

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Technical Cooperation Project

MACEDONIA

Quarterly report

(Period covered: November 2003 to January 2004)

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1. Executive summary

The final results of the 2002 Census, released in December 2003, showed that 64.18% of the total population are ethnic Macedonians, 25.17% are ethnic Albanians, 3.85% are Turks, 2.66% Roma, 0.48 Vlachs, 1.78% Serbs, 0.84% Bosniacs and 1.04% are of other ethnic backgrounds. The final numbers show an increase in the ethnic Albanian, as well as a slight increase in the ethnic Macedonian population.

Law on the Establishment of the University in Tetovo was passed in January. It provides for higher education in Albanian language, and for the creation of a third public university. Although the law calls for the establishment of a new university, it will draw on the structures of the Tetovo University which had been functioning without recognition since 1994.

The draft law on new territorial division triggered criticism that it could affect the structure and ethnic composition of the population in certain municipalities. Over 25 municipal authorities opposed the draft and organised local referendums in favour of maintaining the current boundaries and status. Initiative to hold a national referendum against changes of municipality boundaries may slow down the decentralisation process and implementation of the 2001 Framework Agreement.

An important step in the development of the National Action Plan on Human Rights Education is the likely outcome of the national consultation on human rights education conducted under the OHCHR technical cooperation project. Civil society training on human rights instruments was conducted, and preparations for training on human rights mechanisms are underway. Training on national institutions and on treaty body reporting are also in preparation.

2. Human rights context

Census Results Released – the final detailed results of the 2002 Census, including on the ethnic composition of the population, were released on 1 December 2003. According to these, 64.18% of the total population are ethnic Macedonians, 25.17% are ethnic Albanians, 3.85% are Turks, 2.66% Roma, 0.48 Vlachs, 1.78% Serbs, 0.84% Bosniacs and 1.04% are of other ethnic backgrounds. The final numbers show increase in the ethnic Albanian population – from 22.7% in 1994 to 25.17% – as well as a slight increase in the ethnic Macedonian population, although their percentage of the overall population decreased (to 64.18% from 66.6% in 1994). The international monitors confirmed that the Census had been carried out successfully, professionally and in line with international standards.

The reactions to the long-awaited ethnic composition data, including from the main political parties, were generally those of acceptance, with limited complaints about the process and final results. Smaller parties, including the ethnic Albanian party PDP, and the ethnic Turk and Roma parties, expressed their belief that the number of their respective ethnic groups should be larger, and some politicians and academics pointed out that the results contain other inconsistencies. The Census results will have an impact on further steps for implementation of the 2001 Framework (peace) Agreement as they provide basis for the enactment of decentralisation-related laws (territorial division and local financing) and for further efforts in providing equitable representation in the public administration.

Law on the Establishment of a State University in Tetovo was adopted in January after an extended debate, and without the support of the ethnic Macedonian opposition MPs who now call for a Presidential veto on the legislation. The passing of the law, which provides for higher education in Albanian language and creation of a third public university in the country, was made possible after the Higher Education Law amendments of last Summer allowed state university classes to be taught in languages other than Macedonian. The law calls for the establishment of a new university, but it will draw heavily on the structures of the controversial Tetovo University which functions without recognition as a private initiative since 1994.

The former Bishop of the Macedonian and current Exarch of the Serbian Orthodox church, Mr Zoran Vraniskovski, was arrested on 11 January on criminal charges of “causing national, racial or religious hatred” together with twelve other persons, priests and followers, while they were celebrating a religious service in his private apartment in Bitola. The twelve were subsequently released after being fined for disruption of public peace and order, while Mr Vraniskovski remained in detention until he was charged at the end of January, after which he was released on bail. Mr Vraniskovski, formerly Bishop of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) has supported the ecclesiastical control of the Serbian over the Macedonian Orthodox church, most recently claimed in 2002. After recognising the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and being appointed its Exarch in Macedonia, Mr Vraniskovski was denounced by the MOC as a “traitor” and banned from conducting any religious activities in churches in the country. On the day before his arrest, Mr Vraniskovski announced an agreement on canonical unity with a number of MOC institutions which allegedly recognised the supremacy of SOC. Although the Constitution separates the state from the church and the Government maintains this was an issue for the churches to settle, on 23 January the Parliament adopted a declaration supporting MOC and its autonomous status in relation to other orthodox churches.

The last foreign military mission “Concordia” left the country in December. Concordia is being replaced by “Proxima”, the EU advisory mission that will assist the police reform and further implementation of the Framework Agreement through incorporation of EU standards in particular in activities for prevention of organised crime and community policing.

Weapons Collection Campaign Completed - the Government’s weapon collection campaign ended in December with a total of 7,571 small arms and light weapons surrendered in the forty-five day campaign period. This was the first campaign of the kind to be organised by the national authorities and it was conducted without serious incident. UNDP, which coordinated the support of the international community to the process, has commended the efforts of all involved in the campaign. The amnesty period/collection process follows earlier

preparatory phases which saw the passing of new legislation and an awareness raising period. The final phase will occur within the next 60 days when the collected weapons are destroyed.

3. Human rights activities and events

3.1. Activities supported by the office

The first ever conference on the rights of sexual minorities in the country took place at the end of November, organised by the local NGO "Centre for Civil and Human Rights". Its aim was to provide support and open a policy-oriented dialogue between NGOs, human rights advocates, academia and other stakeholders on dealing with discrimination of sexual minorities' community in the country. Representatives of over 20 international and foreign, but only a few national organizations, including OHCHR took part. OHCHR contributed to the conference by providing an overview of the jurisprudence of human rights committees and special procedures mechanisms in relation to the rights of sexual minorities.

To mark the Human Rights Day 2003, a country-specific version of the Human Rights Day banner was prepared and displayed on billboards throughout the country and drawing contest was organized by OHCHR under the initiative "*Young People Drawing the UDHR*". Over 100 children and youth from primary and secondary schools in Tetovo, Skopje and the Kumanovo village of Matejce participated in the initiative. The Resident Coordinator, UN Country Team and OHCHR carried out these activities jointly and took the opportunity to widely disseminate Human Rights Day messages by the UN Secretary-General and the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Country launch of the 2003 report on Trafficking in Human Beings in South Eastern Europe was organized jointly by OSCE, UNICEF and OHCHR country offices in December. The report was presented in a joint press conference in Skopje that provided an overview on the part concerning FYR of Macedonia and raised positive interest and reactions of the public.

3.2. Comprehensive technical cooperation programme

Based on their assessment of the effectiveness and achievements OHCHR's technical cooperation programme in 2003, the Government in January endorsed the continuation of the OHCHR technical cooperation programme in 2004 with the same objectives and areas of intervention: strengthening of national capacities for protection and promotion of human rights through human rights education in schools, civil society strengthening, development of a National Human Rights Action Plan, support to national human rights institutions, and strengthening of the Government capacity in the field of human rights.

3.2.1. Strengthening of civil society

The focus in the period remained on the 2003/4 OHCHR civil society training series for a core group of participants selected through a competitive process. The second workshop, on introduction to international human rights law and international and regional instruments, took place in December. The trainers, including OHCHR staff and a national civil society expert, introduced the 25 participants to the concept and historical background of international public, humanitarian and human rights law and familiarized them with key human rights issues and international and regional human rights instruments. Representatives of partner organizations, UNHCR, OSCE and the Ombudsman, also took part in the training.

Between the October and December training workshops, the participants met to review their findings on a case study that was assigned as homework in follow up to the first workshop. The exercise was welcomed and participants accepted such assignments as a method of fostering cooperation and promoting learning between training workshops. The participants' evaluations of training activities offered so far show their appreciation for the interactive training approach, the use of relevant real-life examples, and for the ongoing availability of OHCHR staff and partners for consultation and guidance. The next training workshop, on international human rights mechanisms, will take place in February.

In addition to NGO training, OHCHR continued facilitating regular consultations between senior police officials and civil society leaders. MINOP - the "advisory working group for fostering cooperation between the Police, the Ombudsman, and human rights NGOs" established by OHCHR in early 2002, met twice during the period. Having completed the discussion on its methods of work and several prominent cases, the group now focused on selected policy issues and priorities, including on its relations with the media and public at large. Its deliberations have so far remained confidential and not publicised in order to promote understanding and mutual trust of members of the Group. Following significant developments in understanding between civil society human rights organizations and the Ministry of Interior, the Group prepared an initial position paper on its future dealings with the media.

3.2.2. Human rights education (HRE) in primary and secondary schools

OHCHR activities concentrated on convening the National Consultation of Human Rights Education. Prior to the Consultation, the Strategic Partnership Group on Human Rights Education (SPG), which has advisory and coordination responsibility for OHCHR's human rights education activities, intensified efforts to secure active and meaningful participation of education authorities. The Minister of Education appointed to the SPG a senior staff from his Ministry in December, thus intensifying the Ministry's cooperation in preparations for the National Consultation.

Following preparations over several months, the SPG in cooperation with the MoE, the Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution and OHCHR, convened the National Consultation on Human Rights Education in January. The primary aim of the National Consultation was to map out and evaluate national achievements in human rights education to date, and to establish fundamental policy guidelines for the introduction of human rights education (HRE) curricula in primary and secondary schools. The Consultation offered a forum for over 70 policy makers, human rights and education experts and professionals, teachers, civil society, representatives of international organizations and HRE experts from the region to share experiences and discuss strategies on issues such as effective incorporation of HRE in the school system and the design of components of HRE programmes. The Consultation provided initial elements for a National Plan of Action for HRE and defined key components of a HRE programme for schools. The conclusions of the National Consultation identified the need for such a plan and recommended its development. These recommendations will be widely shared for consideration by relevant actors and will also create a base for defining further activities of the OHCHR technical cooperation programme in the field of HRE.

3.2.3. National Human Rights Institutions

OHCHR initiated the planning process for a national consultation meeting aimed to further the understanding and stimulate a national debate on the role and functions of national human rights institutions, and ways of enhancing their effectiveness. The concept and draft outline of the programme are being finalised in close cooperation with interested stakeholders. The target window for the meeting is in the first half of 2004.

3.2.4. Strengthening of Government capacity in the field of human rights

In cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Human Rights Unit, OHCHR is developing a concept for a custom-designed treaty body reporting training for Government officials tasked with human rights treaty reporting.

4. Coordination with partners

OHCHR and OSCE continued convening the monthly Human Rights Institution and Capacity Building Co-ordination Meetings. The current focus is on activities in support of civil society and strengthening of human rights capacity in general. In this regard, members of the coordination group (including international organizations and international NGOs) established a roster of national NGOs that are supported by programmes of participating international organizations. The roster is designed to serve as a coordination, planning and monitoring tool.

The UN Country Team met on a monthly basis and dealt with issues including CCA/UNDAF, Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reporting, the 2003 Resident Coordinator's report, and the 2004 planning requirements. The CCA was finalised and prepared for publication, and the first draft of the UNDAF was submitted for comments to the regional readers' group. In view of MDG monitoring and reporting requirements for 2004, a joint MDG strategy will be developed under the auspices of a UNCT Theme Group that is expected to also be dealing with human rights issues. These and issues around strengthening the UN human rights action at country level, related to Secretary General's second reform report, will be discussed in detail at the UNCT Retreat in February.

5. Impact and achievements

During the reporting period the OHCHR office in Skopje made an impact in terms of its contribution to:

- increased general awareness of human rights and their importance in people's everyday lives through the National Consultation on Human Rights Education and celebration of the International Human Rights Day;
- greater internalisation of the human rights approach in the work and programmes of the UN Country Team through ongoing implementation of the CCA/UNDAF and MDG processes;
- strengthened cooperation between police, the Office of the Ombudsman, and human rights NGOs through facilitated consultation process;
- the filling of gaps in human rights capacity building by means of facilitating interagency coordination.

Some of the achievements of the reporting period to which OHCHR made a contribution are:

- completion of draft elements for the National Action Plan for Human Rights Education;
- organization of a broad national consultation on human rights education in primary and secondary schools;
- delivery of ongoing human rights training of a core group of human rights activists;
- promotion of a broader understanding of the rights-based approach to programming through its work with national partners and rights-holders.
