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**AUTONOMY FOR THE NORTHERN
PART OF KOSOVO:
*UNFOLDING SCENARIOS AND
REGIONAL CONSEQUENCES***

Prishtina, July 2012

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1. Introduction

In February 2012 KIPRED has published “*A Comprehensive Vision for the North: The Final Countdown*”¹ paper, outlining a strategy containing detailed steps that had to be taken then by national and numerous international actors present in Kosovo in order to integrate the north - peacefully. The paper called for and outlined urgent actions to prevent the inter-ethnic conflict in Kosovo, avoid the creation of a dysfunctional state, and maintain regional stability. The basic working assumption was that all stakeholders would be serious in fulfilling their mandates and take decisive steps to implement the Ahtisaari Plan in the north as well. It was the last moment to do so, given that the paper came out one month before the European Union (EU) Council’s decision to grant Serbia the EU candidate status, and more than three months before the elections² in Serbia were to be held; which have been considered as key milestones which the international stakeholders³ and the Government of Kosovo (GoK) could then use to press Serbia in fulfilling German Chancellor’s, Angela Merkel’s, three conditions⁴ which would have resulted in a meaningful change in the northern part of Kosovo.⁵

With the announced end of supervised independence for mid-September 2012, the issue of northern Kosovo is expected to be “solved” in a comprehensive political dialogue between Prishtina and Belgrade which may begin in autumn. Given the failure of implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan in the north, some form of “Ahtisaari Plus” as a solution for the area is seen as the only way forward by main western countries. There are variations of what the “Plus” would mean – from shared service provisions between Serbia and Kosovo which is a liberal reinterpretation of the Ahtisaari Plan to territorial autonomy of the northern part – which would limit to a certain extent the authority of Prishtina in that part of the territory.

While the EU and the United States (US) are seeking a consensus on the way forward for the north, a status of the north incoherent with the status of the Kosovo Serbs south of Ibar river does not have the support in the South. There is a multi-ethnic rejection to a mono-ethnic solution for the north by all the Kosovo Albanian parties, all Kosovo Serb actors south of Ibar, including the Serb Orthodox Church and key civil society organizations.

Not much has changed in northern part of Kosovo. While the main road barricades in the north have been dismantled by KFOR - excluding the main one dividing the city at the main bridge,⁶ the parallel structures remain ready to install them at any given moment, as seen on 3 July, 2012. There are precise points on the main roads from Zvečan towards gate 1 (Jarinje) and the alternative roads towards Serbia in which Serb “municipal territorial defense units” have piled woods, truck trailers, gravel on the sides

¹ “A Comprehensive Vision for the North: The Final Countdown”, KIPRED Policy Paper 2012/2, http://www.kipred.org/advCms/documents/26694_A_Comprehensive_Vision_for_the_North_the_final_countdown.pdf.

² The parliamentary and presidential elections were held in Serbia, including Kosovo, in 06 May 2012 with the consent of Government of Kosovo, Government of Serbia, and the key international stakeholders. The Serbian elections in Kosovo were administered and monitored by the OSCE. Local elections, were not held in Kosovo, apart from the Zvečan and Zubin Potok municipalities, which were illegal according to Serbian and Kosovar authorities, as well as international stakeholders.

³ Primarily, the Quint and the EU Office in Kosovo.

⁴ The three conditions were: (1) Disbandment of parallel security structures; (2) Allowing EULEX to fully operate; and (3) Implement the agreements/conclusions reached on the Belgrade-Pristina EU mediated dialogue since then.

⁵ The British Ambassador to Kosovo, Ian Cliff, and the Foreign Minister of Slovakia have recently joined in to one of Merkel’s conditions for Serbia to dismantle the parallel security structures in the north.

⁶ KFOR has removed one barricade in Rudare, Zvečan, on 01 June 2012, which was accompanied by violence, where 5 people have been injured (2 KFOR German soldiers and 3 members of the Serbian community), and where more than 30 bullets have been shot at KFOR troops and their vehicles.

of main arteries (bridges and main turns), ready to be installed within a very short period (15-30 minutes).⁷ KIPRED has observed at least 30 such locations in the municipality of Leposavic alone.

The parallel security structures have not been dismantled; EULEX still is unable to send more than a dozen personnel in the north and in many cases is limited to do so by Serbian officials in the north who grant random permissions⁸ to the former to move around this part of Kosovo;⁹ a bomb blasted in a residential apartment located at a multiethnic site in Mitrovica North killing one, injuring two residents of an Albanian ethnicity, and displacing more than 40 Albanian families off of the northern part; goods¹⁰ continue to be smuggled through alternative roads,¹¹ and the international and local presence at gates 1 and 31 play little role in stopping them. Above all, the EU candidate status for Serbia has not resulted in the West's hoped outcome in Serbia's Presidential election, in which Tomislav Nikolic, the leader of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), a splinter from the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) of ICTY indictee Vojislav Seselj, won.

Up until the electoral defeat of former president Boris Tadic and the Democratic Party (DS), Serbia's position was Tadic's 4 point plan proposing a full territorial autonomy for the north by creating the "Region Northern Kosovo". The 4 point plan had been endorsed by a number of western diplomats,¹² who had expected "an offer" by Prime Minister Hashim Thaci in return.¹³ Serbia's position regarding the north will most likely harden, given the political reshuffle that the 6th and 20th election results brought in Serbia. With Nikolic as President and Milosevic's descendant, Ivica Dacic, most likely as Prime Minister, Serbia will attempt to propose partition for recognition of Kosovo, or a highly independent north within Kosovo, depending on the international stakeholders' positions. Belgrade's red-line in the upcoming negotiations on the issue of the north will be Tadic's 4 point plan with improbable chances to compromise on the de-facto recognition of Kosovo for which the international community will push.

On the other hand, Prishtina continues to repeat the official line of having "the Ahtisaari Plan"¹⁴ as a plan for the north. On 23 May 2012, the Government of Kosovo (GoK) decided to establish an Administrative Office in Mitrovica North to become fully operational on 22 July 2012. The GoK together with the International Civilian Office (ICO) and the Quint continue to believe that this office, serving de-facto as a municipality, will integrate that part of the territory. Given that approximately 250 Kosovo Serbs have applied for 55 vacant positions by late June 2012, the GoK and the international presence believe that this signifies a high degree of readiness of northern Mitrovica Serbs to integrate within Kosovo. These steps alone are not going to help the GoK integrate the north alone, and the ground is being paved for the "integration" to be compromised through a political process with Serbia. The current government does not have sufficient political power and does not feel that it would negotiate alone with Serbia

⁷ Observation by KIPRED senior researcher in the north. 9 June, 2012, Mitrovica, Zvecan, Leposavic, Jarinje.

⁸ See: B92, "Roads in northern Kosovo open for traffic", 8 March, 2012, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2012&mm=03&dd=08&nav_id=79164.

⁹ EULEX is sometimes given 3 rounds of patrolling a day, sometimes 2 round, and this is up to the Serbian structures in the north to decide.

¹⁰ Mainly oil, cigarettes, and food.

¹¹ Kajtazi, V. "Rrugët e kontrabandës në veri". Koha Ditore. 14 May 2012, <http://www.koha.net/index.php?page=1.13.99309>

¹² See the British Ambassador to Kosovo, Ian Cliff claims: B92, "Tadic's suggestion in line with Ahtisaari plan", 17 January, 2012, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2012&mm=01&dd=17&nav_id=78329

¹³ Palokaj, A. "Ndërkombëtarët duan konsensus të brendshëm për veriu", Koha Ditore 30 January, 2012, <http://www.koha.net/?page=1.13.85934>

¹⁴ Continuously pointed out by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Foreign Minister of Kosovo, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kosovo, and other government officials.

on the north. That is why some western diplomats are attempting to link the two main Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) offshoots – the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) of Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and the Alliance for Future of Kosovo (AAK) of Ramush Haradinaj – into a new governing coalition. This “KLA Government”, according to them, would more easily compromise on the issue of the north in the political process with Belgrade.

Given the magnitude of support in the European Union and the United States for a new political process between Prishtina and Belgrade in which the north would be solved, it is very likely that the solution for the north will be settled around a certain amount of autonomy within the “Plus” variations of the Ahtisaari Plan explained above. This paper, therefore, outlines the likely scenarios that will unfold in Kosovo, the Presevo Valley, Macedonia, and the entire Western Balkans should such a solution for the north materialize.

2. Kosovo

The autonomy for northern Kosovo (Ahtisaari Plus)¹⁵ will touch upon the i) functionality and stability of Kosovo; ii) will impact negatively on Kosovo Serbs; and iii) will ignite frustrations and increase dissatisfaction among the Kosovo Albanians who will be determined to change the new imposed reality.

2.1. Functionality of the state

The minimum parameters for the proper functioning of the state of Kosovo were secured by the provisions provided in the Ahtisaari Plan. Large municipal based autonomy and self-governance for Kosovo Serbs are provided where the local governments have the authority, among others, to: (1) appoint local chiefs of police; (2) fully manage the pre-primary, primary and secondary education including the municipal management of the autonomous University in Mitrovica North, with curricula developed by Serbia; (3) representation in local judiciary with reserved seats; (4) provide local public services (including urban planning and development, local finances and tax collection, land management, construction, business registration licensing, etc.); (5) manage local economic development; (6) provide primary and secondary healthcare, including self-management of three public hospitals (in Mitrovica North, Gracanica and Strpce); (7) use their own language and Cyrillic alphabet; (8) manage cultural affairs as well as benefit from religious and identity protection; (9) have and manage their own media; (10) cooperate with Serbia in all fields of competence, including the right to receive tax free funding from Serbia and human capital; and cross-border cooperation with municipalities in Serbia.

The extent of such autonomy which already grants Kosovo Serb majority municipalities a special status, including a direct cooperation with Serbia (or special links with Serbia), in reality, ought to give Serbia the right to directly share responsibility over the wellbeing and development of Kosovo Serbs in partnership and transparency with Kosovo. This special arrangement for the Kosovo Serbs already makes the state sit on a borderline of proper functioning. Adding an extra layer of any level of territorial autonomy¹⁶ on top of

¹⁵ The autonomy for the north and the Ahtisaari Plus are used interchangeably in this document.

¹⁶ The additional special status (autonomy) of the “Ahtisaari Plus” that is being mentioned is likely to end up being a territorial autonomy for the north given Tadic’s remark for the creation of the “region called northern Kosovo” which implies a certain territorial line as well as the fact that these extra rights are being negotiated for a community living only on a certain, almost precise area, within the territory of Kosovo.

the special autonomy that is already provided for the Serbs will lead to Kosovo becoming a failed state unable to manage its economic affairs, population, territory, and let alone the inter-ethnic relations as foreseen in its constitution.

In addition to the impact that such an autonomy would have on the general (dis)functioning of the state, it will also make the state, which in mid-term shall undergo the EU accession process,¹⁷ impossible to do so. The autonomy for a part of territory and for a portion of a community within the state creates a multi-layered decentralized system of decision making that will make it impossible for Kosovo to properly function. This autonomy will, moreover, provide those leading different sectors in that area with enough competences to drag on processes that are key for the functioning of the state and which the EU asks for. As the functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) shows, northern leaders in their de facto entity may decide not to cooperate with the central authority on security, border management, intelligence provision, fiscal affairs, judiciary, and all the fields this potential autonomy may encompass. These areas are not only important for the proper functioning of the state, but also for the fulfillment of conditions when applying for the EU candidate status or any earlier stage in the accession process. BiH stands as a stark example what happens to a Balkan state with territorial autonomy based on purely ethnic grounds. BiH has been kept as an incompatible state for the EU candidate status for that reason. The international community can do very little to change the situation on the ground once this scenario unfolds. It is the example of Bosnia that tells much that regardless of the international presence, a decentralized over-layering and ethnic based autonomy is impossible to manage.

Instead of closing the issue of the north with current contours provided by the Ahtisaari Plan, an “Ahtisaari Plus” will do just the opposite. It will legalize the existing situation in the north, making it possible for the autonomous area to legally defy the Kosovo state in practice. It will maintain the wish of Belgrade and its prodigies in the north that one day the region will break away. In this new environment, the debate and political activities south of Ibar will shift away from pressing issues such as economic and social development – including overall democratization and rule of law - to an over-consumed nationalistic debate on the character of the state and the need for such a state. This will prevent the overall development of Kosovo and will maintain the society focused on fruitless issues instead of advancing on the key ones.

2.2. The fate of Kosovo Serbs

The “Ahtisaari Plus” autonomy would make the Kosovo Serbs the only ethnic community in Europe granted with double standards within a single state. The majority of them living south of Ibar, which have accommodated with the Ahtisaari Plan as the only way for their preservation, protection and development, will face betrayal. This will send a clear message to the two thirds of the Serbs south of Ibar that their efforts to integrate in and democratize Kosovo have not paid off. The message will also be clear that supporting radicalism by rejecting the state is the way to enjoy far more reaching rights and prospects for development. Thus, the provision of double-standards for the Serbs will lead to a majority of two-thirds having a lesser degree of rights than a minority of one third living in the north. This would negatively impact the Serbs south of Ibar, upon whom the multi-ethnic character of the state depends on.

Autonomy in the north would shatter the Serb political establishment south of Ibar, discrediting all moderate Kosovo Serb leaders. Furthermore, a number of ordinary

¹⁷ Conditions for the SAA and application for the candidate status.

people would immediately leave, be it from growth of pressure coming from the local Albanians,¹⁸ be it from a new political setting for the Serbs in the north, or from the definite loss of prospects for living a sustainable life south of Ibar. The other part will gradually find the new social and political environment in Kosovo growing hostile towards them. As the focus of Serbia, Kosovo, and the dwindling international donors shift solely on the north, including Serbia's disengagement from supporting the Serb social services in the south, Kosovo will, in mid-term, face a considerable depopulation of the South from the Serbs. The destination of the gradual displacement of the Serbs will be the autonomous north and Serbia. This will, eventually and de facto, lead to the creation of two mono-ethnic units in the state, ending up like BiH – a well known example, among the international community, of a dysfunctional state.

The Serb patrimony in Kosovo, with the majority and important ones lying on the south, will also be endangered. The provisions of the Ahtisaari plan on special protection of the Serb Orthodox Church (SPC), including overall preservation of the Serb religious and cultural heritage will be meaningless after the displacement of Kosovo Serbs. The Serb Orthodox Church rejects the autonomy for the north primarily because it understands it would remain without the people which they depend on and eventually turn to anything but protected relics. This is the primary reason why the leadership of the SPC in Kosovo opposes not only the autonomy for the north, but also any advancement of their own extraterritoriality. This effectively pits the SPC against the Serbian state and Belgrade's nationalistic interests. Given the tradition of a link between Serb Orthodox Church and the State, it is unlikely for this gap to become fully public.

2.3. The dissatisfied Kosovo Albanians

The Kosovo Albanians generally view the Ahtisaari Plan as a compromise for gaining full international legitimacy for the independent state. It had diffused Albanian nationalism immediately post-independence, and created a safe environment for the Serbs south of Ibar. The potential autonomy for the north, meaning going beyond the already made compromise, will break into a general public dissatisfaction re-opening up a public debate about what kind of state Kosovo is, and how is this new status going to be dealt with. Given the un-popular compromise made on Kosovo's regional representation with the footnote, the autonomy for the north will be, for the majority Albanians, not only un-popular but it will pose a final blow to the current political elite, who are likely to compromise on such an outcome with a consensus.

This, as a result, will provide more room for nationalist discourse to prevail after the weak position on "protecting national issues" by the current political elite. It is very likely that the hardliners, among the Kosovo Albanians, will gain ground and organize themselves seeking reciprocity for the status of Presevo Valley and ethnic Albanian settlements in Macedonia. The voices and demands for swap of territories between Kosovo and Serbia¹⁹ and change of other borders to join Albania will grow. The dissatisfaction among the hardliners will not only be expressed through an organized form, but also a disorganized (spontaneous) one that will be difficult to manage. In such internal turmoil, Kosovo will be ripe for growing radicalism by forces which will want to delegitimize the new composition of the state with an autonomous north. Furthermore, the current political landscape in Kosovo will be decomposed, providing space for

¹⁸ There are already disorganized armed groups that appear randomly around Kosovo and at border zones. See for example: Koha, "Zarfe me nënshkrime të AKSH-së për serbë të Klinës" 16 May, 2012, <http://www.koha.net/index.php?page=1,13,99721>.

¹⁹ Giving up the autonomous northern Kosovo for the entire Presevo Valley.

emergence of new, essentially nationalistic forces, just before the national elections of 2014.

Instead of pacifying the region, the autonomous northern Kosovo (Ahtisaari Plus) will directly contribute to mid and long-term regional instability. The supervised independence of Kosovo as outlined in the Ahtisaari Plan was one of the key factors stabilizing the region in that it has watered down claims for territorial solutions elsewhere in the Balkans. Primarily this has had an effect on the Albanian minority in Southern Serbia and Macedonia, who had accommodated with the Konculj Agreement and Ohrid Framework Agreement respectively. Their stance will change after the dissatisfaction in Kosovo will have ignited their previous claims for unification with Kosovo (the case of Presevo) and additional rights and higher status (the case of Macedonia).

3. Southern Serbia (Presevo Valley)

The Presevo Valley, a 1,267 km² region²⁰ which refers to the three municipalities (Presevo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja)²¹ in Southern Serbia, has a total population of 88,996, with an ethnic Albanian majority of 57,686, or 65%.²² It has been one of the hot spots in the region whenever the issues concerning Kosovo were raised. It is organically linked to Kosovo; whenever a major crisis erupted in Kosovo, or uncertainties about its status raised, it directly reflected the political and social environment in the Valley.

3.1. The Kosovo connection: key moments

From 1990 to 1992 the Albanians in former socialist Yugoslavia organized their political parties and established a joint political coordination council. This council created a joint platform which attempted to provide solutions for the Albanian population living in Yugoslavia which was in the process of disintegration. Since then, this connection was marked with several broad political developments which have shaped the current situation in the Valley:

1. *The Referendum (1992)*: In light of the political crisis in Kosovo and the uncertain status of the Albanians in Serbia, the unofficial referendum was organized in the Valley, with overwhelming majority voting for the unification with Kosovo. Since then, the area has more strongly come to be connoted as “eastern Kosovo” to reflect their organic attachment to Kosovo. Although this move did not lead to any serious outcome, it marked one of the first political movements in the Valley that directly reflected the crisis and other events in Kosovo.
2. *The UÇPMB²³ insurgency (2000-2001)*: The second main movement in the Valley that reflects its links to Kosovo is the organization of the Albanian armed movement against Serbia under the label of UÇPMB which begins in January 2000 – six months after Kosovo’s war ends. However, the desires of the Albanians to unify the Valley with Kosovo get shadowed after the Konculj Declaration is brokered with the US and NATO led diplomacy in May 2001 which ends the conflict.

²⁰ The area of the Presevo Valley is similar to the area that covers the 4 municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo.

²¹ The ethnic composition of each of the three municipalities is as follows: Presevo – 88% Albanian, 8% Serb, 4% Roma; Bujanovac – 55% Albanian, 34% Serb, 7% Roma; and Medvedja – 67% Serb, 26% Albanian, 3% Montenegrin, and 1% Roma.

²² BIRN Serbia, “South Serbia Demographics”, 24 March, 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/south-serbia-demographics>

²³ Ushtria Çlirimtare e Preshevës Medvegjës dhe Bujanovcit – The Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac.

3. *The Konculj Declaration and the Čović Plan (2001)*: disbands the UÇPMB and allows the re-entry of Serbia's security structures into the 5 km Ground Safety Zone (GSZ). The Konculj Declaration also leads to the creation of the Čović Plan²⁴ which envisages an economic development platform for Southern Serbia as well as the creation of a multi-ethnic force and the re-integration of the Albanian community into the public institutions including the judiciary.
4. *The Kosovo final status talks (2005-2007)*: The Albanian community in the Valley becomes vociferous during the 2005-2007 Kosovo status negotiations in Vienna – they want a reciprocal solution for the Valley should the northern part of Kosovo be agreed to be divided.²⁵
5. *The independence of Kosovo (2008)*: The independence of Kosovo and its post effects bring in a new environment for the Valley. Despite claims that the borders cannot change in the Balkans, Prishtina and Belgrade including some political figures from the Presevo Valley hold secret talks on territorial swap option between the north and the Valley. These talks collapse because of the opposition by the Albanian leader in Macedonia (Ali Ahmeti) who thinks that such a solution would negatively impact the Albanians in Macedonia.
6. *The Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue (2011- 2012)*: Out of seven “conclusions” from the dialogue, there are two which could directly ease the position of the ethnic Albanians in the Valley – i) the mutual recognition of university diplomas and ii) freedom of movement. However, while the first does not get implemented, the second one makes the freedom of movement even harder. Apart from the expensive vehicle insurance – which before they did not pay – two out of four official border crossings²⁶ between Kosovo and the Valley cannot be used.

3.2. The current social conditions of the Albanians

Besides that the Čović Plan brought in a considerable amount of donor funded projects, the plan did not produce much since the region inherits a legacy of underdevelopment for many decades. The Albanian community in the Valley still remains underrepresented in the public institutions, primarily in the police and the judiciary.²⁷ The reasons are twofold. First is the non-discriminatory element: when a position at a public institution is secured for the Albanians, some of them refuse to participate in such jobs²⁸ and there is a general perception that they are unqualified for some of the positions in the public institutions.²⁹ Second is the discriminatory element whereby, for instance, in response to the vacancy for 60 lower rank police officers in Presevo, only 3 Albanians ended up

²⁴ Named after the former Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, Nebojsa Čović and is based on four pillars:

- 1) Elimination of threats to state sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- 2) Security, freedom of movement and the right to return to the Presevo Valley, through the disarmament and disbandment of “terrorists” and “demilitarization of the region”;
- 3) Development of a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society; and
- 4) Economic and Social development.

²⁵ Presheva Jonë, “Southern Serbia (Presevo Valley): The Second Kosovo?”

<http://www.preshevajone.com/southern-serbia-presevo-valley-the-second-kosovo/>. See also: Huszka, Beata “The Presevo Valley if Southern Serbia alongside Kosovo: Case for Decentralisation and Minority Protection: CEPS Policy Brief No. 120, January 2007, <http://aei.pitt.edu/11714/1/1428.pdf>, p. 7.

²⁶ Merdare (gate 3) and Dheu i Bardhë (gate 5) are the ones that can be used, while Mutivoda (gate 4) – linking Prishtina directly to Medvedja and Mucibaba – linking Gjilan directly to Presevo (gate 6) were not included as part of the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia; hence cannot be used.

²⁷ KIPRED interviews with high political officials in the Valley. Presevo and Bujanovac, 24 May 2012. According to Beata Huszka in the CEPS Policy Brief, at the Bujanovac municipal court, 4 out of 44 employees are Albanian and the rest are Serb; where is in the Presevo municipal court, 11 out of 40 of employees are Albanian, 3 Roma, and 24 Serbs.

²⁸ KIPRED interview with a senior political official, Bujanovac, 24 May 2012.

²⁹ KIPRED interview with random youth, Presevo and Bujanovac, 24 May 2012.

being hired, regardless of the fact that the vacancy aimed specifically at the potential officers of the Albanian community.³⁰

The discriminatory effect is also evident in the privatization process in Serbia, in which very little Albanian entrepreneurs were given space to invest in the privatization of some of the socially owned enterprises located in the Albanian majority areas.³¹ The inability of the ethnic Albanians to fully integrate in state and public institution, which at the same time are looked upon as main employers, makes their lives more difficult. High unemployment rate (60% in Bujanovac and 70% in Presevo)³² and the lack of prosperous future are leading to continuous depopulation of the Albanians, primarily among the youth, of the Valley.³³

High unemployment in the public sector also makes the implementation of the official use of Albanian language difficult due to the shortage of Albanian speaking staff. Serbia had adopted the law on its national minorities in 2002, making minority language official in municipalities where they constitute 15% of the population.³⁴ As a result of this law the Albanian language became an official language in Presevo and Bujanovac,³⁵ and later on in Medvedja.³⁶ Despite the initial difficulties and resistance to the implementation of the law, there was some albeit slow progress made over time. Still, just recently in 2011, there was disregard for the law by the central state institutions. The new biometric identity documents are not issued in Albanian (or any other minority language) in Serbia, and, for example, the ballots on the 6 May elections were not printed in local language and alphabet. Albanian leaders in the Valley have attributed this setback to Serbian Socialist Party's (SPS's) nationalistic role in central government and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in particular.

The nature of such problems in the Valley, has provided space for the disenchanting groups to emerge and become more violent. A new armed group "Lëvizja e Lirisë" (The Freedom Movement) appeared on 17 May 2012 by carrying out attacks on a Serbian police checkpoint in the Bujanovac village of Dobrosin³⁷ - the same place where the UÇPMB had emerged. The attacks allegedly were carried out from the Kosovo – Serbia border line, 20-50 meters distance from the checkpoint.³⁸ The same group attacked another police checkpoint in Dobrosin on 28 June 2012 where a police officer got mildly wounded.³⁹ Different weapons have been used in all these assaults from automatic rifles, snipers, and other weapons of high caliber.⁴⁰ It is very unlikely that these kinds of armed groups will be able to advance the rights of the Albanians in the Valley. However, they

³⁰ KIPRED interview with the young Albanian representative of one of the leading political parties in the Valley. Presevo, 24 May 2012.

³¹ KIPRED interview with a senior Kosovo official, 31 May 2012.

³² Huszka, Beata "The Presevo Valley if Southern Serbia alongside Kosovo: Case for Decentralisation and Minority Protection: CEPS Policy Brief No. 120, January 2007, <http://aei.pitt.edu/11714/1/1428.pdf>, p.3.

³³ KIPRED interviews with heads of political parties and local activists, 15 May 2012, Bujanovac and Presevo,

³⁴ FRY now Serbian :Aw on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/archive/documentation/refugees/SaMsocialrights/law%20on%20minorities.pdf>, p.4.

³⁵ Huszka, B. "The Presevo Valley" <http://aei.pitt.edu/11714/1/1428.pdf>, p.3.

³⁶ OSCE Mission to Serbia "Ethnic Minorities in Serbia: An Overview", February 2008, <http://www.osce.org/serbia/30908>, p.7.

³⁷ Indeksonline Agency, "Lëvizja e Lirisë" merr përgjegjësinë", 18 May, 2012, <http://www.indeksonline.net/?FaqeID=2&LajmID=19768>.

³⁸ B92, "Junge says attackers "intended to kill" policemen", 17 May 2012, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2012&mm=05&dd=17&nav_id=80291.

³⁹ Info.Al Portal, "Bujanoc, sulmohet rajoni i policies, merr përsipër "Lëvizja e Lirisë"", 28 June, 2012, <http://info.al/v5/2012/06/bujanoc-sulmohet-rajoni-i-policise-merr-persiper-levizja-e-lire/>.

⁴⁰ NOA Magazine, "Sulmohet me mitralozë policia serbe, Lëvizja e Lirisë merr përgjegjësinë", 18 May, 2012, <http://noa.al/news/artikull.php?id=187074>.

present a real threat for the peace and stability in the Valley. They have the potential to be more aggressive when they see that there will be no reciprocity or any additional rights and status for the local Albanians after the granted autonomy for northern Kosovo.

3.3. The local political dynamics in the Valley mirroring Kosovo

The Albanian leadership in the Valley remains organically attached to, and quite synchronized with the political leadership in Kosovo. All of the leading local political parties in the Valley have direct links to the leading political parties in Kosovo, the reasons ranging from ideological and historical to more narrowed short-term gains.⁴¹ Besides the moderate Party for Democratic Action (PVD) who has had historical links with the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the Albanian Democratic Party (PDSH) and the Movement of Democratic Progress (LPD) primarily have held and continue to hold closer links with the KLA offshoots PDK and AAK respectively.

As a result of Kosovo's President, Ibrahim Rugova's, passing and the consequent splits in LDK, Riza Halimi's PVD links with LDK have gradually faded. On the other hand PDK and AAK continue maintaining their strong ties with PDSH, LPD, the Albanian Democratic Union (UDSH), and the PVD splinter Democratic Party (PD)⁴² in which political interests were not the sole reason, but business as well – in terms of having the same sponsors operating both sides. These relations have also directly shaped the political behavior of the two camps – while PVD has participated in all Serbia's national and local elections, the other camp has been continuously boycotting Belgrade's national elections but participating in municipal ones. Throughout the past decade the Albanian leadership in the Valley "perceived itself to be under pressure from Kosovo politicians to boycott all Serbian national elections in hopes of strengthening the case of 'eastern Kosovo'".⁴³ This reciprocity can be also seen in the census of 2011 where the Albanians in Presevo Valley boycotted the census, mirroring the boycott of the Kosovo Serbs north of Ibar river.

As PDK and AAK gained leadership positions in Prishtina, so did their "sister parties" in the Valley. This shift in political powers, however, did not result in any substantial efforts of Prishtina to assist the Albanians in the Valley. There has been no assistance in the area of education, economic development and investment, or in representing the political interests of the Albanians in the Valley. Meanwhile, while Serbia continues to invest up to hundreds of millions of Euros per year for the Serbian community in Kosovo, mainly in the northern part, not a single computer has Kosovo ever invested for the Albanian community in the Valley.⁴⁴

The political support has even faded over time especially with and after (1) the signing of the Konculj Declaration; (2) during the Kosovo status negotiations in Vienna; (3) with the adoption of the Ahtisaari's Plan, and lastly (4) in the current ongoing Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue. For example, the Albanian representatives of the largest parties in the Valley did not receive any support from their Kosovo counterparts, when they pushed with their September 2007 declaration to implement the Ahtisaari Plan principles in the Valley as a reciprocity measure.⁴⁵ The position of the Albanian leadership in the Valley has always been the *reciprocity* with Kosovo Serbs. Since the demanded reciprocity could

⁴¹ KIPRED interview with Kamberi, G. Local activist and journalist in Presevo Valley, 15 May 2012, Tirana.

⁴² PD split from PVD in 2011, and has dominant support in Bujanovac.

⁴³ ICG 2003, Southern Serbia's Fragile Peace, p.23; KIPRED interviews in Presevo Valley, May 2012.

⁴⁴ KIPRED interviews with numerous personalities in the party leadership in the Valley.

⁴⁵ Deklarate Politike e KKSHLP, 29 September 2007, in "Serbia: Maintaining Peace in the Presevo Valley", Europe Report NO. 186, 16 October, 2007, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/serbia/186-serbia-maintaining-peace-in-the-presevo-valley.aspx>, p.7.

not and cannot be enforced in the Valley, the position of the Albanians has evolved as well. They have now begun asking the same status for Presevo Valley that northern Kosovo might get.

The current Albanian political leadership in the Valley is unable to develop an autonomous policy; the meetings between the respective political leaders in Kosovo and the Valley are very infrequent and limited to short term political gains – usually before elections. The political leaders in the Valley remain divided as much as the political leaders in Kosovo do when it comes to agreeing on any larger national moves. They do not move beyond their limited and short term focus and political gains within their municipal or community boundaries, with primary focus being local affairs. Ultimately, they remain dependant on Kosovo’s politicians for their own future, as well as the future of the area. This way, Albanians in the Valley have become the trump card of political centers and ideologies in Prishtina. But, considering the lack of support on the part of Prishtina, they have effectively been cornered out as a political card for any solution that relates to Kosovo’s north.

3.4. Northern Kosovo autonomy and the Valley: Unfolding Scenarios

The following are the scenarios that are likely to unfold should the autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) be agreed for the north.

SCENARIO I: The results of this scenario are no change of current borders; no regional destabilizing events in short term; silent and gradual swap of people; creation of bi-ethnic entities within Kosovo; a dysfunctional Kosovo; and probable regional destabilizing events in mid-to-long term:

1. The autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) is given to the northern part of Kosovo;
2. *Kosovo:* The functionality of Kosovo as a state is put into question; the multi-ethnic components for the south are less likely to be implemented and advanced; EU integration process stalls;
3. No advancement can be made for the status of the Albanians in the Valley, no social improvement thereof, and an increased rate of depopulation of the area; some of them finding refuge towards Europe, and most of them in Kosovo south of Ibar;
4. The Albanian political establishment in the Valley attempt to push for more rights but do not get support from their Kosovo counterparts and even less from the international community;
5. These events and the newly created situation push the two thirds of the Serbs south of Ibar to make some of them move immediately and some gradually towards the northern part and towards Serbia;
6. Most of the 4,000 Albanians in the north move towards the south;
7. A new character for Kosovo is created with two homogeneous ethnic parts, with the Ibar river dividing the two ethnicities;
8. The new character of the state will shatter many other provisions in the Ahtisaari Plan making it irrelevant for the south and different for the north;
9. The “stateness” and the functioning of Kosovo with its actual borders and a new character (two mono-ethnic parts) make it impossible to move forward with reforms as a single state with its “multi-ethnic” character as envisaged in the Ahtisaari Plan, and thus unable to fulfill many of the conditions for even applying for the EU candidate status and let alone get it.

SCENARIO II: The results of this scenario are the ignition of substantial popular dissatisfaction among the Albanians in Kosovo and the Valley; de-legitimization of the leadership in Kosovo and the Valley; creation of a vacuum hijacked by current and newly created nationalists movements and rhetoric; emergence and intensification of disenchanting and random armed groups; a dysfunctional Kosovo; and the start of political processes and negotiations leading to a destabilized Balkans.

1. The autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) is given to the northern part of Kosovo;
2. Ignition of a limited dissatisfaction of the Albanians, mostly the youth, in the Valley;
3. The functionality of Kosovo according to the Ahtisaari Plan is put into question; the multi-ethnic components for the south are less likely to be implemented and advanced;
4. De-legitimization of Kosovo's leadership (political elite diving into a consensus for the Ahtisaari Plus) leading to an immediate de-legitimization of the leadership and political elite in the Valley as a reflection from de-legitimization in Kosovo;
5. Plunging of popularity for current political elite in Kosovo and the Valley, and the creation of political vacuum;
6. Dissatisfaction manifested in Kosovo which will thrust the already ignited dissatisfaction in the Valley; the vacuum hijacked by nationalist moves and rhetoric leading to a situation where political negotiations of various kinds between Kosovo and Serbia materialize;
7. Security situation deteriorates;
8. The re-opening of political negotiations with de-legitimized leadership are only going to create more rifts with the nationalists who would want to have a voice in most of political moves making it more difficult for concessions to be made;
9. An increased popularity for dissolution of the state and unification with Albania; Kosovar Albanians demand partition;
10. Creation of an unstable situation in the Balkans with Europe incapable of managing it.

4. Macedonia

Macedonia presents a different case from that of the Valley when it comes to the spill-over effects from the potential autonomy for the northern part of Kosovo. While the issue with the Albanians in Southern Serbia is limited to the Albanian community living in the Valley, the issue with Macedonia is different from the overall demographic, geographic, and social context throughout the state. The issue of the Albanian community in Macedonia and the cause itself remains slightly detached from both Kosovo and the Valley; the Albanians' political platforms and aspirations have remained largely within the framework of integration within the Macedonian state and limited to obtaining greater rights as equal citizens within the society. Voices for disintegration, succession, or re-unification with another state have been and remain limited. The example in case is the declaration of the "Republic of Ilyrida" by the Albanians in Western Macedonia, after having boycotted the September 1991 referendum for Macedonian independence.

The Albanian community in Macedonia lives throughout the western and north-western part of Macedonia. Besides, there are around 10 times more Albanians in Macedonia than in the Valley; according to the 2002 Macedonian census,⁴⁶ there are 509,083 Albanians, or more than 25%, among 2,022,547 total population of Macedonia.⁴⁷

Contrary to the Albanian majority municipalities of the Valley that directly border Kosovo, the Albanian majority municipalities in Macedonia are unevenly spread throughout northern (bordering Serbia - the Valley), north-western (bordering Kosovo), and western (bordering Albania) regions of Macedonia.⁴⁸ Sixteen out of total 84 municipalities in Macedonia are those constituting Albanian majority, or less than 20 percent of all the municipalities. These 16 municipalities cover dividedly an area of 3,156 km² out of the total 25,713 km² of the entire country, or 12% of the entire territory of Macedonia.⁴⁹

It is in this context that, unlike the Albanians in the Valley, those in Macedonia have found themselves in a more dominant position as the largest minority in the country, or as it is usually referred to as the “second majority”, ever since Macedonia became independent in 1991. The Albanians have also constantly participated in country’s political processes and have been part of every government coalition, ever since the country became independent. The then existing political and social discrimination was not to the extent of that in Kosovo in 1990-ies since Macedonia became independent. Before its independence, however, while the Albanians in Kosovo enjoyed far more reaching rights, the Albanians in Macedonia were discriminated to the extent that they were deprived of using Albanian names for the newborns. It is this very reason that the older generations of Albanians in Macedonia have far more Muslim connoted names than all the other Albanian communities in the former Yugoslavia.⁵⁰ This was the only way for them to maintain their national identity, and thus link it inseparably with religion, a trait which distinguishes them from other Albanians.

4.1. Key moments for the Albanians in Macedonia

Before Macedonia declared its independence, Albanians had already created their political parties, as elsewhere in former Yugoslavia. After decades of severe discrimination, Albanian political parties demanded a substantial advance of rights as equals in the new state. Voices for secession remained limited.

⁴⁶ Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002.

⁴⁷ The 2002 data are considered flawed and politically motivated by many. Albanians claim that they represent at least 30% of the population in Macedonia. The new state wide census that had begun in October 2011 stopped after the State Census Commission members resigned due to the disagreements on the process between the coalition partners – the Macedonian VMRO-DPMNE and the Albanian BDI.

⁴⁸ Although mainly concentrated in north-west Macedonia, not all of the Albanian majority municipalities border each other – a direct link misses, and thus are spread in numerous divided “enclavic” entities bordering three different neighboring countries. (1) Lipkovo and Aracinovo stand together at the northern part of Macedonia bordering both Kosovo and the Valley through Lipkovo. (2) Studenicani stands alone just south of Skopje, and (3) Chair also stands alone within Skopje, both of these bordering neither of the other Albanian majority municipalities nor any of the bordering countries. (4) Saraj, Zelino, Brvenica, Vrapciste, Bogovinje, Gostivar, Oslomej, Zajas, Tearce, and Tetovo comprise the largest collection of Albanian majority municipalities standing together at the north-western part of Macedonia bordering mainly Kosovo through Tetovo, Tearce, Vrapciste, Bogovinje, and Gostivar; and Albania through Gostivar. (5) Debar and Struga stand narrowly together at the western part of Macedonia bordering Albania through both of these municipalities.

⁴⁹ This is a result of the 2004 redrawing of the municipal borders as part of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which is considered to have benefited the Albanian position into gaining a larger number of municipalities.

⁵⁰ KIPRED interviews in Skopje 1 June, 2012

1. *Beginning of pluralism (1990)*: the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD) and the National Democratic Party (PDP) are established.⁵¹ Nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) creates a technocratic government – the first in post-communist period, excluding the Albanians
2. *Macedonia declares independence (1991)*: Albanians boycott the referendum on independence, as there were no guarantees for the advancement of their rights and end of discrimination. The new constitution proclaimed the new state as “a national state of Macedonian people”.
3. *The Albanian Referendum (1992)*: Albanians hold a referendum on the creation of the “Republic of Illyrida”, as a tool for full equality within Macedonia, by creating an Albanian entity. Macedonian political establishment saw this as an attempt for secession. Albanians formulate key political demands.⁵²
4. *New government in Skopje (1992)*: The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) creates a government, which includes the ethnic Albanian PPD. This did not advance the position of the Albanians in Macedonia.
5. *The Albanians split (1994)*: More radical members of PPD create a new party – the Party for Democratic Prosperity of the Albanians (PPDSH). The new party cannot register, because of Macedonian establishment’s fears of the new nationalistic party. The new party’s members ran in elections and get seats in the Assembly as independent candidates. This does not advance the position of the Albanians in Macedonia either.
6. *Strengthening of the Albanian political “hardliners” (1996)*: The Albanian “nationalist” PPDSH won in most of the Albanian dominated municipalities.⁵³
7. *Creation of a new Albanian political force (1997)*: PPDSH and PPD join to form the Democratic Party of the Albanians (PDSH). Four Albanian mayors get arrested because of public use of Albanian national flag; PDSH leaves the institutions including municipality governance. The new force, again, could not advance the position of the Albanians in Macedonia.
8. *Nationalists from both ethnic camps join to form a government (1998-2002)*: The Macedonian nationalist VMRO-DPMNE join forces with Albanian “hardliner” PDSH to create a coalition government. The Albanian mayors return to their office. However as the position of the Albanians does not advance much, and the grievances only intensify. Attacks on Macedonian police stations take place in 1998, 1999 and 2000 – and the then unknown *National Liberation Army (NLA)* takes responsibility.⁵⁴
9. *The Kosovo war and the NATO campaign against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) (1999)*: The ground war between the KLA and FRY forces intensifies. NATO

⁵¹ Rexhepi, January 2008, “Themelimi i partive politike në Maqedoni”, The Zeqirija Rexhepi Blog, <http://z-rexhepi.blogspot.com/2008/01/themelimi-i-partive-politike-n-maqedoni.html>

⁵² (1) removal of the preamble of the founding constitution proclaiming Macedonia “a national state of Macedonian people”; (2) to be given a partner-nation status – joint decision making with the Macedonians in state and local levels; (3) proportional representation of the Albanians in state institutions; (4) the use of the Albanian language in official for a; (5) the public use of the Albanian flag; and (6) the establishment and later the legalization of a state university in the Albanian language – which had become a core demand as a result of the closure of the University of Prishtina in 1989 by Serbian regime.

⁵³ Bogdan Szajkovski, Elections and Electoral Politics in Macedonia, 1999.

⁵⁴ Iso Rusi, From Army To Party: The Politics of The NLA, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=44474>, p. 1.

begins its air campaign against FRY targets. FRY forces begun ethnic cleansing and hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians find refuge in Macedonia.

10. *The armed conflict (2001)*: Clashes between the NLA and Macedonian security forces intensify; the country comes to a brink of a full civil war. The NLA demands full equality for the Albanians, and repeats the known Albanian political requests. The EU and the US pressure the Macedonian and Albanian opposition SDSM and PPD respectively to join the VMRO-DMNE/PDSH government to negotiate and reach a general consensus to address the ethnic Albanian demands; in the end they join. The Albanian parties in the government ask the NLA to disarm, but as the NLA's leader, Ali Ahmeti, was left out of these political negotiations, the conflict further intensifies.
11. *The Ohrid Agreement (2001)*: The EU/US sponsor the Ohrid Framework Agreement settlement, which was possible only after the inclusion of Ali Ahmeti in the process. The unification of Albanian political parties and the NLA becomes possible only with the involvement of independent political actors of Kosovo Veton Surroi and Ylber Hysa, who mediated between NLA and the Albanian parties the PDSH and PPD and key American and European diplomats⁵⁵. Most of the Albanian demands are included in the Ohrid Agreement.
12. *From war to politics (2002)*: The Albanians propose the creation of the Coordination Council of the Albanians – to be led by NLA figures. The council fails due to PDSH's attempts to hijack the leadership of the Council.⁵⁶ As a result, NLA's Ali Ahmeti responds with the creation of the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI) which, after the 2002 general elections, joins the Macedonian SDSM to create a coalition government.
13. *Inter-ethnic tensions erupts (2012)*: From February to May numerous incidents occur throughout the country including beatings, killings, protests not only among the two ethnicities but also between the people and police officers. In April two multi-ethnic protests drawing thousands are organized wanting peace and joint life.

4.2. The impact of the Ohrid Agreement on the position of the Albanians

The results of the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement have overall been positive. The Albanians received self-government in municipalities, including the official use of language in municipalities where they constitute 20% or more of the population.⁵⁷ The Albanian language can also be used in the Parliament. The language in courts and the judicial system are mainly in Macedonian, however ethnic Albanians have the right to use translation. The use of national flag where the Albanians constitute a majority is also allowed. Moreover, no laws concerning Albanian identity or interests can be passed without the approval of the majority of the Albanians represented in the Parliament.

⁵⁵ The US and British diplomats at their respective Embassies in Skopje were against the involvement of any NLA figure in the political negotiations. They were tagged as a terrorist group among the EU diplomats and offices as well. The Kosovar interlocutors, together with the American diplomat Robert Forwick, played a major role in cutting a ceasefire agreement, the formulation of the political demands for a peace settlement, and the general agreement to include the NLA figures in the political settlement, which eventually led to the Ohrid Agreement.

⁵⁶ Iso Rusi, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Aisling Lyon, "Municipal Decentralisation in the Republic of Macedonia: Preserving a Multi-Ethnic State?", 2011, http://federalgovernance.co/archives/volume8/FG_VOL8_ISS3_LYON.pdf.

As a result of the Ohrid Agreement, the redrawing of municipal borders took place in 2004. The re-drawing of borders which was perceived by ethnic Macedonians to benefit the Albanians was opposed with protests and a failed consequent referendum against it.⁵⁸ The successful creation of new municipalities made the Albanians an overall majority in 16 municipalities, while in 13 other municipalities they constitute more than 20%, but less than 50%; thus making the Albanian language official in 29 municipalities.⁵⁹

The University in the Albanian language has been legalized in 2003. Also, there has been an increase of the Albanian representation within the public institutions. The pre-conflict representation of the Albanians in state and public institutions stood at 3%.⁶⁰ According to Macedonia's Ombudsperson this number was 8.3% in 1997 and 10.2% in 2000. Currently, the representation of the Albanians in public institutions stands at 16%.⁶¹

Even with the positive effects of the Ohrid Agreement, Albanians still remain unequal and underrepresented in different areas in the state. For example, the Albanians remain the majority among the over 30% unemployed.⁶² Also, the Albanians who live in municipalities where they are less than 20% of the population face problems with: language use in public administration, access to education in their native language, and are often victims of discrimination, including by the public officials.⁶³ Another problem in education is that it is heavily influenced by political parties;⁶⁴ teachers and professors obtain their positions based on party affiliations. Students are not immune from such influences either; degrees and scholarships are not always merit based but they are influenced by political party affiliation.

4.3. Grievances and politics

Currently, there is a diverging agenda of the ruling parties in Macedonia, where the VMRO-DPMNE and BDI run their own, separate agendas. VMRO-DPMNE, through the rebranding of Macedonian identity, is spending around 500 million Euros⁶⁵ on statues and "classical" buildings in Skopje 2014 project. VMRO-DPMNE leadership is pushing its nationalist card by implementing this project in the Albanian majority municipality of Chair in Skopje, causing a complete alienation among the Albanian population in the capital. BDI, while trying to serve as a stabilizer and at the same time protecting its position in power, has been unable to absorb and direct the Albanian discontent. The party is being accused of acting more like a "United Nations (UN) observer" rather than a stakeholder in the state.⁶⁶

With a blocked Euro-Atlantic accession process, due to the name dispute with the neighboring Greece, Macedonia is also facing the worst inter-ethnic tensions since 2001. The killing of two Albanian men by a Macedonian police officer in Gostivar,⁶⁷ on 28

⁵⁸ The referendum failed because of the low turnout. It had not reached the required 50% + 1 turnout which was necessary for the referendum to be valid.

⁵⁹ For example the Albanian numbers increased in Brvenica (from 33% to 62,5%); Cair (from 38.9% to 67.2%); Vrapiste (from 0% to 82.4%).

⁶⁰ Arben Xhaveri, cited in Veton Surroi, "Libri i Fluturave", 2010, p. 116

⁶¹ Aisling L., "Municipal Decentralisation"

http://federalgovernance.co/archives/volume8/FG_VOL8_ISS3_LYON.pdf

⁶² Minority Rights Group International, 5 September, 2011

<http://www.minorityrights.org/4025/macedonia/albanians.html>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Sinisa Jakov, "Skopje 2014 Forge Ahead Despite Macedonian Crisis", Balkan Insight 7 June, 212, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/skopje-2014-forges-ahead-despite-macedonian-crisis>.

⁶⁶ KIPRED interviews in Skopje 1 June 2012,

⁶⁷ KIPRED sources in Macedonia claim that the Macedonian police officer pulled the trigger after being assaulted by a group of Albanian men in front of his daughter while he was parking his car.

February 2012, ignited a series of inter-ethnic violent acts.⁶⁸ Around a week later, on 7 March 2012, five people of Albanian ethnicity were beaten in a bus in Skopje.⁶⁹ Few days later Albanians retaliated by attacking and beating Macedonian elderly and youngsters in the streets.⁷⁰ Such incidents continued on daily basis which were followed by arrests. These acts were also associated by several protests throughout the country by both ethnic groups chanting nationalist and chauvinist slogans against one another. Also, in March a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the Embassy of Macedonia in Prishtina.

These events culminated with the killing of 5 ethnic Macedonians - four of them young who were fishing at a Skopje nearby lake and a standing elderly - by Albanian men. This killing shocked the country, leading to anti-Albanian protests throughout the country. To make matters worse, Macedonia's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) claimed, after carrying out raids and arrests, that the 5 victims were executed by Muslim terrorist groups. All of the arrested individuals were ethnic Albanians and a few former NLA members.⁷¹ Such approach by Macedonian officials was badly received not only by Muslims but also by ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. As a result, two massive protests were organized in Skopje, the largest one on 11 May 2012 when 10,000 Albanians spontaneously⁷² took to the streets and chanted religious ("Muslims are not terrorists") and nationalist ("Greater Albania") slogans.

The spontaneity of the protests in Skopje, behind which were neither of the largest Albanian political parties, the BDI and PDSH, create the space for the creation of an alternative political movement of the Albanians who are dissatisfied with their own political establishment.⁷³ Currently, Ali Ahmeti's BDI and Gruevski's VRMO-DPMNE reflect a similar breeze of comfort just like the DPA-VMRO-DPMNE coalition did before the 2001 conflict. The space that is being created for an alternative movement fears the ruling Albanian political establishment whose comfort is shaken by recent events.

The dissatisfaction and the de-legitimization that the Albanian political establishment is facing has already led to voices asking for federalization of Macedonia and the creation of bi-cameral Assembly, as a minimum which would guarantee the equality of the ethnic Albanians.⁷⁴ These voices will grow over time as they organize themselves in solid political foundations, which the Macedonian part sees as a threat to the division and as a result the dissolution of the state. The current Albanian political establishment will not put forth such demands; however the ruling political party BDI which also runs 15 out of 16 Albanian majority municipalities, will not do anything either to prevent this.⁷⁵ This

⁶⁸ Balkans Aljazeera, "Talas medjuetnickih incidenata u Makedoniji", 9 March, 2012 <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/talas-meduetnickih-incidenata-u-makedoniji>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ KIPRED sources of various backgrounds in Macedonia claim that the MIA jumped in too quickly with the verdict, especially by claiming that the attacks were a source of terrorist groups. Muslim terrorist groups were mentioned in order not to finger-point at a specific ethnicity (in this case Albanians) and thus prevent further escalation of inter-ethnic incidents. This allegedly would bring both Albanians and Macedonians together against a newly created common "enemy". However, journalists who have been in touch with the MIA claim that the allegations of the Ministry are baseless and that the killing was done for reasons of pure property dispute. The target was not the four youngsters, but the elderly who according to the MIA was allegedly a witness. Quite the contrary. In this property dispute, the target was the elderly who was promised by the current government the property which had been leased to an Albanian before, and the four youngsters were victims of being witness to such criminal act.

⁷² KIPRED numerous interviews in Skopje and Tetovo, 31 May, 1 and 6 June, 2012.

⁷³ KIPRED observations during numerous visits to Macedonia, May, June 2012.

⁷⁴ KIPRED interview with civil society representatives and journalists in Skopje and Tetovo, June 2012.

⁷⁵ KIPRED interview with a senior BDI official, Tetovo, 31 May 2012.

will give impulse to the rising popularity of the “Ethnic (Greater) Albania” idea among a segment of the Albanian population.

As the Albanians push for reorganization of the state, the Macedonians will react with their previous proposal on partition of the country. Federalization and bi-cameral Assembly go beyond what the Macedonians want for the state and the internal organization of the country. They would rather have a partitioned state than a federal one. During the conflict of 2001, the then VMRO-DPMNE leadership offered the PDSH a solution which envisioned the partition of country – whereby a narrow strip of northwestern Macedonia, inhabited by Albanians, would secede and join either Kosovo or Albania. At the same time, the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences proposed a detailed map of the partition of the country, which was publicly endorsed by the VMRO-DPMNE. According to the chairman of the Academy, Georgi Efremov, the plan would be for the Albanians to “settle in the western regions of Gostivar, Tetovo, and Debar which would then join Albania itself at a later date. In exchange, Albania would hand over to Macedonia the town of Pogradec and the surrounding area near Prespa Lake, where a small Macedonian minority lives.”⁷⁶ This proposal was rejected by NLA’s Ali Ahmeti who wanted to set for integration rather than partition.

This made Ali Ahmeti not only the guarantor of Macedonia’s territorial integrity but also a factor for regional stability and preservation of regional state borders. It was him who in 2010 rejected the idea of partitioning Kosovo and the swap of territories northern Kosovo with the Valley during secret negotiations between the governments of Kosovo and Serbia, aided by some Presevo Valley politicians. Ahmeti vehemently opposed this solution,⁷⁷ and clearly stated that he would guarantee neither the stability of Macedonia nor that of the region. He viewed such a solution as a loss for the position of the Albanians in Macedonia, because it would have led to the partitioning of Macedonia on parts which in reality would not include anything close to what Albanians claim as theirs. His position was strongly supported by the prime minister of Albania Sali Berisha, who strongly opposed partition. Members of the international community withdrew their passive support for partition, closing the subject for the time being.

4.4. Northern Kosovo autonomy and Macedonia: Unfolding Scenarios

The following are the scenarios that are likely to unfold should the autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) be agreed for the northern Kosovo.

SCENARIO I: The results of this scenario are no change to current borders; no regional destabilizing events in short-term; the idea of bi-cameral Assembly and federalization become part of the mainstream; mutual ethnic protests and inter-ethnic hatreds take place; Macedonia becomes politically unstable; regional destabilizing events unfold in mid-to-long term:

1. The autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) is given to the northern part of Kosovo;
2. The functionality of Kosovo according to the Ahtisaari Plan is put into question; the multi-ethnic components for the south are less likely to be implemented and advanced;

⁷⁶ Veton Latifi, “Storm Over Macedonia Partition Plan”, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 6 June, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/storm-over-macedonia-partition-plan>

⁷⁷ KIPRED interview with Ali Ahmeti, Recice e Vogel, 31 May 2012.

3. The independent and individual voices (media, academics, civil society) re-open the debate about the status of the Albanians in Macedonia and a potential reciprocity in Macedonia;
4. Demands for the creation of bi-cameral Assembly and federalization find fertile grounds of support among the Albanians, who are already dissatisfied, and their political leadership faced with fading legitimacy;
5. Mutual protests take place; Macedonian nationalist voices opposing such demands chanting nationalist and anti-Albanian slogans. Similarly Albanians of various backgrounds, a mix of nationalist and those among religious groups, find a cause for taking the streets for these new demands and express the general dissatisfaction;
6. Political establishment of both camps, Macedonian and Albanian, especially those in the coalition government attempt to minimize the effects; the political opposition from both camps tries to take over the cause.

SCENARIO II: The results of this scenario are increased demands for change of current borders; regional destabilizing events; Macedonia becomes unstable and leadership changes; a third dominant Albanian movement arises as an alternative; the region becomes unstable:

1. The autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) is given to the northern part of Kosovo;
2. The idea for bi-cameral Assembly and federalization become stronger as the dissatisfied group in Kosovo march in solidarity with the dissatisfied groups in Macedonia;
3. The unstable political establishment in Macedonia leads to early elections changing the political landscape;
4. An overall Albanian consensus in the country for federalization is created;
5. Political negotiations restart in Macedonia with Western envoys as observers and mediators;
6. The negotiations period further intensifies the dissatisfaction;
7. Ethnic Macedonian leaders again propose the division of the country; mirroring the voices in Kosovo for real and full partition north of Ibar and the growing demands for dissolution of the state and unification with Albania grow.

5. The remaining regional and other international actors

5.1. Regional actors

The creation of an autonomous region in northern Kosovo will have direct impact on the behavior and the developments of two other actors in the region – Albania and BiH. Albania has been the most cooperative state with the international agenda for the region in the last two decades. It has supported without opposition the Dayton Agreement, the Rambouillet Accord, the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the Konculj Declaration, the Ohrid Agreement, the Ahtisaari Plan and any solution which the international community has sponsored. However, over the past decade, Albania has gained a different status and position in the region. It has gone through continuous economic

development⁷⁸ and has become part of NATO, further contributing to its domestic stability and security.

Nevertheless, the political and social disconnect that has existed between the Albanians of Albania and the ones of the former socialist Yugoslavia is recently changing. Albania strongly supports the independence of Kosovo and continuously lobbies for its recognitions. It also tries to play a stabilizing role in Macedonia and the Valley. As the region has grown more nationalistic in the last few years, Albania has increased its “national” role in the region as well. In accordance to the Article 8 of its Constitution, Albania has begun focusing on “protecting the national rights of the Albanian people who live outside its borders.”⁷⁹ For instance, the Albanian Ambassador to Kosovo has recently publicly criticized all those who support the concept of a “Kosovar nation” claiming that this is an attempt to revise the history and identity of the Albanians.⁸⁰ At the same time, the Albanian Ambassador to Macedonia received in his office the head of a displaced ethnic Albanian family from Veles, and publicly said that Albania would get engaged in protecting the interests of vulnerable Albanians in Macedonia, indirectly accusing the BDI leadership of not doing enough.⁸¹ This new approach by Tirana shows that the state is not only willing but also capable of becoming a more active player in Albanian issues outside its borders and reshaping its role in the region.

Bosnia portrays the starkest example of a fragile and dysfunctional state, resulting from the international community’s shortsightedness and inability to fundamentally bridge peace, democracy and development in the Western Balkans. The internationally sponsored Dayton Agreement has ended the war but at the same time it has created a dysfunctional state with two entities – the Bosniak-Croat entity the BiH Federation composed of 10 cantons; the Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS); and the multiethnic District of Brcko. This complicated state setup contributes greatly to the state paralysis, apart from continuously prevailing ethnic antagonisms seventeen years after the war. Apart from RS sabotage for greater cohesion in BiH, the Croats have for years been demanding their own ethnic territorial unit, and a re-composition of the state. In this, the Croats have the silent backing of some key EU countries.⁸²

Such a BiH faces a divided international community. The EU has conditioned Bosnia’s application for membership with the closure of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which will close on a condition that BiH creates strong state central institutions, a condition which RS rejects, backed by Serbia and Russia. The EU, in principle, wants the closure of OHR, and is willing to compromise with the RS, but it is faced with opposition from the United States and Turkey. With the divisions among the supervisors of BiH – the United States, the EU, Russia and Turkey, the centripetal forces in the state will grow, which will contribute to BiH remaining as a weak state, functioning primarily on the will of the international community.

5.2. International actors

The concerted approach by key international actors brought peace to the Western Balkans over a decade ago. Peace and stability became the modus operandi of

⁷⁸ For example: Albania’s GDP has surpassed that of Macedonia in 2000, currently more than 1.2 billion Euros higher. Moreover Albania’s budget has recently surpassed that of Macedonia, currently standing at more than 0.4 billion Euros higher.

⁷⁹ The Constitution of the Republic of Albania, Article 8, Paragraph 1.

⁸⁰ “Lauka: S’ka komb kosovar”, Gazeta Express, 11 June 2012, <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/?cid=1.13.83653>.

⁸¹ “Maqedoni, debimi i shqiptarit”, Top Channel Albania, 19 June, 2012 <http://www.top-channel.tv/artikull.php?id=236907&ref=ml>.

⁸² KIPRED interview with European and BiH diplomats, Sofia, Bulgaria 8 June, 2012.

international involvement, focusing only on short term goals. This lack of strategic vision has brought the region at the current state of affairs – unstable, nationalistic, without real democratic institutions, and with problems which cannot be solved with a missing international consensus. While the EU is facing economic problems and the US is undergoing a strategic shift away from Europe, Russia is using this vacuum to advance its interests. This situation further complicates matters in the region.

The United States has announced its strategic shift away from Europe, including the Balkans, over to Asia Pacific. It has also made it clear that the Balkans is Europe's problem. However, the EU, even more than 20 years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, has not been able to create a unified foreign policy towards the Balkans. Ironically, the Balkans is the very problem with which the EU was faced when it was incapable of reacting independently, and needed the American leadership to pacify its own backyard. And it is the wars in the Balkans which made the EU aware of the necessity for a common foreign and security policy.

Even after two decades of being involved in the region, the European Union has not been able to devise a common approach for the Balkans. There is still a fundamental lack of an overall strategic vision for the region; problems with Kosovo's recognition by five of its member states, and the divided approach towards the solution for the northern part of Kosovo; its inability to move forward with the accession process for Macedonia because of the latter's disputes with Greece; besides granting the candidate status to Serbia, it was unable to save the pro-European forces in the country because of a complete disconnect with the realities in Serbia; complete division over the future composition of Bosnia; and the inability to use the accession "carrot" to influence consensus-building political culture in Albania and ensure free and fair elections.

The ineffectiveness of the EU has shaped the Union's approach towards the region to a technical reform process. This approach will be unsustainable, and will not contribute either to stability or to democracy and development of the region. Faced with its domestic economic problems and the raise of the political right, it does not have the energy to support fundamental reforms as much as it has tried to do until 2008. Hence, it is clear that the European Union is not capable to deal with the region alone. However, with the US's strategic shift - leaving the Balkans on Europe's hand – the EU will have to deal with the Balkans on its own.

Russia sees the Balkans as a strategic region, and although it cannot compete with the EU's and the US's influence, Moscow still attempts to wage its interests and influence using the Western weakness. It tries to do this by supporting Serbia as its main regional partner, and undermining the overall Western architecture of the region. Moscow cannot "forgive" that it was sidelined (because of its own internal weakness) during 1990ies and especially the NATO air campaign against the then FRY. However, over the past decade Russia has recovered both economically and politically. It uses its global influence to stop states from recognizing Kosovo's independence; it supports Serbia's policy towards the northern part of Kosovo; it supports the RS demands in BiH; and has silently proposed the federalization of Macedonia four years ago. Therefore, Russia is effectively attempting to shame the West with its lack of "successes" in the region.

6. The final scenario

The Western powers are tired of the Balkans. They see the relations between Serbia and Kosovo as the last unresolved issue in the region and are requiring "normalized"

relations between the two, short of mutual recognition. The “price” for this normalization is the autonomy for northern part of Kosovo. Given the regional dynamics, this envisioned autonomy will not lead to greater stability, but quite to the contrary. It will set the stage for yet another international involvement in the next 5 – 10 years, with much less legitimacy and trust by regional domestic players and the people of the region. Taking into account the local, regional, and international dynamics, the autonomy for northern Kosovo will most likely lead to the following scenario:

SCENARIO: The results of the likely scenario are no change to current borders in short-term; regional destabilizing events; silent and gradual swap of people; creation of bi-ethnic entities within Kosovo, and a dysfunctional Kosovo; tensions in the Presevo Valley leading to a silent displacement of the ethnic Albanians; new political negotiations begin in Macedonia for the federalization of the state, contributing to internal instability; Bosnia gets paralyzed as the RS and the BiH Croats propose a joint platform for reorganization of the state; voices for redrawing of borders in the Balkans grow with an increasing nationalistic sentiment in all regional states; Europe is unable to manage these events incapable to move beyond the current regatta accession platform; the US’s role fades, but attempts to lead from background:

1. *Kosovo:* The autonomy (Ahtisaari Plus) is given to the northern part of Kosovo;
2. *Kosovo:* The functionality of Kosovo as a state is put into question; the multi-ethnic components for the south are less likely to be implemented and advanced; EU integration process stalls;
3. *Presevo Valley:* Ethnic tensions rise; no advancement can be made for the status of the Albanians in the Valley, no social improvement thereof, and an increased rate of depopulation of the area; some of them finding refuge towards Europe, and most of them in Kosovo south;
4. *Macedonia:* The independent and individual voices (media, academics, civil society) re-open the debate about the status of the Albanians in Macedonia and a potential reciprocity in Macedonia with the position of northern Kosovo, including special links with Kosovo and Albania;
5. *Kosovo:* These events and the newly created situation in Kosovo push the two thirds of the Serbs south of Ibar to make a gradual move towards Serbia and north of Ibar;
6. *Kosovo:* Left in despair, most of the 4,000 Albanians in the north move towards the south;
7. *Kosovo:* A new character for Kosovo is created with two homogeneous ethnic parts, with the Ibar river dividing the two ethnicities;
8. *BiH:* The BiH Croats press for the creation of a Croat entity in the state, threatening with the full blockage of the institutions of the Federation and the central BiH institutions; RS supports them;
9. *Kosovo, the Presevo Valley, Macedonia:* Kosovar leadership loses legitimacy, and with it the political leadership in the Valley as well as in Macedonia; popular support for unification with Albania grows;
10. *Macedonia:* Albanian demands for the creation of bi-cameral Assembly and full federalization of the state find fertile ground among the already dissatisfied Albanians in Macedonia; the Albanian political leadership is faced with fading legitimacy;
11. *Kosovo and Macedonia:* The dissatisfied Albanian groups in Kosovo march in solidarity with the dissatisfied Albanian groups in Macedonia;

12. *Macedonia*: Mutual protests (the magnitude difficult to know) will take place – Macedonian nationalist voices opposing such demands chanting nationalist and anti-Albanian slogans. Similarly Albanians of various backgrounds, a mix of nationalist and those among religious groups, find a cause for taking the streets for these new demands and express the general dissatisfaction; the government collapses leading to extraordinary elections; the country faces a completely stalled EU integration process;
13. *BiH*: Bosnia remains paralyzed, a joint platform for reorganizing and further functioning of the state is proposed by the RS and the Croats; the Bosniaks reject the terms;
14. *Kosovo*: The “stateness” and the functioning of Kosovo with its actual borders and a new character (two mono-ethnic parts) make it impossible to move forward with reforms as a single state with its “multi-ethnic” character as envisaged in the Ahtisaari Plan, and thus unable to fulfill many of the conditions for even applying for the EU candidate status and let alone get it.
15. *Macedonia*: Elections radicalize both camps, where the Albanian parties ask for full federalization of Macedonia; the Macedonian parties begin considering again the idea of partition of the country;
16. *Macedonia*: Political negotiations restart in Macedonia with weak Western envoys as observers and mediators; the negotiations period further increase the internal dissatisfaction;
17. *Kosovo and Macedonia*: Voices for real partition of Kosovo and unification with Albania grow among the Kosovo Albanians, affecting directly the negotiating political position of ethnic Albanian position in Macedonia;
18. *BiH*: The RS announces it will hold a referendum on independence and unification with Serbia; the Croats announce the creation of their own entity without the Bosniak consent;
19. *The Western Balkans*: A new picture created with hostile relations between the people in the region resulting in sporadic violence and displacements which threaten the entire region.

The creation of a dysfunctional Kosovo with an autonomous north will cement the quick fix policy of the international community in the Western Balkans, and instead of stabilizing the region it will do the contrary. This will demand another international involvement in the area during the next decade, because of the negative consequences of its own policy shortsightedness.

In mid-term, this policy will result in creating a fertile ground for a complete redrawing of the current borders in the region. The Albanians, as they currently stand, are not ready for this scenario to unfold; Macedonia’s entire existence will be threatened involving other states beyond the Western Balkans; while BiH will likely be dissolved. These changes in the region will not occur peacefully.