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**MACEDONIA'S
AGONY**

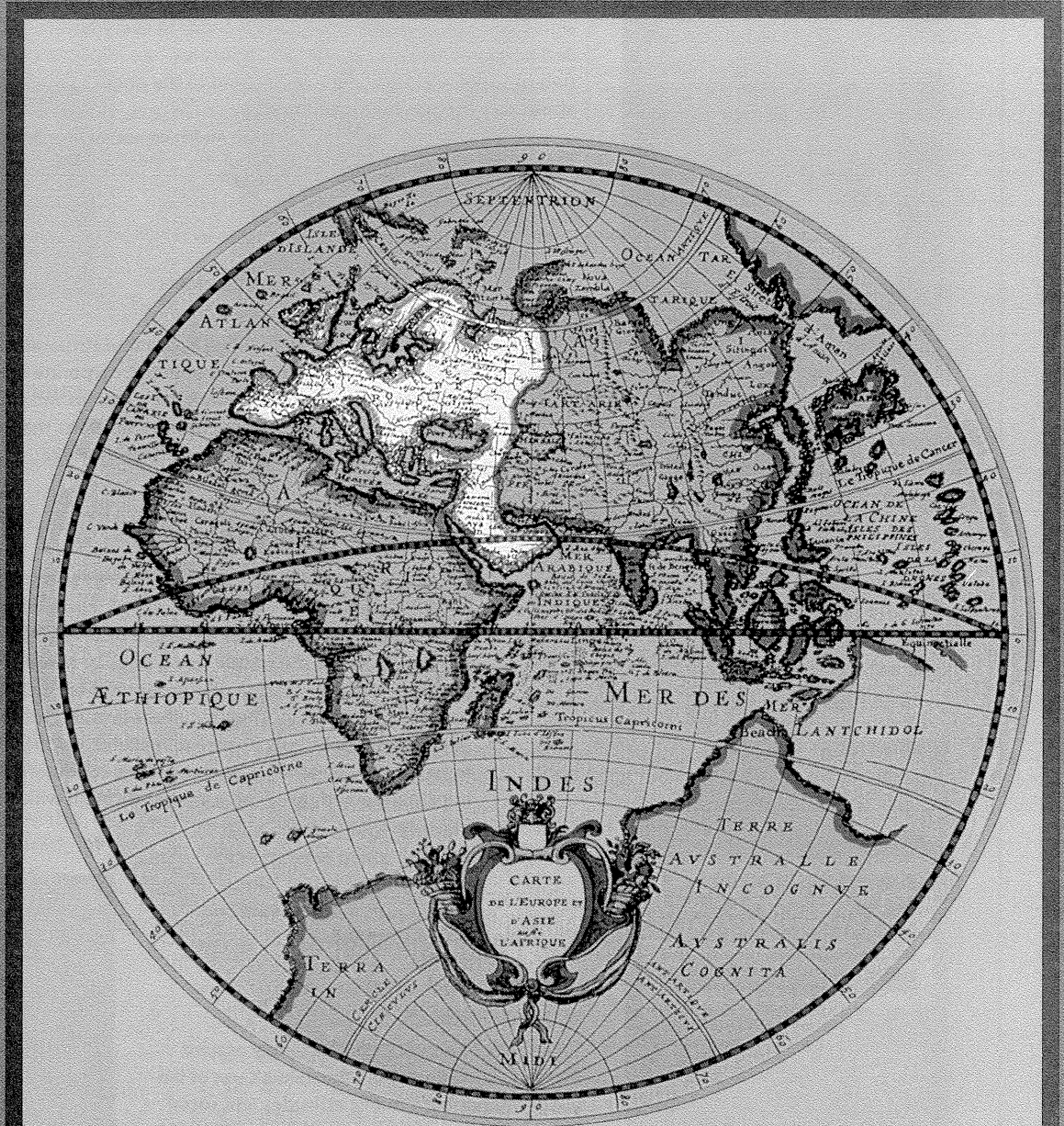
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FROM LEFT: ALBANIAN STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF THEIR UNDERGROUND UNIVERSITY IN TETOVO; THE TETOVO VALLEY; MACEDONIAN STUDENTS PROTEST ALBANIAN-LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING IN SKOPJE



TERMS OF

**What Macedonian
and Albanian
intellectuals talk
about when they
talk about war.**

BY LAURA SECOR

FOUR MONTHS INTO THE MACEDONIAN government's low-intensity war against ethnic Albanian guerrillas, Victor Friedman, a scholar of Balkan linguistics, happened to be in the capital city of Skopje. Tracking the media that served the country's two largest ethnic communities, he noted sharp divisions: Macedonian-language papers, serving the 66 percent ethnic majority, reported military maneuvers and threats to the country's territorial integrity, while Albanian-language papers, serving the country's largest minority, at around 23 percent of the population, reported civilian suffering and police brutality. "These presses almost always reported different stories. They had completely different perspectives," Friedman recalls. So, too, did much of their readerships. Albanian guerrillas in the hills called for expanded linguistic and educational rights; the Macedonian government greeted such demands, made at gunpoint, with skepticism, accusing the rebels of fighting instead for territorial separation. On May 30 of this year, however, journalists in both camps found something to agree on: Macedonia's preeminent intel-

lectual organization, the Academy of Sciences and Arts, had proposed something outrageous and unacceptable.

As custodians of culture in embattled lands, academicians in the Balkans have famously marshaled their resources to controversial ends, promoting visions of ancestral glory, eternal victimization, and thwarted territorial aims. For a decade, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU) distinguished itself by studiously avoiding such inflammatory rhetoric, calling instead for greater Balkan integration and cooperation. True, MANU is not itself an integrated institution; it does not include a single Albanian member. But when the conflict began on Macedonian soil in March 2001, MANU declared, "We must seek a way out of this situation not in some retrograde historical projects involving the re-drawing of new frontiers...but rather in the building up of Macedonia as a modern, civil, European state."

And yet, by late May, the situation in Macedonia appeared to be unraveling. War continued to smolder; the former Yugoslavia offered no precedent for



ENGAGEMENT

peaceful resolution of armed ethnic conflict; and the international community pressed the Macedonian government to accept Albanian linguistic demands. Such measures were decidedly unpopular with MANU, which declared a year ago that “the formation of a university institution in the Albanian language would lead to disintegration in the state.” Now the state appeared to be disintegrating anyway: Rebels had come within five miles of Skopje, taking the city’s airport into their sights. As Macedonia veered toward full-scale civil war, MANU’s president, the geneticist Georgi Efremov, leaked a puzzling document to the press. It proposed neither a future Balkan commonwealth nor a sweeping Macedonian empire. Rather, it suggested a swap of territory and populations among Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo, based on the dubious example of Croatia, which “cleansed” itself of Serbs in 1995.

Due to armed conflict in the country’s west and north, Efremov and his colleagues told the Macedonian daily *Vecer*, “cohabitation between Macedonians and

Albanians has become entirely impossible.... [T]he two ethnicities belong to diametrically opposite civilizations which differ according to their religious beliefs, language, and traditions.” Under the circumstances, the only solution was for the two communities to “peacefully say goodbye to each other.” Macedonia should cede some of its western territory to Albania or Kosovo, and Albania should cede some towns in its north to Macedonia. Minority populations would then have three months to exchange their homes and property so that both Macedonia and Albania would be ethnically clean. As Efremov explained at a press conference on May 30, “We live in the twenty-first century. We are fed up with wars and killings.”

Efremov’s plan met with immediate and passionate disapproval from both sides, recalls Friedman: “After all, the regions are mixed, and people in the mixed regions have been living together peacefully and in harmony for centuries.” The idea had not even been discussed, let alone approved, by much of MANU’s membership, says Friedman, a Mellon Professor of the

Humanities at the University of Chicago who is one of MANU’s two members from the United States. Within two weeks, Efremov was forced to resign MANU’s presidency in disgrace.

MANU’s tightrope walking—its alternate calls for Balkan integration and ethnic separation, its haste to distance itself from Efremov’s plan—reflects the confused and delicate state of Macedonia’s struggle, as the country’s two largest ethnic blocs wrangle over issues of education and language that would seem more appropriate for a heated parliamentary debate than for a guerrilla war. At least, these are the explicit issues at stake. Many local observers believe they are mere smoke screens for another sort of power struggle involving territory and smuggling interests. If that cynicism is justified, it is also, paradoxically, a testament to the genuine significance of the language issue: How else could such allegedly self-interested elites create such an impressive gulf between ethnic blocs using only language as a wedge?

The answer may be that language is never “only” language, least of all in a

region crosscut by imperial claims and post-colonial splintering. Many ethnic Albanians see access to educational, political, and cultural institutions in their native tongue as a basic civil right. But to the Macedonian government, as to the Yugoslav and Serbian governments before it, the strength and separateness of Albanian national identity, combined with the dispersal of ethnic Albanians across three countries, appear to pose a special threat of secession. The threat is accentuated by Macedonian insecurity. After all, the very existence of a Macedonian language—related to, but separate from, Bulgarian and Serbian—has long been denied by expansionists in Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia, who also deny the existence of a Macedonian ethnicity.

Today, Macedonia is for the first time the official language of a sovereign state, and its defenders jealously guard its primacy.

into Macedonia one time too many. The Serb police now stop each of that company's vehicles at the border, shoo the passengers out, and proceed to take the bus apart screw by screw.

Probably the strangest thing is that the Serb police, known in Belgrade as the drug vendors of choice, should care about smuggling. But ever since a democratic government took over Serbia, settling a long-running dispute over the Serbian-Macedonian border and beginning to bring Serbia into compliance with international law, the smuggling trade in Macedonia has been drastically affected. Some observers, including Vladimir Milcin, a theater professor at Skopje's Saints Cyril and Methodius University and the head of Macedonia's Open Society Institute, intimate that Macedonia's war may have started here, in the no-man's-land between

is someone stupid or destructive enough to light a match.

Morning finds Skopje depleted and fearful. My first appointment is with Jabir Derala, a human rights activist, leader of a nongovernmental organization, and poet. Derala is Albanian-identified, even though his first language is Macedonian and his background is Albanian, Turkish, Croatian, Italian, and Iraqi. Born in Tetovo, he grew up in a Macedonian-dominated town outside Skopje. His father, a teacher of arts and music, was killed in Bosnia in 1992 by one of his Croatian students. "I hope I am not going to get his destiny," Derala says, visibly shaken by the previous night's riots.

When I ask Derala how deep the ethnic tensions in Macedonia ran prior to the emergence of the NLA, he replies, "Before, people were tense; they were living parallel lives. But now they hate each other.

A GRAFFITO ON THE OUTER WALL OF THE MACEDONIAN NATIONAL THEATER GREETED THE OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH THE FOLLOWING WORDS: "LEARN BULGARIAN, BROTHER. YOU'RE GOING TO NEED IT."

Indeed, Albanian linguistic demands, to say nothing of alleged territorial ones, cut to the very quick of Macedonian fears. Suppose a Greater Albania were to emerge from the ashes of Yugoslavia? Would a truncated Macedonia stand a chance of retaining its independence? Probably. But many Macedonians are anxious nonetheless. One bitter graffito on the outer wall of the Macedonian National Theater greeted the outbreak of war with the following words: "Learn Bulgarian, brother. You're going to need it."

THE BELGRADE-SKOPJE

bus trip has changed in the last year. During the Milosevic era, I made the seven-hour journey in a broken seat on a sweltering coach whose windshield was shaded with Bosnian Serb propaganda posters. The driver, concerned about my safety, would not let me out of his sight. This year, despite the war, two bus companies are in fierce competition over the route. The company I take is winning, not only because it features a smiling stewardess who hands out sandwiches and plastic cups of Turkish coffee, but also because its rival has been caught smuggling drugs, guns, and women

two hard-up countries living on the edge of international norms.

This June evening, the northern Macedonian countryside is cleaved by the highway we travel. Out the window to the left is pitch darkness, where I am told that the Macedonian government has cut electricity to Albanian villages. To the right, a few scattered lights; but these Macedonian towns have had their water supply severed by the Albanian rebels known as the National Liberation Army, or NLA.

The news, as we enter Skopje, is ominous. NATO forces have escorted NLA fighters out of Aracinovo, a suburb five miles from Skopje, returning the town to Macedonian control, but have relocated the rebels and their weapons to another NLA-held town. I step off the bus into a riot. Reserve police and soldiers are furious with their government for allowing NATO to act, as Milcin puts it, "as a tourist agency." Armed men mass around the parliament, firing automatic weapons into the air and into shopwindows. If they storm across the Vardar River to Skopje's Albanian quarter, there will be civil war tonight. That simple: It feels as though the city were doused in gasoline. All that's required

They fear each other, and then they hate each other." His words come back to me later at one of Skopje's Internet cafés. Macedonian boys are playing a shoot-'em-up video game with bloodcurdlingly realistic graphics. They name their teams after Serbian paramilitaries and yell out to one another how many "Albanian terrorists" each has killed.

The only republic to secede from Yugoslavia without a war, Macedonia was for a decade considered an oasis of peace and a triumph of preventive diplomacy. Today, many observers blame the country's troubles on the West—for failing to stanch the tide of weapons and men coming over the Kosovo border, for failing to disarm the Kosovo Liberation Army, for enforcing sanctions on Yugoslavia that redounded to the detriment of neighboring countries, for acquiescing to Greek pressures on the fragile Macedonian state. Fatefully, the people of Macedonia elected nationalist political parties from both ethnic blocs to power in 1998. The Macedonian VMRO, led by Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski, and the Albanian DPA, led by Arben Xhaferi, work in coalition, forming, on the face of it, the region's

best example of a functioning multiethnic democracy. But the two parties are at cross-purposes. They have made promises to their ethnic constituencies that they can't possibly keep while working together. The NLA fighters, says the Albanian editor and journalist Iso Rusi, emerged in response to the ineffectiveness of the Albanian representatives in government. And yet nothing has pushed Macedonia further down the path of no return than the sudden appearance of armed insurgents.

Under the circumstances, Macedonia's intellectual community is starkly riven. Milcin tells me a story about staging a performance at an Albanian-language theater. The general manager objected to two members of Milcin's cast. "I said, 'What's the problem with them?'" They were actors from that theater, Albanians. He said, "They are Albanians, but they are not

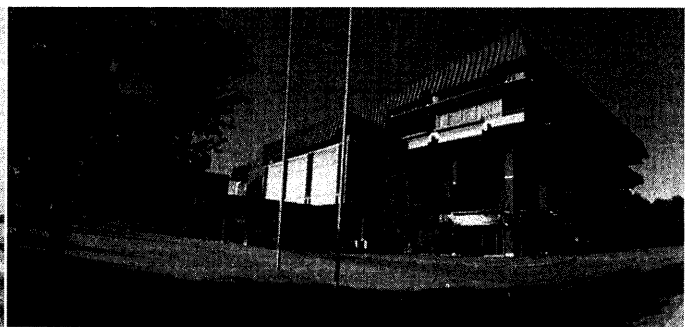
Albanian or Macedonian, complains that such conformist pressures afflict the other community more than their own. Near the end of my stay in Skopje, I meet with a Macedonian literary theorist who has just returned from an annual summer academy in the lakeside resort town of Ohrid. No Albanian academics attended the summer school, and she tells me she knows for a fact that they were threatened by the NLA, which warned them against cooperating with Macedonians. No one will tell you this, she warns, but Albanians are really afraid to break ranks right now. Later the same night, I run her story by a group of Albanians. They laugh. Albanian intellectuals were not invited, they retort.

One Albanian academic, Teuta Arifi, who teaches Albanian literature at Skopje's main university, says she got an invitation but declined. "They asked me to prepare

discarded maps portend ethnic cleansing in Macedonia, Derala replies, "Everything is going in that direction. Who will prevent this, and how?"

IN HIS BOOK *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, the Yale historian Ivo Banac calls his chapter on Macedonia "The Macédoine." By that he means the mixed salad, so christened by a Frenchman for Macedonia's ethnic and linguistic diversity. Home to Macedonians, Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Vlachs, Roma, and other ethnic groups, the country is now plagued by runaway metaphors, including the following title of a historical summary issued by a nonprofit group: "Macedonia: An Explosive Fruit Salad."

Historically, Macedonia subsumed not only today's Macedonia but also con-



VICTOR FRIEDMAN, LEFT, IS A SCHOLAR OF BOTH MACEDONIAN AND ALBANIAN. HE IS A MEMBER OF THE MACEDONIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS, ABOVE.

Albanian enough. They are cosmopolites." Several months later, Milcin was to stage his adaptation of Dostoyevsky's novel *Devils* at a Macedonian-language theater. The general manager of that theater asked to see Milcin's cast list. "One of the main parts was to be played by one of those two Albanians—those 'not-enough' Albanians," Milcin recalls. "After looking at the list, the manager said, 'No way, we know your strategy, your ideas about multiethnicity. We are not going to agree to this.' I said, 'Okay, then I am not going to work. It's a question of integrity; I am not going to compromise this.'" Within days, the manager apologized and backed down. "He was obviously afraid of a scandal in the media," Milcin explains.

To Milcin, the moral of this story is that the Macedonian community is slightly less closed than the Albanian one. But almost everyone I speak to, whether

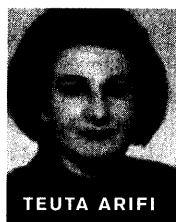
some lecture about Islam and human rights," she recalls. "I didn't see why one Albanian has to prepare the lecture on Islam and human rights. I asked if they had a lecture on Christianity and human rights. They told me they did not. I told them that if they have this religious approach, they should have two approaches. And the answer I got was that, as a Western concept, Christianity is related automatically to human rights. I told them I have a problem with that, because, as far as I know, the Inquisition was not a very good example of human rights."

If the Ohrid summer school has become controversial, the very mention of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts makes many local intellectuals cringe with fear or embarrassment. A Macedonian legal scholar says sheepishly, "I don't know how it happens in the Balkans that all the academies are full of hard-liners." Asked if the

tiguous territory that now lies in Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. The identity of the ancient Macedonian people has been debated by historians since the time of Herodotus. Were they Greeks, or a separate people? Alexander the Great, son of Philip II of Macedon, famously united the Greek city-states and extended the Greek empire through Afghanistan to the east and as far as Egypt to the south around 330 B.C. Many Greek nationalists today consider the very designation "Macedonia"—not to mention all symbols associated with Alexander the Great—to be an inalienable part of the Greek heritage. On that basis, Greece refused to recognize the Macedonian state upon its independence in 1991, going so far as to impose a crippling blockade, and successfully obstructing international recognition of Macedonia's chosen name and flag. Although there is little consensus, a number of historians

today argue that the ancient Macedonians were a non-Hellenic people with no evident relation to contemporary Greeks or contemporary Macedonians.

Today's Macedonians are by and large the descendants of Slavic tribes that migrated to the Balkans in the sixth century A.D. From the same wave of migration came all the Slavs of the former Yugoslavia as well as the Bulgarians, who are believed to be the descendants of both Slavs and the Turkic people known as proto-Bulgarians. The resulting patchwork of Slavic nations across the lower Balkan Peninsula formed what scholars call a linguistic continuum, in which dialects gradually shade into one another. Dialects spoken in the east of Bulgaria, for example, differ substantially from those spoken on the western coast of Dalmatia, but at no point in between, from



not accord ethnic nations any official status. Balkan nationalist movements began to undermine Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century, however. During this period, the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs all hoped to include Macedonia in their emerging states, and they buttressed their claims by insisting that the Macedonians were in fact Greeks, Bulgarians, or Serbs, respectively. The three nations vied for Macedonian loyalties partly by operating rival religious schools throughout the territory and partly by supporting groups that plotted uprisings against the Ottomans. The most significant of these groups were Bulgarian-oriented; one of them, VMRO, is the namesake of Macedonia's current ruling party.

In the end, Macedonia was liberated only through a series of bloody regional wars. The treaty that ended the Second Balkan War in 1913 permanently parti-

1945, understood that any hint of Serbian oppression could divert Macedonian loyalties to Bulgaria, which was now a hostile state in the Stalinist orbit. (Tito had broken with Stalin in 1948, but Bulgaria remained loyal to Moscow.) And so the Yugoslav portion of Macedonia was offered recognition and autonomy. Along with Serbo-Croat, the official language within the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia was Macedonian, which was based on the Macedonian literary language that had sprung from the west-central dialects in the nineteenth century. And while Tito's state censors carefully rooted out Bulgarian sympathies from Macedonia's official history, they permitted Macedonians to express anti-Serbian sentiments forbidden in other Yugoslav republics.

From Tito's success was born a common perception, encouraged by Bulgarian and Greek nationalists, that Tito invented the Macedonian language and ethnicity as a

IN 1995, KOSOVARS HELPED FOUND AN UNDERGROUND UNIVERSITY IN TETOVO. BY THE TIME OF MY VISIT, MANY OF ITS STUDENTS ARE BELIEVED TO BE TOTING KALASHNIKOV'S IN THE HILLS ABOVE.

east to west and from north to south, do two neighboring Slavic villages speak mutually unintelligible tongues. Similar continua can be found elsewhere in the world—from Germany through Holland, for example. And their significance for scholars of national movements is profound. How does one determine what constitutes a language as opposed to a dialect? Loring Danforth, author of *The Macedonian Conflict*, likes to quote the anthropologist Manning Nash, who once defined a language as “a dialect with an army and a navy.”

The armies and navies of the medieval Balkans overran Macedonia at regular intervals. Bulgaria's king Simeon conquered Macedonia in the tenth century; later, King Dusan made Skopje the seat of his short-lived Serbian empire. But the Ottoman Empire would prove the region's decisive conqueror. Indeed, the Porte would not hold any territory longer than it held Macedonia—not even the bulk of modern Turkey. Under the Ottoman millet system, the empire distinguished its Christian subjects from its Muslim subjects, but it did

tioned geographic Macedonia, awarding 50 percent to Greece, 40 percent to Serbia, and only 10 percent to Bulgaria. Determined to recover its losses, Bulgaria joined the losing side of both world wars. History crushed Bulgarian ambitions. To this day, however, Bulgaria does not recognize any Macedonian minority within its borders; and though it recognizes the Macedonian state, it explicitly refuses to recognize the Macedonian nation, let alone the Macedonian language, which it considers a Bulgarian dialect. Greece, too, denies the existence of a Macedonian language or ethnicity. Its Macedonian minority endured mandatory Hellenization until the mid-1970s; even today, many Greek Macedonians are afraid to speak their native language in public.

The first Yugoslav state, which lasted from 1918 through 1941, adopted tactics no different from those of its neighbors, attempting to incorporate its portion of Macedonia into Serbia by force (the territory was christened “Southern Serbia,” and its citizens considered Serbs). But the second Yugoslavia, reunited under Tito in

bulwark against superior Bulgarian claims. Indeed, Macedo-Bulgarian linguistic and cultural affinities are real. As Banac writes, “There was never any serious doubt that the Slavic population of Macedonia belonged to the same linguistic, historical, and cultural zone as the Bulgarians.” But does this make Macedonians a subgroup of Bulgarians? Two frequently cited histories of Macedonia, Hugh Poulton's *Who Are the Macedonians?* and Stephen E. Palmer Jr. and Robert R. King's *Yugoslav Communism and the Macedonian Question*, indicate that before World War II, Bulgarian consciousness prevailed among the Slavs of Macedonia. According to Palmer and King, that Bulgarian affiliation was systematically suppressed under Tito.

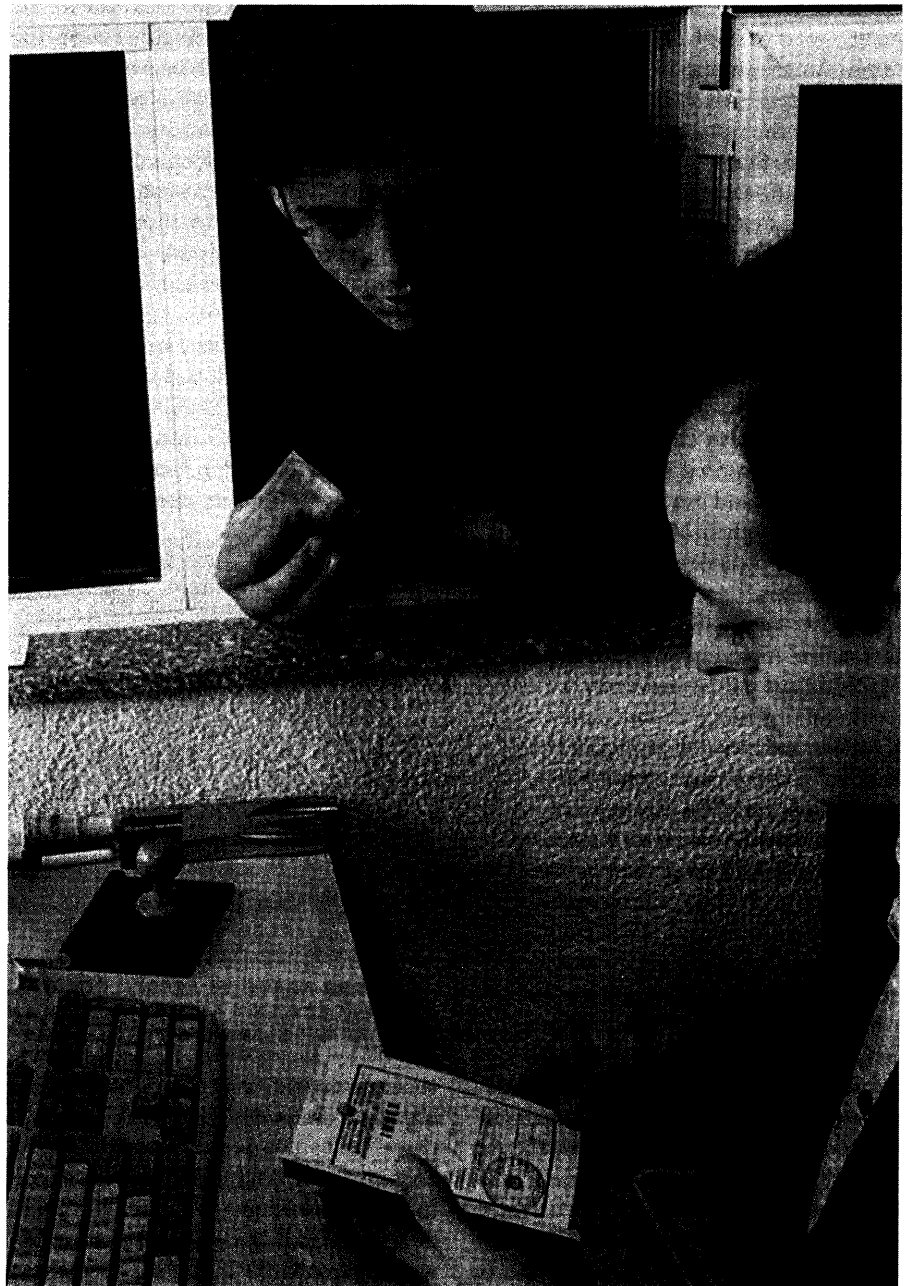
Friedman considers such accounts to be dangerous nonsense. They “unwittingly reproduce Bulgarian propaganda,” he fumes by e-mail, privileging Bulgarian national consciousness as somehow more natural than Macedonian consciousness. The latter emerged no later than the nineteenth century, says Friedman, and the Macedo-Bulgarian language group is no

more or less differentiated than the Swedish-Norwegian continuum. Friedman cites texts published in Macedonian dialects as early as 1794 and notes a published statement of Macedonian national identity from 1875. The most prominent early Macedonian nationalist, Krste Misirkov, wrote *On Macedonian Matters* in 1903, but Bulgarians immediately suppressed it. In fact, writes Friedman, "If Bulgaria had not briefly cooperated with Tito 1946–48, we might never have seen Misirkov's texts."

The contest over Macedonia has not only politicized its historiography, says Friedman; it has also resulted in the destruction of evidence. Slavic manuscripts reportedly have been dumped in Lake Prespa by Albanian authorities. Andrew Rossos of the University of Toronto has alleged Bulgarian suppression of archival materials, while Greek police have reportedly confiscated tapes from linguists recording Macedonian dialects in northern Greece. According to Friedman, the doubt and ambiguity that continue to linger around Macedonia's name, language, and ethnicity are a shadow cast by these neighboring states. Albanian extremists, he contends, take advantage of the confusion for their own purposes.

And yet, Friedman has written, Albanians and Macedonians share similar historical frustrations. By the end of World War II, Albanian-populated lands had been divided between Albania and Yugoslavia, leaving nearly 40 percent of ethnic Albanians outside the Albanian state. The most widely spoken non-Slavic language in the former Yugoslavia, Albanian is Indo-European but related to no other modern language. Surrounding nations dismissed Albanian as a mishmash of Balkan dialects. And so, writes Friedman in one essay, "both groups were linguistically marginalized. In the case of Macedonians, they were told that they spoke either Serbian or Bulgarian, while in the case of Albanians, they were told that their language was not really a language at all."

For Albanians in the old Yugoslavia, the main linguistic problem was education, which had become a political dilemma: They could be educated in Serbo-Croatian, a language many Albanians spoke, but it was not their native tongue, and few Albanian literary works



AN ALBANIAN STUDENT PAYS \$140 TO REGISTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TETOVO, WHICH IS NOT RECOGNIZED BY THE MACEDONIAN GOVERNMENT.

had been translated into it. Alternatively, they could lobby for Albanian-language education in a country where Albanian was spoken only in the poorest regions of the south. The first option yielded individual social mobility at the cost of assimilation. The second held out the possibility of improving the collective status of Albanians by institutionalizing their language and culture in an already polyglot land. Albanians lobbied hard for the latter, winning linguistic and educational rights in Kosovo in 1969—only to have them

revoked by Slobodan Milosevic in 1989. That battle would have serious repercussions in Macedonia.

SKOPJE is a graceful city of stone streets and minarets; but the campus of Saints Cyril and Methodius University, located on a ribbon of highway and fashioned of stark gray concrete, is nothing short of forbidding. Across the street, in the basement of a shopping center, lies the café favored by Skopje's Albanian intellectuals. Teuta Arifi, from the university's

Albanian language and literature department, meets with me there one rainy afternoon. American pop music blares into a largely empty room: It's been exactly a week since the riots, which spurred many Albanians to flee preemptively to Kosovo. "You don't have the faith you had before," Arifi confesses. "And you don't feel good when more than 50 percent of your neighbors aren't here anymore."

With a faculty of only fifteen members, including assistants, Arifi's department, founded in 1970, enrolls no more than forty-five to fifty students a year. Students can study Albanian culture in their native tongue, but required survey courses, like literary theory and the history of world literature, are taught in Macedonian. "I am not happy, and my colleagues are not happy," says Arifi, whose specialty is the nineteenth-century literature of Albanian romanticism. Macedonians see the university as a cultural organ of the state, Arifi contends, and hence of the majority national group—their own. "For that reason, the Albanian request for a university was treated as a political request rather than as a request to meet important needs of Albanians," she says.

Back when Macedonia was a republic of Yugoslavia, ethnic Albanian students and scholars simply traversed the Sar Mountains to attend Kosovo's University of Pristina, then the world's foremost Albanian-language university. But back then, the Sar formed a geographic, not a political, frontier. Today the mountains mark an international boundary—one mined by the Serbian army in 1999 and now guarded by the international military force known as KFOR. Overnight, Kosovo became a dangerous province of a foreign country.

When Macedonia became independent in 1991, ethnic Albanian politicians requested an Albanian-language pedagogical institute in order to train teachers for Macedonia's Albanian-language primary and secondary schools. The request was denied. So, too, were calls for an expanded Albanian track at Saints Cyril and Methodius University. At the same time, Kosovo's crisis deepened; unemployed ethnic Albanian intellectuals fled Serbian repression, settling in increasing numbers in Tetovo on the Macedonian

side of the border. The solution to the refugees' problems coincided with the demands of the local Albanian population: In 1995, Kosovar professors helped found an underground university. Despite an opening marred by police gunfire, in which a student was killed, the so-called University of Tetovo continued to operate illegally, serving an enthusiastic student body a controversial blend of informal education and nationalist solidarity.

Funded through the same shadowy network as the rebels, and led by nationalist hard-liner Fadil Sulejmani, the university became a hotbed of Albanian militancy, say its detractors. By the time of my visit to Tetovo, many of the uni-



ALBANIAN LEADER ARBEN XHAFERI, LEFT, SHAKES HANDS WITH MACEDONIAN PRIME MINISTER LJUBCO GEORGIEVSKI AFTER SIGNING A PEACE DEAL.

versity's students are believed to be toting Kalashnikovs in the hills above.

DESPITE Macedonian intransigence, the Albanian-language higher-education issue was nearing resolution before the war began, thanks to outside mediation. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which represents fifty-five countries, recently secured the Macedonian government's permission to found a new, private university in Tetovo. South East Europe University (SEEU) will provide professional training for Albanian students but avoid the more politically sensitive field of Albanian studies. Launched by Max van der Stoep, the OSCE's high commissioner on national minorities, and funded largely by Western governments, the university will offer instruction in Albanian, English, and Macedonian for nearly three thousand students starting this fall. The underground

University of Tetovo, by contrast, served up to ten thousand students and did not shy away from the humanities. Its rector has reportedly described SEEU as a "puppet school" designed to "crush" the University of Tetovo.

A local journalist leads me through a dusty courtyard to SEEU's temporary offices. The new university's director, Alajdin Abazi, dressed in a crisp shirt and tie, meets me in a barren conference room not far from the university's construction site. SEEU broke ground the same day the war began, says Abazi, whose sharp blue eyes illuminate his weather-beaten face. Apart from the construction and the shooting, a final hurdle remains: accreditation. The university has applied to a special commission made up of eight professors from existing universities, two members of MANU, and five government appointees. Abazi chuckles. "So there are fifteen members—one is Albanian, fourteen are Macedonian," he notes. "I hope they will support us."

Born in Tetovo, Abazi earned his Ph.D. in physics and electro-technics at the University of Zagreb. Opportunity then called him to Pristina University, where he took a faculty position in 1969. At the same time, he worked his way up to president of Kosovo's electric power distribution company. But that life was not to last: When Milosevic rose to power and expelled Albanians from positions of influence, Abazi was abruptly fired from both of his posts. For the following decade, he wandered, first on a Fulbright to the United States, later in western Europe and then China. When family problems drew him back to Macedonia, Abazi knew that resuming an academic post was out of the question: He became a banker. "I worked at a private bank for seven years," he tells me. "It was in vain to think I could go and ask for a place as a professor at Skopje University." Today he feels he is at last doing something meaningful for the town where he was born.

Problems remain, however. By government mandate, the university must require some classes in Macedonian. Abazi says, "For me it is not normal, but somebody decided it." More important than educating students in the language of their

country's majority, in Abazi's view, is preparing them for integration into western Europe. The new school will emphasize English-language skills, as well as "knowledge of European culture and so on," Abazi says. But it will come at a cost: Students will pay about eight hundred dollars a year in tuition, which is about half Macedonia's yearly per capita income. "So it doesn't mean all Albanians are satisfied with this solution," Abazi says. "There are still a few questions. For example, why is this private? Why are we going to pay and somebody's not going to pay in Skopje?"

ACCORDING to Friedman, the question of minority education is a red herring. As often happens in this region, a shared social problem masquerades as a divisive ethnic one. "The more important question is the quality of education," says Friedman. "If the education is known to be of high quality, it's not so important what language it's delivered in." He cites the case of a Turkish-sponsored high school in Skopje that offers classes in Turkish, Macedonian, and English. "There is a waiting list of all ethnicities of parents trying to get their kids into this high school," he says. Why? Because it's a good school.

A great many local and international activists have long sought to focus the country's energies on shared concerns—the economy, for instance, or infrastructural needs. But in the realm of culture, the politics of identity are difficult to downplay. If Albanians are to consider Macedonian cultural institutions their own, why aren't their contributions better represented in MANU, for instance, or the national museum? Why, Macedonians retort, do Albanians insist on flying the flag of a neighboring state—Albania?

When Albanians grumble about conducting even minimal university course work in the country's official language, it's not hard to understand why Macedonians perceive them as identifying more closely with Albanians in Kosovo than with Macedonians in Macedonia. Says Friedman, "The bottom line from the Macedonian point of view is that they look around and Macedonia is surrounded on four sides by nation-states that have national languages. Minorities in those countries have to learn the national language. What's more, ethnic Macedonian minorities in Greece and Bulgaria don't have nearly the educational

opportunities, to say nothing of the rights, that minorities do in Macedonia, for all the imperfections."

Hugh Poulton expresses some sympathy for the beleaguered Macedonian state, but he also cautions against invidious comparisons. "The Macedonian government line was that Albanians are a minority," says Poulton. "If they should have a faculty, so should Turks and Vlachs. That's insulting to the Albanians, and stupid. Anyone can see that Albanians aren't just a minority; they're a sizable community. Albanian education rights compared to those of *Vlachs*?"

But if Albanians in Macedonia are not a minority, what are they? It's a question inherited from the old Yugoslavia, which classified Albanians as a "national minority" rather than as a "constituent nation." The latter status conferred greater self-rule and the option of secession from the federal state. It accrued to the far less numerous Montenegrins—and, for that matter, to Macedonians—but not to Albanians, ostensibly because an Albanian homeland existed outside Yugoslav borders.

Many Albanians in Macedonia want the same thing Albanians in Yugoslavia wanted: status as a federal, autonomous unit of the state, with the option of secession. This arrangement—a binational Macedonia—could conceivably grant Albanians greater territorial, political, and cultural self-determination. It would also cost Macedonians their unitary nation-state, reducing their status, too, to that of a federal unit within a confederal state. Worse, says Milcin, it would lock Macedonia into an ethnically polarized political system dominated by nationalist parties—one where "these two communities, not forgetting that there are also other minorities in Macedonia, will forever have leaders who will be their masters."

WITHIN two months of my visit, NATO brokered a tenuous peace in Macedonia and deployed a force to collect weapons from the NLA. While the agreement states unequivocally that "there are no territorial solutions to ethnic issues," it also provides for the decentralization of the state, which will in practice afford greater self-rule for the Albanian-dominated regions in the west and north. Albanian will be made an official language within certain contexts, and the Macedonian government will be forced

to provide funding for Albanian-language higher education.

Hard-liners, especially on the Macedonian side, are not happy. And pessimists on both sides say the war is not over; it's simply lying in wait for NATO's departure, or for next year's "fighting season"—the summer—to begin. In the meantime, much of Macedonia is already mourning what many fear is the real casualty of the country's short war: namely, the notion of a civic state—one made up of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, and one where the state's primary obligation is to its inhabitants, not to one national culture, or even two. Despite the peace agreement's apparent commitment to such a state, the "facts on the ground" are not encouraging. Nor is it certain that even a civic state created with the best intentions could fully honor Macedonia's diversity, considering that Macedonians and Albanians disagree about what its minority-language provisions should look like.

Too bad, because the *macédoine* is defined by nothing if not multiplicity. Richly diverse throughout its history, Macedonia also became home to those who migrated here during the era of Yugoslav integration. In June, I visited Ferid Muhic, a philosopher at Saints Cyril and Methodius who was born in Bosnia and moved to Macedonia at age fourteen. "The first thing I noticed from the train was a really unforgettable, fascinating peak of Ljuboten, the beginning of Sar Planina," Muhic recalls. "For me the most important contacts, developing feelings, are connected to this land, this landscape—the first emotions, the first real friendships. You have some kind of emotional, intellectual, affectional roots."

Today Muhic is worried for the very integrity and coherence of the mixed society he considers his own. Who now can lead this country? What Macedonian leader could earn the trust of Albanians—what Albanian, the trust of Macedonians? What's missing, says Muhic, is a shared political context. Without that, he says, "you don't have a unifying principle that will really put the state on the same level for all its citizens. It will appear for one group as the instrument of protection, and for the other, as the instrument of oppression."

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