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IBPP Research Associates. Macedonia

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The following note (lightly edited for English only) from a professor in Skopje, Macedonia was addressed to a professional colleague of the IBPP Editorial Board in response to that colleague's inquiry into the situation in Macedonia. The note was transmitted to the professional colleague one week ago on a day that United States (U.S.) news reports included criticisms of the closing of border crossings from Serbia into Macedonia.

Yes, my dear friend, you are right. For nearly two months we have had terrible weeks. Since for many years by now I regularly listen to evening BBC and CNN broadcasts, I am aware that at this time there have been rather critical images and comments on the attitude of the Republic of Macedonia, its Government, and ethnic Macedonians and other Macedonian citizens of non-Albanian ethnicity, as well as Catholic Albanians--although the last have not been mentioned specifically. For the first time I am astonished at such poor, "on the surface," and unrealistic presentations.

For example, statement like this: "... there are no tennis courts in the camps for refugee Kosovar Albanians" in a situation when the Republic of Macedonia is approaching total economic collapse and bankruptcy because of the war in Kosovo and the rest of Serbia and Montenegro, and when only the natural spring and summer harvest prevents Macedonia from starvation?!

Let me emphasize at the beginning, every ethnic cleansing and exodus is a tragedy per se, and so is this one for the Islamic Kosovar Albanians (and for other minorities too), and in particular it is a tragedy for the minority of Kosovar Albanians who are Catholics or Orthodox and who are being prosecuted (sic?) by their fellow-Albanians for not supporting the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). These are my ethics exactly because I am a refugee-child from the Civil War in Greek Macedonia. So I am very sensitive on these matters.

The reality is:

1. Up to now, there have entered legally to Macedonia more than 230,000 Islamic Kosovar Albanians as refugees, and less than 30,000 have been transferred to third countries despite all promises from all involved sides--including European Union (EU) countries, the US, and other European countries, and the United Nations (UN). That is, there has been an addition of 11% of the total population of the Republic of Macedonia. In Macedonia this raises the population of Albanians to 33-35% of the nation's population and brings with it the political requirement to change the constitution and divide the sovereignty of the country between Macedonians and Albanians. (There is speculation that there are another 30,000-50,000 who have entered illegally.)
2. The KLA has established secret bases in some places on the north, northwestern, and western borders, A few of them have been discovered and tens of tons of armaments and ammunition (of Chinese, Russian, Bulgarian, and some European manufacturers) have been seized. These people are already provoking incidents inside the Republic of Macedonia.

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3. Apart from some minor support by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Army in the Republic of Macedonia and some from the UN and from EU countries, building camps and supporting living and medical needs of Albanian refugees there, which does not exceed 10% - 12% of the total expenses so far, has been paid for by this little and poor Republic of Macedonia.

4. There is a constantly growing disappointment at present of the vast majority of Macedonian citizens towards the EU, NATO, the UN, and everything else except for Christian Churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Methodist, etc.). A feeling of being sacrificed for some new strategic games (as in the Balkan Wars, in World War I and World War II, and in the civil war in Greece) makes Macedonian people think it would have been much better and (that they) would have had much happier times and much happier hopes for the future had the Ottoman Empire not collapsed at the beginning of 20th century.

5. If NATO, the EU and the UN are not going to fulfill their promises regarding the return of Islamic Albanians to Kosovo after the war in Kosovo and Serbia and Montenegro is over, I fear a civil war--likely to be a religious civil war or a war against an expanding Albania--might take place in the Republic of Macedonia. Then, I fear the process of exterminating what has survived out of the Macedonian nation during this 20th century shall be completed.

What I summarized above might be difficult to understand. However, knowing your personality, if you would have come to the Republic of Macedonia and lived here for some time or if you could come in the near future see with your own eyes, I believe, this would be approximately the resulting image you would create for yourself. This is not an optimistic prospect, I realize. But, frankly speaking with open mind and heart, this gives the outline of my opinion and personal judgement.

Yes, my dear friend, unlike in October 1998 when we last met, these two months I am worried a lot about the remaining part of the Macedonian nation and about my country, let alone about my family. My eldest daughter got married in November 1998 and, of course, we all in both families are looking forward for grand-children. Shall we have good luck to get them to be born and live in peace and prosperity, and get their own chances in life? It is not an simple and easy question to answer any more.

In any case, I am deeply moved by your words, and therefore felt free to express my own opinion. Thank you so much for your concern about myself and family, and my country. I have received messages with similar words of concern from a number of colleague-friends these past weeks. (Keywords: Kosovo, Macedonia, NATO, Serbia, Yugoslavia.)