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09 January 2006

MKD100789.E

Macedonia: Treatment of ethnic Albanians by the government, security officials, and other groups (January 2005 - December 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

General Situation

According to Macedonia's 2002 Census, ethnic Albanians represented 25 per cent of the country's population (EU 9 Nov. 2005; Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005; HRW 13 Jan. 2005).

Despite the 2001 Framework Peace Agreement (also known as the Ohrid Agreement or FWA), which ended an armed conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, several sources noted that interethnic tensions persist (ibid.; EIU 4 Oct. 2004; Dow Jones 17 Mar. 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5) and are one of the most serious socio-political problems in the country (Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005).

The Ombudsman is responsible for safeguarding "the principles of non-discrimination and equitable representation of communities" both in public office and elsewhere (Council of Europe 15 Feb. 2005; EU 9 Nov. 2005). In its report on Macedonia, the 2005 European Union (EU) Enlargement Report noted that a new Ombudsman was elected in 2004 vowing to be active in this regard (ibid.), but information on his effectiveness could not be found within time constraints.

The 2005 EU Enlargement Report for Macedonia warned of increasing segregation of ethnic groups in Macedonia and the absence of acceptable levels of interaction between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians (ibid.).

Events

Some ethnic Macedonians made unsuccessful efforts to prevent the implementation of the Territorial Organization Act, which calls for the re-drawing of the boundaries of administrative districts to give greater representation to ethnic Albanians in local governments (HRW 13 Jan. 2005; *New York Times* 8 Nov. 2004). In their protest over the re-drawing of boundaries, on 24 July 2004, some ethnic Macedonians rioted in ethnic Albanian cities such as Struga, attacking Albanian-owned businesses and property (IHT 24 July 2004). The police reportedly used tear gas and rubber bullets to quell these riots, and 17 people were injured (ibid.). The World Macedonian Congress, an organization composed of Macedonian nationalists opposed to the 2001 peace agreement between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians called the Ohrid Accords, then called a referendum to halt the Territorial Organization Act, fearing it would give ethnic Albanians too much power" (*New York Times* 8 Nov. 2004). However, the referendum failed due to insufficient public support (ibid.; HRW 13 Jan. 2005).

On New Year's Day 2005, ethnic Macedonians again attacked ethnic Albanian interests in Struga, this time vandalizing the offices of two major Albanian political parties (*Fakti* 5 Jan. 2005).

Language

In accordance with the FWA, the Albanian language is now official in municipalities where ethnic Albanians represent at least 20 per cent of the population (EU 9 Nov. 2005; Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005; Council of Europe 15 Feb. 2005), which includes the capital of Macedonia, Skopje (*Financial Times* 16 July 2004). *Country Reports 2004* noted that in practice, however, ethnic minorities who comprised more than a fifth of an area's population did not always have the opportunity to use their language when addressing the central government (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). In addition, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) indicated that Albanian-language media in Macedonia was limited: in May 2005, there was only one functioning daily newspaper (*Fakti*), one national television station and several "very low quality" local stations, and no radio stations (2 May 2005). The problems were felt especially by ethnic Albanian women, a high proportion of whom do not speak Macedonian (RFE/RL 2 May 2005).

Representation in the Public Service

The participation of ethnic Albanians in public institutions has been improving (HRW 13 Jan. 2005; Council of Europe 15 Feb. 2005; EU 9 Nov. 2005): the proportion of ethnic Albanians employed in the Macedonian public service rose from 12 per cent in December 2002 to 15 per cent by July 2005 (*ibid.*), although there is a sentiment among segments of the ethnic Albanian population that equitable government representation has yet to be reached (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). Ethnic Albanian members of parliament can also use the Albanian language in parliament (*ibid.*).

Education

There has been a rise in the proportion of ethnic Albanians enrolled in higher education (HRW 13 Jan. 2005; EU 9 Nov. 2005), from 7 per cent in 2001/2002 to 16 per cent in 2004/2005 (*ibid.*). In 2004, Tetovo University, a new Albanian-language institution, opened its doors (*ibid.*; HRW 13 Jan. 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). However, *Country Reports 2004* mentioned continuing ethnic tensions in the educational sector at a time when school segregation is on the rise, often due to parents' encouragement, and ethnic Albanians reportedly claim that their access to education resources is relatively inferior to that of ethnic Macedonians (*ibid.*).

Security Forces

The proportion of ethnic Albanians in the Macedonian armed forces has apparently climbed from 3 per cent in 2002 to 10 per cent in 2004 (EU 9 Nov. 2005), although *Country Reports 2004* claimed that ethnic Albanians were underrepresented in the army and in the police force (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). However, beginning in April 2004, 280 ethnic Albanian police cadets participated in a year-long training course out of a total of 345 "non-majority" police officers (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia did not respond to requests for information within time constraints.

Internet Sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), *Courrier des Balkans* [Arcueil, France], European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), *European Union (EU) Enlargement Report*, The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Macedonia, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), International Crisis Group (ICG), International Helsinki Federation (IHF), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United States Department of State.


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