



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

Tensions between the Macedonian and Albanian ethnic communities in the Republic of Macedonia exploded into seven months of armed conflict in 2001. Violeta Petroska-Beska, who was a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace during the conflict, returned to her native Macedonia in the fall of 2001 and—together with her colleague Mirjana Najcevska and with support from the Institute—organized a program to promote ethnic reconciliation among high school students and teachers. This report sketches the background to the conflict, describes the ethnic divisions within the educational system, examines the goals and methodology of the reconciliation program, and assesses the program's impact within Macedonia and its lessons for peacebuilders everywhere.

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**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

*Violeta Petroska-Beska and Mirjana Najcevska*

## Macedonia

### Understanding History, Preventing Future Conflict

## Summary

- Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia have distinctly different but equally ethnocentric views of the causes and course of the armed conflict in 2001. These attitudes, which are largely emotionally driven and fueled by prejudice, are likely to stifle efforts to overcome existing animosities and may well sow the seeds of future conflicts.
- If left unchanged, Macedonia's mostly ethnically segregated educational system is likely to reinforce these conflicting understandings of the country's recent history. However, the educational system can be a powerful instrument for social change; a change in the way that history is taught in Macedonia's schools could significantly enhance the prospects for ethnic reconciliation.
- A program entitled "Understanding Current History" was launched in 2002 to combat the divisive effect of the educational system and to encourage ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians to develop a shared understanding of the 2001 conflict.
- The program consisted of a series of workshops that offered students, teachers, and trainee teachers a safe place in which to lay bare nationalist accounts of the conflict, to confront prejudices and stereotypes, and to engage in a dialogue designed to discover common elements in ostensibly irreconcilable perspectives.
- The workshops succeeded in building some trust and mutual understanding where little or none had existed before. Participants confessed that they had joined the program solely to justify their own points of view but had come to see "the inevitability of respecting the other's perspective."
- It remains to be seen whether material generated through this kind of dialogue will be used in the Macedonian educational system in the near future, especially given the current high level of ethnic antagonism. However, the program offers valuable lessons and encouragement to people in all countries seeking to build peace by working with educators and students to promote interethnic understanding.

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## Introduction

### ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

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The fighting between armed Albanians and Macedonian security forces in 2001 ended in August of that year with the signing of the Framework Agreement at Ohrid. Since then, many of Macedonia's political leaders have vowed to develop cooperation between the two ethnic communities, which have long been separated not only by language and religion but also socially, economically, and politically. One of the key challenges facing the country is to extend this determination to promote cooperation from the political to the social level. Macedonia's educational system, as a major agent for social change, has a huge responsibility in this endeavor. In particular, the way in which the conflict of 2001 is presented to students and interpreted in the curriculum at all levels of education in the Republic of Macedonia will significantly influence the future course of interethnic relations.

Recent experience has pointed to the palpable dangers posed by ethnocentric and emotionally driven views of history. Not surprisingly, ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians have entirely different understandings of what happened over the course of the armed conflict of 2001, perhaps the most critical period of modern Macedonia's history. If left unchallenged, these opposing views, based on incomplete, selective, and one-sided interpretations of events, will foster intolerant nationalism on both sides. Thus, Macedonia's future will be determined not least by how its children are taught about its recent past. How will schools approach the issue? What wording will teachers and textbooks use? And what "facts" will form the basis for historical accounts? If teachers from both communities insist on presenting only their own, skewed interpretations of the "truth," they will deepen the divide between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. However, if the same teachers accept opposing interpretations as parts of a larger truth, they will help bridge that gap.

## Background to the Conflict of 2001

The modern-day state of Macedonia was born in mid-1944, when the Republic of Macedonia was established on the eve of complete liberation from fascist occupation. The following year, Macedonia entered the recently established Federation of States of Yugoslavia as an equal partner with Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Before then, Macedonia had been enmeshed in a long and often violent struggle to assert its own statehood, a struggle in which Serbia (later, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), Bulgaria, and Greece had been the major rivals to control Macedonian territory.

In 1991, the Republic of Macedonia seceded from the Yugoslav federation after a referendum in which two-thirds of the population voted in favor of independence. Although independence was implemented peacefully, some issues concerning recognition of the new state's identity and borders were not completely resolved. Objections by Greece to the name of the country led the United Nations to address the newly independent republic by a provisional name, "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"; the United Nations did not, however, deny the state's right to present itself as "the Republic of Macedonia." Meanwhile, in 1992 the United Nations established UNPREDEP, a peacekeeping mission charged with preventing a spillover of violence from neighboring countries and with promoting domestic stability. Until it was terminated in 1999, UNPREDEP not only deployed troops but also sought to encourage institution building and social integration.

Roughly speaking, ethnic Macedonians constitute two-thirds of the population of the country, ethnic Albanians account for one-quarter, and a mix of ethnic Turks, Roma, Serbs, and others make up the rest. The Macedonian and Albanian communities had led peaceful but increasingly separate lives under Yugoslav rule, with ethnic Macedonians becoming increasingly urbanized and dominating the public-sector workforce, while ethnic Albanians suffered from low levels of education and employment and tended

to remain in the impoverished countryside. The new republic's constitution promised Albanians and other nationalities "full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people," but the structural inequalities between the ethnic groups persisted, fueling Albanian resentment. On the Macedonian side, many people suspected the Albanian community of rampant criminality and of disloyalty to the new state—disloyalty that ranged from tax evasion to secessionist and irredentist plots. The three coalition governments formed in the 1990s included Albanian parties but were dominated by Macedonian parties.

Ethnic tensions mounted, especially in the predominantly ethnic Albanian regions of the country, which bordered Albania to the west and Kosovo to the north. Eventually, armed clashes erupted in the spring of 2001 between Macedonian security forces and a formerly unknown group, the National Liberation Army (NLA—in Albanian, the group's acronym is identical to that used by the guerrilla group that had fought Serbian forces in Kosovo two years earlier). The international community pressed for a swift end to the fighting, and in May 2001 a government of national unity was formed. The fighting came to close with the signing in August of the Framework Agreement, which had the full support of the United States, the European Union, and the OSCE. NATO forces oversaw a handover of weapons by the NLA. In September, the electorate approved amendments to the constitution, which were intended to address the main concerns of the Albanian parties. The changed constitution, for instance, gave greater recognition to the Albanian language and greater power to local Albanian minorities.

## Education and Ethnic Division

Macedonia's educational system has long been one of the major contributors to the de facto segregation between the ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian communities. Using opportunities offered by this system, ethnic Albanians attend separate classes at preschool, primary, secondary, and high school levels, where they are taught solely in their native tongue (the Macedonian language is taught as a separate subject from the third grade on). Even in ethnically mixed schools, where Albanian students study under the same roof with ethnic Macedonians, separation and lack of communication between the two groups is obvious during breaks and extracurricular activities.

A similar situation exists for teachers. Even though they might be colleagues in the same school, most ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian teachers do not cooperate with one another. Very often, they collectively compete over issues such as levels of competence, administrative positions, and even schools' names. No efforts have been made to tailor preservice teacher training to the multicultural needs of society. On the contrary, the existing universities, where future preschool and primary school teachers study, are ethnically divided and continue to nourish negative stereotypes and prejudices about the "others."

Inevitably, the sense of a clear division between "us" and "them" that prevails in Macedonian schools shapes the outlook of students. Children are surrounded by negative stereotypes and prejudices, whose authenticity they cannot challenge. Ethnic Macedonians and Albanians do not communicate directly, but learn about one another from stories told by members of their own communities. Any interpersonal conflict between students and/or teachers of different ethnic backgrounds is likely to be seen as having an ethnic dimension. This situation is frequently used as an excuse to put Macedonian and Albanian students in different "shifts" (there are two separate shifts, with half the student body going to school in the morning and the other half in the afternoon), a practice commonly regarded as a "good" preventive measure.

In addition, the school curriculum fails to provide topics that might encourage mutual understanding. Whereas Albanian-speaking students, like other non-Macedonian-speaking students, are obliged to learn about the history, literature, and culture of the Macedonian

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nation, Macedonian-speaking students are taught very little about the history, literature, and culture of other ethnic groups living in the country. Moreover, most textbooks, particularly those dealing with history and literature, clearly reflect ethnocentric agendas and biases.

The high level of tension within the educational system is visible also outside the schools. It is becoming common for ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian high school students to fight at bus stops and in the streets before and after school. Ethnic Macedonian students frequently boycott classes and march in the streets to protest policies that they see as favoring the Albanian community; ethnic Albanian students equally readily boycott classes if their demands are not met or if called upon by their community to demonstrate support for a particular issue.

## Education and Ethnic Reconciliation

Yet, while the educational system currently reinforces ethnic divisions, it also has the potential to help bridge the ethnic divide. Indeed, the school system is, potentially, the single most effective mechanism for introducing the kind of social change necessary if the rhetoric of reconciliation employed by political leaders is to be translated into practice. What needs to be done is to introduce curricular and extracurricular programs aimed at providing opportunities for all students to learn about one another, regardless of their ethnicity and language of instruction. These programs require changes not only in *what* is taught but also in *how* it is taught; modifications and additions to the content of lessons must be accompanied by a profound shift in the teaching method toward a more student-centered approach.

Encouragingly, even before the outbreak of fighting in 2001, efforts had been made to improve interethnic relations by focusing on children. Outside the educational system, for example, Search for Common Ground in Macedonia (a field office of two nongovernmental organizations, one based in Brussels, the other in Washington, D.C.) created the television series *Nashe Maalo* to teach tolerance-building and conflict-resolution skills to children aged eight through twelve. Many other NGOs, both local and international, were working with elementary and secondary school students, conducting workshops for children from all ethnic communities to encourage them to communicate and to learn more about one another. Take, for instance, one of the programs initiated by the Ethnic Conflict Resolution Project (ECRP), a training and research center based at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje that was founded in 1994 with the support of members of both ethnic communities. The program, "Appreciating Differences," was launched in 1997–98 and brought together many groups of students from ethnically mixed high schools to think critically and creatively about different aspects of their lives while discussing topics such as culture and multiculturalism, values and human rights, and stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. In addition, ECRP, together with Search for Common Ground, established bilingual, bicultural Macedonian-Albanian groups within five public kindergartens in four towns in Macedonia.

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## "Understanding Current History"

### Goals

The armed conflict in 2001 dramatically underlined the need for such programs while also creating a new demand, namely, the need to prevent partisan accounts of the recent fighting from winning acceptance in the educational system, thereby further deepening ethnic animosity and division. Responding to this challenge, the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (CHRCR), a university-based research and training center directed

by the authors, organized a series of workshops entitled “Understanding Current History.” The workshops had three goals. The first was to provide insight into the contrasting views of the armed conflict and the ways these views are influenced by ethnocentric interpretations. The second was to encourage current history teachers, future teachers, and high school students to develop a joint understanding of the causes and course of the clashes between Macedonia’s security forces and Albanian armed forces. A third goal was to develop a model for training current and future history teachers to overcome ethnocentric perspectives by introducing respect for differences in views and perspectives.

Between February and November 2002, three workshops were held with three different groups of participants: high school teachers of history; students in teacher training departments at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and the South-East Europe University in Tetovo; and students from ethnically mixed high schools. All three groups included members of a variety of ethnic groups, although most participants were ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.

### **Methodology**

At the beginning of each workshop, participants were told that they were to work on a history lecture entitled “The Armed Conflict on the Territory of the Republic of Macedonia in 2001.” The basic framework for the lecture—a series of seven sections, each addressing a different aspect of the conflict—paralleled a structure found in many history textbooks used at elementary and high school levels in Macedonia. The purpose in using this framework was twofold: first, to make the task easier for teachers and students by employing a framework with which they were already familiar; second, to show participants that even an existing framework can accommodate historical interpretations that reduce, rather than widen, Macedonia’s ethnic divisions.

Each workshop had two main phases. In the first, participants were asked to imagine how future historians from their own ethnic communities would describe recent events. Working in small, ethnically homogeneous groups to develop these partisan perspectives, participants of each ethnic group produced narratives that were markedly ethnocentric and fundamentally at odds with the accounts prepared by members of the other ethnic group. In the second phase, all the participants worked together to develop a fact-based history lecture that would present disputed events in a way acceptable to both sides.

The mere fact that the Macedonian and Albanian ethnic communities perceive each other as implacable adversaries encourages the creation of two parallel “realities,” two mindsets that are mutually hostile, mutually noncommunicative, and equally impenetrable to outside influences. Locked into its own inflexible understanding of events, each side finds it difficult to think and argue rationally and tends to be governed by emotional impulses. Workshop sessions were thus designed and conducted with two aims in mind: to penetrate these closed, intraethnic realities, and to elevate the level of rationality in interethnic communication.

If participants were to break out of their hermetic mindsets and engage in rational dialogue on such a painful topic as the recent armed conflict, they needed to feel secure. Thus, from the outset, the workshop sought to create a safe space for participants. When writing the partisan perspectives, teachers and students were asked to put themselves in the shoes of extremely ethnocentric historians representing their own ethnic group. Although the workshop organizers anticipated that most of the participants would simply project their own views, by telling the participants to imagine themselves as ethnic extremists, the organizers allowed the participants to pretend that the views they were voicing were not necessarily their own, thereby depersonalizing highly sensitive issues and avoiding interpersonal confrontations and disagreements between members of the opposing ethnic groups.

Between the first and second phases of each workshop, teachers and students worked on topics such as the nature of conflicts; perceptions and misperceptions in conflict

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situations; ethnic stereotypes and prejudices; majority-minority relations and discrimination; and human rights and freedoms. Explored through ethnically neutral exercises involving simulations and discussions based on individual attitudes and everyday experiences, each topic yielded insights that helped lead the teachers and students toward a desired point, namely, legitimizing one another's perspective.

At the beginning of the program, participants were confronted with the fact that conflicts are an unavoidable part of life and exist on a personal as well as a group level. After analyzing examples of both interpersonal and intergroup conflicts that happened in their everyday life, the participants came to recognize that conflicts can improve the relationships between the individuals and/or groups involved if approached in a constructive way.

Various exercises prepared the participants to accept that perceptions are subjective and that individuals see events through a lens distorted by their own interests, values, and previous experiences. Participants were given opportunities to experience how the latter shape perceptions and limit a person's ability to see the whole picture and appreciate the full range of forces and factors at play. Teachers and students also learned that conflicts are surrounded by misperceptions that force the confronted parties to see themselves and their own actions as morally irreproachable and those of the other side as evil.

While discussing ethnic stereotypes, participants had a chance to realize that all ethnic groups generally consider the negative stereotypes about them to be false, whereas the positive ones tend to be accepted as true. In addition, participants realized that people are apt to use a word with positive connotations to describe their own group's behavior and a synonym with negative connotations to characterize the same behavior by members of the opposite group.

The workshop helped teachers and students understand how direct intergroup conflicts lead to us-versus-them divisions, creating and emphasizing ethnic prejudices that play an important role in discrimination. Participants discussed minority-majority relationships and through simulations and exercises were able to experience discrimination by the minority against the majority and vice versa; they came to realize that both minorities and majorities have a responsibility to provide and preserve cohesion within a society.

The subject of human rights was approached with the intention of making the participants aware of basic human rights and freedoms and of the ways in which they can be violated and protected. Teachers and students focused on individual rights and argued about their understanding of concepts such as universality, equality, freedom of choice, and active and passive freedom. The goal of the exercises was to build a sense of individual ownership of the rights and freedoms and to stress communication among individuals, as opposed to contact between predefined groups. Participants were constantly regrouped within the different exercises, a tactic that encouraged participants to stop seeing themselves as belonging to just one group and to start identifying with groups of varied composition.

## **Results**

The differences between the two versions—partisan and fact-based—of the lecture that participants prepared during each workshop were striking. In the first, ethnocentric, iteration of "The Armed Conflict on the Territory of the Republic of Macedonia in 2001," ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians focused on different aspects of the same events and offered completely different interpretations of those events. These differences, although varying in their intensity and scope, were present throughout the lecture and to a great extent reflected the interplay of emotions, ethnocentric descriptions, labeling, and blaming. In the second version, which was based on facts suggested and accepted by all participants during an open discussion session, the tone was much more dispassionate and the content more evenhanded. When participants found themselves unable to come to agreement or to verify a particular fact, the second lecture presented both interpretations of events without further comment or analysis.

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The two lectures were both structured according to the same seven-point framework, but as the following point-by-point summary makes clear, their content varied considerably.

### **1. Socioeconomic and political conditions in the Republic of Macedonia in 2000–2001**

- *Partisan perspective:* The ethnic Macedonian side focused on the performance of the government and of the economy nationally, while also noting the impact of events in Kosovo on the developing crisis. The ethnic Albanian side focused on the situation facing ethnic Albanians and judged government performance only in terms of its impact on the Albanian community.
- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that the main characteristics of the period were high unemployment, an unfinished process of privatization, and numerous bankruptcies in the business sector. Political life was marred by many scandals involving the abuse of power. The parties in power had a nationalistic orientation. The government was centralized, the legal system was still undergoing definition and revision, and the judicial system was slow and inefficient.

### **2. Reasons for beginning of the armed conflict**

- *Partisan perspective:* Each side blamed the other for the conflict. The ethnic Macedonians contended that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, together with their ethnic kin in Albania and Kosovo, were seeking to create a “Greater Albania.” Albanian fighters, and by extension all Albanians within Macedonia, were seen not as citizens of Macedonia but as committed terrorists from Kosovo and as part of a regionwide system of organized crime. The ethnic Macedonians argued that the Albanian minority is not, and has never been, discriminated against, and thus they refused to discuss claims of specific human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians.

The ethnic Albanians equated their position with that of the Albanians in Kosovo. Thus, the Macedonian constitution was equated with the constitutional restrictions placed on Albanians in Kosovo, and the behavior of the Macedonian security forces was compared to the use of terror by the Serbian state against Albanians in Kosovo.

- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that the protagonists in the armed conflict were the National Liberation Army and the security forces (the army and the police) of the Republic of Macedonia.

There are different interpretations of the armed conflict’s causes. According to ethnic Macedonians, the armed conflict was a direct consequence of growing nationalism among the Albanian population and their aspirations to increase their territorial influence within the Republic of Macedonia. According to ethnic Albanians, their unequal social position and the fact that their basic human rights and freedoms were in jeopardy were the main reasons for launching the armed conflict.

### **3. Course of the armed conflict**

- *Partisan perspective:* From the ethnic Macedonian perspective, the armed conflict began when Albanians attacked the security forces and Macedonia’s civil population. Consequently, the ethnic Macedonians saw themselves as victims. Villages that were bombed by the Macedonian forces were characterized as legitimate war targets, and any civilians found in certain areas were assumed to be collaborators of the NLA.

The ethnic Albanians explained the emergence and the course of the conflict by the authorities’ refusal to respond positively to Albanian demands. Only Albanian civilians, who were characterized as an innocent rural population, were seen as victims. Legitimate targets of NLA attacks included not only Macedonian soldiers but also Macedonian police, whether on duty or off duty.

- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that the armed conflict began in the area near the village of Tanusevci (Skopska Crna Gora) in February 2001. There were armed actions in the Kumanovo-Lipkovo, Tetovo, and Skopje regions. During the conflict, the

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NLA attacked the police and army forces, while the security forces shelled, with heavy artillery, the villages in the aforementioned regions.

There were victims on both sides. Objects with religious and cultural-historical significance for both sides were destroyed in the regions that experienced conflict. Even in parts of the country that were not directly affected by the armed conflict, religious and cultural-historical buildings were attacked and the property of Muslim citizens was damaged. A large number of people left their homes in the crisis regions and settled in other parts of Macedonia or in other countries.

#### **4. *The role of the parliament, the government, the police, and the military forces during the conflict***

***Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians both criticized the performance of [the country's political] institutions, arguing that their failure to forge a concerted response to the violence contributed to its duration and intensity.***

- *Partisan perspective:* The views of the two sides converged, at least superficially, in regard to the role played by the country's most powerful political institutions. Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians both criticized the performance of these institutions, arguing that their failure to forge a concerted response to the violence contributed to its duration and intensity. However, whereas ethnic Macedonians pointed an accusing finger at the Albanian political parties within the government and the parliament, ethnic Albanians laid all the blame on the Macedonian political parties.

As for the role of the security forces, the ethnic Macedonian side expressed disappointment in the inability of the army and the police to handle the "aggression" and attributed this failure to poor decision making, a lack of integrity at the highest level, and inadequate supplies and training. The legality and the morality of the methods and actions of the army were not questioned. The reserve staff mobilized during the crisis and the Special Forces formed in this period were not seen as separate from the army or the police. In contrast, the ethnic Albanian side condemned the behavior of the army and the police, who were seen as representatives of the Macedonian ethnic community who discriminated against ethnic Albanians and violated their rights. The use of the reserve staff and the Special Forces was taken as evidence of the government's preference for a military solution and was blamed for prolonging the war.

- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that during the armed conflict a new, broader governing coalition was formed and there has been communication between the four largest political parties: VMRO-DPMNE (Democratic Party for National Democratic Unity), the SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia), the DPA (Democratic Albanian Party), and the PDP (Party for Democratic Prosperity). The parliament barely functioned, convening only once, and state officials acted in an uncoordinated manner, which was reflected in the actions of the army and the police.

#### **5. *The contribution of the international community to the development and resolution of the conflict***

- *Partisan perspective:* Ethnic Macedonians believed that the international community openly favored the Albanians and was unsympathetic and even hostile to ethnic Macedonians. This bias was seen as contributing to the deepening of the conflict (by encouraging the Albanians to inflate their demands), as hypocritical (given the international community's refusal to support secessionist groups in other countries), and as unwelcome interference in Macedonia's internal affairs. The ethnic Macedonian sense of injustice was compounded by the belief that the Western powers have a long history of carving up Macedonian territory to suit their own purposes, a history extending from the Berlin Congress of 1878 to the Paris Conference of 1919 and beyond.

In contrast, the ethnic Albanians had an exceedingly positive perception of the role of the international community. Indeed, ethnic Albanians believed that the armed conflict in Macedonia would not have occurred had the Albanians not enjoyed international support, especially from the United States and NATO.

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- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that the international community has been actively present from the very beginning of the armed conflict, although its actions have been inconsistent and its terminology changeable (e.g., the Albanian armed forces were labeled as “terrorists” at first and as “rebels” later). Through its mediators, the international community participated in the formulation of the Framework Agreement and supported its signing. NATO forces were stationed in the country shortly after the conflict began.

#### **6. The end of the conflict and the meaning of the Framework Agreement**

- *Partisan perspective:* The end of the conflict and the signing of the Framework Agreement were seen by both sides within the context of the role of the international community. Both sides perceived the Macedonian state and the ethnic Macedonian population as losers and took the agreement as irrefutable proof of this. Ethnic Macedonians believed that the agreement had been forced on Macedonia by the international community and was bound to fail because its provisions would be boycotted, sabotaged, or otherwise negated by the ethnic Macedonian community. Ethnic Albanians viewed the Framework Agreement as a clear victory. Although the agreement incorporated some compromise solutions to contentious issues, ethnic Albanians believed that it essentially met all their demands. The outcome of the conflict was taken by ethnic Albanians as compelling evidence that force is the best way—perhaps the only way—to achieve their demands.
- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that the armed conflict ended with the signing of the Framework Agreement in Ohrid. This is a political agreement between the leaders of the four largest parties in the Republic of Macedonia: VMRO-DPMNE, the SDSM, the DPA, and the PDP. The Framework Agreement stipulated changes in Macedonia’s constitution, disarmament of and amnesty for the members of the NLA, early parliamentary elections, and legal and structural changes to the state.

#### **7. The influence of the conflict on the overall democratic movement in the country**

- *Partisan perspective:* The outcome of the conflict entirely devalued democracy in the eyes of ethnic Macedonians. Although ethnic Albanians saw the outcome as a victory for the Albanian cause, it did nothing to change their previous poor opinion of the democratic system in the Republic of Macedonia.
- *Fact-based version:* Both sides agreed that the armed conflict not only disrupted the ecosystem but also violated a large number of basic human rights and freedoms, devaluing the democratic movement in the country. The Framework Agreement led to changes in Macedonia’s constitution, to new laws that promise to decentralize government control and promote self-government, and to the state reorienting itself to deemphasize its military character and accentuate its multiethnic and multicultural aspects.

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## **Conclusions: Evaluating Success**

When, at the end of the program, participants were asked to evaluate their experiences, they emphasized the usefulness of the workshop, expressed appreciation for its positive outcome, and noted that they had expected it to be quite different. Most of them confessed that they had agreed to participate in the workshop not to develop some degree of mutual understanding but to justify the actions of their own ethnic community. On their evaluation forms, participants wrote that the workshop had “brought their views closer,” helped them “accept the opinions of others,” “offered new perspectives,” and “provided new experiences.” They found the program “very meaningful,” “stimulating,” “pragmatic,” and “educative,” even though at the beginning they thought it seemed to have nothing to do with history. All agreed that the ethnic heterogeneity of the group was “crucial to

***At the end of the program, participants . . . emphasized the usefulness of the workshop, expressed appreciation for its positive outcome, and noted that they had expected it to be quite different.***

the success of the workshop,” and there was general agreement that the workshop was “very well guided in a way that forced them to accept the inevitability of respecting the other’s perspective.”

Yet, while the participants had learned to listen to the opinions of the other ethnic community, they were still a very long way from sympathizing with, or even perhaps understanding, the other side. Significantly, although the moderate versions of the lecture were free from invective, they also evinced no real acceptance of the validity of conflicting views. Opposing opinions were recorded in the fact-based versions but not reconciled. The two sides acknowledged their differences, but neither side reexamined its own opinions in light of the views expressed by the other side. Furthermore, the facts recorded in the fact-based lecture seem disconnected from one another; there is no interpretive thread with which to weave them into one fabric. Clearly, participants in the workshops had yet to develop a comprehensive approach to the problems that precipitated the conflict and to the task of finding mutually beneficial solutions.

But it is surely unrealistic to expect any workshop to inspire such a transformation in attitudes. Moreover, to focus on what the participants failed to achieve is to ignore the very real progress that they did make during the program. Before attending the workshop, participants knew little about the views of the other side, harbored deep-seated prejudices about the other side, tended to argue emotionally rather than rationally about the events of 2001, and saw no reason to question their own interpretations of those events. After the workshop, participants knew much more about the other side’s outlook, were much more conscious of the shortcomings of ethnic stereotypes, were more prepared to argue rationally about the causes and consequences of the recent armed conflict, and appreciated that their own opinions of the conflict did not necessarily encompass the full historical truth.

In part, “Understanding Current History” was a pilot project intended to determine whether it is even possible to raise the subject of teaching recent history without also raising ethnic tensions. The encouraging results from the workshops have inspired further efforts, and a new initiative aimed at a larger number of history teachers from primary and high schools is planned for 2004.

The need for such efforts constantly increases. Students and schools continue to divide along ethnic lines, and the opportunities for students from different ethnic communities to meet in safe places to discuss ethnocentrism and nationalism are declining. Education is commonly used as an arena for political showdowns; indeed, open conflict among teachers, students, and parents has erupted in two high schools.

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The message from the workshop is clear: If encouraged to work together, and if given the right conditions in which to do so, teachers and students from different ethnic groups can find common ground in an attempt to create a shared history out of present events. The contents and methodology of the workshops helped build trust and cooperation between the participants, enabling them to work together to define common elements of the recent conflict and to accept certain facts about its course. The workshop prepared the participants to accept that ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians have a right to differ in the way they see and interpret the armed conflict of 2001. The workshop may also have made participants more aware of the differences between facts and interpretations, an awareness that is essential if ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians are to develop a common perspective on Macedonia’s past and work together to build a mutually rewarding future.

In Macedonia, as elsewhere, the challenge is to extend the lessons learned in projects such as “Understanding Current History” to the wider educational system and, thus, to the wider society. Incorporating the content and approach of these workshops into the educational system as a whole would promote significant changes, in both the short and

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the long term, in the perspectives of Macedonia's different ethnic communities. Of course, the educational system is hard to penetrate, given that teachers are themselves members of one or another ethnic community and thus likely to be locked into a closed perspective. Informal workshops, however, can play a crucial role in breaking down ethnic and cognitive barriers by offering both the knowledge and the skills with which educators can liberate themselves and their students from an ethnocentrically skewed understanding of recent history.

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For more information on this topic, see our web site ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), which has an online edition of this report containing links to related web sites, as well as additional information on the subject.

## Recent Institute Work on the Balkans

The United States Institute of Peace has long been active in promoting a better understanding of the conflicts besetting the Balkans and of the opportunities for conflict management and resolution. The Institute's Balkans Working Group, for instance, has regularly convened to offer policy-relevant analysis of unfolding crises and longer-term issues, while eminent figures from the region have looked to the future in a wide assortment of Institute-sponsored public briefings.

To spur research on the possibilities for peace in the Balkans, the Institute has brought an array of scholars, diplomats, and journalists to its Washington offices as senior fellows; to the same end, it has awarded more than \$3 million in grants since 1992. The Institute has also rendered a variety of distinctly practical support: facilitating dialogue among municipal and ethnic leaders; training government officials, security forces, and NGO representatives in conflict management skills; and working with educational institutions in zones of conflict—both within the Balkans and beyond—to build local capacity to deal with regional conflicts and promote the growth of civil society.

Over the years, the Institute has published numerous books and reports on the Balkans, among them *An Ounce of Prevention: Macedonia and the UN Experience in Preventive Diplomacy*, a book by Henryk Sokalski, a former Institute fellow and head of UNPREDEP, and *Grappling with Peace Education in Serbia*, a Peaceworks report by Ruzica Rosandic, also a former fellow and a professor of educational psychology at the University of Belgrade.



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