mostly during attempts to smuggle them across the border, though a smaller proportion was seized within the country.

Nevertheless it is true that the looting of approximately 650,000 weapons from arms stores in Albania during three months of political turmoil in 1997 acted as a major source of weapons proliferation across South Eastern Europe, including Macedonia. In 1997, a Kalashnikov cost as little as \$15 on the streets of Albania.⁹⁸ Many of these weapons found their way into Kosovo and played a role in the KLA uprising. Due to the mountainous terrain along the border it was sometimes easier to bring guns into Kosovo via Macedonia rather than directly from Albania. Weapons caches were established in Macedonia along the Kosovo border to keep them out of reach of the Yugoslav security forces. One such SALW store was discovered in the village of Lojane, near Kumanovo, in a region close to the border of Kosovo.⁹⁹ During the 2001 crisis in Macedonia, the Lipkovo (where Lojane is located) and Tetovo regions became strongholds of the NLA.

⁹⁷ Courtesy of Dr Trpe Stojanovski, Senior Counsellor, Ministry of the Interior, Macedonian Government.

⁹⁸ Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, *Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the problem*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p 201.

⁹⁹ A report in the Macedonian weekly *Start*, estimated the amount of weaponry found in one storage depot in Lojane at four tons, with an approximate value of 100,000 Euros (October 2000).

After the NATO intervention in Kosovo, a large part of this weaponry began to flow into Southern Serbia and Macedonia. In 2000, when KFOR took measures to disarm and collect weapons in Kosovo, observers at the time reported that many arms were brought into Northern Albania and regions of Macedonia for storage.¹⁰⁰ According to the Macedonian MoI, there were 300,000–350,000 units of various types of weapons originating from the military depots in Albania, mainly of Chinese origin, and around 150,000 pieces of new weapons in the region procured from Western European and Asian sources.¹⁰¹ Chinese-made weapons were cheaper, but were also considered to be of lower quality, and those who could afford to do so bought Yugoslav-made, former Soviet bloc, or Western weapons, paying considerable sums for them: \$250 or more per gun.

All in all, in 1997–2000 Macedonian security forces confiscated 7,123 pieces of SALW and 456,546 pieces of ammunition, a dramatic increase compared to 1991–96.

Armament during 2001

The authorities were caught unprepared for the 2001 crisis and tried hastily to organise armed defence by any means possible. This resulted in rapid distribution of arms to those ethnic Macedonians who could be mobilised to protect their homelands. The Lions, the police and army reservists, and in some cases Macedonian civilians as well, were all armed by the MoI during the 2001 crisis. The figures vary from 500 to 2,000 small arms, mainly AK-47 and semi-automatic rifles of Yugoslav origin.¹⁰² The town of Vratnica, an ethnic Macedonian-populated municipality in a largely Albanian area on the border with Kosovo, which was cut off by fighting for two months in 2001, provides a good example of how the process of distributing weapons worked. Vratnica often came under threat of attack, with MoI helicopters providing the only lifeline for the Macedonian authorities. Local police reservists were mobilised first, followed by army reservists (those who finished their service in the army as conscripts remain 'army reservists', to be called on in a state of emergency), who were assigned to the police forces. Some of them already possessed legal weapons provided by and registered with the MoI, while the remainder were given weapons flown in from the rest of Macedonia. In Jagunovce municipality, located between Skopje and Tetovo, about 200 additional police and army reservists were recruited and armed at the time. Police authorities claim that records were kept and most of these weapons were handed in, but admit that a small percentage of guns may have slipped through the net.¹⁰³

Ethnic Albanians claim that during the crisis, trucks loaded with weapons openly distributed weapons to Macedonians in the streets of Tetovo.¹⁰⁴ In Gostivar, the MoI also distributed arms to ethnic Macedonians and in the tightly-knit local community it is known who got them.¹⁰⁵ In some cases male able-bodied villagers who had initially fled the fighting in the outskirts of Skopje together with their families were given weapons and paid 3–4 times their normal state salary to return to defend their villages, though in the end they did not have to fight.¹⁰⁶ The MoI claims not to have any records of whom these weapons were distributed to, but asserts that most of these arms were returned immediately after the crisis. The local authorities, however, claim that the police reservists were on the MoI's official payroll at the time. Records of serial numbers of the distributed weapons were also kept and lists of those to whom they were given. This is supported by claims by some Macedonians in rural areas near Tetovo that soon after the MoI issued them with weapons the NLA arrived, with copies of the MoI distribution lists, and demanded that the weapons be handed over to them. It is

¹⁰⁰ Ripley T, 'The UCK's arsenal', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 2000, pp 22–23.

¹⁰¹ Delevska S K, 'Pola Milion Pushki i Pistoli gi cekaat izborite' *Vest*, Godina 3, Broj 598, Skopje, 6 July 2002.

¹⁰² According to an article in the Macedonian Daily *VEST* (12 June 2001), the local police station in one district of Skopje armed 150 civilians in one day. The article emphasised the individuals armed were not police or military reservists.

¹⁰³ Interview with Saso Trajcevski, Police Commander, Jagunovce, January 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Murtesan Ismaili, January 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Albert Musliu, ADI, Gostivar, January 2003.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Biljana Vankovska, University of Saints Kiril and Methodij, Skopje, January 2003.

believed that about 1,000 distributed weapons are held by Macedonian police reservists and ethnic Macedonian civilians, though the MoI claims to have collected some of them.¹⁰⁷

This practice of allocating weapons in the time of chaos led to the perception among the Albanian community that ethnic Macedonians got their weapons for free or, more precisely, had more opportunities to obtain weapons by legal means, while Albanians had to buy arms and had no opportunity to legalise them. Moreover, individual licences to possess arms legally were distributed by the previous leadership of the MoI for political purposes among its supporters. Reportedly, the DPA also benefited from such practices, but to a lesser extent, as they had fewer people in politics. Irrespective of whether they adequately reflect the reality of the recent past, these perceptions are strongly held and might have implications for future weapons collection initiatives.

Finally, during the crisis in the west of the country, villagers occasionally organised themselves into ‘village guards’ to protect their community and property. Such individuals were armed with whatever was at hand, mainly hunting rifles and farm tools.¹⁰⁹ Since the MoI reportedly distributed weapons to civilians, it is likely that such spontaneously organised villagers may also have received weapons.

Reflecting in August 2003 on the arms distributed during the conflict, Interior Minister Kostov declared: ‘New police stations could have been built in the former crisis areas with the money that were spent from the budget for giving expensive weapons as prizes in 2001 and 2002. With the 300,000 euros that were spent on weapons, two or three police stations could have been built.’¹¹⁰

Current situation and estimates on possession

During 1998–2003, an increase in illegal firearms trafficking is evident. During this period, 883 criminal charges were registered against 1,228 offenders, and 9,876 weapons were seized, of which 3,119 were military weapons, 571 hunting rifles, 279 sport weapons, as well as 477,984 pieces of ammunition and 11 tons of explosives. During 2002 alone, 153 criminal acts were registered involving 215 offenders, and a total of 713 weapons were seized, including 381 military-style weapons, 278 pistols, 48 automatic and semiautomatic rifles, 4 light weapons, 91 bombs, 26 revolvers and 9,520 pieces of ammunition. Criminal charges were filed against 340 offenders, with penalties ranging from 1–10 years’ imprisonment to fines of 5–15 times average salary. According to the MoI, the weapons seized had been illegally transferred into Macedonia from Kosovo and Albania.¹¹¹

As **Table 3** shows, weapons are relatively cheap and easy to obtain on the black market.

Table 3: street prices for weapons in Macedonia, 2002

Type of weapon	Price/\$
Chinese Kalashnikov	100–200
Yugoslav Kalashnikov	200–300
Russian Makarov Pistol	100–200
Yugoslav Pistol, 7.62cal	250–350
9mm Pistol	50–400
Chinese Hand grenade	10–15
Ammunition	1 per bullet

Source: Ministry of the Interior estimates¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Stevo Pendarovski, Presidential Adviser on National Security, January 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Reportedly, the DPA was given 500 signed blank licences to use as it saw fit by the former MoI. Interviews in Skopje.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Toni Koceski, Mayor of Vratnica, January 2003.

¹¹⁰ NATO news clips citing Macedonian media, 20 August 2003.

¹¹¹ Report of the Republic of Macedonia on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action, Skopje, May 2003, <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/docs/nationalreports/2002/macedonia.PDF>

¹¹² Also interview with Mire Markoski, August 2002.

The Macedonian authorities have spoken of 80,000–100,000 illegal weapons in circulation in Macedonia.¹¹³ A recent Small Arms Survey estimates, based on its Small Arms Baseline Assessment conducted in Macedonia, that there are between 110,000 and 170,000 illegal weapons holders in the country, some of whom may possess more than one weapon. According to the study, 15.6 percent of the population admit to holding a firearm and 89 percent of gunshot victims are male.¹¹⁴

While many believe that the Albanian community holds the majority of illicit weapons, ethnic Macedonians are also known to hold illegal weapons, though perhaps to a lesser degree. 'Ethnic Macedonian civilians probably hold no less than 25,000 rifles of all sorts and at least twice as many handguns.'¹¹⁵ At the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference in New York, the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ilinka Mitreva, reported that 'according to some statistics, more than 700,000 pieces of arms are at stake,' in, as she put it, the 'broader region,' of which only some 24 percent have been retrieved.¹¹⁶ The porous borders in the North West of the country mean that these weapons are indeed a regional, rather than a national problem, as the director of the Organised Crime and Firearms Trafficking Unit has also underlined: 'Weapons are migratory in the region consisting of Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Southern Serbia. They are regularly being relocated and moving from one place to another in the region according to demand. The weapons follow exactly the political unrest in the region and unfortunately at the moment they are still in Macedonia awaiting a new conflict here or in another place in the region.'¹¹⁷

It is difficult to give precise numbers of weapons in the region or to assess the geographical spread of small arms reliably, but some observations can be made. In the areas of Macedonia bordering Albania, which are traditionally poor, pistols and rifles are available relatively cheaply. The conflict exposed the widespread proliferation of arms in and around Tetovo, Kumanovo, Kichevo and in and around Skopje by members of all communities. The Prespa area, located in the south, is a traditional hunting area with two national parks, where local hunters historically held guns. More recently, areas in the east of the country, on the border with Bulgaria (Strumica, Novoselo, Blagoev Grad) have seen an influx of arms from Bulgaria, many Soviet-made pistols among them.¹¹⁸ Finally, Ohrid in the west is a holiday resort full of bars and is close to borders, with a reputation for being a stronghold of organised crime.¹¹⁹

Civilians have often become blasé about the use of guns. Villagers hear regular shootings during the night and no longer react with alarm when they hear a shot, as they are now used to it. In the Kumanovo area, for instance, shots are often fired, but according to the local mayor, most people claim these are celebratory shootings. Furthermore, citizens do not report shootings to the police when they hear them, so such incidents are rarely investigated.¹²⁰

Among the wide range of SALW held in Macedonia and elsewhere in the region are assault rifles, obsolete rifles, handguns, heavy machine guns, sniper rifles, shoulder launched SAMs, RPGs, mortars, anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines, explosives, hand grenades, anti-aircraft missiles, shotguns, and grenade launchers. Though many of these are of Chinese manufacture, indicating they are from Albania, there is also weaponry of western origin, including state-of-the-art sniper rifles such as McMillan .50 calibre anti-materiel rifles, Steyr SSG models, PVS-7 night vision goggles, LEICA

113 http://www.realitymacedonia.org.mk/web/news_page.asp?nid=2572

114 'Preliminary SALW Survey Report for Macedonia', SEESAC Activity Report no 14, 1 August 2003, p 1.

115 Kusovac Z, 'How Many Weapons in Macedonia?' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 29 August 2001.

116 Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Mrs Ilinka Mitreva, at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects, <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/smallarms/statements/macedoniaE.html>

117 Mire Markoski, director of the Organized Crime and Firearms Trafficking Unit, Ministry of Interior, Macedonia. (Translated from: Delevska S K, 'Pola Milion Pushki i Pistoli gi cekaat izborite', *Vest*, Godina 3, Broj 598, 6 July 2002.)

118 For instance, in May 2003 customs officials found 6,000 pieces of gun ammunition calibre 7.65 and 9mm during a check on a Bulgarian freight vehicle at the Deve Bair border crossing, MIA news agency, Skopje, 7 May 2003.

119 Interview with Natasa Dokovska, Journalists for children and women rights and protection of environment in Macedonia, Skopje, January 2003.

120 Interview with Slobodan Kovacevski, mayor of Kumanovo, July 2002.

laser ranger binoculars and other similar equipment, some of which could be seen in the hands of UCK members during media interviews.

Smuggling routes

Illegal arms in Macedonia are mostly smuggled from the western and north-western parts of the country. Since independence, the state border with Albania has been mainly guarded by the Macedonian authorities, whose capacities are limited. The difficult terrain, with a number of mountainous and forested areas, makes it hard to maintain security permanently, and criminal groups from both sides of the border have taken advantage of this for illegal arms trafficking. Corridors for illegal trafficking through and into Macedonia are found all along the length of the border with Albania and Kosovo, especially at the following places:

- On both sides of Ohrid Lake, near the official border crossing of Kafasan,
- On the mountainous part of the border with Albania, especially the region to the north and south of Debar,
- At the numerous crossings on the Sara Mountain into Kosovo,
- In the northern part of the Skopje valley,
- In the Kumanovo-Lipkovo region.¹²¹

Arms are transported on foot, using cattle, in vehicles and in tractors. One trick involves the use of trained cattle, loaded with goods but unaccompanied by people, which find their way across the border. For some time, criminal groups, which were often based on family ties, smuggled arms into Macedonia. Some of these arms were stored on Macedonian territory, while others were used for illegal trade. As conflict appeared to come closer, this type of illegal trade gained a new, more organised form, manifested with greater violence, combined with other forms of organised crime.

The seizure of weapons of Soviet/Russian and Western European origin indicates a new influx of weapons. Macedonia's eastern border with Bulgaria has seen an increase in arms trafficking in recent years. Weaponry smuggled from Bulgaria is primarily of Soviet/Russian origin. Bulgarians and Macedonians are the primary traffickers along the border. They have no political motives, are motivated solely by profit and have a reputation of selling to all sides. The MoI appears to be less concerned with weapons brought over the Bulgarian border than with those brought over the Kosovo and Albanian borders. It also claims that effective co-operation with the Bulgarian authorities is minimising the illicit trade in the eastern part of the country.¹²²

The re-supply of weapons apparently continues: as one international observer noted, 'I cannot tell you how many arms are around, but I have a firm belief that arms can easily be found if a need arises'.

Reasons for possessing arms

Despite some notable recent improvements in the situation in Macedonia, a truly safe and secure environment is still far off. Therefore, fears for individual and collective security remain one of the main reasons why ordinary people continue to hold weapons.

The near outbreak of civil war and the fragile peace that followed have fuelled the demand among the public for firearms. According to the MoI, the number of citizens who applied in 2001 and 2002 for a permit to possess a weapon increased 10 times in relation to 2000, the year before the crisis.¹²³ Likewise, 'the number of private security agencies that have regular licences for weapons have also multiplied so their employees are automatically getting licences for weapons, if the legal criteria for possession are

¹²¹ Opinion of military experts at the Ministry of Defence, Skopje, December, 2002.

¹²² Interview with Mire Markoski, MoI, Skopje, August 2002.

¹²³ Ibid.

met. But there are many more cases of individuals, partly due to the security situation and partly to “act cool”, who possess weapons without permission or licence from the MoI and are a danger to every environment or community.¹²⁴

There is a perception that the 2001 crisis broke a taboo on violence as a legitimate means to achieve political or personal goals. Guns are not only more widely available, but people are also more ready to use them. An illustration of the direct relationship between SALW supply and the crime rate is obvious from the MoI’s statistics from 1991–2001 on firearm-related criminal offences and the number of offenders involved (see **Table 4**).

Table 4: Offences relating to SALW, and number of offenders, 1991–2001

Year	SALW Crime offences	Offenders
1991	7	22
1992	57	75
1993	95	92
1994	67	65
1995	62	68
1996	77	29
1997	160	238
1998	205	269
1999	157	240
2000	173	252
2001	232	184

Source: Ministry of the Interior¹²⁵

Political violence and perceptions of security

The post-crisis period witnessed great uncertainty over the country’s stability and distrust between the two main communities. Some wondered whether Macedonia was in a post-conflict or a pre-conflict situation. VMRO-DPMNE and DPA propaganda about the impossibility of peaceful co-existence between the two communities also fuelled suspicions over each other’s intentions. Many ordinary citizens felt that they ought to hold on to their guns in case violence restarted and the state was unable to protect them, or acted as an oppressor. The pre-election atmosphere was extremely tense. Expectations of violence within, rather than between two communities were high.¹²⁶

Since then, on the whole the situation has noticeably improved. Members of the Albanian community feel more confident in the multi-ethnic police force, which many initially greeted with resentment, and acknowledge that they no longer live in fear of ethnic Macedonian policemen.¹²⁷ The newly elected politicians took it upon themselves to set an example of good co-operation, appearing together in public and having discussions about challenging and contentious issues among governmental officials.¹²⁸ Overcoming the legacy of distrust and healing recent wounds will certainly take a long time, but the perception of security has been enhanced, and profound doubts about the viability of the country have diminished.

However, conditions in former crisis zones remain precarious, and overall stability in the country remains fragile. Albanians continue to be disappointed in the slow

¹²⁴ Mire Markoski, director of the Organized Crime and Firearms Trafficking Unit, Ministry of Interior, Macedonia. (Translated from: Delevska S K, ‘Pola Milion Pushki i Pistoli gi cekaat izborite’, *Vest*, Godina 3, Broj 598, 6 July 2002.)

¹²⁵ Courtesy of Dr Trpe Stojanovski.

¹²⁶ Both local and international observers communicated this view to the research team in July 2002.

¹²⁷ Interviews with Albanian politicians and experts, January 2003.

¹²⁸ Interview with Rizvan Suleimani, Deputy Minister of Defence, Skopje, January 2003.

implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. In May–June 2003, a deterioration of security was reported throughout the country. Two Polish peacekeepers died in an explosion on 4 March 2003 in the Kumanovo area after disturbing a pair of anti-tank mines that had been taped together and placed on a trail usually used by Macedonian troops, who were probably the intended victims, though another suggestion was that the mine was planted to protect a temporary weapons store inaugurated in response to Serbian surge operations in the Presevo valley.¹²⁹ Such incidents can easily be politicised, with negative consequences to peace and to weapons collection initiatives. Ethnic Macedonians living as a minority in the west of the country, an area predominantly populated by Albanians, also still feel insecure. The fighting is too recent to be forgotten. In Vratnica, for example, two villagers abducted during the crisis are still missing, while those released from captivity remain traumatised. The fact that there are many illicit weapons around contributes to the perception of insecurity. At night gunshots and explosions are often heard in the area. The reasons for these gunshots are unclear, but could be attributed to gang warfare.¹³⁰

Crime

The interaction between crime and politics has marred Macedonia's development since independence. The criminal contacts and smuggling networks in the region flourished during the sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Greek embargo of Macedonia between 1992–95. Businesspeople in both countries found themselves constrained and resorted to smuggling networks, while governments tolerated this to keep their economies functioning. Unable to establish normal trade relations, both sides pursued illegal trafficking as a means of ensuring the supply of goods such as oil. Arms to supply the wars in Croatia and Bosnia passed through such channels, which were further developed and expanded for increasingly lucrative businesses such as drugs, contraband cigarettes and human trafficking.

In fact, it may be argued that one of the main causes of the 2001 conflict was less political in nature than criminal. According to this interpretation, criminal groups from both Kosovo and Macedonia saw that the Macedonian authorities were having some success in disrupting their activities and realised that if they helped to destabilise border areas which lay across their trafficking routes, this lack of state control would boost their ability to operate unhindered. It is suggested that the clash between the Macedonian authorities and a 'protection unit', an armed group guarding criminal activities, in Tanusevci acted as a catalyst for the wider violence. Tanusevci, a village directly south of the Vitina municipality in South East Kosovo, lies on a smuggling route into Kosovo and on to Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia, and eventually Western Europe. Both the NLA and criminal organisations had previously exploited its strategic location on the mountain ridge. Hence it was important for the Macedonian authorities to gain control over Tanusevci, and also the neighbouring village of Debalde. In both municipalities, opposition to the recent Skopje–Belgrade border agreement (see section on 'Combating Cross-Border Crime') is fierce, since the agreement will give the Macedonian authorities commanding views over these smuggling routes – a trade from which some of the villagers currently profit.¹³¹ Hence when the Tanusevci 'protection unit' was raided by the Macedonian police as part of an anti-smuggling operation, this provoked local anger and spurred further violence.

Neil Barnett of *Jane's Intelligence Review* argues that there has been a tendency to focus solely on the traditional domestic and political threats to stability in Macedonia, whereas trouble is just as likely to be externally inspired and more clearly criminal in character. Criminal groups are prepared to react violently if their operations are seriously hampered, including directly against the state authorities. When this happens, the line between crime and politics rapidly begins to blur.

¹²⁹ Barnett N, 'Balkans Facing Uncertain Future', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, May 2003, p 49.

¹³⁰ Interview in Vratnica, January 2003.

¹³¹ Barnett N, op cit, p 49.

Recently, as the political tension has lessened, its place has been taken by a rising fear of crime. Ethnic Albanians from outside Tetovo admit that they feel uncomfortable spending time in the town, as ‘one can get caught in the cross-fire between gangs’. Violent crime has risen markedly since the 2002 elections. 32 murders were committed in December 2002–January 2003, mainly in the Tetovo area; 29 were Albanian victims who died at the hands of other Albanians, including an important Islamic dignitary (in previous years, an average of 60 murders per year was recorded).¹³² These murders were not incidents of political violence, but mostly competition between rival gangs for control over territory, brothels or smuggling routes, in which innocent people were often caught up. Kidnapping for ransom – a relatively new phenomenon – has emerged in the west of the country, while before there were cases where members of the other ethnic group were abducted during the crisis for political reasons. Shoot-outs between criminal gangs, crime related to human and other trafficking¹³³ and armed robberies are increasingly common. The primary area for criminal activity is believed to be the Tetovo area and the territories running down to Ohrid and Struga.¹³⁴ In particular, there is a great deal of violence on the road between Tetovo and Gostivar. In the run up to the elections local people believed that the groups responsible for shootings were related to political parties, and were trying to destabilise the situation and postpone the elections. However, shootings with no apparent political agenda continue to the present day.

No single cause satisfactorily explains this rise in violent crime. During 2002, the police force, with the assistance of the OSCE, has been re-deployed into the former crisis regions, re-establishing the rule of law and filling security vacuums that existed in the ‘grey areas’.¹³⁵ Yet, this has not prevented a rise in crime in the region. Policing by ‘old methods’ was no longer acceptable, not least because of international criticism. At the same time, new methods – such as multi-ethnic police patrols and the reform of the police *force* into a police *service* – are bringing tangible results only slowly. Thus, progress in improving the domestic order is painfully slow, and the increase in criminality is a by-product of the transformation process, at least in the short term. The other explanation is more controversial and prevails among the Macedonian public. According to this view, the former NLA command, including Ahmeti, used to pay its rank-and-file soldiers, but as the NLA transformed into the DUI and entered the legitimate political process, such practices ended. As a result, the DUI lost control over some former NLA fighters. These young men have no jobs and no longer enjoy high esteem as ‘freedom fighters’. Out with guns in the streets, they are bound to cause trouble, especially since Kosovo, with its vast opportunities to escape across the border, is nearby. It was also alleged that after the elections the parties lost some control over their own followers in Albanian areas.¹³⁶

‘Gun culture’¹³⁷

The term ‘gun culture’ requires some definition – it is a widely used term to refer to social practices ranging from the firing of rifles at traditional ceremonies such as weddings to gang violence involving firearms among urban youth. The report refers to ‘gun culture’ in inverted commas to highlight the fact that there is no agreement among academics as to whether ‘gun culture’ is a real phenomenon.

The existence of a ‘gun culture’ is often used to imply that the attitudes it suggests are innate and irreversible, rendering efforts at promoting a more responsible approach to gun control ineffectual and therefore pointless. Against this, others argue that ‘gun

¹³² Interview with Trpe Stojanovski, Ministry of Interior, Skopje, 20 January 2003.

¹³³ For example, when the research team visited the Tetovo-Gostivar area in January 2003, the bodies of three dead foreign young women were found along with one heavily wounded female survivor. Police believed the young women were ‘employees’ of a brothel caught in the crossfire of a gun-battle between rival criminal gangs.

¹³⁴ Interviews with Skopje-based international observers, Skopje, January 2003.

¹³⁵ For more information see Peake G, *Policing the Peace: Police reform in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia*, London: Saferworld, 2003 (forthcoming).

¹³⁶ Interviews with Skopje-based international observers, Skopje, January 2003.

¹³⁷ This section was written together with Chrissie Hirst of Saferworld.

culture' is an inexplicit term and should not be used in this way. The position taken here is that such cultural associations may well constitute one of several reasons for the possession of weapons, and that more detailed knowledge of the reasons and motivation for possession will give significant advantages to those working to combat proliferation and design successful disarmament strategies.

On a basic level, 'gun culture' can be defined as the widespread acceptability within a society of the use and possession of firearms.¹³⁸ Such a 'gun culture' may or may not be based on traditional use and possession of firearms, but where such historical traditions exist they may provide a reference point which can make the trend seem more acceptable or explicable. It is important to make a distinction between 'gun culture' and a 'culture of violence'. While there may indeed be an overlap between the two, in many societies which are described as having a 'gun culture', the use of such weapons for violent purposes is strictly forbidden. A good example of this is provided by Finland, where a population of 5 million possesses about 1.5 million firearms, yet the crime rate is very low.

Though culture is often popularly seen as being something fixed and unchangeable, no form of culture is static. Culture is not born purely of 'tradition', but develops and is reinterpreted as society changes. 'Gun culture' in Macedonia is an amalgam of many factors, some of them stretching back centuries, some much more recent.

Popular attitudes towards weapons in Macedonia have much in common with 'gun cultures' elsewhere in much of the Balkans, where historical factors have combined to produce a traditional affinity with arms in almost every ethnic and cultural group. The last two centuries of transition and instability encouraged tendencies to view the community or extended family both as the immediate unit of social authority and defence. In the past, when society had a patriarchal, familial community structure, in many areas it was natural for the head of the family to possess a weapon, which was used to protect and guarantee the family's property and honour. Owning a weapon was considered a proof and symbol of manhood and authority. Important occasions were marked with celebratory gunfire. Therefore, personal weapons were seen as objects of great value and honour. If a man did not own a weapon he was less respected in society, while those who were skilful in handling guns were especially admired. Whatever the rules of the state, local customs provided unwritten laws that regulated the use, and prevented the misuse, of these weapons. Though this is a stereotypical image that to some extent belongs in the past, it still strikes an emotional chord among men in the Balkans and does indeed reflect something of their attitude towards arms.

In the former Yugoslavia, firearms as a commodity were under the control of an accepted and well-established state: the state security services were issued with official weapons and civilian possession was almost entirely controlled through licensing and registration. Guns were, however, widely held, familiar objects in society. The army was an important institution in Yugoslav society: positions in the army conferred respect and social privileges, and professional military personnel were issued weapons that they were allowed to carry and often kept at home. Obligatory military service for young men, usually served for two years¹³⁹ between the age of 18 and 27 years, meant that the male half of the population had been fully trained in handling and firing military firearms and were accustomed to using a range of weapons. In addition, the concept of civil defence existed throughout the Yugoslav Federation – 'people's defence and civil self-protection' was part of the school curriculum and all pupils were instructed in basic firearms use and maintenance, including practical instruction, principles and typology of various weaponry (including bombs and chemical

¹³⁸ An alternative definition given by Dr Sami Faltas defines gun culture as a system of values and beliefs in which the availability and possession of firearms is considered appropriate and commonplace. Faltas S, 'Reasons for Gun Ownership', presentation at a roundtable hosted by BICC, in co-operation with the Small Arms Survey and Saferworld, on 'Gun Culture: the role of the gun in cultural identity and community perceptions', Skopje, 18 June 2003.

¹³⁹ The length of military service varied between three and one years from the establishment of Yugoslavia and the present day rump of the federation, Serbia and Montenegro.

weapons) and military and civilian first aid. This military element and concept of civil defence within Yugoslav society meant that a large proportion of the population were familiar with the presence, possession and use of firearms. The arms industry was also viewed in positive terms, with fierce pride in Yugoslav-produced weapons. The arms trade was seen as a legitimate business and a valuable source of hard-currency revenue.

Availability was also a factor that encouraged possession and therefore acceptability. Throughout the last century, arms have been relatively easy to find because of the frequency of wars, uprisings and armed clashes in the Balkan region. In the past hundred years there have been at least ten wars or armed clashes of varying scale which affected Macedonia, directly or indirectly. In various ways, some of the arms used in this fighting ended up in the hands of the civilian population, which held on to these weapons because they thought that they could do no harm and might come in useful. Like most Balkan peoples, Macedonians' attitude towards arms is best summed up by the Macedonian proverb 'arms require neither food nor drink – it's good to have them and you might need them.' Many Macedonians who apply for gun licences now give such reasons for wanting a weapon. Moreover, the experience of the Second World War, when there had been extensive guerrilla warfare on Yugoslav territory, has not been entirely forgotten.

In the stable years before Yugoslavia fell apart, expressions of 'gun culture' were more limited, but still very much in evidence. Firearms and bandoleers were occasionally worn as part of national or traditional costume, and guns were fired into the air, usually by older men, as an expression of joy at celebrations such as weddings or births. Anecdotal evidence sees these cultural expressions crossing social divides, with urban, educated elites also firing weapons on celebratory occasions, such as success for Yugoslavia in a sporting event. This practice has become increasingly popular over the last ten years as firearms possession has become more widespread and the use of guns more commonplace.¹⁴⁰

The trauma of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the resulting conflicts and insecurity changed this familiarity with firearms into a much more negative social trend. Although Macedonia escaped significant violence at the time of its secession, the accompanying instability and conflict in neighbouring countries contributed to an increase in lawlessness and high levels of crime. Levels of violence rose – and with this came an increased dependency (or perception of dependency) on firearms for defence, as the state could no longer be relied upon as a guarantor of security. Unlike other states in South Eastern Europe, Macedonia established an organised state structure relatively late, preventing a feeling of belonging to the state from taking root among local population. Instead, a greater attachment emerged to local loyalties, such as the family, clan or local community. People felt that they had to rely on themselves, and so needed to keep arms in order to protect their property and honour.

Accompanying these heightened perceptions of insecurity came the re-emergence of nationalism. The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia into its constituent states resulted in the strengthening or propagation of 'nationalist' and ethnic definitions and distinctions. The 1990s has seen a significant popular re-visitation of traditional cultures and cultural identity. Based on ethnic divisions and fed by a political context of insecurity and conflict, the traditional image of the *komita* or *hajduk*, has been re-asserted. Active in the 18th and 19th century, the *hajduci* were groups of robbers or bandits, who led a wild, violent lifestyle and were romanticised in a similar way to 'highwaymen' in Britain. Never seen or depicted without a rifle or pistol tucked into their waistbands, these bandit-heroes were intimately associated with firearms and this 're-traditionalisation' has fed positive associations with firearms.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ During the research team's July 2002 visit to the new South Eastern Europe University in Tetovo, evidence of random bullets falling on the university was plain to see. Staff regularly have to patch holes in the buildings and roofs from bullets that have fallen on the school.

¹⁴¹ 'Yugoslav Wars: the "Revenge of the Countryside", Between Sociological Reality and Nationalist Myth', Association Francaise d'Etudes Sur Les Balkans, www.afebalk.org.

Fed by romanticised war stories and film images, macho culture and fashion have meant that guns have now become a part of youth culture. Indeed, similar hero-types to the romanticised *hajduci* can be found in the ‘strong men’ of the Balkans today: the Mafia. Mafia-style images and ‘followings’ are now common among young men, particularly in the context of disrupted education and poor career opportunities, where working in the black market is commonplace. ‘Mafia culture’ should not be confused with traditional associations with firearms – it is much more closely linked to the culture of violence which has developed out of the last ten years of insecurity and lawlessness, where weapons are possessed primarily for use in violent or illegal activities.¹⁴²

There has been some debate about how attitudes towards guns differ between the different communities within Macedonia. Many people claim that ‘gun culture’ is strongest within the Albanian clan structure, where it is believed that every head of a family should possess a firearm.¹⁴³ Historically, the Albanian connection to firearms is well established. Under Ottoman rule only Muslims were allowed to possess firearms, whereas for Christians access to firearms was strictly controlled. During a visit to the Balkans in 1905, an Albanian explained to the British writer, Edith Durham, that Albanians put possession of a firearm before religion. ‘We Albanians have quite peculiar ideas. We must have freedom; we will profess any form of religion which leaves us free to carry a gun. Therefore the majority of us are Moslems’,¹⁴⁴ Yet Kusovac argues that while ‘ethnic Macedonians share a similar gun culture,’ historically they have had less opportunity to arm themselves,¹⁴⁵ until the 2001 crisis gave everyone in the country a chance to do so. It should be clear, however, that it was not just the 2001 crisis which made the use of violence seem more acceptable; in fact, in some areas, higher levels of violence and more violent incidents have been recorded since the cessation of hostilities.

In this context, there have been strong incentives for private individuals to obtain weapons. Firearms became much easier to get hold of in Macedonia than before independence, and many families that had not possessed firearms, or possessed only one, took advantage of the widespread accessibility to acquire a means of self-defence: in the words of the Mayor of Tetovo, ‘guns are more readily available than books.’ Another dynamic that has been noted is what might be called a ‘group effect’: if weapons are easy to obtain, and visible within society, norms of possession are established or strengthened. Macedonia is a small country with tight community bonds and neighbours watch what others are doing in case ‘they know better’ that there may be potential violence. Rumours quickly fill the absence of accurate information about the state of affairs in other parts of the country. Generally, if neighbours are acquiring weapons ‘just in case,’ everybody will know about it and this may cause them to follow suit.¹⁴⁶

Such culture is not static. Growing modernisation and urbanisation, the erosion of traditional ties, and the experience of living and travelling abroad all work against ‘gun culture’. At the same time, belief in violence as a solution for political or personal problems has been boosted by the upheavals of the post-independence period and social and economic anarchy. This turmoil weakened respect for traditional norms, such as respect for one’s elders and the unwritten conventions on handling guns. It would be naïve to believe that young men with guns in Macedonia form a part of a traditional ‘gun culture’ and are responsive to pressure from village elders or heads of family. They are rather products of modernity, in which traditional norms and affiliations were bent to suit present needs, and were rejected if they might restrict freedom of enterprise. Similarly, it is wrong to assume that any ethnic group is culturally homogeneous. Saferworld argues that ‘the extent of male attitudes to violence and links of gun

¹⁴² See the discussion of Arkan and Ceca’s wedding in Ordanova D, ‘Balkan Wedding Revisited: Multiple Messages of Filmed Nuptials’, Working Paper 98-1, Centre for Austrian Studies, 2000.

¹⁴³ Kusovac Z, ‘How Many Weapons in Macedonia?’ *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 29 August 2001.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Edith Durham, *The Burden of the Balkans*, Thomas Nelson & Sons: London, 1905, p 51.

¹⁴⁵ Kusovac Z, ‘How Many Weapons in Macedonia?’ *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 29 August 2001.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Albert Musliu, ADI, Gostivar, January 2003.

possession with masculinity and blood feuds is likely to differ on class and rural/urban lines,¹⁴⁷ and this applies equally to ethnic communities in Macedonia.

Meanwhile, the ill effects of guns are increasingly felt in society, and people are more prepared to talk about them. Domestic disputes and incidents involving use of guns among young people have increased. Firearms-related accidents are growing: in 2001, 16 people were injured and 3 killed in accidents, while between February and July 2002, 55 were injured and 11 killed.¹⁴⁸ In the village of Bozovce in the Tetovo valley, an elderly woman was killed through celebratory fire at a New Year's celebration, shocking villagers, who turned to the OSCE for help to collect weapons.¹⁴⁹ According to the OSCE, efforts by local communities to reduce random gunfire are more obvious and have grass-roots support.

¹⁴⁷ Davis I, 'Small arms and light weapons in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia', Saferworld Report, May 2002.

¹⁴⁸ According to Elizaveta Arsovska, Vecer newspaper journalist responsible for 'black chronicle', July 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Chris Tomley, OSCE, Skopje, January 2003.

3

Prospects and obstacles for disarmament

DISARMAMENT IS A PRECARIOUS PROCESS and requires a number of forces working together in the same direction simultaneously. The pillars for reducing SALW include political commitment from the government to disarmament and reduction of fear of conflict, police reform to provide citizens with security, effective border controls to prevent smuggling, coherent legislation, international support and inclusion of civil society in educating the public about the dangers of small arms. The chapter below analyses these pillars in more detail.

A genuine commitment from politicians is the most necessary precondition for effective disarmament in Macedonia. Action on weapons collection and gun control is relatively high on the list of governmental priorities. In November 2002, the government announced its intention to pass the new law, opening the way to practical measures. Co-operation between the MoI and the MoD has improved, as the leaders of both belong to the same party. There is also better coordination between the presidential office and the 'power' ministries, unlike under the previous government, which was plagued by numerous counterproductive internal controversies. The DUI says that it believes work on SALW is important.¹⁵⁰

The government has established a Tri-Ministerial National Co-ordination Body (NCB) on SALW after parliament passed the new laws regarding civilian possession and voluntary weapons collection (see section on Legal Change below). It is the job of the NCB to oversee, plan and co-ordinate the implementation of these laws. The NCB brings together representatives of the MoI, the MoD and the Ministry of Finance, as the Customs Unit belongs to the latter, as well as UNDP and NGO representatives. The NCB is headed by Major General Zoran Jovanovski of the MoI.

The Minister of Defence, Vlado Buckovski, announced the government's commitment to collecting weapons, adding that 'this should not be only a symbolic collection as the Operation Essential Harvest was, but a real manifestation that the legal state on the entire territory of the Republic of Macedonia functions.'¹⁵¹ Officials stressed that as SALW proliferation is a political problem, a voluntary component with appropriate confidence-building measures is indispensable. The government has demonstrated the importance it attaches to disarmament by launching a 45-day weapons amnesty from 1 November 2003. It will be possible either to voluntarily surrender weapons or to

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Ermira Mehmeti, DUI spokeswoman, Tetovo, January 2003.

¹⁵¹ 'Macedonian defence minister says weapons collection to resume in spring', 7 November 2002, www.csees.net/news

register them. The amnesty is being run by Gezim Ostreni, a former NLA commander who is now general secretary of the DUI.

Police reform

The events surrounding the 2001 conflict – the withdrawal of many ethnic Albanians from the police force and Boskovski's political opportunism – lessened the police's ability to enforce the law. These events highlighted existing problems that had previously received little attention. Advice from the international community on how to police the country also led to some confusion: while insisting on the need to adhere to non-confrontational methods, observe human rights standards and reduce interethnic tensions, it remained silent on how to combat serious crime. Should this also be done by non-confrontational means? And what kind of criticism would it attract if citizens' human rights were violated? In the dilemma between current efficiency and best practice in the long term, it became difficult to navigate between domestic security needs and satisfying Western norms, even as pressure for reform mounted. For example, during 2003 the international community has urged Macedonians to tackle the crime wave, but has provided no guidance on how it expects this to be done. Moreover, the disbanding of the Lions left a gap in rapid deployment capability.¹⁵² The new Rapid Deployment and Rapid Intervention Units are expected to take over this role. Troops were recruited in summer 2003 ahead of basic training scheduled to commence by September 2003. It will be not be possible, however, to judge the effectiveness of these new units for some time.

Two external agencies are engaged in police reform in Macedonia: the OSCE Mission in Skopje and the EU's European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR). The objective of the OSCE police reform effort is to make policing more effective by providing training and turning the police into public servants, rather than an instrument of oppression. Observing human rights standards and the rule of law became important elements of the programme. The OSCE currently sees its role as providing training to existing policemen and new cadets in basic skills, teaching new methods in intelligence gathering, forensics etc., while the EAR is responsible for the police reform package. The EAR is in the process of establishing a national action plan for reform, which includes elaborating a strategy for police reform, redesigning some departments within the MoI, setting up a police academy, and proposing measures to rebuild trust in the police.

Some rural areas populated by ethnic Albanians along the border had virtually no police presence after independence. In general, the Macedonian state had little real influence over rural Albanians either in terms of law enforcement, or as a provider of services. Addressing the need to introduce a police presence in these areas, which were also the ones most affected by the 2001 crisis, the OSCE took up the challenge of creating multi-ethnic police patrols. The Mission developed a step-by-step Major Plan ('matrix') of police re-entry into these 'former crisis' regions. The original OSCE matrix was envisaged as 55 steps (from the establishment of a contact desk to a 24-hour police presence), but was adopted as 55 days instead.¹⁵³

Initially, Macedonian policemen felt very uncomfortable about entering Albanian areas, where they were greeted with suspicion, but not resistance. At the start, international officers had to accompany multi-ethnic police units at all times. Development organisations also made it clear to village communities that international staff were reluctant to work in villages which were 'no-go' areas for police, and as a result essential services like electricity or telephone lines could not be installed in such areas. Eventually, villagers started to realise that at best the police meant no harm, or were even too apprehensive in their approach, and that if they allowed the police into their villages, development aid might follow. The police re-entry programme was com-

¹⁵² Barnett N, 'Balkans Facing Uncertain Future', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, May 2003, p 47.

¹⁵³ Interviews with OSCE officials, January 2003.

pleted on 11 July 2002, by which time police had re-entered all of the 138 villages in the former crisis regions. A total of 900 ethnic Albanians have been employed as reserve police officers, and 500 will join during 2003. Mobile patrols have replaced the stationary posts positioned on the outskirts of villages. The next stage in the process has been to introduce community policing. In some places in crisis regions, Civilian Liaison Committees are being set up to provide better communication. Recently it has been suggested that these committees be used to educate villagers about the dangers of SALW.

Despite widespread doubts about the viability of a multi-ethnic police service, its token presence in crisis areas, and the initial resentment of Albanian villagers, the practice has started to take root. Moreover, in some Albanian villages where people were at first uncomfortable to allow a multi-ethnic police service to (re)enter, complaints are mounting that the police are not doing enough to protect inhabitants from criminal gangs. In other words, people want the police to have a greater, not a smaller presence and to play a more active role.¹⁵⁴ This change in attitudes is quite remarkable. However, it has to be noted that the multi-ethnic force is a community police service and in its current state has no capacity to combat tough criminals operating in the former crisis area. The Tigers are forces designed and trained for such tasks, but the unit is currently staffed by ethnic Macedonians: whether the local population would regard their operations in Albanian areas as acceptable remains to be seen.

On a positive note, co-operation on joint policy-making and implementation between senior Macedonian and Albanian politicians and officials has increased.¹⁵⁵ However, suspicion and resentment between groups remains high and a sea-change in cultural attitudes is needed. Still, some ethnic Albanians who previously served in the police force but left during the conflict are being brought back. Only 6 percent of employees in the MoI were Albanian as of January 2003.¹⁵⁶ In order to increase their representation and level of education, a reserved quota of students for Albanians and small minority groups in the police academy is planned, and affirmative action is to be practised.

Police commanders note that it remains difficult to police Albanian rural areas, as even a multi-ethnic police service still cannot enter villages whenever it wants. Large areas of mountainous territory north and west of Tetovo remain effectively beyond police control. As a result, armed groups move freely in places where they feel more secure, and they are sometimes supported by the local population, which is reluctant to co-operate with the police.¹⁵⁷ In general, progress is slower than local police chiefs expected, but is nevertheless apparent. Gaining the trust of communities alienated by years of neglect is bound to take time and patience.

Increasing Albanian representation in the security sector remains an uphill task. Currently, the DUI, through its appointees in the new government and especially through the Deputy Minister of the Interior, is pushing for ethnic Albanian members of the police force to be given more responsibility. According to the Ohrid Agreement, the number of Albanians in the force should mirror the ethnic composition of Macedonia, which is unknown. Although the census took place in October 2002, the results have not been released, and many fear that if the results are not what it is believed they should be, instability may follow.¹⁵⁸ 500 Albanians should have been recruited into the MoI by now. The Army needs another 600 people – members of all communities, out of which 150 slots are reserved for Albanians. However, this does not overcome the problem that at present there are not enough career professionals among Albanians to fill senior positions, and increased representation at least in short term would mean recruitment of more lower-ranking staff.

¹⁵⁴ Interviews at the OSCE Mission in Skopje, January 2003.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Rizvan Suleimani, Deputy Minister of Defence, January 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Trpe Stojanovski, Ministry of Interior, Skopje, January 2003.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Saso Trajeviski, police commander, Jagunovce, January 2003.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2003/01/08012003161005.asp>

Another problem is that corruption is still endemic throughout the system, despite the government's efforts to root it out at a higher level. For example, it was common under the previous government for bar owners to receive advance warning when they were about to be raided by the authorities – information that could only come from a reasonably senior source. When the new government came in, it was hoped that this practice had been eradicated, yet just a few months later, in January 2003, when bars in Ohrid, Struga and Skopje were raided, it was apparent that nine of the twelve bar owners had been forewarned.¹⁵⁹

Legal change

Law on supplying, possession and carrying of weapons

A fairly large number of firearms are legally owned in Macedonia. As of 31 March 2003, there were 155,992 guns registered: individuals possessed 139,857 pieces, while organisations had 13,797 and hunting associations 2,342 pieces of weaponry.¹⁶⁰

Until recently, the legal instruments in Macedonia regulating the procurement, possession and registration of weapons dated back to 1972 and were not adequate for present conditions. Among the drawbacks of that legislation were the obscure and obsolete classification of weaponry and the lack of a well-defined registration, categorisation, supervision, and regulation of the legal arms market. Moreover, the regulatory requirements disabled police activities against the illicit arms market and obstructed practical measures to fight crime. In view of this, a new law on acquisition, possession and use has been adopted.

The new Law on Supply, Possession and Carrying of Weapons was adopted in June 2003, and amended on 18 July the same year. According to the law, the MoI is the authority responsible for controlling the legal civilian possession of firearms. A citizen of Macedonia may legally possess a firearm by obtaining a licence from the Ministry. The laws regarding the legal possession of firearms require that in order to receive a licence, a person must be at least 18 years old and must be in good mental health. Licences cannot be issued to individuals with criminal records, those who have breached firearm regulations, or those suspected of intending to misuse the weapons. The licence is issued only to those organisations which have an appropriate security service to protect their property.

Organisations and citizens can be given permission to supply, possess and carry: hunting rifles, pistols, revolvers, small calibre guns and small calibre pistols (weapons with guttered barrels) and weapon parts. Local branches of the MoI issue licences for such weapons. The owner of the weapon is obliged to keep it in working order, take care of ammunition and be aware of how to handle weapons. The weapon should not be used in public places where the safety of others might be endangered.

The licence is issued at the discretion of the MoI, meaning that it makes the ultimate decision on whether a person is allowed to possess a weapon or not. When an application is denied, the MoI is not required to give a reason. Normally, a person applying for a licence must pass three checks:

- Checks are made with the Ministry of Justice on whether the applicant has a criminal record
- The MoI will check whether the applicant is under criminal investigation
- The police are sent to do a field check and interview the applicant's family and neighbours. The final filter or check is the discretion of the MoI.

This application process applies mostly to handguns. For shotguns and hunting rifles, the process can be speeded up if the person has been a member of a hunting or

¹⁵⁹ Interview with EU Monitoring Mission, Skopje, January 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Report on Implementation of UN Programme of Action, May 2003, Skopje <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/docs/nationalreports/2002/macedonia.PDF>

sporting club. Individuals who do not belong to a hunting club cannot possess hunting rifles and guns. Possession of a fully automatic weapon is forbidden for all citizens except employees of the Army and the MoI. A person found in possession of a weapon without a licence can be imprisoned for two to three months or fined between \$100–200, a substantial amount considering that in 2000, GDP per capita was \$4400.¹⁶¹ One problem with this system is the inherent nepotism and cronyism within the MoI and previous governments in general.

Other laws include the ‘Law on Manufacture and Trade in Weapons and Military Equipment’ regulating issues of manufacturing and transport of weapons and equipment, and the ‘Law on External Trade’ regulating the export/import licensing procedures of weapons and military equipment.

The debate on voluntary collection

In March 2002, members of various political parties recognised the need for further disarmament initiatives. In the following months, parties in parliament offered various plans for a weapons collection programme and amendments to the laws regarding the legal possession of firearms.

In April 2002, the VMRO-DPMNE produced a draft law for a voluntary weapons-collection programme which was submitted to the parliament by the MoI. The draft law proposed that the MoI would collect firearms, ammunition and explosive material voluntarily surrendered by individuals during a 45-day period. The Ministry would establish collection points around the country and invite the OSCE and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide observers. A mass public appeal through the media was to notify citizens of the need to turn in weapons and information on the location of collection points. During that 45-day period, all individuals possessing weapons illegally who voluntarily surrendered them to the MoI would be granted amnesty, exonerating them from any criminal prosecution. Furthermore, the MoI would carry out the collection without any identification or registration of the individuals so as to maintain their anonymity. The Ministry would register the weapons, ammunition and explosive material according to type, model, calibre, production number, producer and condition of the weapon. Based on an assessment of the condition of the weapon, old or obsolete weapons would be destroyed, but usable weapons would be stored by the Ministry for possible future use.

The MoI has advocated a voluntary handover, ruling out cash incentives for individuals, fearing that if they buy back the weapons, it will increase smuggling by those hoping to profit at the expense of the state budget. The Ministry intended to embark on a public awareness campaign of the kind that has proven effective in Croatia and Serbia. It also suggested relying heavily on international participation in the initiative.

Representatives of the SDSM, the main opposition party at the time, proposed a different law calling for local rather than national authorities to run the collection of voluntarily surrendered weapons. They also advocated a ‘re-registration’ of all firearms, including legally held arms. The aim of the re-registration would be to take stock of all citizens in possession of a firearm, including those who received weapons directly from the government during the crisis. This procedure would reveal the scale of the distribution of firearms to civilians that happened during and following the crisis by the political parties in the previous government.

Another party in parliament, the Democratic Alliance headed by Pavle Trajanov, another former Minister of the Interior, proposes disarmament in three phases. It envisages consensus-building among all political parties on weapons collection, and the provision of monetary compensation by the international community to motivate individuals. It also proposed amending the penal code to increase the punishment for

illegal possession of weapons and for the state to act forcefully in seizing weapons from those that did not surrender them voluntarily.¹⁶²

The VMRO-DPMNE draft was heavily criticised. Many claimed that it was just a 'cut and paste' proposal of the Croatian law which failed to meet any of the specific requirements of Macedonia's multi-ethnic identity. Another concern focused on the role of the MoI. As the conflict was so recent and tensions persisted, many in the Albanian areas of Macedonia still have little trust in the national and, as they see it, Macedonian-dominated authorities. Another criticism is that the proposed programme would only destroy some of the weapons, while storing serviceable ones. It seems unlikely that members of the Albanian community would surrender their weapons to an authority that they fear might one day use those same weapons against them.

The national authorities face another dilemma: how to act after the amnesty period is over and some weapons still remain in the hands of civilians. Do they unleash a forced collection programme and conduct raids to seize weapon stockpiles? This approach risks encountering armed resistance which, given the fragile peace, could quickly escalate into major violence. So far, the MoI has been reluctant to use such an approach, acknowledging that it knows where some weapons caches are located, but is unwilling to raid them for fear of casualties among the security forces and civilians, leading inevitably to an escalation of violence.¹⁶³ At the same time, if the government pursues only a 'soft' approach, any fear of punishment would disappear.

Law on gun amnesty

The MoI always stressed that voluntary surrender and the condition of anonymity are very important in weapons' collection initiatives. Drafting the new law on 'Law on the Voluntary Surrender and Collection of Firearms, Ammunition and Explosive Materials and the Legalisation of Weapons' has been an important step. The law was adopted in June 2003, establishing the National Coordination Body (NCB) and defining the main objectives and principles of the voluntary weapons' surrender and legalisation initiative. The law regulates the voluntary surrender of firearms, ammunition and explosive materials, owned and held without authorisation, as well as the collection, stockpiling and destruction of the surrendered weapons. It also provides for legalisation of illegally held weapons for which a licence can be issued. The law stipulates that there will be no identification or registration of persons surrendering their weapons, and no criminal procedures will be initiated against such persons. To ensure appropriate representation and inclusivity, the NCB is composed of the President of the Commission for Defence and Security, four members of parliament, Vice-President, Ministers of Interior and Defence and one representative of local government and of the non-governmental sector. The NCB passes the National Programme on general security enhancement through surrender of firearms determining the activities for implementation, the ways in which collection would be organised, the timeframe and financing for the programme. Surrender of weapons is to be conducted in front of the commissions established by the NCB, which are made up of representatives of the Interior, Defence and Justice ministries, and of the local authorities where the weapons are collected. Collected weapons must be destroyed to preclude any suspicion of their potential misuse by the authorities. Individuals can also use this opportunity to apply for a licence for their weapons, while the Ministry of Interior will issue a licence if the person satisfies the conditions specified in the Law on Acquisition, Possession and Carrying of Weapons, without determining the weapons' origin. According to the SAS study conducted in summer 2003, 57 percent of the population stated that they would acquire guns legally, if given the opportunity.¹⁶⁴ The government insists that equality

¹⁶² Sona K, 'Pola Milion Pushki i Pistoli gi cekaat izborite', *Vest*, Godina 3, Broj 598, Skopje, 6 July 2002.

¹⁶³ Interview with Mire Markoski, Mol, Skopje, August 2002.

¹⁶⁴ SEESAC Activity Report no 14, 1 August 2003.

and neutrality will be its guiding principles aiming to prevent perceptions that one community could profit at another's expense.

UNDP Skopje and other international bodies have been intensively engaged in advising the government on the formulation of a national programme on small arms control¹⁶⁵ and on a law on voluntary surrender and collection of weapons.¹⁶⁶ In July 2003 the NCB decided the amnesty would run from 1 November to 15 December 2003. A large-scale public awareness campaign would accompany the amnesty.

However, some fear the amnesty is being introduced too hastily. UNDP has recommended that from a technical viewpoint the start date of the amnesty period, originally proposed by the government to begin on 1 October, should be postponed until spring 2004. It argued that the delay would increase the chances of success for the public awareness campaign and the collection process. Furthermore, as SALW proliferation is very much a political issue, there are fears that an unsuccessful campaign could be highly politically damaging.

Combating cross-border crime

Effective border controls and customs are largely absent in Macedonia, and the border is porous in many places. Mountainous terrain further complicates the task of border management. Cross-border trafficking is a major criminal industry. Human trafficking is rampant, with women being smuggled through Macedonia to the West.¹⁶⁷ Brothels have been set up in the country, where women stay especially during winter months until it is possible to move them further westwards.¹⁶⁸ To a large extent, this goes hand-in-hand with gun running. Human trafficking is often the subject of armed gang warfare. On the border with Greece, Macedonia also suffers from illegal immigration: in 2002 alone, 12,100 immigrants were officially detained.¹⁶⁹ Many more have probably entered undetected. Unscrupulous traffickers have been promising to smuggle people into the EU via the Macedonia province of Greece, only to dump them in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia instead.

The main concern is the border with Kosovo. KFOR troops have arrested Bosnian, Croat, and Bulgarian nationals as well as ethnic Albanians attempting to smuggle weaponry into Macedonia from Kosovo, demonstrating how the illicit trade of weapons cuts across ethnic lines.¹⁷⁰ One NLA commander even told an IWPR reporter in August 2001 that 'Serbs give us the best deals, while Albanians from Albania give us a hard time.'¹⁷¹ KFOR operations to seize arms have prevented some NLA weapons from reaching frontline troops. During Operation Eagle in Kosovo, KFOR intercepted 2,000 weapons and 180,000 rounds of ammunition bound for Macedonia.¹⁷² From June to September 2001 alone, Operation Eagle resulted in the arrest of 797 individuals, the seizure of 729 assault rifles, 63 support weapons including mortars and machine guns, over 1,500 grenades, mines and over 150,000 rounds of ammunition.¹⁷³ KFOR also seized 9M14 Malyutka (AT-3 'Sagger') wire guided anti-tank missiles, 9M32 Strela-2M (SA-7B 'Grail' Mod 1) shoulder-launched surface to air missiles and one 9M313 Igla-1 (SA-16 'Gimlet') missile on the border destined to Macedonia.¹⁷⁴ In October 2002

¹⁶⁵ National Program For Improving the General Security Through Voluntary Surrender of Weapons, Ammunition and Explosive Materials.

¹⁶⁶ Law on Voluntary Surrender and Collection of Weapons, Ammunition and Explosive Materials and For the Legalization of Weapons.

¹⁶⁷ The US Department of State's *Annual Trafficking of Persons Report 2003* identified Macedonia as 'a country of transit and destination for women and children trafficked for prostitution from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, notably Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria', <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21276.htm>

¹⁶⁸ In February 2003 Bojku 'Leku' Dilaver, a notorious trafficker in women, was arrested, and in a few days the courtroom in Struga where he was to be tried was bombed. Leku received only six months in jail.

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.ear.eu.int/macedonia/fyrom-a1c2f3h4.htm>

¹⁷⁰ Ripley T, 'Insurgency in Macedonia drives Balkans arms trade', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2001.

¹⁷¹ Haxhijaj B, 'The NLA's Arms Suppliers', *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, BCR no 272, Pristina, 17 August 2001.

¹⁷² Ripley T, 'Intentions unclear as NLA hands over arms', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 October 2001.

¹⁷³ NATO Press Briefing, 4 September 2001 at the NATO Press Centre, Skopje.

¹⁷⁴ Ripley T, 'Insurgency in Macedonia drives Balkans arms trade', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2001.

KFOR troops seized 'several mule loads' of arms near the Blace crossing on the Kosovo border. The find included anti-tank mines, thousands of rounds of ammunition of up to 12.7mm calibre, and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) rounds. Neil Barnett notes that such a heavy consignment of weapons was unlikely to be intended for purely criminal use, and the find fits into a pattern of arms seizures that suggests the structured movement of arms from Kosovo into Macedonia.¹⁷⁵ This in turn implies that a return to organised violence cannot be ruled out.

In summer 2002, small groups of armed Albanians were observed moving across the border, though the reasons for these movements were unclear. The ABB reported that it had come under fire on several occasions, but with no visible injuries. In June–July 2002, a group of 42 men armed with light weapons crossed the border from Kosovo, launching some low-key attacks on the 1st ABB.¹⁷⁶ British KFOR troops were moved towards the border, and such crossings were halted for a while. In December, MoD spokesman Marjan Gjurovski announced that the ABB had registered, in co-operation with KFOR, some movement across the border with Kosovo. According to Dnevnik, sources in the Macedonian army confirmed that a regrouping of armed groups had been noticed in the Lipkovo area.¹⁷⁷ There was an RPG attack against a border post in March 2003.

The official demarcation of the border between Macedonia and Kosovo remains a problem. In 2002, the FRY ratified an agreement with Macedonia on border delimitation which was recognised by the UN Security Council, but rejected by the Kosovo Assembly (parliament of Kosovo), as it claimed that it violated the rights of ethnic Albanians who live on both sides of the border.¹⁷⁸ The agreement saw Kosovo lose around 12 sq km to Macedonia, and Macedonia lose around 2.5 sq km to Serbia. A US investigation into the new border, however, concluded that it was demarcated according to international best practice. Moreover, although Kosovo lost territory, it was mostly very steep land, and in some respects the agreement favoured it, as the cement factory on the Blace crossing which was previously divided, is now completely within Kosovo. Some of the opposition to the new border derived from the fact that it could complicate smuggling and make it easier for security forces to control border movements.¹⁷⁹ Operationally, however, the controversy changes little, as the *de facto* border follows a natural route which is defensible on both sides.

The new Macedonian government worked hard to establish good relations with its neighbours, concluding a number of cross-border agreements and nominating liaison officers to improve operational links. The previous VMRO-DPMNE government frustrated attempts to develop better relations with UNMIK and KFOR on cross-border cooperation. Macedonian officials acknowledge that co-operation between the ABB and KFOR has improved and that KFOR now acts more decisively against smuggling.¹⁸⁰ The present government approached UNMIK to offer help on cross-border crime and weapons smuggling, and to include SALW-related issues, in particular illegal trafficking, in the Interim Protocol on Police Cooperation concluded in November 2002. In February 2003, the Macedonian Defence Ministry and KFOR agreed on the co-ordinated protection of the Kosovo border, including establishing a hotline to exchange information on border incidents. The Macedonian Defence Minister Vlado Buckovski was the first high-ranking Macedonian official to visit Pristina since the crisis of 2001.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Barnett N, *op cit*, p 49.

¹⁷⁶ Allegedly, somebody from the international community walked into their camp and explained that it would be in their interests to return to Kosovo.

¹⁷⁷ 'Rebels in Lipkovo area announce "new war" in Macedonia in spring', 19 December 2002, www.csees.net/news

¹⁷⁸ For more on the Macedonian-Kosovo border dispute see: Nikolic D, 'Macedonian Border Dispute Nearing End', *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, Balkan Crisis Report no 211, Skopje, 22 January 2001; Liewer S, 'Kosovo ethnic Albanians angry at U.N. decision to turn their land over to Macedonia', *European and Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Kosovo bureau, 5 March 2002; Fetahu A, 'Macedonians enraged by Kosovo vote', *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, Balkan Crisis Report no 339, Skopje, 30 May 2002.

¹⁷⁹ Barnett N, p 47.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Stevo Pendarovski, presidential adviser on national security, Skopje, July 2002.

¹⁸¹ 'Macedonia, KFOR agree on coordinated protection of Kosovo border', 13 February 2003, www.csees.net/news

In January 2003, the Macedonian government signed a co-operation agreement with the FRY (now Serbia and Montenegro) on Combating Organised Crime. After the downfall of Milosevic, the policing of the FRY border in Southern Serbia by Serb police had also weakened, while under the previous regime it used to be robust, although often enforced by brutal means. Nebojsa Covic, Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Southern Serbia, in an effort to gain support from the international community, tried to ensure that the army and police did not engage in acts of brutality and could not be accused of 'living in the Milosevic era'. Macedonians claim that this changed set of priorities weakened border protection on the Serb side.

Facilitated by NATO, negotiations are underway between the Ministries of Defence of Albania and Macedonia on an agreement on joint control of the border. Proposals for joint border patrols, would, if followed up, curtail organised crime and illegal crossings.¹⁸² The border with Bulgaria is also a concern, as Bulgaria is a haven for stolen cars and other illegal goods.

Overall, the international community was slow to react to the challenge posed by organised crime in the Balkans, as other issues, such as humanitarian intervention against the Milosevic-inspired wars and democratisation efforts, occupied the international agenda. The US government was the first to recognise and take up the problem of cross-border crime and smuggling, having facilitated the establishment of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative Center for Combating Cross-Border Crime (SECI Center), a liaison body for police and customs officers from across the broader region. Recently, the EU and several individual European governments started to address the challenges of cross-border crime and smuggling more seriously. The EAR took the lead in the issue of border management. This includes the establishment of a border police service and border demarcation. Currently, the 'broad green' border (i.e. no permanent installations) is largely unmanned, and SALW movements can easily go undetected.

Effective action to improve border security and prevent crime faces a number of challenges. Firstly, the border terrain is largely mountainous. In the SFRY era, the only borders which were tightly guarded were those with Bulgaria and Albania, due to the nature of the regimes in both countries and their policies of isolation. At the moment, even with better functioning border controls and a more advanced physical infrastructure, it is hard to envisage that all illegal crossings can be effectively closed. It may prove more effective to strengthen efforts to stop criminal gangs when they are inside the countries, by better intelligence gathering, proper surveillance, co-operation with counterparts across the border and pre-emptive measures against suspicious targets. These, however, will also require elimination of corruption among law-enforcement personnel.

Secondly, one factor relevant to the debate about borders is whether a desire for a Greater Albania has much support. This does not appear to be the case in Albania, and the DUI has publicly renounced this idea in Macedonia. However, the Albanian diaspora, and some Kosovar politicians, may not be so keen to abandon such aspirations. Any revival of this idea in the heart and minds of the Albanian population would be likely to challenge the present borders.

Thirdly, the Macedonian government is forced to tolerate the 'grey sector' of the economy, much of which is based on smuggling, as it cannot create enough jobs. It fears that unemployed and poor people could be more of a public danger as they could engage in violence. It thus prefers a degree of tolerance, facilitated by corruption, as a safer option for the time being. The World Bank estimates that 25 percent of GDP is produced in the 'grey' economy, second in scale only to Bulgaria, and 31 percent of the workforce is engaged in the black market.¹⁸³

¹⁸² 'Albania has no information on patrolling along border with Macedonia', 10 December 2002, www.csees.net/news

¹⁸³ <http://www.worldbank.org.mk/wb-mk.htm>

The role of the international community

Due to its proximity to Western Europe, the Balkans has been the focus of significant intervention by the international community, whose engagement in Macedonia occurred by extension of its presence in Kosovo. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) had been involved in confidence-building measures in the 1990s, among other players. Yet the role played by the international community in Macedonia had been ambiguous. On the one hand, it has made commendable efforts to prevent conflict from escalating out of control and to convince the opposing sides to resolve their differences by peaceful negotiation. On the other hand, international engagement in Macedonia has often appeared to ignore local realities, while the policies of Western governments have at times seemed confused or contradictory.

The international community can justifiably claim success for its part in bringing the conflicting parties in the 2001 crisis to the negotiating table. It fostered the Ohrid Agreement, which saved the country from further bloodshed, which in turn relied on a prior agreement between Ali Ahmeti and NATO and the US. This provided some assurance to the Macedonian negotiators.¹⁸⁴ NATO troops have been present in Macedonia as part of the support structure for the KFOR mission in Kosovo since 1999. The international community also provided assistance for various aspects of security sector reform and offered a significant aid and development package.

Operation Essential Harvest and its aftermath

As part of the peace agreement, NATO agreed to preside over a voluntary collection programme of weapons handed over by the NLA in August–September 2001. This went under the code name *Operation Essential Harvest* and involved 3,500 NATO troops. As NATO later claimed,¹⁸⁵ this was never meant to completely disarm the NLA, but rather to provide a chance for it to signal its good faith in the Ohrid Agreement, thus building confidence in the larger peace process. This, however, was not how it was perceived at the time by Macedonians, who assumed that the primary purpose of the operation was the disarmament of the NLA. Much disappointment followed when it emerged that the weapons that had been handed over were merely the tip of the iceberg. Politically, *Operation Essential Harvest* was regarded as a success and a necessary step in building confidence between the communities, but its effect on arms proliferation was limited. As the report of Macedonia on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects points out, ‘although it did result in collection of certain amount of arms in illegal possession, it was not meant and it did not address the problem in a comprehensive manner and the vast majority of arms remained in illegal possession’.¹⁸⁶

On 26 September 2001, NATO announced the end of *Essential Harvest*. Weapons and ammunition were collected and transported to a disposal site at Krivolac in Macedonia, where they were later publicly destroyed. Ammunition and weapons deemed too unsafe to move were destroyed at the collection sites. A total of 3,210 assault rifles, 483 machine guns, 161 mortars and anti-tank weapons, and 17 air defence weapons systems were collected and destroyed. Also destroyed were another 397,625 mines, explosives and items of ammunition.¹⁸⁷ Four armoured personnel carriers and tanks that had been seized by rebels from Macedonian security forces were also handed in. NATO proclaimed the operation a success as it had collected more than the 3,000 weapons – the target that had been agreed with the NLA. Based on intelligence reports claiming a stockpile of 5,000 weapons, the NLA had handed in more than half their weapons.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ On the events surrounding the signing of the Ohrid Agreement see Popetrevski V, Latifi V, ‘The Ohrid Framework Agreement Negotiations’, in *Ohrid and Beyond*, pp 49–57.

¹⁸⁵ Thiessen M, November 2001 FNS-BICC conference on SALW, Skopje.

¹⁸⁶ <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/docs/nationalreports/2002/macedonia.PDF>

¹⁸⁷ Source: NATO website, www.afsouth.nato.int/operations/skopje/harvest.htm.

¹⁸⁸ Kusovac Z, ‘Ali Ahmeti – Political representative of the National Liberation Army of Macedonia’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 19 September 2001.

Many Macedonians, however, claimed the operation had merely allowed the NLA to rid their stockpiles of obsolete guns to make way for newer weapons.¹⁸⁹ The Macedonian government had insisted on the collection of at least 7,000 weapons based on the NLA strength of 7,000 combatants.¹⁹⁰ In the duel that followed, NATO argued that with fewer weapons in rebel hands, Macedonia would be more stable and that the disarmament should be seen a gesture to the Macedonian parliament to begin reforms that would benefit the Albanian minority.

Yet just a month after the end of *Essential Harvest* in the village of Tanuse, Macedonian police and army officials uncovered a buried cache of 'rocket launchers, more than a dozen anti-tank mines, several machine guns and Kalashnikov assault rifles, about 60 hand grenades and a substantial quantity of explosives'.¹⁹¹ The discovery served to undermine the operation as a confidence-building measure and fuelled unease among the Macedonian community. More recently, NATO sources have claimed that the NLA surrendered only around 10 percent of their weapons.¹⁹²

Meanwhile, NATO launched other operations to seize weapons and cut the NLA's supply chain. During *Essential Harvest*, NATO discreetly attempted to monitor how much weaponry the NLA took out of Macedonia for storage or burial.¹⁹³

At the same time, however, US policy in Macedonia has remained unclear, especially as far as the activities of Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) are concerned. There are continuing allegations that the US security consultancy assisted the NLA and was present with them in Aracinovo.¹⁹⁴ NATO coordinated the evacuation of the NLA fighters with their weapons from Aracinovo during the conflict.¹⁹⁵ It is an open secret that KLA fighters in Kosovo had close links with US military instructors. However, such links turned into a liability when fighting started in the Presevo valley. Aid to Albanian insurgents continued in Macedonia, although the criminal links of some of these groups had already become well known.¹⁹⁶ MPRI has now been replaced by Booz Allen Hamilton, another US security consultancy, which has little experience in the Balkans.

Task Force Fox (TFF), with 750 personnel (and 250 in reserve), replaced Task Force Harvest. Its official mandate was to protect the international monitors overseeing the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. Task Force Fox expired on 15 December 2002, and was followed on 16 December by 'Operation Allied Harmony', numbering 450 troops.. The EU assumed NATO's responsibilities on 31 March 2003, launching 'Operation Concordia' under the leadership of Admiral Rainer Feist. The mandate of *Allied Harmony* was two-fold: its operational elements provided support for international monitors such as the OSCE and the EU Monitoring Mission, which together monitor the political situation and advise the government on military reform; while its advisory elements assisted the government in taking control of security throughout the country.¹⁹⁷ *Concordia*, a 350-strong force, is more a monitoring mission than a peacekeeping one. Militarily, little has changed, as the same troops are performing largely the same duties,¹⁹⁸ while the numbers of US personnel were small anyhow. The political ramifications are more significant, however. To Albanians, NATO and the US were largely synonymous and celebrated as the force behind the 'liberation' of Kosovo. There is a fear that taking NATO out of the picture will reduce the credibility of the

¹⁸⁹ International security officials claim they had reports indicating that many people were issued a new weapon as a reward for obeying NLA orders to turn in their old one.

¹⁹⁰ 'How many groups, how many guns?', *The Economist*, 25 August 2001, pp 26–27.

¹⁹¹ CNN, 'Macedonia arms cache fuels unease', www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/10/11/macedonia.arms/index.html, 11 October 2001.

¹⁹² Ripley T, 'Stakes high in Macedonia election', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 2002, pp 40–41.

¹⁹³ 'How many groups, how many guns?' *The Economist*, 25 August 2001, pp 26–27.

¹⁹⁴ See, for instance, Ordanoski S, 'Lions and Tigers: the militarisation of the Macedonian right', in *Ohrid and Beyond: a Cross-ethnic Investigation into the Macedonian Crisis*, IWPR, Skopje, 2002, pp 35–48. Ordanoski nevertheless stresses that these reports were not independently verified.

¹⁹⁵ International Crisis Group Report 'Moving Macedonia', p 7.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with a Skopje-based senior international official.

¹⁹⁷ NATO Press Release (2002) 131, November 2002.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Maria Thiessen, Skopje, January 2003.

European force among the ethnic Albanian population, lowering the effectiveness of the operation.

Macedonians have long resented what they regard as the international community's refusal to see the obvious, until policies started to change in the capitals of power. The initial denial that the proliferation of weapons from Albania and the Kosovo crisis had a profound impact on stability in Macedonia did not win many friends in Skopje. On the contrary, it led to a widespread belief that the international community is more inclined to turn a sympathetic ear to listen to Albanian concerns, leaving Macedonians to the mercy of events. The appearance of leaders who are believed to have criminal links side by side with senior Western politicians such as Tony Blair sent a message that notions of fair play and justice can be exploited according to political convenience.

Government officials claim that they long sought to persuade the international community to act upon SALW problems in Macedonia, as it became evident that arms coming from Albania had a huge destabilising potential and that conflict prevention in Macedonia should be put on the international agenda. In 1999, Macedonia proposed an initiative on SALW to the EU Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. This was not taken on board, although the general view of the proposal was favourable. Such policies led Macedonian officials to conclude that the international community was more interested in engaging in projects on border controls and legal change, but far more reluctant to collect weapons inside the country. Only the 2001 crisis made the international community acknowledge the problem. 'The region is on the agenda of terrorists, but terrorism is not on the Stability Pact's agenda,'¹⁹⁹ Macedonians believed. The decision to locate the Stability Pact-UNDP South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) in Belgrade rather than Skopje was interpreted in this light. In response came a proposal to create a national SALW centre to co-ordinate disarmament and control efforts.

What Macedonians expect from the international community is a greater awareness of how recent history has affected them, such as recognition of the impact of the Albania and Kosovo crises on Macedonia. They also seek acknowledgement that NATO has collected only a token amount of weapons and that illegal weapons are still a problem after *Essential Harvest* and pose a threat within the country.

Support for disarmament projects

International organisations – led by the UNDP Office in Skopje, operating together with the UNDP Small Arms and Demobilization Unit (SADU) of Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), SEESAC, and the OSCE Mission in Macedonia – are now keen to support the government in its disarmament efforts.

In this regard, UNDP is implementing a 6 months preparatory assistance project, called Small Arms Control in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (SACIM) to assist the government in its preparing of the ground for voluntary disarmament, strengthened security, sustainable development, and reducing the level of unintended death or injury among civilians.²⁰⁰

The UNDP assistance programme is based on a strategy consisting of two main elements: support to the Government in the development, preparation and implementation of its voluntary small arms surrender, collection and legalization initiative; and preparing the ground for a longer-term intervention via the development of a long-term strategy and project document on small arms reduction.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Nicola Todorovski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Skopje, January 2003.

²⁰⁰ The agreement between UNDP and the Ministry of Interior on the SACIM Project was signed in April 2003. The full title of the project is: 'Small Arms Control in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (SACIM) Preparatory Assistance Document, MCD/02/H08/A/1X/34'.

²⁰¹ Specific objectives concerning the voluntary small arms initiative foreseen include: supporting the development of the legal and operational framework for the national programme on general security enhancement through voluntary surrender of illicit weapons; and supporting the raising of public awareness, sensitising communities and promoting public participation in the national programme.

The current government is much more welcoming to the international presence than its predecessor.²⁰² The willingness to cooperate with international actors demonstrates that it wants to change the previous perception of its own population and that of the international community. Still, an underlying fear lurks that Macedonia might become another international protectorate, like Kosovo and Bosnia. For a small country, this seems a real possibility, fed by a perception that the Albanian community also has that goal. 'Friendly advice' by high-powered internationals is sometimes met with the response that Macedonian state institutions are perfectly capable of dealing with the issue. This influences the attitude towards the presence of international troops, which the government envisages should leave at the end of 2003.²⁰³ This, however, contradicts the claim that the Macedonian authorities would like the international community to play a more robust role in weapons collection and maintain security when the census results are released in autumn 2003.

Arguably, transforming Macedonia into yet another protectorate is not in the interests of the international community either. Indigenous institutions and local elected leaders can in the end create a better order, even if some aspects of it are likely to be messy in the short term. The West's overriding interest in South Eastern Europe lies in the region's destabilising potential and threats to neighbouring countries and those further afield, through smuggling, human trafficking and, more recently, as a safe haven for terrorists. Not surprisingly, the emphasis on creating viable security arrangements locally is paramount for countering such threats.

Public attitudes and the role of civil society²⁰⁴

Unsurprisingly, after the conflict, small arms issues provoke keen public interest, but discussing them is not easy. On the one hand, there is a need to hold an open and honest debate on the issues of SALW proliferation and prospects for disarmament: what realistically can and cannot be done? On the other hand, the topic is sensitive, since communities could easily start blaming each other for the initial armament and all the associated troubles. Therefore topics have to be chosen selectively and handled with care. Fear of shattering the fragile interethnic peace has led to a stifling atmosphere where certain issues cannot be openly discussed.

After a number of firearms incidents and more visible gunfire in and around towns and villages, some public pressure to rid society of guns started to emerge. This reflects changing attitudes to crime more generally. Public attitudes towards smuggling depend on the commodity smuggled: smuggling drugs, especially heroin, is regarded as evil, while cigarette smuggling is often viewed more as a regular business. Until recently, gun smuggling was not considered relevant to ordinary people's lives – people believed the arms simply transited Macedonia without affecting the country directly, so it was a problem for foreigners. After the conflict, and the increase in violent incidents in its aftermath, these attitudes changed significantly, as people started to realise the scale of the danger to their own society.

A decade of failed hopes and disillusionment brought widespread cynicism, with the general public starting to believe that politics was solely about profit. Many intellectuals turned to the non-governmental sector, which eventually emerged as one of the few booming industries in the otherwise struggling economy. The international community, despairing of corruption among official cadres, was prepared to put funds into civil society, which it viewed as being less corrupt and more accountable. Yet NGO development was severely affected by donor requirements on the kinds of projects undertaken, which favoured a 'multi-ethnic approach' and organisations with employees from a mix of ethnic backgrounds. While these are noble aims, the donor agenda

²⁰² International Crisis Group Report 'Moving Macedonia'.

²⁰³ For the discussion see International Crisis Group Report 'Moving Macedonia'.

²⁰⁴ This section was written together with Dana Plavcova of Saferworld.

does not always correspond to local circumstances, and it is sometimes unclear how much these NGOs can act as 'agents of change', particularly when many of them are still in the process of defining their own role in society. In spite of this, there are a number of NGOs who can indeed connect better and work much more effectively with their communities than is possible for state or international organisations. Though many NGOs are ethnically mixed, this is often simply because it increases their chances of gaining funding from international donors. However, there are NGOs who are multi-ethnic as a result of a natural process of acquiring qualified staff or because they work on common issues in multi-ethnic areas. It is sometimes questionable how successful these groups can be in communities which refuse to accept them on principle. Therefore it is also common for mono-ethnic NGOs to form partnerships with NGOs of different ethnic groups so that a 'joint' project is implemented in parallel in both communities, which can be more effective.

Despite some small signs of improvement, however, the truth is that the NGO sector is far from representing the type of inclusive, independent civil society to which donors aspire. Most NGOs are not only mono-ethnic, they also tend to be closely linked to particular political figures and lack wider support from society. As a recent USAID report on civil society notes, 'the NGO sector remains ethnically and politically divided with NGOs frequently identified with a particular political affiliation.'²⁰⁵ Nor are NGOs financially independent: 'For the most part, NGOs are still very donor dependent. Local sources of funding are practically nonexistent because of the difficult economic situation.'²⁰⁶ This means that in practice the large majority of NGOs, being established by and dependent on donors, are not constituency-based organisations. Only once they have received funding do some of them decide to hunt for a constituency. Some NGOs exist only on paper, having been registered simply to be ready for future activities, or even with no intention of actually doing anything. Some are little more than 'one-man-bands' or 'family businesses'. Others have emerged as service delivery agents for international organisations, capable of distributing aid and undertaking local projects but lacking the altruistic aims and focus of other NGOs. Former politicians have also established their own NGOs, and some existing groups became associated with particular parties or political figures; this has led to the politicisation of the third sector and limited its independent standing in the public's eyes; nor is it necessarily any more transparent than the government. Nonetheless, some genuine NGOs do exist throughout the country, mostly in the form of small, efficient groups that are addressing community needs.

In terms of work on SALW and security, many NGOs recognise that there is a problem and that there is a role for them to play, but very few actually have any experience working on such issues. Civil society efforts to combat proliferation of small arms have so far mostly involved conducting surveys, raising awareness and networking. There are NGOs interested and motivated to work on small arms issues, some of which have become members of networks such as the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and the South Eastern Europe Small Arms NGO Network, established at a Saferworld-hosted regional meeting in November 2002. There are potential local partners for conducting research, surveys, campaigning, education, advocacy, lobbying, and working with media and youth. Many NGOs have good capacity to do public awareness work, especially if provided with appropriate training; a first attempt at addressing this need was undertaken in June 2003, when Saferworld and UNDP Skopje organised a training seminar for about ten NGO participants on working on small arms, strategic planning, campaigning and advocacy. It should, however, also be acknowledged that civil society action on SALW issues can be dangerous, and the risks may be more than individuals are prepared to take.

There is a need to enhance NGOs' knowledge of small arms issues and build their skills in strategising, activity planning and project implementation before they can be

²⁰⁵ United States Agency for International Development, *The 2002 NGO Sustainability Index* (USAID, 2003).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p 113.

expected to deliver practical, high-quality outcomes and spread the disarmament gospel. Even those NGOs that have gained experience and respect working on SALW issues could have been more effective had they spent more time on strategic planning and organisational management. Nonetheless, to ensure that they represent their people and have a stake in their own community, it is of paramount importance that they can communicate their message in their own words, and the international community should refrain from putting words into their mouths.

The media is very important in public campaigning and awareness-raising. Currently, small arms issues are more typically covered by 'black chronicle' columns reporting accidents and homicides. Such coverage is generally sensationalist and often inflammatory, as it tends to politicise the issue. In Macedonia, reporting is often complicated by the fact that the media is divided by language. Journalists writing in either language cover the same events in a different way, putting a different spin on them. As Macedonians largely do not speak Albanian, few know what has actually been said (and often suspect the worst). In general, there is still a lack of professionalism among much of the media, and journalists from both sides are uncomfortable about interaction with their counterparts in the other community. A first step at addressing this problem came in April 2003 with a seminar on media training and reporting small arms issues held in Skopje by IWPR, Saferworld, and SEESAC. Much remains to be done to ensure that the public is properly informed and that reports on small arms possession are not deliberately skewed for political purposes. This cannot be done by training journalists alone, however; as this report has made clear, the whole issue of SALW possession and proliferation is complex, and only a comprehensive approach that deals with a number of factors simultaneously can hope to be effective.

4

Disarmament options in a multi-ethnic state

SINCE 1991, the Balkan conflicts have provided an ample supply of cheap and deadly weapons for war. Macedonia has become the latest victim of the migratory supply of arms that flow from crisis to crisis depending on demand. If not collected, these weapons will continue to threaten peace as they lie waiting for (and most probably facilitating) the next outbreak of violence in the Balkans. There is thus an urgent need to improve the daily security of citizens of Macedonia and implement practical disarmament projects. To be effective, however, any such disarmament initiatives need to be thoughtfully constructed, taking into account the political and social situation in the country, as well as the technical and practical limitations of what is possible.

The Macedonian government has been criticised for its inability to secure lasting stability in the country, its slow implementation of the Ohrid Agreement and, more recently, for its haste in initiating the national gun amnesty, which could go wrong if it is not prepared adequately. Only 36 percent of respondents in a recent survey believe the amnesty will be successful.²⁰⁷ At the same time, the government may feel that improvements in security are unlikely in the short term, and that delaying the amnesty would make little practical difference. It may not be entirely convinced that the proposed measures will work, but there appear to be no viable alternatives. Politically, it is important for the government to be seen to be acting decisively after so much talk of the need for disarmament, otherwise its pledges will lose credibility. Bowing to international pressure to postpone the initiative till spring – which the current government is suspected of by its opponents – is not popular and requires flexibility on both sides. In these circumstances, the government's efforts should be recognised and supported in what is likely to prove a difficult undertaking.

Even with the best of preparations, however, the 45-day amnesty will not solve all the problems relating to gun control. Everyone involved in security issues, both within Macedonia itself and in the international community, should realise that the amnesty is only the first step in a long process. This process will involve responding to a wide variety of challenges, which include: addressing domestic political concerns by cementing the foundations for a multi-ethnic state where members of all ethnic communities can feel secure; strengthening the state's capacity to combat organised crime; and improving regional stability, particularly by fostering greater co-operation on cross-border issues and by addressing concerns about the effects of the unresolved status of Kosovo on internal Macedonian politics.

Moreover, some communities may not respond to the proposed amnesty due to the legacy of mistrust, and it is highly likely that additional measures will need to be designed to respond to future developments. The chapter below outlines some of the factors which continue to influence practical disarmament and which should be considered when seeking to combat SALW proliferation and enhance security and community safety.

Political commitment

First and foremost, given the weight political parties carry in Macedonia, the main parties – in government and opposition alike – need to express their commitment to disarmament. This should be communicated both through public statements as well as the adoption of new laws, and also through informal dialogue with their own constituencies. Any significant arms control initiative would be jeopardised if there is no ‘buy-in’ from the parties, who can spread the message through their party networks. It is particularly important that weapons control initiatives are supported not only at the highest level, but also at the regional and local level, where implementation will take place. This means acknowledging the important role that public figures such as local mayors will have, and ensuring that they are ready to back disarmament.

Following the parliamentary elections of 15 September 2002, political tensions have reduced markedly, but have not disappeared altogether. The political commitment of both the SDSM and the DUI to building a viable and inclusive state has been significant enough to institute positive change. Consequently, the appeal of radical groups has considerably diminished. However, any hesitation or mistakes by the government can readily be exploited by nationalist forces on both sides. Politicians are therefore very mindful of the need to preserve interethnic peace in Macedonia. But this tends to restrict honest and open debate on the SALW problem in the country, which is much needed if practical disarmament is to take place. Such debate will inevitably open recent wounds and may revolve around the question of ‘who is to blame’. Politicians have to be very careful in discussing the nature of the problem and realistic options for weapons collection and gun control measures.

Police reform

One step on which all parties agree is the need for police reform. There is a general awareness across the spectrum that only a police force accepted by all Macedonian citizens, regardless of their ethnic group, can hope to combat threats such as organised crime and weapon smuggling effectively. This has led to moves towards developing a multi-ethnic police force, facilitated by the international community. These initiatives have apparently started to bear fruit, with the police having regained the trust of much of the Albanian community. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of the police is relatively low, and progress in fighting crime is painfully slow compared to the high expectations of what this initiative is to deliver. Moreover, although the objective of police ‘re-entry’ into the former crisis region has officially been achieved, the reality is that large areas are still not under full police control. In practice, this means that the already difficult task of preventing smuggling at the border is made harder by the lack of police presence further in.

Furthermore, multi-ethnic community police officers are incapable of combating increasingly serious armed crime. Since the end of the conflict, such violent crime has occurred more among members of the same community than between different ethnic groups. Gunfire and explosions have become increasingly common, especially in former crisis areas. The specific reasons for this escalation are unclear; however, some observers note that the police presence in these areas is less robust and the law is

less rigorously enforced. Another reason suggested by some commentators is that there are many former fighters with no income and no occupation other than further violence, who turn to criminal activity in an absence of other options.

Creating a multi-ethnic police force that is acceptable to all Macedonian citizens will be a long process, and it is essential that this is recognised both within Macedonia, and by the international community – and that resources are provided accordingly. The tasks of establishing full police control over all rural areas and destroying the organised crime networks are only possible if the police are better equipped and trained. It is also important that human rights awareness is integrated into police training, to ensure that the police do not lose their legitimacy among sections of the population.

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes

The absence of comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes for ex-combatants, such as those of the NLA and the Lions special forces police unit, has been noted.²⁰⁸ This issue created tensions in January 2003 when the Lions rebelled against attempts to disband the unit. The deal eventually reached with the Lions did not sit well with the DUI, as in its view former NLA fighters should have been afforded the same opportunities. All ethnic communities would benefit from a DDR programme for former police and military reservists as well as former NLA members. The poor economic situation in Macedonia makes this a particularly great need, and international organisations with experience in this field should work with the government to develop such a programme.

Weapons collection initiatives

Weapons proliferation is increasingly being recognised as a problem in Macedonia, and pressure is emerging among the public for disarmament. As noted above,²⁰⁹ though popular attitudes towards weapons possession have to be taken into account when planning weapons collection initiatives, the existence of a supposed ‘gun culture’ need not necessarily act as an impediment to such efforts. People in both communities have higher expectations of the state as the provider of security than before, stressing that they would rather see the state maintain law and order than to have to rely on themselves. Thus, if the state is strong and consistently fair in dealing with both communities, voluntary surrender of weapons is not only desirable, but actually possible. Macedonian respondents claimed that the idea of having a multi-ethnic police and Albanian representation has largely been accepted by the Macedonian majority, and some even claimed that their community members would be prepared to disarm first in order to set a positive example and as a confidence-building measure. Albanian representatives noted that despite the myth or reality of ‘gun culture’, it would be possible to disarm the Albanians if they felt that the institutions of the state were working in their favour.

Decision-makers will need to take a number of factors into account when undertaking a weapons collection programme in Macedonia. Firstly, they need to be aware of how any such programme would be perceived by the two main ethnic groups. There is a perception among the Albanian community that their ‘side’ had to pay for arms while Macedonians received guns for free. Whether fair or not, this belief is strongly held, and stories are frequently recounted about how weapons were distributed to ethnic Macedonians during the crisis. This may lead Albanians to be reluctant to give up their weapons without any compensation. On the other hand, compensation would make

²⁰⁸ See Bielej J, ‘NLA rebels left in limbo’, *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, BCR no 282, Skopje, 21 September 2001.

²⁰⁹ See section on ‘Gun culture’.

Macedonians feel that it mainly rewards the Albanian community, as this would undermine justice and benefit those who broke the law.

Secondly, they also need to consider the legacy of the conflict and the fragile nature of the interethnic peace. The experience of weapons collection in Albania, based on competition between municipalities (the one which collects the most arms and ammunition is rewarded with a development project, such as a clean water supply or road repairs, while the others get nothing)²¹⁰ may not be easily replicable in Macedonia due to the complex mix of ethnicity. If it is true that the Albanian community holds more illicit arms, they would have more weapons to hand over in exchange for development and their areas would benefit more. This could send an adverse message to Macedonians that international policies reward Albanians and their inclination to possess arms. There is already a perception that the international community invested money in conflict areas and rebuilt Albanian homes destroyed by shooting during the 2001 crisis, although the initial fighting was started by the Albanian side. Poor Macedonian areas which remained peaceful did not benefit.²¹¹

Thirdly, decision-makers need to think carefully about the logistical and technical provisions for the actual weapons collection. Some argue that it would be better if local police representatives collect weapons from their community members and hand them over to the authorities on condition of anonymity. Police stations will need training on the technical aspects of weapons collection, equipment and increased staff around collection points. Training on technical aspects of weapons' collection would also be required. This prompted the UNDP Skopje and other international agencies to propose postponing the amnesty to allow for better preparation and training.

Lastly, as noted above, it must be accepted that even a very successful weapons collection initiative will not in itself be enough to solve all SALW and security-related problems in Macedonia. In this respect, it is important that any such weapons collection programme fits coherently into a wider developmental agenda. The focus should not be on collecting a certain number of weapons or encouraging different regions to compete for funds, but rather on making sure the programme addresses real community needs and creates a better environment for economic and social development. The best incentive would be the promise of improved security, something which both communities agree is desirable. Weapons collection should be part of a broader political process aimed at confidence building. Community leaders, local authorities and civil society organisations all have valuable roles to play in assuring that this is successful.

Combating organised crime

Organised crime has a vested interest in instability, both because it makes it easier to continue to trade in arms illegally, and because instability means there is a greater market for these arms. With Kosovo in the neighbourhood, and Macedonia's position on one of the major smuggling routes to Western Europe, the existence of organised crime is not surprising. The traffic of illegal arms is not restricted to one ethnic group, but is a multi-ethnic business with criminal elements from across the Balkans profiting from the illegal trade of weapons and other contraband.

Despite improved co-operation with its neighbours under the new government, cross-border crime, including the trafficking of weapons, still needs to be tackled. Agreements were reached with UNMIK in Kosovo, the FRY and Albania; however, the borders remain porous and border guards are poorly trained, under-resourced and

²¹⁰ This approach is the current strategy of the third and ongoing phase of the UNDP-implemented collection programme in Albania, the SALW Control Project.

²¹¹ Interview with Peter Matthiesen, German Defence Attaché, Skopje, July 2002.

badly paid, while the mountainous terrain produces formidable obstacles to effective policing. In such conditions it may be more productive to try to stop criminals while inside the country through improved surveillance, intelligence gathering and pre-emptive measures, including the exchange of information with counterparts in neighbouring countries. As part of the reform effort, border patrols should be ethnically mixed to be more acceptable in the eyes of the local population. It would be advisable, at least initially, for the international community to supervise such border controls to prevent corruption. The international community should also provide technical and financial support to assist the Macedonian authorities in training staff in advanced customs techniques and intelligence gathering, and in improving systems of inter-agency and regional co-operation and information exchange.

The international community also needs to be more aware that organised crime cannot be prevented simply by improving the capacity of governments in South Eastern Europe. Arguably, Western states have not done enough to tackle crime from source and transit countries in South Eastern Europe before smuggled commodities reach their countries of destination in the West. Many of the same measures that are prescribed to countries in South Eastern Europe need also to be implemented more effectively in Western Europe, where there is also a need for more training on border issues, intelligence gathering, and so forth.²¹² Furthermore, in order to combat cross-border crime, which stretches across Europe without respect for international boundaries, it is increasingly necessary for national law-enforcement agencies to be able to share information quickly and efficiently. If it is to be truly effective, this information exchange will have to be a truly two-way process, so that local officials have the facts they need to act. Developing such information exchanges between agencies in Western and South Eastern Europe will be a complicated process because of the sensitive nature of the information exchanged, so it will be necessary to build trust gradually between relevant agencies of the different states.

Implementing laws on domestic weapons possession

The introduction of a new law on domestic weapons possession is very welcome. However, simply passing new laws will not by itself change the situation. All aspects of the state infrastructure should be ready to implement the new laws; otherwise they risk remaining on paper only or legitimising inconsistent application and enforcement. The government should make an honest assessment of where the difficulties in implementing this law may lie and, if necessary, seek international support in building its capacity to act.

Community involvement

No successful voluntary weapons collection can be undertaken without the co-operation and trust of the local communities. It is essential that local authorities, religious institutions and voluntary sector groups all back the project. Civil society organisations may act as a transmission belt between the government and its law-enforcement agencies and communities on the ground. The media is important in shaping public attitudes towards SALW and security issues and therefore also need to be persuaded to back disarmament and report weapons-related stories in a sensitive and non-inflammatory manner.

However, it is necessary to have realistic expectations of the capabilities and capacity of Macedonian civil society in determining what it can and cannot deliver. Much of it is

²¹² For a detailed analysis of the problem of organised crime in Europe, and suggestions for how organised crime can be combated more effectively, see Davis I, Hirst C and Mariani B, *Organised crime, corruption and illicit arms trafficking in an enlarged EU: Challenges and perspectives*, (Saferworld, 2001).

polarised across ethnic lines, some NGOs remain highly politicised, and many flourish with Western money, seeking to implement projects that suit donor requirements. The capacity of civil society needs to be developed further, especially in provincial areas, before it can deliver and act as an agent of change. International NGOs can play an important role in this capacity building by co-operating and sharing their experiences with local NGOs.

Despite its weaknesses, the active involvement of civil society and local government is essential for a successful voluntary collection program, and both should be used for public awareness campaigns aimed at informing and changing the population's attitudes towards weapons. However, expectations of the impact of civil society organisations should be long-term.

Report from the Skopje roundtable meeting 'Small arms and light weapons in Macedonia: priorities for action'

Holiday Inn, Skopje
19 March, 2003

Introduction

On 19 March 2003, almost 60 participants from the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, international organisations, diplomatic missions to Macedonia and national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research institutes gathered together for a roundtable meeting on *Small Arms and Light Weapons in Macedonia: Priorities for Action*.

Since 2000, South Eastern Europe has seen an emerging awareness of the threat posed by small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation to stability, peace building efforts and economic, political and social development. Initiatives such as the Szeged Small Arms Process,²¹³ the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe's Regional Implementation Plan on Combating the Proliferation of SALW,²¹⁴ the subsequent establishment of the South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of SALW (SEESAC)²¹⁵ and the recent UNDP initiatives in Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina all reflect the increase in micro-disarmament activities in the Balkans over the last few years. This growing regional understanding of the need to institute, and consolidate, SALW control activities, combined with the political context of the achievements made within the framework of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the present need to build on progress so far in Macedonia, provides a valuable opportunity to take action on the issue and support conflict prevention and normalization efforts in the country.

In this context, a national meeting on the topic of SALW was co-hosted by Saferworld and the Presidential Cabinet of Macedonia, in collaboration with the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), and a Skopje NGO, the FORUM Centre for Strategic Research and Documentation. Held with the purpose of promoting open and frank discussion on SALW issues as they relate specifically to Macedonia, the meeting brought together representatives from the Macedonian Presidential Cabinet, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Local Self-Government, from the UNDP, OSCE, EU and NATO/EAPC and from the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, Netherlands, Canada, Russian Federation and Switzerland in their capacity as policy- and decision-makers on the issue of small arms control.

The overall aim of the meeting was to assist in the identification of priorities for action to form part of a long-term national strategy. More specifically, key objectives of the roundtable were to:

- Provide an open forum for the discussion of SALW proliferation and control issues in Macedonia by government officials, political parties and key actors within the international community.
- Assist in the consolidation of political commitment and will for action through a joint exploration of possibilities for developing practical disarmament and collection measures as part of a long-term national strategy designed to stem the proliferation of SALW.
- Identify opportunities and challenges associated with practical implementation of effective non-proliferation and disarmament activities.
- Identify areas in which the international community can assist the Government of Macedonia to implement a long-term strategy and make substantial progress on SALW issues.

Utilising the main findings and recommendations of the Macedonia research project as a basis for discussion and debate, the roundtable featured four sessions on the primary thematic issues pertinent to the SALW problem in Macedonia: exploring the nature of the problem; disarmament and collection; illegal domestic possession and uncontrolled weapons; and identification of key priorities for action.

Summary of presentations and discussion

Opening statements

Following a welcome and introduction by Mr Paul Eavis, Director of Saferworld, opening statements were made by the President of Macedonia, Mr Boris Trajkovski, and His Excellency Mr George Edgar, the British Ambassador to Macedonia. Providing a frame of reference for the meeting, the opening statements emphasised the negative impact of small arms proliferation on Macedonia.

213 Established at a meeting in Szeged, Hungary in 2000, the Szeged Small Arms process is an informal forum which allows governments, civil society and international organisations to develop policies and practical projects that combat the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons across the South East European region.

214 www.stabilitypact.org

215 www.seesac.org

Illicit trafficking of SALW was highlighted as a serious concern. As it borders several key areas of proliferation in the Western Balkans – Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Albania – Macedonia is currently a recipient country, and a hub, for the illegal transfer of weapons. In the last ten years, the region has seen an almost continuous flow of weapons from one conflict zone to another: the north of Macedonia, which experienced serious unrest and armed violence in 2001, and is commonly referred to as the ‘crisis region’, is particularly vulnerable. The challenges of preventing and eradicating the influx of weapons in this area are complex. The limited capacity of the Macedonian state security services is compounded by mountainous and often inaccessible border areas, and the neighbouring states’ border control mechanisms are also under-resourced.

The wider implications of the high levels of diffusion and illicit trafficking were also highlighted, as SALW proliferation in this area is a problem that affects the entire region. Indeed, the point was made that arms trafficking in the Balkans has already impacted on Western European countries on various levels. The need for concerted action on the issue was underlined, as was the need for strong political will and effective anti-trafficking initiatives in all the countries concerned.

It was felt that specific measures against organised crime, including cross-border crime and arms smuggling, will be required. In addition, a need to collect the illegal weapons currently in Macedonia was emphasised, while speakers noted that the process of collection and disarmament should be approached carefully and methodically. Opening statements also underlined the fact that combating proliferation in Macedonia would be a lengthy process, and one that would require support from revised and updated legislation.

Session one – Small arms and light weapons in Macedonia: the nature of the problem

In the first session of the roundtable, a basis for discussion was provided by the presentations of Dr Anna Matveeva, Head of the Arms & Security Programme for Eastern Europe at Saferworld, and Mr Zoran Jachev of the NGO Transparency Macedonia. Dr Matveeva and Mr Jachev presented a summary of the key findings and recommendations resulting from research on SALW and related issues in Macedonia by Saferworld and BICC.

The nature of the proliferation of small arms in the country, primarily security-oriented possession, was discussed. Speakers highlighted the fact that the recent instability in the country, particularly the violence in the Spring of 2001, had resulted in a large increase in possession, both legal and illegal. The issue of divisions and mistrust between ethnic groups in the country, primarily between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians, was discussed. While the traditions of weapons possession were perceived to differ between the two groups, as were their main sources of small arms to an extent, it was agreed that levels of possession within both groups had increased substantially. The increase in possession is clearly in line with the rise in levels of, and perceptions of, insecurity, a trend supported by government statistics giving the number of applications for firearms licenses before and after 2001.

The point was made that aside from issues of traditional possession, or ‘gun culture’, weapons possession closely correlates with community security, or, on a basic level, how safe people feel. This dynamic in turn leads to the question of how to increase perceptions of security and thus lower the demand for weapons, which will depend on progress in a number of areas. It was agreed that a combination of political, social and economic development, in addition to specific small arms control initiatives such as border control and collection, would be necessary if security is to be improved in the longer-term.

On this note, Mr Hari Kostov, the Minister of the Interior of Macedonia, gave a presentation on domestic initiatives and future plans to combat the proliferation of SALW in Macedonia. Mr Kostov underlined the points made in the opening statements regarding the regional and international nature of the problem and stressed the Macedonian Government’s commitment to take comprehensive action on weapons diffusion in the country. However, the point was made that engaging the support of all relevant government ministries and the international community will be required if security is to be enhanced and SALW to be addressed effectively.

Mr Kostov outlined the legislative action the Government is preparing to take. The laws governing civilian possession and carrying of firearms are to be reformed, with substantial amendments, particularly in relation to the carrying of firearms in public places. In addition, new legislation regarding a national collection effort is to be passed. It was envisaged that a national co-ordinating body would be established to oversee practical collection and disarmament activities in the country. Composed of representatives from government, civil society and parliament, the co-ordinating body would deal with various SALW control measures, including capacity building, awareness raising, legal reform and the societal dimensions of weapons proliferation. The new legislation is expected to come into effect in June 2003, and Macedonian civil society is to be consulted on the draft, which will be debated publicly prior to adoption.

Further to legal reform, a national strategy is under development. In close co-operation with UNDP FYROM, who have developed project proposals for SALW control, the Ministry of the Interior is currently formulating a strategy which, as well as the legislative action and co-ordinating mechanism noted above, will also include weapons collection.

Session two – disarmament and collection

Dr Owen Greene chaired the second session and gave an introductory presentation on lessons learned in practical disarmament, which framed the following presentations and discussion. His overview outlined best practice on legislation, voluntary surrender and weapons amnesties, highlighting the need for practical, safe and community-oriented approaches to collection. In terms of legislation, Dr Greene observed that in South Eastern Europe laws governing civilian possession of firearms were in general usually substantially restrictive and balanced. However, he noted that the implementation of these laws was often not as effective as would be desired, and that governments should be aware that legislation without comprehensive and impartial enforcement will not solve problems of illegal possession, a point echoed by other speakers. On the topic of collection, Dr Greene summarised the models employed in various contexts, emphasising the need to choose relevant incentives for communities and noting the potential risks of monetary compensation for weapons surrender, primarily the danger of further stimulating flows of illicit weapons and of 'rewarding' those in possession of unregistered, and therefore illegal, guns.

The 'buy-back' approach, involving financial compensation for illegal arms, has however, brought some success in Croatia. Mr Lav Kalda, formerly a senior official within the Croatian Ministry of the Interior with responsibility for the Croatian national programme to reduce small arms proliferation, gave a presentation outlining the strategies employed and his experience of collection initiatives. The Croatian national programme involved a series of amnesties, one of which was combined with a buy-back phase that resulted in large numbers of surrendered small arms. Mr Kalda acknowledged the drawbacks of offering financial incentives – the risks Dr Greene outlined, and of fraud, and the extremely high costs of such programmes – but felt that in specific contexts they could bring substantial results in a short space of time. In terms of amnesty periods, Mr Kalda stressed that these should not be prolonged indefinitely, and that it is essential that a clear message be communicated to the public at the end of an amnesty that illegal possession will not be tolerated and offenders will be prosecuted.

Mr Kalda also spoke about the challenges facing voluntary surrender and collection programmes, in particular the difficulty of engaging widespread public support in a post-conflict context. Both Mr Kalda and Dr Greene highlighted the need for sensitivity in a recently, or potentially, unstable environment and for utilising a collection methodology appropriate for a specific situation. The need to employ different approaches to disarmament and voluntary surrender in different communities was also clear from the discussion following the presentations, which highlighted the ethnic divisions and sensitivities surrounding the issue of weapons possession in Macedonian society.

The key lessons learned from the Croatian experience in this area were in Mr Kalda's view the need to take a 'humanitarian approach' to SALW control, particularly to amnesty and voluntary surrender, and to engage in sustained public awareness raising and public information campaigns to begin changing attitudes to gun ownership. Mr Wolf-Christian Paes, of BICC, supported this point in his presentation on the role of civil society in disarmament and collection programmes, emphasising the value of involving local NGOs in awareness raising campaigns. Civil society organisations often have the skills and experience to equip them better than governments to disseminate more targeted information, packaged in a manner that appeals to the public. In addition, in certain circumstances, the impartiality associated with NGO awareness raising provides a good counter-balance to 'official' public information messages, which may carry with them political baggage, particularly in a post-conflict environment.

This aspect of collection and disarmament programme implementation was also noted by Major General Zehedin Tushi, Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff within the Macedonian Ministry of Defence. Major General Tushi's presentation on progress and current government priorities for disarmament and demobilisation highlighted the need to build trust between citizens and the authorities following periods of instability. In the discussion following Session Two, and Session Three, participants stressed the need for the Macedonian security forces to be proactive in gaining the confidence of communities.

The Macedonian Government is hopeful that a successful small arms collection programme will increase confidence in the government, and Major General Tushi underlined the need to enhance security, both as a tool for, and as a result of, disarmament. He also noted that the role of local authorities, which have gained responsibilities in some areas as part of wider moves to devolve power, in collection initiatives should not be under-estimated. This point was picked up in the discussion by Mr Toni Koceski, the Mayor of Vratnica, who stressed that local government needs to be fully engaged in disarmament initiatives if its advantages of localised knowledge and community interaction are to be fully utilised. In addition, it was felt that both local government and civil society could provide valuable input to central government planning and policy development on SALW.

Session three – illegal domestic possession and uncontrolled small arms and light weapons

The third session of the roundtable explored the role of legislation and wider regional initiatives and expanded on issues raised earlier – namely the need for public confidence in the authorities and the role of local government.

An introduction to the background of the current efforts of the Macedonian Government in the area of SALW control was given by the session's chair, Mr Trpe Stojanovski of the Macedonian Ministry of the Interior. In the broad security context, the point was made that Macedonia aspires to join both the EU and NATO, and Ambassador Nikola Todorcevski, the Macedonian National Co-ordinator for the Stability Pact, made the point that the country must therefore reduce its levels of SALW proliferation in order to qualify for membership. Although it was recognised that this would be a lengthy process, the current initiatives underway in the region, and internationally, provide helpful guidance and the opportunity for concerted action.

Mr Stojanovski outlined the initiatives taken by the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the framework for action provided by the Pact's Regional Implementation Plan for Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the UN Programme of Action, for which he expressed the Macedonian Government's support. Both of these agreements contain commitments to improving and strengthening legislation governing arms possession, import and export. Mr Dennis Brennan, Interim Team Leader and Legal Adviser at SEESAC, presented on the need to act on these commitments.

Mr Brennan stressed that laws cannot do what a political process cannot do, and that without sustained political will and commitment disarmament will inevitably be unsuccessful. He supported the points made by Dr Greene in the previous session that a law is only as good as its implementation, noting that a 'bad' law is one that is not enforceable and thereby risks remaining only on paper. Mr Brennan emphasised that the practical aspects of enforcement must be taken into consideration when drafting SALW control legislation, as a bad law is worse than no law at all. This point was picked up on in the following discussion, when participants raised concerns that if legislative regulations are too tough they may discourage citizens from coming forward to register their weapons for a new licence.

Mr Brennan also highlighted the need for an intensive effort to inform people about existing regulations governing possession, and in particular about new legislation, both to assist compliance and to reassure citizens. Anonymity is a common concern when legislation governing amnesties is introduced, and it was noted that the latest draft of the Macedonian legislation on amnesty provides for anonymous surrender of illegal weapons. Legal reform related to arms control is progressing in various countries throughout the region. Mr Brennan gave a brief summary of the SEESAC Arms Law Process and discussions during a regional roundtable on arms export control and civilian possession legislation held in November 2002.

Further points on the issue of legal reform were made by Mr Aleksandar Gestakovski, the Macedonian Minister for Local Self-Government. As part of the implementation of the Framework Agreement, a range of functions is being devolved to local government and municipal authorities. As various SALW control responsibilities, issuing firearms licenses for example, are being transferred from central to local authorities, Mr Gestakovski stressed the benefits of consulting local authorities during the drafting of new legislation. Such consultation would also ensure transparency and would assist in information-sharing and awareness raising within the devolved branches of government. Echoing points made earlier regarding the need for disarmament programmes to differentiate between the varying needs of individual communities, he felt it was essential that central government understands the different community perspectives on the implementation of new legislation and collection.

In terms of the implementation of collection programmes, Mr Gestakovski emphasised that the Mayors have a key role to play, in both the planning and implementation phases of projects. He felt strongly that local authorities should be represented on co-ordination committees and local media outlets engaged in awareness raising and reporting about weapons collection. Weapons for development initiatives in particular raise significant issues for local authorities. Prioritisation of infrastructure projects to benefit the whole community and sensitivity to localised ethnic tensions are best handled by local government, which has the insight and ability to prevent problems developing.

Participants supported Mr Gestakovski's views during the discussion, agreeing that local government involvement in collection is essential and that a strategy for central and local government co-operation should be prepared, particularly with regard to implementation. It was clear that the great majority of participants felt that enhanced security during collection, the effective implementation of SALW control legislation and the prevention of any resulting increase in inter-ethnic tension would depend on a good relationship between local authorities and central government.

Session four – combating proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Macedonia: identification of key priorities for action

The final session was introduced by Dr Matveeva, who underlined the substantial progress made in the area of SALW control over the last couple of years. Increased commitment from governments and more realism displayed by the international community, combined with more regional co-ordination have significantly improved the prospects for disarmament in the region. She noted, however, that the cornerstone of any successful reduction programme is building and maintaining political will for SALW control and collection and keeping a clear focus on the ultimate objective of creating a safe and secure environment in Macedonia.

Framing the discussion to follow, Dr Matveeva emphasised that much remains to be done and summarised key points raised during the first three sessions. On the issue of collection, questions were raised about: whether to tackle organised crime before or after weapons collection from communities; whether to trial collection initiatives in the most sensitive areas or to pilot programmes in communities away from the crisis regions; whether incentives should be offered; whether the weapons for development collection approach would work in Macedonia; and whether the collected weapons would be destroyed. The practicalities of local registration and surrender and the consistent enforcement of an amnesty were also raised in discussion.

Mr Lazar Kitanovski, Security Adviser to the Prime Minister's Office, made the closing remarks at the roundtable. He spoke about the need to prepare carefully for a collection programme. He noted that successful collection would depend largely on the available capacity in the three crucial areas – political, institutional and social. Mr Kitanovski stressed that if sufficient linkages can be made between political capacity (or the will to move things forward) and institutional capacity (namely the resources of the local authorities or efficacy of legislation), then the results of projects can be optimised. Mr Kitanovski closed by stressing the importance of civil society capacity to collection efforts, and highlighted the role that local government, NGOs, the media and communities have to play in engaging public support for an initiative that should be perceived as a project to benefit all of Macedonian society.

Key conclusions and recommendations

In the plenary discussion, several recommendations and areas for action were identified by participants.

- **Incentives** Communities in the crisis areas in the north of the country remain underdeveloped and sporadic violence continues. Insecurity, combined with traditional affiliation to firearms, means that communities will be reluctant to give up their weapons, and this must be recognized. *Communities should be engaged and involved in identifying solutions, and incentives will be necessary as a cessation of violence and stability are unlikely to be sufficient to encourage voluntary surrender.*
- **Combating crime** Perceptions of security are pivotal to the success of disarmament initiatives and priority should therefore be given to addressing the organized criminal elements that threaten security. *A comprehensive approach to collection is needed in order to deal with the source of threats to citizens' security and improve public confidence in the authorities.*
- **Legislation and the role of local government** Local government and Mayors have a potentially crucial role to play, particularly given the high profile recognition, and possible reward in the form of infrastructure development, of successful collection efforts in their municipality. *There is a need to assess the practicalities and role of local government in collection and disarmament initiatives before finalizing legislation in order to ensure municipal authorities are fully involved in the development of all aspects of a national strategy to combat SALW proliferation.*
- **Co-ordination** There does not appear to be a clear plan or vision of the different aspects of the SALW control initiatives foreseen, eg awareness-raising projects, weapons amnesty, collection and registration programmes and the UNDP FYROM proposal for weapons for development pilot projects. *A clear vision, objectives, timelines and a co-ordination mechanism need to be articulated in order to ensure that SALW control activities in Macedonia are mutually reinforcing and complimentary.*

AGENDA**Small Arms and Light Weapons in Macedonia: Priorities for Action
Hotel Holiday Inn, Skopje, 19th March 2003**

An international roundtable discussion co-hosted by Saferworld (UK) and the Presidential Cabinet of Macedonia, in collaboration with the Bonn International Center for Conversion (Germany) and FORUM Centre for Strategic Research and Documentation

Supported by the UK Government

Wednesday 19 March 2003

0845–0930 Registration

0930–1000 Welcome and introduction – *Objectives and desired outcomes*
Mr Paul Eavis, Director, Saferworld

Opening address

Mr Boris Trajkovski, President of the Republic of Macedonia

Opening remarks

HE Mr George Edgar, United Kingdom Ambassador to Macedonia

1000–1130 Session One – Small arms and light weapons in Macedonia: nature of the problem – *A summary of key findings and recommendations resulting from the Saferworld-BICC Research Report*

CHAIR: Mr Paul Eavis, Director, Saferworld

SPEAKERS:

Dr Anna Matveeva, Saferworld

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons

Mr Zoran Jachev, Transparency Macedonia

Illegal domestic possession and uncontrolled small arms and light weapons

Mr Hari Kostov, Minister of the Interior

Domestic initiatives and future intentions to combat proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Macedonia

1130–1200 Refreshment break

1200–1330 Session Two – Disarmament and collection

CHAIR AND INTRODUCTION: Dr Owen Greene, Saferworld Board Member

An overview of lessons learned in practical disarmament

SPEAKERS:

Mr Lav Kalda, formerly of the Ministry of the Interior, Croatia

Experience of weapons' collection in Croatia

Gen. Zeheddin Tushi, Ministry of Defence

Progress and current priorities for disarmament and demobilisation

Mr Wolf-Christian Paes, BICC

The role of civil society

Open discussion

1330–1430 Lunch

1430–1600 Session Three – Illegal domestic possession and uncontrolled small arms and light weapons

CHAIR: Mr Trpe Stojanovski, Ministry of the Interior

SPEAKERS:

Mr Dennis Brennan, Acting Team Leader, SEESAC

Strengthening legislation and regulations governing domestic possession and export/import

Mr Aleksander Gestakovski, Minister of Local Government

Community perspectives

Amb Nicola Todorcevski, National Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact,

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The broader security context

Open discussion

1600–1630 Refreshment break

1630–1715 Session Four – Combating proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Macedonia: Identification of key priorities for action

CHAIR: Dr Anna Matveeva, Saferworld

Open discussion (illegal domestic possession, legislation and regulations, creating the conditions conducive to disarmament and collection, and broader security issues)

1715–1730 Closing remarks

Mr Lazar Kitanovski, Security Advisor to the Prime Minister

**Small Arms and Light Weapons in Macedonia: Priorities for Action
Hotel Holiday Inn, Skopje, 19th March 2003****List of Participants****International and Local Organisations**

Mr Paul Eavis	Saferworld
Dr Anna Matveeva	Saferworld
Ms Dana Plavcova	Saferworld
Mr Tony Monaghan	Saferworld
Dr Owen Greene	Saferworld Board Member
Mr Wolf-Christian Paes	BICC
Mr Hans Risser	BICC
Mr Zoran Jachev	Transparency Macedonia
Mr Saso Ordanoski	FORUM Centre for Strategic Research and Documentation
Mr Lav Kalda	(former) Ministry of the Interior, Croatia
Mr Veton Latifi	IWPR/MTV
Ms Maria Theissen	NATO Civilian Liaison Office, Skopje
Mr Ingimar Ingimarsson	NATO Civilian Liaison Office, Skopje
Mr Mikael Griffon	NATO / EAPC – Arms Control and Police Affairs
Mr Constantin Cakioussis	Office of the Special Representative of the EU
Mr Frode Mauring	UNDP Resident Representative
Mr Kim Johnsen	UNDP
Mr Vasilik Neofotistos	UNDP
Mr Ataul Karim	Head of UNMIK Liaison Office, Skopje
Dr Oleg Levitin	UNMIK Liaison Office, Skopje
Mr Harry Broer	Senior Adviser of the Police Development Unit, OSCE
Mr Chris Tomley	OSCE
Mr Henry Bolton	EU
Mr Dennis Brennan	Interim Team Leader and Legal Adviser, SEESAC
Ms Chrissie Hirst	NGO Co-ordinator, SEESAC
Ms Svetlana Djurdjevic Lukic	Communications Officer, SEESAC
Mr Henk van der Wal	Deputy Head of Mission Office, EUMM
Mr Edward Joseph	International Crisis Group, Skopje
Mr Dane Talevski	International Crisis Group, Skopje
Mr Andreas Klein	Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Skopje
Mr Emil Kirjas	Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Skopje
Dr Suzette Grillot	Department of Political Sciences, University of Oklahoma (Small Arms Survey)
Ms Shelly Stoneman	Small Arms Survey, Research Assistant

Government of the Republic of Macedonia Representatives

Mr Boris Trajkovski	President of the Republic of Macedonia
Mr Hari Kostov	Minister of the Interior
Mr Aleksander Gestakovski	Minister of Local Government
Mr Lazar Kitanovski	Security Adviser to the Prime Minister
Mr Igor Dzundev	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr Trpe Stojanovski	Ministry of the Interior
Lt Col Tomislav Rizevski	Deputy Chief of Division, Ministry of Defence
Major General Zehedin Tushi	Deputy Chief, Army General Staff
Mr Milanco Usprcov	State Adviser, Ministry of Defence
Amb Nikola Todorcevski	National Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr Igor Dzundev	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Svetlana Geleva	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Chief Inspector Trasan Bogoevski	Ministry of the Interior
Mr Gjorgilevska Cvetanka	Ministry of the Interior

Local Government & Political Party Representatives

Mr Toni Koceski	Mayor of Vratnica Municipality
Mr Boris Kondarko	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
Mr Igor Ivanovski	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia

Diplomatic Mission Representatives

Mr Drew Blakeney	Political Officer, US Embassy
HE George Edgar	UK Ambassador, UK Embassy
HE Dag Halvorsen	Norwegian Ambassador, Norwegian Embassy
Lt Col Hans Vos	Defence Attaché, Royal Netherlands Embassy
Mr Habib Massoud	Head of Office, Canadian Embassy
Ms Isabella Sami	Political Attaché, Canadian Embassy
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Mr Evgeny Igorov	Counsellor, Embassy of the Russian Federation

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COVER PHOTO: Macedonian police officers present what they say are weapons and ammunition captured from gunmen in the area of the village of Tanusevci near the Kosovan border, March 2001. © ASSOCIATED PRESS / BORIS GRDANOSKI.



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