6. Civil-Military Relations in Macedonia: Between Peace and War

The process of transition towards democracy in the Balkans has been dramatic and turbulent since its onset. Particularly civil-military reforms have been dependent on many external and internal factors, which differed from one country to another. However, the transitional civil-military relations in the Yugoslav-successor states have had a common determinant i.e. war/conflict. While the war/violent conflict has been the crucial determinant of all major developments in the other former Yugoslav republics, on the surface it looks as if Macedonia is an exception where all reforms take place in a peaceful environment. The other newly independent states as well as their militaries were born in the process of rise of nationalism and violent disintegration of Second Yugoslavia. The question is whether Macedonia has really been relieved from war threats and succeeded to take advantage of peace in terms of intensification of the democratisation process? How far has really the process of civil-military reforms gone, especially in comparison to the other former Yugoslav republics?

I Towards Statehood and New Defence System: Macedonian Peace Story – If Any?

Having been one of the smallest republics with less than two million inhabitants and within a hostile regional environment (as it was perceived), Macedonia was more a consumer than a provider of services to the Yugoslav Federation, especially in economic and security terms. In identity terms, Macedonian nationalism had a privileged position and even blessings from the top unlike the other Yugoslav nationalisms that were heavily suppressed. One may conclude that Macedonia had more benefits than costs in security terms in former Yugoslavia.

The explanation as to why it was possible for Macedonia to leave the federation in a peaceful manner can be found in a set of factors. First of all, from the point of view of Serbian nationalism it was not perceived as a threat. Macedonia was militarily helpless, and the Serbian minority hardly numerous, so it seemed that it could be regained without any

problem at some later point. In 1991–92 the focus of the Serbian policy was on the other Yugoslav fronts where military capacity and armament were badly needed.

The second happy circumstance was the tactics that the Macedonian leadership used. It relied on the fact that Macedonians had never been perceived as secessionists and inimical towards Serbia. There had not been any military preparations or paramilitary groups, and the government favoured the negotiation table as a form of conflict resolution. In the eventual worst-case scenario President Gligorov opted for non-violent resistance and appeals to the international community. No matter how risky and unsound it looked at the time, the leadership thought that independence could not be defended at any cost.[1] An additional, though not a crucial circumstance was the fact that in the negotiation team of the Yugoslav people's Army (YPA) there were officers with long years of service in Macedonia and with Macedonian wives. Yet military reasons prevailed in the decision to withdraw peacefully from Macedonia.

In terms of the dominant public stand regarding the Yugoslav wars that had already started there was nothing heroic or belligerent. The Macedonians were in a state of shock from the very beginning because of the coincidence – the first death casualty of the pending conflicts was a Macedonian private killed during the unrest in Split (Croatia) in spring 1991. The developments that followed persuaded the public that there was nothing for Macedonia in the wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. Macedonia continued sending the annual quota of conscripts in the YPA and issued the appeal to the officers of Macedonian origin to return to Macedonia only in early 1992 (i.e. when the final agreement with the YPA was reached), which made her partly involved in the wars in Slovenia and Croatia.

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[1] In one occasion President Gligorov stated that at the time of negotiations on the YPA withdrawal from Macedonia he had already prepared a video-type with his address to the nation. In case of failure of the negotiations and his arrest the type was supposed to be broadcasted. The message was a call for non-violent civil resistance and an appeal to the international community. (Interview of the author with the President Gligorov, Ohrid, October 1997).

Following the referendum on independence from 8 September and the new Constitution of 17 November 1991, the first organic law to be adopted in the Assembly was the Defence Law in February 1992. Actually, *de facto* and *de jure* the new Macedonian defence system in a period coexisted with the old federal one. Avoidance of any hostilities was of utmost importance for the new state, even at high material costs. The YPA took along all movable armament and equipment (and what was not possible to remove was destroyed). Macedonia was left totally militarily helpless and even more – there was no material for heroic stories about the courageous behaviour regarding the mighty military opponent. The price was paid in material terms, but the reward was peace. Macedonia did not fight for peace, it was granted freedom and independence. More importantly, the newly born Macedonian army had no internal opponents in a form of paramilitary forces out of any state control.

Unlike Slovenia that had built up its military force on the foundations of the Republican Territorial Defence (TD) long before the war occurred, the delayed process in Macedonia took a different course. Along with the YPA withdrawal from the borders the units of the Macedonian TD took over control, but it was never given the status of a nucleus of the new army. Since early 1992 Macedonian officers were coming back and were immediately included in the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM). A few months' vacuum period caused a slight competition atmosphere among the members of the TD and the professional military staff from YPA. The former insisted on their more prominent position in the new military hierarchy, claiming that the ARM was established thanks to the TD's efforts. There was even a formal request to the President of the Republic for transformation of the Republican Staff of TD into a new General Staff of ARM.[2] Once established ARM included without any discrimination all available cadres from TD and the former YPA.

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[2] Trajan Gocevski, *Kolektivnata bezbednost i odbranata na Makedonija (Collective Security and Macedonian Defence)* (Kumanovo: Prosveta, 1990): 255–6.

Despite calls from some political parties and intellectuals, the government undertook practical steps toward formation of the ARM only after the establishment of the entire political and legal framework. There was no euphoria or national sentiment accompanying the creation of the first military force of independent Macedonia. Even the nationalist party (MAAK) that had called for secession since 1990, in September 1991 proposed a radical solution in the form of a *Manifesto for Demilitarisation of the Macedonian Republic*. Some domestic authors are uncritically euphoric about the meaning of this document and the peaceful behaviour of Macedonia in 1991-92: "The process of gaining independence from the ex-Yugoslav federation peacefully has cast light on the Republic of Macedonia as a civilised state and the small Macedonian population as a great civilised people striving for establishing eternal peace in Kant's sense of the word: "Vom ewigen Frieden. The essence of the Macedonian peace model on the Balkans has been pointed out in the Manifesto for Demilitarisation of the Macedonian Republic' in September 1991."[3]

Actually, the Manifesto was a symbolic cry of a group of intellectuals concerned about Macedonia's future in the hostile Balkans. It was not a product of a mature civil society movement or a sound theoretical consideration, and thus it did not echo strongly in the society. Unlike Slovenia in 1990, the demilitarisation idea was not backed by any critical evaluation of the deficiencies of the previous military establishment. It was more a product of Macedonia's passivity and self-pity than a concept led by a proactive and democratic attitude towards national security issues. Macedonia's peacefulness was more a coincidence than a result of some political decision. Very soon it was apparent that the young state possessed a deep internal conflict potential and lacked the democratic culture for a peaceful conflict resolution. Therefore, it is incorrect to conclude that demilitarisation and making an 'oasis of peace' out of Macedonia were the leading ideas in government policymaking in 1991–92.[4] The idea of a neutral Macedonia promoted

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3 Olga Murdzeva-Skarik and Svetomir Skarik, 'Peace and UNPREDEP in Macedonia', paper presented at XVI IPRA General Conference, *Creating Nonviolent Futures*, Brisbane, Australia, 8–12 July 1996, p 11.

4 Olga Murdzeva-Skarik and Svetomir Skarik, 'Peace and UNPREDEP in Macedonia'.

by the creator of the new defence system, professor of defence studies Trajan Gocevski, did not create any public attention and was treated only as a nice but unrealistic idea.[5]

In early 1992 Macedonia was *de facto* a demilitarised country since the YPA did not leave any armament or equipment behind. *De jure* the new defence system was built up in that period. The most urgent need for the time being was making a precise account of the human and particularly professional potential and the material resources. These efforts seemed hopeless in the context of the series of disadvantages from that period, such as: the double embargo from the north (by enforcement of the UN sanctions against FR Yugoslavia) and from the south (by the Greek government because of the name dispute); the UN embargo on the import of arms and military equipment for all Yugoslav successor states indiscriminately; decreased level of economic development emphasised by the disintegration of the former Yugoslav market etc.

The military by definition is an institution whose legitimacy depends on its functional efficiency and capability to perform its mission. The data from public polls showed that the citizens were not convinced that the new military was capable and efficient enough to preserve peace.[6] The government efforts could not cover the truth that the army-building process faced enormous difficulties. Furthermore, the country was under a dual pressure of accomplishing both functional and societal imperative (in Huntington terms). This was almost an impossible task to accomplish under conditions of trauma, transition and initial democratisation.

In this critical period when it was totally disarmed the country was not directly militarily threatened. The possibility of spillover effects

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5 Trajan Gocevski, Neutralna Makedonija:od vizija do stvarnost (Neutral Macedonia: From Vision to Reality (Kumanovo: Makedonska riznica, 1995).

6 Agency for Public Opinion Survey (NIP Nova Makedonija, DATA Press) realised two surveys during March–May 1996 on a sample of 2,800 respondents. The survey titled peace in Macedonia showed interesting results regarding ARM. Only a small minority of citizens (2.29 per cent) was convinced that ARM had contributed to preserving peace in the country. Only 14.71 per cent thought that the realisation of a lasting peace depended on the military.

from the other war zones in former Yugoslavia was immense, but the traditional rivals over Macedonia (i.e. neighbouring countries) were not showing any serious aggressive intentions. The difficulties and insecurities were more related to the Macedonian identity in terms of statehood and nationhood. The struggle for international recognition was more than difficult, but the obstacles contributed to strengthening Macedonian nationalism. The Macedonians still cannot forget the very critical political moments when they were 'left in the lurch' by the Albanians on the most substantial issue – the international recognition of the Macedonian state.

The internal threat of violent interethnic conflict was becoming more and more pertinent. Since 1991, on the Albanian side there have been several important indications concerning the attitude towards the Macedonian state: Albanians boycotted the referendum on independence in 1991 as well as the census; the Albanian parliamentary group boycotted adoption of the new Constitution in the same year; in 1992 Albanians held illegal referendum which demonstrated that 90 per cent supported independence; in 1994 they declared an autonomous 'Republic Illiryda' in the western part of the Republic. In early November 1993 the police arrested a group of Albanians (including a deputy minister of defence in the government of Macedonia) and accused them of attempting to establish paramilitary forces. Their next steps ostensibly would have been to separate 'Illiryda' by force, and then to unify it with Albania and independent Kosovo.

The ARM was supposed to find solid foundations of its legitimacy in the state, whose complete identity was highly contested (the name, borders, membership in the international organisations etc.). The Defence Law defined it as 'armed force of all citizens of the Republic of Macedonia', which should have been accompanied by a number of actions that would have promoted the integrative social role of the military. Like once before the YPA, the ARM was supposed to contribute to the general national integration. In reality the implementation of this policy faced big difficulties. In the first several years the young Albanian conscripts boycotted compulsory military service. The government and the judicial system deliberately ignored these phenomena, while in the public it was a taboo.

Regarding the professional officer corps the Albanians have always been highly underrepresented (since the Second Yugoslavia period). Because the ARM had to rely on the old cadres from the former parent-institution, it inherited a complicated situation regarding ethnic representation in the officer corps. Unofficially, the so-called 'national-key' was seen as the best solution, at least, regarding the high-ranking officers. Although the 'national key' principle might sometimes be the simplest way to achieve ethnic balance, as a criteria for recruitment it is in direct opposition to the *ethos*, or at least, the myth of the military as an institution.[7] It is, or should be, an institution where the principles of professionalism and capability are primarily respected. It does not release the civilian and military authorities from taking measures aimed at stimulation of interest in the military profession among the members of the ethnic groups that are poorly represented in the military hierarchy. The data from the first five generations of cadets enrolled in the Military academy indicate that the problem continues to be important.

In the background of the problem there is the so-called 'question of loyalty', which is typical not only for multiethnic and fledgling democracies in South-East Europe.[8] In Macedonian society there is a widespread opinion that when stability and national security are at issue one does not pose the question: 'Will Macedonians attack Albanians, or *vice versa*?' but 'Will they defend and protect each other in case Macedonia is attacked by a third party?'[9]

The ethnic concerns have been present in all debates on the profile of the Macedonian army. The proposals for introduction of all-volunteer armed forces have most often been directed towards the creation of a

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7 The consistent and sometimes even stubborn implementation of the 'national key' principle, as both the Yugoslav and Soviet case proved, is not a guarantee for satisfactory results. (Cynthia Enloe, *Policija, vojska i etnicitet: fundamenti drzavne vlasti (Police, Military and Ethnicity: Foundations of State Power)* (Zagreb: Globus, 1990): 177.

8 Alon Peled, A Question of Loyalty: Military Manpower Policy in Multiethnic States (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

9 Ferid Muhic, 'Kulturnata integracija i socijalniot pluralizam: makedonskiot model'(Cultural integration and social pluralism: the Macedonian model), *Socioloska revija*, vol. 1, no 1, 1996, p 26.

military organisation that would easily be tailored according to pure ethnic criteria. In March 1998 certain circles (so-called Council of Intellectuals) around then opposition party the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) advocated the concept of a 'Macedonian National Army'. According to the retired Gen. Mitre Arsovski (the first Chief of Staff in independent Macedonia) the idea of ARM as a military of all citizens was supposed to serve the state (i.e. regime and consequently it was politicised). The National Army, in opposite, would serve the (Macedonian) people. Another member of the Council put it more explicitly: 'One cannot expect loyalty from a military consisting, among others, of Albanians and Kosovars.'[10]

The Constitution clearly determines the external military mission of the armed forces, which is usually seen as a guarantee that they will be kept away from the internal political scene. The interaction of societal and external (regional and international) factors not only determines the concept of security, but also the role of the military and the police. The data on the social and material status of the police and army staff clearly indicate that the police forces are much better off than the Army's ones. In other words, internal security threats are seen as more serious than the external ones. Thus police represent a serious functional rival to the military as well as a competitor in regard to the scarce social and economic resources. Self-conscious regarding its inferiority in guaranteeing the external security and gravity of the internal (ethnic) conflicts, the ARM could easily turn more attention to the internal plight.

During the first months of independence, and later on as well, there were incidents on the Macedonian borders (with Greece), which were not challenging but certainly provocative. The spontaneous reactions of the top brass 'ready to respond in a decisive manner' manifested their inability to adjust to the new environment. For the time being the loudest advocate of such an approach was the Chief of Staff, Gen. Arsovski. Only several years after, he proposed an internal security doctrine that

[10] Budo Vukobrat, 'Mitre would like to go to NATO!', *AIM Press Skopje* (www.aimpress.org), 5 March 1998.

would allow the military to intervene in domestic riots and conflicts when the police were not sufficient to cope with them.

The government's call for an international presence in 1992 manifested a far more reasonable and critical attitude to the security capabilities of the state. The first initiative for deployment of UN peace forces on the Macedonian territory came from President Gligorov in November 1992. The UN Security Council authorised the establishment of UNPROFOR's presence in Macedonia by its resolution 795(1992) of 11 December 1992 as 'UNPROFOR's Macedonia Command'. Its mandate was originally defined as follows: 'to monitor the border areas with Albania and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; to strengthen, by its presence, the country's security and stability; and report on any developments that could threaten the country'.[11]

The conclusion about the first several years of independence is that civil–military relations were in the shadow of a more important issue – society–military, or better, ethnic–military relations. Soon it became clear that the issue would deeply affect the profile of civil–military relations in the long run.

II Impediments of Macedonian civil–military relations

The revival of the pre-communist military traditions and symbols in the other Yugoslav successor states had begun before the final dissolution took place. Macedonia does not fit into that pattern since 'the national emancipation in the military sphere' came as a sort of surprise. When it became clear that state independence became the inevitable option, creation of the legal foundations of the independent state was the priority. Adoption of the new Constitution (17 November 1991) and several organic laws (including the Defence Law) were sine qua non as legitimacy before the international community. The whole proceeding was done in a rush with no time for a wider public debate on the state (and defence) policy. The fragile balance of the actors on the political

[11] 'UNPREDEP – United Nations Preventive Deployment Force: Mission Backgrounder', *Department of Public Information, United Nations*, Webedition, updated 12 June 1997.

scene (of which none had enough power to determine the basic directions) mirrored the many compromise solutions included in the legal system.

The political system was supposed to be created in accordance with the basic premises of parliamentary democracy, but it was done in an inconsistent way with lots of improvisations. The democratic deficit was to be compensated for by imitation of the institutions and principles from Western democracies. The tailoring of the legal system was tasked to provide democratic legitimisation with special emphasis on fundamental human rights and freedoms. Again the solution was easy to find – the list was copied from the basic international documents on human rights and pasted into the Constitution. There was nothing much in Macedonian society to 'constitutionalise' in autumn 1991, so the Constitution was more a list of good intentions than a product of the social reality.

Having lacked any pre-communist (democratic) traditions, Macedonian constitutionalists had a rare opportunity to draft a political system 'out of nothing'. The situation that could be described as '*tabula rasa*' allowed them to choose among the available models, ignoring the fact that they have all been established in a long process and in accordance with the national conditions. The situation regarding the model of civil–military relations was even more bizarre. Having lacked any experience and expertise, the issue was not given any special attention. The existing model is more a by-product of the accepted democratic pattern of the political system than a result of some idea about the necessity of democratic control of the military. After all, in 1991 Macedonia did not have its own armed forces and one could not guess when these would be created. The (normative) model of democratic control preceded the establishment of what should have been controlled. The whole issue was virtually *terra incognita*. Even nine years after, the issue is still a kind of novelty both for the academic community and the public. At the same time, the problems are growing, while the gap between the normative and the real is getting deeper. Furthermore, the normative model of separation of powers has its own deficiencies.

The Assembly, which is supposed to be the focal political institution in the parliamentary democracy, has been playing a secondary role in the overall political process. From a constitutional point of view, it not only holds the most important competencies typical of a legislative branch, but its position is strengthened even beyond what is usual. Namely, no other branch of power can dissolve the parliament and call for new elections. Hypothetically, only the parliament itself is authorised to do that, which is highly unlikely to happen. In reality, however, the parliament has been on the margins of political developments. Under the clear supremacy of the executive power (government and/or the President) most often it has been in the role of a voting machine for decisions made elsewhere. The structure of the Assembly so far has been in favour of one party or a ruling coalition with a weak opposition. This situation created a kind of disdainful attitude towards the proposals and critiques coming from the other side of the political spectrum. Thus the politically very important control function towards the executive branch has been discredited. The activities of the parliamentary commission for internal policy and defence have been more focused on giving support to the government's proposals than toward their critique.

The most unusual feature of the Macedonian parliamentary system is in the structure and position of the executive branch. It is two-headed and consists of Government and the President of the Republic. The relationship legislative-executive power as well as the relationships within the executive domain has been dependent more on the current power-holders than on the constitutional model. The inconsistency of the constitutional model consists of two basic premises. First, there is the inability of the government to dissolve the parliament under any circumstances. Secondly, the president is elected directly from the citizens and is thus not responsible to parliament. An additional problem arises from the non-existing legally defined relationship between the Government and the President, especially in the realm of security and defence policy. The Constitution defined the boundaries of the institutions' competencies in a vague way, relinquishing to the Defence Law the task of developing a network of institutional relations. However, the Law also failed to eliminate the ambiguity in terms of competencies and responsibilities on several lines, such as: the President of the Republic (as designated Commander in Chief of the Armed

Forces) and the Government; the Government – Ministry of Defence; and the President of the Republic – Ministry of the Defence – General Staff.

Many political analysts agree that Macedonia does not have a pure model of parliamentary system, because of the strong elements of the presidential system. The debate usually runs around the legal aspects while neglecting the more substantial dimension. The presidential system in Macedonia, particularly linked with the personality of the first president Gligorov (1991–99), was more existent in essence than based in the constitution. The new President Trajkovski made a good contrast with the situation created by his predecessor. Unlike his counterparts in Croatia and Yugoslavia, Gligorov has been remembered as a wise and reasonable politician and a 'father' of the 'oasis of peace'.

However, his methods used in domestic affairs, although rather 'soft', showed a cunning politician. He used his influence in a rather informal way, which is indirectly proved by the fact that there are few acts with his signature applied to them (except in the case of promulgation declaring laws). He wanted to see himself as a president of all citizens, but the opposition saw him as a number one member of the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDUM).[12] In regard to the military Gligorov had unquestionable authority and very often even bypassing regular channels of communication.[13] For the opposition it was a clear

[12] Many of these allegations appeared to be true during the presidential and parliamentary elections in 1994 when Gligorov's campaign was conducted together with the SDSM and the other two parties united in the coalition 'Alliance for Macedonia'.

[13] For example, President Gligorov promoted the former defence minister, retired Col. Risto Damjanovski, into a general in an unprecedented way. Damjanovski had been removed from office because of his loyalty towards the YPA orders during the period of gaining independence. It had been believed that he had been responsible for withdrawal of the draft Defence Law in 1991 under the explanation that 'we already have a federal defence law that is still valid'. His promotion was made exclusively by Gligorov who skipped the regular procedure of taking proposals from the General Staff of the Army. The other peculiarity was that Damjanovski had been retired for three years, when he was promoted into a general. Obviously Gligorov introduced a practice valid in the former Yugoslavia, although the retired officers are usually promoted only in

sign of building an alliance between the pro-Serb oriented President and the former YPA officers, all called 'old guard'. According to foreign analysts the civilian control of the military and the national security system was 'personal' and depended more on Gligorov's role than on constitutional mechanisms.[14] The change in office from 1999 showed that the function of the President was heavily dependent on who is in office. Gligorov's successor lacks his experience and charisma, but also knowledge in defence matters. However, his main deficiency is lack of legitimacy. He came into power in a way that many see as fraudulent elections.[15]

It is believed that the invisible coalition between Gligorov and the Government of Branko Crvenkovski (SDUM) was an alliance in which Gligorov dominated the young and inexperienced Prime Minister. The situation changed a bit after the assassination attempt on Gligorov's life in 1995, when gradually his influence in political developments was partly diminished by the 'gamins from our own rows', i.e. the young ambitious SDUM elite. After the 1998 parliamentary elections for the first time the Government and the President belonged to opposite political positions. The problem was named 'cohabitation' and was explained as a normal political phenomenon in any democracy, but the serious collisions occurred at several very important points with a clear significance for the foreign and security policy of the country. The election of Trajkovski promised far better understanding between the President and the Government but it soon appeared that the Prime Minister, as a leader of the ruling IMRO, has been a far most dominant political figure.

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exceptional situations like wartime when it is necessary. ('Gligorov napravi general od ministerot Damjanovski smenet poradi projugoslovenstvo' (Gligorov promoted into a general the minister Damjanovski, who was replaced because of pro-Yugoslavness), *Dnevnik*, 1 September 1997).

14 Zlatko Isakovic and Constantine P. Danopoulos, 'In search of identity: civil–military relations and nationhood in the Former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia (FYROM)' in Constantine P. Danopoulos and Daniel Zirker (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet and Yugoslav Successor States* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

15 OSCE monitoring mission reported serious violations of the procedure in Western Macedonia, but only after the new president came into office.

The 1991 Constitution introduced a new institution in the national security system – the Security Council of the Republic of Macedonia. It gathers together the leading political figures, such as the President of the Republic (who acts as its chair), the Prime Minister, the president of the Assembly, the ministers of foreign affairs, interior and defence and three members appointed by the President of the Republic. Although it is not established as a body attached to the President's office, so far it has been under its decisive influence. Formally it is supposed to consider matters of significance for the national security system and to give advice and recommendations to the Assembly. In practice, it has been a rather 'shadowy institution' functioning *ad hoc* and in a highly non-transparent manner. Actually the public has perceived the sessions of the Council as an alarming signal. The feeling of confusion and insecurity usually increased, especially after opposing statements on the security situation, given to the media by its different members.

At the beginning of the 1999 NATO intervention in Yugoslavia after the meeting of the Security Council, President Gligorov said to the media that he had proposed the introduction of a state of emergency, but he had been outvoted. However, the Government's representative stated that the situation was under control and that Gligorov only wanted to effect a 'coup d'état' in order to prolong his mandate and postpone the presidential elections. The weakest point in the public quarrel was that according to the constitution the state of emergency might have been declared only 'when major natural disasters or epidemics take place' and not because of a refugee influx, no matter how big it was. The second similar situation happened in spring 1999 after several serious armed incidents on the border with Kosovo, when the President proclaimed it a serious situation and ordered combat readiness of part of the ARM and deployment of twice as many soldiers in the border area, while Prime Minister Georgievski calmed down the public by saying that the situation was perfectly stable and secure. His coalition partner Arben Xhaferi, the leader of the Albanian party (PDPA, Party of Democratic Prosperity of Albanians) backed his statement saying that Macedonia had never been more secure.[16]

[16] Quoted by Iso Rusi, 'Incidents on the Macedonian-Kosovo Border', *AIM Press-Skopje (www.aimpress.org)*, 23 June 2000.

The Government's competencies in defence matters in practice mostly depend on the current relationship between the President and the Prime Minister, although every day more operative activities are left to the Defence Ministry. The existing legal lacuna regarding the position and responsibility of the Defence Minister in practice produces many deviations. The most important issue is whether the Minister is responsible to the Government or to the President of the Republic. The Defence Law's inconsistencies imply a closer relation with the President, but it is not necessarily always the case. During Gligorov's term, it was believed that his consent regarding the choice of the defence minister was, although informal, decisive. However, the new President Trajkovski is usually not consulted about the most important issues of national security, which puts him in a rather farcical situation as far as the public is concerned.[17]

One of the main novelties of the 1991 Constitution has been the demand that only a civilian can be appointed a defence minister. The idea strengthened the civilian control of the military. However, from the very beginning the ambiguity of the relationships between the President, the Government and the Defence Ministry was noticed by the General Staff. Then Chief of Staff, Gen. Arsovski and a group of high-ranking officers came up with a proposal for tighter linking of the General Staff with the Commander-in-Chief (the President). Moreover, in their view the appointment of the civilian defence minister was a sign of politicisation of the Defence Ministry and the ARM. Soon after this letter Gen. Arsovski was dismissed from office and retired early. However, he reappeared again as an under-secretary in the Defence Ministry in the IMRO government.

The act of appointing a civilian at the top of the Defence Ministry is often an insufficient step in terms of civilian control. It cannot guarantee civilian surveillance in defence matters in the long run, unless other competent civil experts surround the minister. Regardless of who has

[17] For example, in spring 2000 a public scandal occurred when the media revealed a report of the head of the Military Security Service on activities of Albanian paramilitary units in Macedonia. It appeared that the report had been submitted to the Prime Minister, while the President had not been informed at all.

been in office, the general pattern in the Macedonian defence Ministry is that the ministers do not call for external civilian expertise. As for the internal one available in the administration the civilianisation process is being implemented in a bizarre way. The elite comprehends civilianisation as an open opportunity for endless purges and nepotism. Purges among civil servants and experts are made on a strange political criterion, which is centred on the 'question of loyalty'. On the surface this loyalty is attached to the SDUM or IMRO (the two dominant political parties), but in the background there is the old division on Serbomane and Bulgaromane respectively. During the previous SDUM rule two under-secretary offices were vacant for quite some time after the spectacular removal of civilian officials with the assistance of the military police. Under the current government people who were in office for an extremely short term and then replaced have occupied the positions. For some time, for example, the under-secretary for defence policy was a military officer (afterwards appointed assistant to the Chief of Staff of ARM) as well as the undersecretary for procurement and legal affairs. Asked at a press conference about this solution, Minister Kljusev replied that Gen. Janev (the under-secretary for defence policy) had been wearing a civil suit during work hours and had been very obedient, so there was no danger of violation of the principle of civilian control.

Civil–military relations in Macedonia have been shaped in an atmosphere of sharp fragmentation and antagonism on the political scene. The party system is divided along ethnic lines, but there are also traditional divisions among the Macedonians themselves. A political opponent is usually seen as an enemy who should be discredited as a 'traitor to the Macedonian cause'. Some years ago the SDUM government was accused for its 'soft' policy towards Albanians' demands. From the beginning of the multiparty system IMRO has declared itself as the only genuine Macedonian party, and introduced the division of 'patriots' and 'traitors', i.e. 'real Macedonians' and 'the others'. Today being in power, the situation is the opposite: IMRO is in a coalition with the radical Albanian party (PDPA) and is blamed for 'selling and dividing' Macedonia between Albania and Bulgaria. Over the course of years the nationalistic zeal has grown in a relatively less nationalistic Macedonia. Fermentation of the relationship between the

politics and the military has not reached its zenith yet, since the political system and the military still go through serious mutations with uncertain outcome on both sides.

III Macedonian officer corps: old faces in new uniforms

According to the official (and even some scholarly) interpretations the Macedonian Army is a new institution not only due to the time of its creation, but also given its new political, legal, social and cultural foundations. Most often it is totally ignored that it still bears certain (visible) scars of its parent institution. Namely, the YPA took all armaments but left the officers to withdraw to their home republic and to join the ARM.

Macedonia did not have big problems in terms of recruitment of commissioned and non-commissioned officers thanks to the attractiveness of the military profession among the youth in former Yugoslavia. Most of the officers of Macedonian (and few of Albanian) origin moved to the republic after the appeal of the government in 1992. However, the gathered cadres gave an odd profile of the military institution. Some of the ten generals and 2,400 officers specialised as navy or air forces officers. In one period the peculiarity of the landlocked country was the vice-admiral on the post of the Chief of Staff (Dragoljub Bocinov).

Macedonian officers left the YPA with inferiority complex and, even with a belief that they were discriminated against in terms of career mobility on the upper ranks of the military hierarchy. They also suffered frustration because of the collapse of the state and the military they used to loyally serve until the last moment. Overnight they found themselves in a radically different political and military environment. Two opposite driving forces – Yugo-nostalgia and pro-Macedonianism – have shaped the institutional identity of the Macedonian military. Both inclinations, however, appear to be harmful either for them personally or for the democratic prospects of the country. For many of the older-generation officers the memories of the ‘good old times’, when they served the fourth best military in Europe, are still fresh. It had nothing to do with

their political loyalty to Yugoslavia (or Serbia), but rather with their inability to adjust to the unfavourable environment. At the same time, some of them have finally found a favourable basis for their professional affirmation, but also for reawakening of national pride and patriotism. For the officers raised in the spirit of communism, abolishing the ideology created a vacuum that called for some other substance. Nationalism was seen as the best choice thanks to its potential to mobilise the young state against external and internal threats. Loyalty was attached more to their nation than to the (multiethnic) state.

Constitutionally, it seemed that the ARM was granted only the external military mission, i.e. protection of independence and territorial integrity of the country against aggression. Compared with the former YPA it seemed like the abolition of the internal function and protection of the regime from domestic threats. The officers have to abandon the messianic self-image as the ultimate defenders of the constitutional order (and regime). Nevertheless, the total concentration on an external military mission has induced new frustrations for ill-armed and poorly trained army. In the first years after gaining independence there were often border provocations or the manifestation of force both in the south and the north. Although they were not serious security threats, they were sufficiently distressing for the military officers.

One of the most critical incidents happened on the northern border (the elevation 1703 known as Chupino Brdo) in 1994. Ten Yugoslav soldiers occupied the elevation on the undefined Yugoslav–Macedonian border, which was seen by many as a clear provocation and overture to a war between the two states. The Defence Minister Popovski reacted resolutely and set a deadline for the withdrawal of the Yugoslav troops and said that the Macedonian Army would take over the elevation by force if necessary.[18] When the Yugoslav soldiers withdrew upon the order of the Yugoslav General Staff, no one believed that it was the Macedonian military power that had made them go peacefully. The incident happened on the eve of the presidential elections in Macedonia, so the opposition came forward with the speculation that the incident

[18] Panta Dzambazoski, 'What caused the General Staff off?', *AIM Press – Skopje (www.aimpress.org)*, 5 July 1994.

was faked and was the result of an agreement between Gligorov and Milosevic. Allegedly, both of them could score positive points – Milosevic internationally and Gligorov internally. The attempt of an armed forcing out of a foreign army from what was considered Macedonian territory should have shown the decisiveness of Gligorov, who had been accused for his pacifist and soft foreign policy by the opposition parties. However, the feeling that dominated in Macedonia after the peaceful settlement was not victorious. The resolution to fight back was rather seen as a possible dangerous venture, doubtlessly at a much greater cost than the strategic significance of the elevation 1703.

The other external challenge for the Macedonian army has been related to the 1997 events in neighbouring Albania. The collapse of the state was followed by the abandonment of the border posts by the Albanian soldiers. Different gangs were freely crossing the border and running arms smuggling from Albania in Macedonia, and mainly in Kosovo. For the time being Macedonian border troops together with UNPROFOR forces achieved some results, but the course of events showed that it was not sufficient.

Officially, the ARM is not permitted to exercise any internal missions (except disaster management under conditions prescribed by law). However, at least on one occasion there were rumours about its engagement in the context of internal political struggle. Having blamed the government for fraud in the first round of the 1994 elections, the opposition organised a big protest meeting in the capital, Skopje. Allegedly, the President of the Republic issued an order to certain Army units to raise their military readiness in case the peaceful protests turned into violent ones. At the beginning the rumours were categorically denied by the officials, but later on they admitted that ‘the Army units were engaged in a safeguard of the Commander in Chief’. The order was made by the Commander in Chief himself and realised through the Defence Ministry, but without the knowledge of Chief of Staff Bocinov.

The affair that had been left at a level of speculations, nevertheless showed several critical points. First, it showed that all possibilities for involvement of the military (or some units) in the domestic political confrontations had not been eliminated despite a relatively clear legal

regulation. Secondly, the special units that were supposed to be used were out of the regular chain of command, i.e. under a direct line of command that led from the President to the Defence Ministry (the Department for Military Security and Intelligence). Thirdly, bypassing of the General Staff might have been an indication of a lack of confidence that the military in general would be willing to act against the citizens. Several years after the event, then Chief of Staff[19] energetically denied his involvement in the whole matter: "I find offensive the allegations about my responsibility for obeying the orders for mobilisation of the army and increase of the military readiness. I claim that such an order was not issued. If it had been issued – you can be sure that I would have rejected it. Since long ago I had said 'no' to such orders. I had no motivation and there is no power in the world that would enforce me to use weapons against my own people. I have proved that many times before, even in the times when one should have courage to do that and to persist as a Macedonian. [...] As a professional and orthodox soldier I have always honourably and with dignity defended the interests of the Macedonian people. One thought has always been leading me – the thought of the Macedonian cause. I am not a machine and a servant, but I am a patriot."[20]

In the background of this statement is the idea of the so-called 'patriotic soldier' as opposed to the modern concept of a 'professional soldier'. The patriotic soldier is believed to be loyal to his nation rather than to the constitution. In this very case the dubiousness arises from the fact that the Macedonian nation does not match with (all) citizens. According to widespread opinion the sources of instability and conflict in Macedonia are predominantly internal ones, i.e. related to the fragile interethnic relations in the country. Constitutionally the military mission is strictly limited on its external dimension, but even some of the

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[19] Bocinov has been known as a 'Macedonian hero' from the Yugoslav wars because of his refusal to obey the order of his superior to fire on Split (Croatia). He was charged by the YPA military judicial authorities and put to jail where he was tortured. He was released only after long negotiations and pressures on the Belgrade regime.

[20] 'General Bocinov: Nema sila sto ce me natera da pukam vo sopstveniot narod!' (General Bocinov: 'There is no such power that would enforce me to fire against my own people!'), *Nova Makedonija*, 17 February 1999, p. 7.

creators of the Constitution advocate rather flexible interpretation of the possible engagement of the military when territorial integrity has been threatened.[21] According to this standpoint, there will be no need for declaration of a state of war or state of emergency if any secessionist movement tries to violate Macedonian territory. If the police and other security forces are insufficient to control the situation, then the ARM will be automatically called to intervene. Such interpretations leave a 'small door open' for military intervention in case of intrastate conflict in spite of the legal definitions of the military mission. Since the officers of Macedonian origin heavily dominate in the military ranks, the question of their loyalty in such a case is irrelevant.

From the point of view of the internal military regime within the ARM another bizarre situation has existed for several years. In 1993 the Constitutional Court repealed the statutory provision according to which military service was to be regulated by the act of the defence minister. The created legal vacuum has not been eliminated yet. This situation raises serious doubt about military discipline, especially the disciplinary accountability of the officers and the recruits.

De-politicisation of the ARM is formally proclaimed but only in the form of 'de-partisation' (banning party activity in the armed forces). The Defence Law prohibits organising and performing activities on behalf of the political parties and other civil associations within the Army. The *de facto* situation looks different. The overwhelming majority of the officers have a communist pedigree and until the 1998 parliamentary elections (and IMRO's victory) there were very often allegations that they were members of the 'old guard'. Under the IMRO government the de-politicisation process has been intensified but in a weird manner. The I*MRO-isation* of the armed forces, police and intelligence services is of enormous magnitude. Today's opposition (SDUM) blames the government for purges among the state administration, military and security forces on political criterion. Unofficially, many officers claim that the IMRO membership is the only way to get a career promotion.

[21] Interview of the author with Dr Vlado Popovski, the member of the expert group who drafted the Constitution and the former Minister of Defence, Skopje, June 2000.

Personnel without adequate education and experience holds higher positions, while the removal of the old cadres is being explained by cleansing of the ARM of Gligorov's influence.

The biggest purges have been done among the elite ARM units, such as 'Scorpios' and 'Wolves'. The financial terms of the service in these, for now only, entirely professional units have contributed to mass abandonment of the young well-trained cadres. The bad working conditions, unlimited work hours and unpaid salaries are the main points of criticism among the professionals. Following the demands for professionalism of the Army, which is seen as a crucial feature of the 'Western model', the government claims certain achievements as well as ambitious plans for the future. The official data from 1996 showed that 30 per cent of the ARM military staff was professional, and it was expected to increase to 50 per cent in the next several years.[22] The figures seem less important than the fact that the negative tendencies, such as nepotism, corruption and politicisation, have contributed to compromising the meaning of professionalism. From the perspective of the former YPA officers today's situation has less in common with military professionalism than the one in the former Yugoslavia.

The way professionalism is comprehended in Macedonia indicates that it is seen mainly as an important criterion for admission to NATO and less as a control mechanism in Huntington's terms. Aside from the prism in which professionalism is seen, a more crucial aspect is the financial ability of the state to achieve this goal. Macedonia had to build the army from scratch, so the priority was to provide some armament regardless of its source or the standard. Most of the current military arms and equipment are of different age, military purpose and country of origin, which in general creates huge problems in terms of achieving NATO standards. Bearing in mind that many of the donatorstates[23]

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22 *Nova Makedonija*, 2 September 1996, p 2.

23 One of the biggest 'achievements of the VMRO government was the agreement with Bulgaria that provided 100 tanks for the Macedonian army. Both sides intended to score positive points in domestic and international terms. The Macedonian Government pictured the gift as ultimate proof of the friendly intentions from the Bulgarian side that should have definitively reassured Macedonians of their good will and non-aggressive politics towards Macedonia.

gifted Macedonia with weapons that were far from modern and of suspicious quality, many observers believe that the country has been turned into a depot for old and useless arms, that are expensive to maintain. The material situation in the ARM is so poor that it does not deserve even the attribute of a 'paper-tiger' since no one has ever taken it seriously. All these prove that the ARM has all the preconditions not to be released from its inferiority complex in the years to come.

On the other hand, it was presented as a significant improvement of Macedonia's military capabilities. In addition to the propagandists' points, the Sofia regime could show NATO/EU that it had Europeanised its policy towards the neighbours. Besides, it elegantly got rid of the extra tanks in accordance with the international agreement for reduction of arms in Central and Eastern Europe. Very soon it appeared that the gift did not consist of all one hundred tanks but less, and that the funds needed for their maintenance are an unbearable burden for Macedonia, let alone the fact that they are completely inadequate for Macedonia's defensive strategy.