Macedonia 2001 and Beyond:
New or Old War?

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The article investigates the security challenges in today’s Macedonia starting with the 2001 events, as well as the level of influence of the transnational organized crime over Macedonian society and state. The analysis identifies three issues underlying the 2001 conflict in Macedonia: poverty and unemployment, institutional weakness (lack of rule of law, legitimacy) and corruption and organized crime, characterizing it as a ‘new war’. The socio-economic difficulties as well as institutional weakness in Macedonia helped organized criminal groups to take control over society and state. The absence of a human security approach to the problems of Macedonia poses the country at risk of stepping back into a conflict.

I. Introduction

The social changes that took place during the last decades in Macedonia spread across all spheres of life. Society had been paying for the difficult and lengthy transition process from the socialist system: as a consequence poverty and criminality increased and the fabric of Macedonian society degenerated. The transition produced a system full of weaknesses which escalated in the 2001 conflict. Three issues fuelled the conflict: poverty and unemployment, institutional weakness (lack of rule of law, legitimacy) and corruption and organized crime.

The concept of human security, which is used in this article as theoretical framework of analysis, has radically expanded the understanding of security. The human security discourse shifted the security focus on the basic human needs. Macedonia’s strategic goal is EU and NATO integration: the main accent is on reforms in the military security sector. All public opinion polls however, suggest that the citizens are far less concerned with the

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safety of their state or with the global war on terrorism than they are with their mere survival (poverty, unemployment, corruption, etc.).³

Regional criminal groups exploited social problems and institutional weakness and contributed to the creation of the conflict that can be therefore characterized as a ‘new war’.⁴ ‘New wars’ are intra-state and characterized by criminal activities, privatizing militia or guerrilla/paramilitary groups aiming for material gain and using violence as a way of consolidating power.⁵ The role of diaspora⁶ in the ‘new wars’ is very important as well, as the use of propaganda (through media), the usage of symbolism, and new, revitalized nationalism for mobilization. There is also the presence of degenerate ruling elite and new class of mafia types. ‘New wars’ occur in areas of economic stagnation; they are supported by a small number of the population, however as demonstrated the final outcome is criminalization and even disintegration of society.

Seven years after the end of the conflict Macedonia still cannot answer to its domestic challenges. One can argue that the mainstream analysis fails to address and identify the real reasons for the occurrence of the violence in 2001. The period of 2002-2006 included post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation: the National Liberation Army (NLA) fighters were demobilized, a wide amnesty to everyone that participated in the conflict was granted, former combatants and the civilian population were disarmed. Furthermore a consociational democracy was established and the NLA leadership transformed in a political actor. The 2001 conflict is still labelled by international as well as domestic experts as ‘ethno-political’ conflict: neither language nor religious difference, however, proved sufficient to understand the omnipresent insecurity in Macedonia today. In a society where everything is securitized (i.e. the problems which are not necessarily threats are treated as such), the real security issues are not discussed publicly.⁷ According to Wæver, securitization is a procedure which attaches a label of urgency upon certain issues.⁸ This article aims to investigate the security challenges in today’s Macedonia as well as the level of influence of transnational organized crime over Macedonian society.

II. The Weaknesses Of Society – Poverty And Unemployment

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⁵ Kaldor, Mary, New and Old Wars, at p. 3.
⁶ The role of diaspora is mostly through financing the paramilitary and as well as military groups and sometimes also direct participation in those groups, as it was the case in the Yugoslav wars throughout the 90’s. The diaspora also aided the trafficking and smuggling of weapons.
“How stable is the security situation in Macedonia? [I]t is stable till midnight, afterwards I do not know”.

The two most important socio-economic concerns in Macedonia are poverty and unemployment. The transition process produced a “system full of weaknesses, however, the weaknesses of the system have, inevitably, become weaknesses of the individual; frequently frustrated by the lack of clear norms in behaviour, disoriented in terms of value structures and having weakened moral principles and feelings of aimlessness, etc.”.

Macedonia, one of the poorest of the former Yugoslav republics, “was born economically ’challenged’”. It has been calculated that the economic embargo imposed by Greece in the ‘90s costed Macedonia $80 million per month, while the UN blockade imposed on Serbia a total of $8 billion, due to the fact that most of the export and import of goods in Macedonia at that time had been conducted with and through Serbia: it was a very bad head-start for Macedonia on the road of transition. The UNDP Early Warning Report from 2003 includes a survey on citizens concerns. Both ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, ranked their concerns in the following order:

1. Unemployment (78.8%)
2. Poverty (66%)
3. Corruption (54.8%)
4. Crime (43.1%)
5. Ethnic problems (29.5%)

One year after the conflict, which was characterized as ethno-political, the top four concerns of the citizens were not ethnic. Interesting is also that the different ethnic communities in Macedonia ranked the concerns very similarly. Even before the conflict there were more than 300,000 unemployed (in a country of two million) and half of the employed were not paid on a regular basis.

The nature of unemployment is mainly structural with the existing tax wage being very high, thus increasing the cost of labour in an environment of a very high unemployment rate. After the conflict the country is still in the list of countries with the highest unemployment rates (around 40%), one third of the population lives on the brink of poverty (i.e. it can not supply regular meals) and there

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9 Interview conducted with Mr. Deralla, Xhabir journalist and leader of NGO ‘Civil’, 10 April 2007, Skopje, Macedonia.
12 Liotta, Peter H. and Cindy R. Jebb, Mapping Macedonia: Idea and Identity, at p. 76.
14 Vankovska, Biljana, Current Trends of the Circumstances in Macedonia, at p. 19.
have never been so many protests and hunger-strikes\textsuperscript{16} led by desperate citizens.\textsuperscript{17} Some analysts have warned that “the implementation of the Framework Agreement could deflect the government from addressing unemployment, but a long-term strategy to overhaul the economy has been drawn up in order to effect a real reduction in poverty and unemployment”.\textsuperscript{18} When asked about the main causes of poverty, one of the respondents answered:

I think that it is exactly the poverty caused by the clan-political structure and milieu in Macedonia, the one which does not allow an economic development; and that keeps them at the top of the economic food chain and us the ordinary citizens, it keeps us at the bottom. It keeps is in a situation in which we can start pointing fingers ‘yes, he is responsible for my impoverishment, he is responsible for the situation that my daughter cannot get good education or for the situation that my son is taking drugs at age 12’.\textsuperscript{19}

The UNDP National Report from 2001\textsuperscript{20} concluded that:

the lines of exclusion in the Macedonian society are complex and they are not primarily following ethnic lines (with the exception of the Roma), but party lines and lines of education of the population. In Macedonia awareness of this situation is not missing, but the political will for changing things is missing.\textsuperscript{21}

III. Regional Conflicts and Wars – Reasons For Increased Corruption and Organised Crime

Corruption and organised crime are so powerful in Macedonia that the causes of the conflict can be attributed to this phenomenon. The conflict officially started when a journalist discovered trafficking routes near the village of Tanishevci at the Northern border of Macedonia. This development fits into the ‘new war’ argument presented by Mary Kaldor:

\textsuperscript{16} There is a ‘camping-ground’ across the Assembly building in Skopje where the workers that have lost their jobs have been protesting since early Spring 2007; the author predicts that the camp will stay there for another year and a half at least.
\textsuperscript{17} Vankovska, Biljana, \textit{Current Trends of the Circumstances in Macedonia}, at p. 71.
\textsuperscript{19} Interview conducted with Mr. Xhabir Deralla journalist and leader of NGO ‘Civil’, 10 April 2007, Skopje, Macedonia.
\textsuperscript{21} National Human Development Report 2001 – Social Exclusion and Human Insecurity in FRY Macedonia, at p. 29.
These are wars which exacerbate the disintegration of the state – declines in GDP, loss of tax revenue, loss of legitimacy, etc. [...]. Above all, they construct new sectarian identities (religious, ethnic or tribal) that undermine the sense of a shared political community. Indeed, this could be considered the purpose of these wars.²²

In the Macedonian conflict, it seems that criminals sparked ethnic tensions to safeguard their interests. There exists a wide network of non-state criminal activities mainly focused on the illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs and humans.²³ It seems that in the Macedonian society in the area of corruption and organized crime, ethnic Macedonians and Albanians work together without any ethnic prejudices.²⁴ This ‘regional business’ is more focused on military equipment and weapons since “the numerous ‘fronts’ could easily absorb the weapons” ²⁵; however, trafficking of drugs and human trafficking also take substantial part of the overall activities. The circulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) remain a grave problem in the region. During the conflict around 10,000 pieces of weapons were distributed among the civilian population. In September 2002, it was estimated that the number of SALW in circulation was 150,000-200,000 pieces.²⁶ At the moment, there are at least 1 million arms in the region and 100,000 to 450,000 in Macedonia alone; their destruction costs five dollars a piece, making it a very expensive endeavour.²⁷ Trafficking of human beings has been a persistent problem in Southeast Europe ever since the beginning of the transition period in the countries of Southeast Europe, including Macedonia.

Poverty and wars in Southeast Europe are believed to be the reasons for increased organized criminal activities and criminalization of society. Few factors led to the impoverishment of the population in Southeast Europe: the collapse of communism, the liberalization accompanied by political and economic vacuum of the institutions and the number of conflicts and wars in the region. These factors also created a fertile ground for criminal networks. The growth of the vulnerability of individuals, especially women, to become victims of human trafficking is a result of the collapse of the social and economic systems, serious crumbling of certain traditional values, inadequate legal punishments for such crimes and especially the enormous increase of poverty in the countries of transition, composes one specific occurrence in the former socialist countries, including Macedonia. The growth of the unemployment level, the ‘feminization of poverty’ as a result of the process of transition has marginalized the women and made them become victims of the networks of human trafficking.²⁸ The institutional factors such as dispersion of decision-making power, gender prejudices, etc. also have a great role in gender inequality. In

²² Kaldor, Mary, *New and Old Wars*, at p. 3.
²³ Interview conducted with General-Brigadier Tim Cross, 8 May 2007, London.
²⁵ Vankovska, Biljana, *Current Trends of the Circumstances in Macedonia*, at p. 16.
²⁶ Vankovska, Biljana, *Current Trends of the Circumstances in Macedonia*, at p. 44.
these societies, there are greater prejudices against female victims of human trafficking, than towards the members of the criminal networks who are trafficking in humans and in many instances go unpunished. 29 Namely, there has been a great discrepancy between the charges that were made and the actual sentences performed, “difference between registered and sentenced crimes during the past two decades – indicator of the current existing weakness of the judicial system and inefficiencies of the courts”. 30 Very often there has been a direct link between the criminal groups which perform trafficking and the local authorities (either in a form of peace enforcing missions or local policemen). In this respect one can understand the meaning of Lupsha’s argument that “what is new is the fact that organized crime now possesses tools once reserved for nation-states”. 31 Furthermore in Lupsha’s article one can observe the evolving patterns and trends in different forms of organized crime and its evolution toward penetrations of legitimate businesses.

In the late period of transition, corruption has dramatically increased in Macedonia and elsewhere in the region. Vankovska divides the mafia’s spheres of influence into two spheres of influence: Albanian organized criminal groups control the Northwest and West part of the country, while the Macedonian groups (ab)use the state apparatus. 32 According to Transparency International, in 2006 Macedonia had a corruption index of 2,7 (on a scale 0-10, 0 being highest). 33 Between 1997 and 2000 alone, there were 134 cases of corruption filed against government employees and 567 cases of “abuse of official authority”. 34 Apart from abuses of power there are also the cases of taking bribes, which are most frequent in the health service, municipality administration offices, education, and customs. 35 If one refers to the ‘new war’ argument, the propositions for re-establishing law and order are the following: “reconstruction of political legitimacy. [...] So, political legitimacy can only be reconstructed on the basis of popular consent and within a framework of international law.”. 36 The lack of legitimacy is very closely connected to the condition in which the institutions in Macedonia currently find themselves. Furthermore, the question which one needs to analyse is whether securitization of criminal occurrences has taken place in Macedonia, supported by the analysis of who benefits from the ‘securitization’ and who benefits from the status quo. Regarding the question,

30 Caceva, Violeta, Criminal Activity During the Period of Transition in Macedonia, at p. 33.
32 Vankovska, Biljana, Current Trends of the Circumstances in Macedonia, at p. 16
34 Hislope, Robert, Organized Come in a Disorganized State: How Corruption Contributed to Macedonia’s Mini-War, in: Problems of Post-Communism (Volume 49, Number 3), M.E.Sharpe, New York, 2002, pp. 33-41, at p. 35. The latest case is against the former Prime Minister, Vlado Buckovski, from the time when he was Minister of Defense. At a plenary session on 2 August 2007 he was stripped from his diplomatic immunity and now he is eligible for a trial.
35 Caceva, Violeta, Criminal Activity During the Period of Transition in Macedonia, at p. 34.
who benefits from it being ‘securitized’ one can certainly answer that the potential victims, the ordinary citizens are the beneficiaries of terminating criminal occurrences. On the other hand, the current beneficiaries of the status quo of organized crime are not only the members of criminal networks, but also the corrupted officials. The fight against crime goes hand in hand with how society functions. A recent example of combating organized crime in Macedonia by the police forces reveals much about the overall attitude toward criminal groups.

A. Police Action ‘Mountain Storm’

The police action ‘Mountain Storm’ was conducted on 7 November 2007 with the aim to incarcerate the members of an armed criminal group which, according to the operative knowledge of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), was operating in the area of Shar Mountain. This group was collecting arms over a long period of time, planning an armed action and assaulting the local population. The criminal group was composed of persons wanted by international and local organizations that suspected them of having committed serious criminal offences and of partly being fugitives from Macedonian and Kosovan prisons. The action was conducted by an ethnically mixed police unit from MIA starting at 5 am the morning of 7th November.

Prior to the police action, the public was informed through the media about the existence of such groups, especially the escapees from the Kosovan prison ‘Dubrava’ and the group acting in the area of the village of Brodec. In the action, six persons were killed and 13 were incarcerated. The latter are still in prison and they are charged for “helping terrorist organization” (article 394-a, par. 2 from the Criminal Law of the Republic of Macedonia) as well as for “unlawful manufacture, possession and sale with weapons or explosive materials” (article 396 of the Criminal Law of RM).

The action ‘Mountain Storm’ was proclaimed successful by the Macedonian politicians as well as by the representatives of the international community. The media described the action as skirmish between the police forces and “a criminal-extremist gang of Lirim Jakupi – The Nazi and Ramadan Shiti” numbering from 15 to 50 members. The intentions of the gang were mainly trafficking of weapons, however also planning an armed

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40 In the aftermath of the police action, the beginning of ‘Peace Unlimited Festival’ was marked in Skopje. For the past eight years, the festival has been annually organized by NGO ‘Civil’ which is dedicated to the protection of human rights and freedoms and control of arms. ‘Civil’ conducted the disarmament of civilians during 2002 and 2003 in the areas affected by the 2001 conflict in Macedonia.
action. The Jakupi gang can be characterized as both criminal gang and extremist group. According to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Macedonia, “If a criminal gang composed of escapee Kosovan prisoners and their local ‘colleagues’ (i.e. from Macedonia) were goal of the action, than the action can be hardly proclaimed as successful, at least according to the number of persons that were killed during the action”. However, the biggest errors were made in the so-called ‘crises management’ part. First of all, the Minister of Internal Affairs and its Deputy gave just some sporadic statements on the action, but they informed in detail the foreign diplomatic missions in Skopje. It is unlikely to think that the Ministry will publicly state the results of the investigation regarding usage of fire-arms and force that caused the death of six persons. An even bigger error was the fact that the local population in Brodec was not informed about what had been happening in their village until the afternoon on November 7. Informing the local population is an essential practice of ‘crises management’.

IV. Institutional Weakness

The scholar Grzymala-Busse traces the causes of institutional weakness back to the early days of transition. She argues that nomenklatura hampered transition to democracy so that they could absorb state resources abusing the state. Both international and domestic pressures do not have much effect on nomenklatura since there is weak opposition and no external regulation. Furthermore, institutions have formal and informal elements and they are path dependent, so what the Macedonian institutions are experiencing now is a consequence of the decisions taken in the early transition period. In October 2000, according to Brimma-Gallup poll, the respondents in Macedonia did not trust:

1. Parliament 62.2%
2. Government 58.1%
3. Attorney General 61%
4. Courts 59.6%
5. Banks 62.3%
6. Police 51.3%

The lack of trust and loyalty towards state institutions and public administration is a direct result of the politicization of the state administration. The research showed that there is consensus among political and intellectual elite upon this question; however nothing has been done to prevent it. Frckovski argues that “For multicultural state in which you have
different narrations of the groups, neutral and efficient administration is all that you have in common." To prove and earn its loyalty, the state has still to provide this neutral and efficient administration. Nowadays, Macedonia is in a state of ‘elementary insecurity’ as Frckovski argues – lack of rule of law, lack of elementary regulations, economy, etc. This basic insecurity has been manipulatively used by the organized criminal groups in order to advance their interests.

According to a public opinion survey of the Institute for Socio-Political and Juridical Studies in Skopje conducted in July 2001, in the middle of the crisis, the major factor for the emergence of the conflict in Macedonia was the incompetence and the corruption of the government and Parliament with 76%. More importantly, 55% of the respondents believe that “politicians have no concept of how to run the state”. All of the above-stated circumstances hinder the process of democratization and produce a vicious circle where none of the ethnic communities can provide legitimacy to a system which is inefficient, corrupt and insecure.

V. Toward The New Paradigm - Human Security Perspective

In the last decades, the concept of security has been expanding to accommodate the new challenges created by the impact of globalization and changes in the international political sphere. The expansion of the concept of security has been paralleled by process of norm transition i.e. changing of norms, imposing consequences for the security agendas of the actors in the international political arena. The theory of securitization is a theory of search for referent object, “Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization”. Apart from “security of whom” (or referent object), securitization is also concerned with two other questions: “security of what” (what are the values at risk) and “security from whom or what” (what are the sources of threat). The post-Cold War environment can be considered as a renaissance of security studies by taking a new, more humanistic approach. Human security treats the following parameters: referent object is the individual and humanity in general; values at risk vary from mere survival of the individual to quality of life and human rights; possible source of threat can be the state but also the impact of globalization. If the source of threat

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46 Interview conducted with Ljubomir Frckovski, former Minister of Internal Affairs, 11 April 2007, Skopje.
47 Interview with Ljubomir Frckovski.
49 Dauti, Daut and Borjan Jovanovski, The Challenge of Macedonia’s ’New Beginning’, at p. 11.
52 Møller, Bjorn, National, Societal and Human Security: General Discussion with a Case Study from the Balkans, at p. 43.
53 Møller, Bjorn. National, Societal and Human Security: General Discussion with a Case Study from the Balkans, at p. 43.
used to be solely external (conflict between states), now the source of threat can be also internal.

The best way to understand human security is to take the following approach: “In terms of survival of the individual, death could come equally from hunger, AIDS, human trafficking, etc. as it could come from a soldier’s weapon. In terms of human development, low quality of life, extreme poverty and human misery can be even worse than incarceration of an individual”. In this respect, human security issues are more likely to be present in developing countries suffering economic underdevelopment as well as institutional weaknesses. Furthermore, one can argue that human security/insecurity is a much more important issue to be addressed in post-war and post-conflict societies. Human security issues are changing the agenda of state and non-state actors in respect that they are creating a link between security and sustainability.

The socio-economic difficulties as well as institutional weakness in Macedonia starting from the early period of transition helped organized criminal groups to take control over society and state. Moreover, one can argue that the influence of organized criminal groups in Macedonia aggravated the situation to a degree that in 2001 it escalated with the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. Criminal-extremist groups were the reason behind the conflict in Macedonia, they profited and are still profiting from it. In this case how successful is the current solution created according to the ethno-political presumptions. For illustration, one should look at the following example “multiethnic police patrols in the vulnerable areas of Macedonia were welcomed by the local population. However, they did not improve their economic welfare, nor did they necessarily change the quality of their relationships with their ethnic neighbours. Similarly, construction of roads or electricity grids improved the quality of life of the local population but did not their interaction”. In practice, it will need at least ten years for the society to absorb the conflict, i.e. the devastating consequences, primarily the non-material ones, such as lack of trust and cooperation among communities. Vankovska argues that the crisis was a consequence of the failure and immaturity of the Macedonian political parties which placed into danger the entire society and the citizens: “In the time of the crises 2001, Macedonia was already facing 10 years of legitimacy-crises of the governing power”. The legitimacy-crises of the state political structures together with the increased impoverishment of the population provided a fertile soil for the organized criminal groups to establish their status in Macedonia.

VI. Conclusion

The analysis identifies three issues underlining the 2001 conflict: poverty and unemployment, institutional weakness (lack of rule of law and legitimacy), corruption and organized crime. This way, the regional criminal groups used the social issues and the insti-

54 Tomovska, Ivana, A Threat to Security Anywhere is a Threat to Security Everywhere?, at p. 2.
55 Kostovicova, Denisa, Old and New Insecurity in the Balkans. Lessons From EU’s Involvement in Macedonia, at p. 62.
tutional weakness to influence the state and the society in Macedonia. These problems should be addressed more appropriately with the concept of human security.

The high level of poverty and unemployment in Macedonia which dramatically increased in the early period of transition contributed to alternative methods of generating income in the households: citizens get involved in grey-economy as well as in certain criminal activities. The regional conflicts and wars, including the 2001 conflict in Macedonia also strengthened the position of organized criminal groups in the region. According to Kaldor’s argument regarding new and old wars, the violent events in the region were, in fact, initiated by organized terrorist and criminal groups. The new wars and/or conflict on the Balkans were characterized by criminal activities, privatized militia or guerrilla/paramilitary groups using violence as a way of consolidating power and increase their profit.

The article presents an example of the recent police action ‘Mountain Storm’ against a criminal-extremist gang and how it was managed by the police forces. Lack of information and transparency from the authorities to the public and especially to the inhabitants of the village of Brodec where the action took place reveals a weakness of the state apparatus in crises management and addressing human security needs. The following analysis puts emphasis on the institutional weaknesses and how its act in favour of the criminal groups in Macedonia; if the problem is addressed from a human security perspective, the real insecurities of the citizens could be taken into consideration.

The current political and social environment in Macedonia can be described as an accumulation of ethnic, social, economic and security grievances of the citizens; “state cannot impose itself as a arbitrator because it itself is a focus and cause of the citizen’s grievances”. The latest UNDP Early Warning Report for Macedonia, describes the period since 2006 as “consolidation period” (the 2002-2006 is “post-conflict period”). However, the report does not specify whether it is consolidation of democracy or some other type of regime and/or condition. Moreover, the Report says the citizens are fed up with questions from the sphere of interethnic relations and in their opinion it is the politicians and the media which create the impression of ethnic tension and not the citizens. The real security issues which the ordinary citizens in Macedonia face and fear are firstly human security issues (poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, etc) and secondly insecurity coming from organized crime groups which at instances prove to have greater power than the state institutions. One of the respondents answered “That is why Macedonia can be hardly defended today, because it cannot offer to its citizens the feeling that they live in a system which offers them protection”. The concluding excerpt has a rather grim note; however the reality is such, instead of going full speed ahead, the organized criminal groups and the influence they have over state and society hamper development in Macedonia and hamper the state’s integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Inter-

57 Kostovicova, Denisa, Old and New Insecurity in the Balkans. Lessons From EU’s Involvement in Macedonia, at p. 61.
60 Interview conducted with Emil Kirjas, former Secretary of State, 7 June 2007, London.
ethnic relations are steadily improving; however, the overall development of the country still needs to be addressed from various aspects in order to improve human security.