

NEW MUNICIPALITIES, A NEW OPPORTUNITIES



**IBRAHIM
MEHMETI**

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During the last 15 months, the issues of decentralisation and Macedonia's redistricting have become key factors in determining the overall atmosphere of society, as well as of the political process. Many words and a lot of energy were wasted in proving certain arguments. Despite that, and especially because of the way in which those arguments were laid out and justified, the citizens were further confused and much less informed about what is actually going on.

The example of several municipalities, where the redistricting has turned into a struggle "to be or not to be," most clearly speaks to the consequences from the political parties' fighting (with conscious or unconscious involvement of the media) to use the decentralisation process for their own promotion. In any case, ordinary citizens will pay for the outcome of bad or short-sighted politics, but the bill for it will be submitted in a form of another halt in the country's development on all levels.

In spite of some flaws, the new municipalities certainly represent a new chance that should be taken advantage of. There is no doubt that the most common reason that citizens were disappointed, and thus easily manipulated, was the ethnically defined, isolated stream of information. For years now this manipulation has been preventing the discovery of common interests of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic particularities.

In this issue Multiethnic Forum is, once more, trying to unveil the reality about the decentralisation process and the new territorial organisation. Research shows that most citizens in Macedonia know very little about the essentials of the decentralisation process and redistricting, so that is why we tried to cover topics in this issue that will shed light on at least some of the numerous dilemmas. Taking into consideration that Macedonia is on the brink of local elections, this issue has yet another dimension and we hope that it will help citizens understand the upcoming changes better.



BORDER BETWEEN TWO GARDENS

It was the beginning of spring. The first bluish-white flowers blossomed among the green leaves of the cherry tree. The worm passed from the cherry tree into its owner's soul when his neighbour told him that the cherries would instead be his since the tree branches extend into his property

LUAN STAROVA

Once upon a time in a picturesque village two neighbours lived in two beautiful houses with even more beautiful gardens. Their ancestors had always lived in harmony and understanding, regardless of their different religious and ethnic backgrounds. They celebrated the holidays together, they went through a lot of things together, and some of them became friends, even brothers by blood.

The neighbours lived in harmony and understanding until the worm entered the neighbour's big cherry tree and its branches crossed over the boundary between the two gardens into the neighbour's yard.

Of course, nothing could bring the cherry tree branches back across. It was the beginning of spring. The first bluish-white flowers blossomed among the cherry tree's green leaves. The worm passed from the cherry tree into its owner's soul when his neighbour told him that the cherries would be his instead since the branches extend into his property.

First they tried to settle things peacefully as good long-time neighbours, to find the solution without compromising each other. But there was no solution. Third parties got involved but they only caused misfortune. The solution could not be found. And while the neighbours fought, the flowers ripened into succulent cherries. The cherry tree was as rich in fruits as never before. The neighbours decided first to seek justice before the representative

of the regional office in the village. He could not find the solution! The Member of Parliament for the region was also summoned. The potential MP from the opposition party, who had lost the previous parliamentary elections, heard of the event.

Of course the neighbours sought justice from the wise old men in the village, too. Each had his own opinion! Some thought that the cherries belong to the one who owns the roots of the tree, and some claimed that the cherries belong to the owner of the garden where the tree branches fall. All for the good, still there was no solution.

Finally the neighbours tried to find a solution to the mutual problem by themselves. The neighbour in whose garden the cherry tree was growing proposed a Solomonic solution-the fruits should be doled out in two parts after the harvest. He justified his proposal by claiming that he was deprived of a portion of air in his garden. The neighbour told him that he should be satisfied with the shade from the cherry tree leaves! Be that as it

may, the two neighbours could not find a solution! They even went to court. But even there things didn't go smoothly. The process was constantly delayed.

After a short while, the village became divided into two groups. The first was in favour of the man who owned the roots of the cherry tree and the other was supporting the man who had the cherry tree branches full with cherries hanging over his garden.

So the boundary between the two gardens extended into the village and divided the inhabitants already politicized from the last parliamentary and municipal elections.

The village has always had a tendency to be an independent municipality but now with the new issue of the "boundary between the two gardens," the activist villagers, who cared little for the soil and their livestock, saw an opportunity to make a new municipality out of the divided village and try out their luck! So some of them sided with the first villager, emphasizing the ethnic issues, whereas the others supported the second villager, claiming to be victimized. Mediators got involved, the problem nearly became internationally recog-

nized but everything still had to be settled locally. A "crisis management" group was established, involving even local officials with such hidden agendas as gaining more power in the future municipality or the parliamentary elections.

Summer passed in unprecedented battles between the locals and the parties involved. Spring passed, but the cherry trees were left unpicked, they soon rotted and fell to the ground. While the boundary issue between the two gardens was discussed it was strictly forbidden to pick the fruits. Better that they rot until the boundary between them is resolved. Some children secretly ate the ripe cherries but they were just a few. The teams were on duty, the crisis groups held meetings. Surveyors paid by the political parties arrived to draw the new boundaries of the new territorial administration to provoke the others. But that is another topic, another dilemma. The new boundary line was guarded day and night - it depended on the destiny of the cherry tree growing between the two borders of the neighbours.

One night when the village was fast asleep and the first autumn clouds

were hiding the streaks of starry light, the cherry tree's owner was sawing long and hard to cut the tree's trunk with a sharp and silent saw. When the "boundary guards" woke up in the morning and the teams of journalists were in place awaiting the crisis management group meeting on the "territorial integrity" of the village, unusual sounds were coming from the cherry tree, which sounded like the desperate voice of a human being. Then, the tree swung strongly and fell right along the boundary between the two gardens.

And here ends the Balkan version of the tale of the gardener and his cherry tree. The epilogue adds that all problems and dilemmas were resolved once the cherry tree was felled. The gardener ended up without his cherry tree but his neighbour will not be able to cool off in its shade either. The boundary patrol withdrew since they were left without a job. The TV teams had nothing to report on and the crisis management group dissolved. Life went on, but this time without the cherry tree between the two gardens.

(The author is a writer)

PEOPLE AND POLITICS

LIVE LOCALLY, THINK GLOBALLY, ACT MORALLY!

DANILO KOCEVSKI

As we look at what is happening before Skopje's local elections, citizens can be anything but satisfied. We see one thing on television and put out by the political and partisan leaders and moguls. How people perceive everything is something else. The citizens mainly hold to their own viewpoint, their own opinion and unfortunately, a great deal of dissatisfaction. That dissatisfaction does not correspond to the emphatic optimism of the candidates when they occasionally state sentimentally: "I am happy...enormously happy that the candidate was supported by one or another party for his historical decision to say yes, and finally run for mayor. Truly touching. Do the

politicians and candidates really not understand the tragicomedy of the situation, living in clouds, so out of

touch with reality?

Politics must not suffocate Skopje or any other city in Macedonia, especially when we discuss local elections. The local elections and the concept for the new municipalities should be fused into one, a possibility to catch our breath before facing the devastating gallop for political power that wants to have its hand in everything. That is exactly what the concept of local government is: to destroy the power centres in favour of the smaller units, which will decide their destiny on their own. On behalf of the citizen, the very same whom we repeatedly mention in civil society terms rather than ethnic terms. That citizen and that society are very rarely mentioned lately, since we are absorbed by the daily political and nationalis-

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tic machinations. Since we did not do very well in that sphere, we must not fail as far as the new concepts of self-government are concerned.

The immense politicisation does not have to suffocate the city, for it is extraneous to efforts to serve the citizens. If the administrative, cultural, economical and social structures in a city are fomented and obsessed on mainly by one party, then woe to the people and the citizens who will strive to break free from the grasp of narrow interests. In the last few years we have gotten a significantly powerful political city oligarchy that assumes the sovereign right to govern less (or more) arrogantly. They are losing more and more any sense of measure and balance, not only among political interests but for the common, everyday changes and

a few of them nowadays! The logic is this: the more candidates, the more chances for votes to spill over. So the chances I may lose are greater. So, people, don't be hasty, am I not good-looking and smart enough, why do you need someone else? Such nonsense. The immense politicisation, especially in the capital, brought us to the point where an independent candidacy barely exists, or has become a caricature of itself. Unfortunately. You don't need to be a prophet to foresee that with this unscrupulous elimination of independent candidacies, and their practical disabling, Skopje will be unable for a long time to revive and stand solidly in its mayoral elections.

While we can assume this, we should not, of course, accept and approve it, seeing that the new concept

of self-governance offers great potential for decision-making in all areas, particularly in finance, where severe corruption is possible. This is especially apt in a situation like ours, where the local system has not yet begun to thrive.

And the concept for the new municipalities and the new chances that they present consists of quite the opposite. Regardless of their ethnicity, citizens ought to be capable of solving problems and communicating with good motives, more responsibly and more purposefully. This should lead to exclusion of power that comes from outside and from above, thus avoiding any undemocratic impositions. Wherever there are real-life problems, life itself will find a way to solve them, even if they are the most extreme kind: financial, social, ethical, interethnic. So it has been till now in a multiethnic environment like Macedonia. Nevertheless, politics itself does not always manage to find ways to identify and solve real problems, to discover and offer contemporary solutions. Life does not wait and stand still where we stopped fifty or a hundred years ago. That non-resolution is favourable ground for extremism and intolerance of various shades.

The new municipalities should open new chances, new opportunities, and new ways of living. New maxims will probably emerge that bring people together, rather than separating, irritating, confronting, degrading and tendentiously provoking them. Surely one of those positive maxims could be:

Live locally, think globally, act morally!

Above all, local life should be understood in the most beautiful and positive sense of the word: to take advantage of every benefit that self-governance, co-existence and problem-solving make possible. Implicit global thinking, which opens doors to the world, assumes this kind of life. There is no true flourishing of ideas, improvement of ways of living, or progress without it; this is the foundation on which the modern world resides. So far we have been excluding one with the other, even though they can only exist in correlation and mutual support.

Issues raised can thus lead us to the most important point: to act morally, without hypocrisy, without imposing personal interests, without using force or terrorising others, without saying one thing and doing something else. And last but not least, politics must not only be empty rhetoric but also give real instigation for progress. This is the only way that new municipalities can take new chances without fearing recidivism or regression.

(The author is a publicist and a writer)



needs as well. There are no irreplaceable and God-given individuals in a democracy. Only those who persistently and undemocratically impose themselves seem irreplaceable, as they cut off opportunities for circulating ideas and putting up more candidates.

Wherever the choice of candidates narrows, the chances for democracy narrow as well. Take the concrete example from our current local pre-election period. As the years since our independence pass, the number of candidates for local elections, especially in the capital, are ever fewer. It all comes down to

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THE NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEEDS SOME SMARTS

EROL RIZAOV

Even if Macedonia's local elections end in an implausibly fair outcome, as the European Union requests, it still does not mean that one of the initial trials for the new redistricting and the effectiveness of the Republic's local governments can be declared successful. These local elections are only the beginning of a long process that arises from the way that the new redistricting plays out in practice, both economically and politically. This process raises the question whether Macedonia's citizens can come to understand that they are finally able to participate in the adoption of crucial decisions that can substantially affect their future lives.

Experts claim that even developed countries with high democratic standards need to put in much time and effort, and funding in particular, in order to enable the functioning of local government, as has been laid out in theory and in the law, ministerial cabinets and expert studies. In the first few years we see much tension and misunderstanding, a great deal of ignorance, suspicion and even exasperation and protests. Changes soon occur, bringing with them completely different skills and pragmatic experiences that arise from the establishment of local government. Such is the case in countries with a history of local government processes. However, in the Balkan countries, or more generally in poorer regions, and especially where interethnic relations are built in a tense climate of territorial division, the situation is more delicate and the likelihood of a failed local government is much greater. In such regions, after the new redistricting and local independence, everything is perceived differently. Everyday

problems that have been lingering for years become the subject of phobic arguments, and imply a dire, negative outcome for local government. Even now we hear threatening catch phrases: the state is powerless, ethnic communities have assumed too much power. Imagine if traffic violations were treated as politically motivated and pointed out as an example of interethnic intolerance. The experts on redistricting and local government in general point out that for a while citizens will not experience in the same way even, say, traffic tickets between Shtip and Kochani

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and between Tetovo and Gostivar, depending on their nationality and the nationality of the police officer writing the ticket, let alone the more important issues that will be delegated to the municipalities. The new municipal authorities, the ruling political elites, and the opposition-regardless of their stance during the parliamentary sessions on the referendum and Macedonia's redistricting -will therefore have to build a strong consensus on how local government will function. Otherwise Macedonia can expect neither EU candidacy nor NATO admission, nor any serious stabilization of interethnic relations in the country. The big test of Macedonia's democratisation is all

about the effectiveness of local government. So far, only a few key steps have been taken, but that is just the beginning. They include the adoption of the redistricting law and the unsuccessful referendum. The practical aspects are instead the lion's share of this huge reform.

Things must move in two directions, as local government is a broad and busy two-way street. One direction is from the state and its institutions to the municipalities and directly to the citizens. The other, and the less discussed, is from the municipalities and citizens toward the state and their responsibilities. This symbiosis is crucial to affirming local government as one of the biggest achievements of democracy. Standstills in either direction aggravate citizens more than in the previous, centralized system which may lead to disappointment and a lack of trust in the mutual obligations of the state and the municipalities. A clear division of authority and adherence to the rules are the basic prerequisites for a positive outcome in the establishment of local government. The devolvement of responsibilities from the state to the municipalities in health care, education, policing, and ecology could create profound chaos if, for instance, taxes are not collected on time or obligations are not met.

Even if the state's costs are covered, if payments are delayed as they are now, the local governments will not become operational. Add to the mix the usual interethnic misunderstandings and tensions, and the local government in Macedonia could crash at the start, rekindling the anachronistic arguments on the division of the country.

Even though the discussions and preparations of the law so far contain mistakes, inappropriate

provisions, and a lot of politics and partisanship, now is the time for local governance and the new redistricting to be implemented in accordance with expert opinions, actual conditions, and civic rights. The economic parameters are especially important. The desire for a municipality and an emotional reaction to the new municipal borders is one thing, but the real economic potential for the poor municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia is another. Now all of that will be reflected in practice and in everyday life. Many new and old municipalities will experience economic weaknesses. State mechanisms for creating a special

Instead, those who invested money wanted to see returns on their investment, which is understandable. When they started to disre-

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The affluent regions always forget that every north has its south so the relations between the developed and underdeveloped regions often experience strong clashes. Those differences are dramatic in the Republic of Macedonia due to the additional factors affecting the municipalities such as the interethnic boundaries and problems.

The government and the opposition in the Republic of Macedonia, the academic institutions, the media and especially the nongovernmental organizations will have to expend a lot of energy to create a climate of tolerance and tactfulness, and to undergo training. The state will have to under-



fund for encouraging the development of underdeveloped municipalities will therefore have to be enabled quickly.

The first signals of the fall of Yugoslavia appeared in the problematic relations between the rich north and the poor south. Everyone was then aware that market benefits and the monopolistic system for generating extra profit would result in the establishment of funds for the less-developed regions.

regard the obligations towards the poorer southern region, the first litigations and arguments occurred which rapidly spilled over onto the political scene and anticipated the fall of Yugoslavia. Certainly, there are many other reasons for the fall of Yugoslavia but it should never be forgotten that the situation deteriorated once regions assumed responsibility for local governance and the economic interaction between the south and the north.

take rigorous measures for financial discipline if the intentions of establishing the highest standards of democracy are sincere.

I look at these processes in the Republic of Macedonia with fear and a dose of moderate optimism.

(The author is editor-in-chief with „Utrinski vesnik“)

GOVERNANCE INSTEAD OF RULE

Decentralisation must be considered a necessity for the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia and their big chance to enter the world that they vaguely desired 15 years ago more courageously. And with it, to let go of the culture of evasion that has been present in this region for centuries. In short, to stop recoiling when facing authority, as if they were someone else's ruler, and waiting until they leave or are replaced by somebody else

BRANISLAV SARKANJAC

Decentralisation has its own justifications, which can not be reduced only to legal interpretation and some empty political phrases about bringing the authorities closer to the people. A successful decentralisation requires something significant that will complete the legal frame. Moreover, real decentralisation even avoids using the terms authority and people. Governance and active citizen are its terms. Firstly, decentralisation itself turns out to be a solution to the problems of governance in the contemporary state, especially a hierarchical state such as Macedonia. The hierarchically structured, centralised state has been struggling with the same problem for a few decades now: how to construct the vertical relations that enable the overall influence and control of the system from the top downwards. Those one-way relations have stopped functioning since the 1970s.

Kings and servants do not exist nowadays (they never have, except in children's story books). Societies are complex and so differentiated that autonomous sub-systems function with their own inner dynamics (such as, for example, education and health) and are no longer reliant on centralised political control. There is more and more pressure on politics to deal with governance problems. The lesson is simple: the ruler who wants solely to rule will not govern, so governing is possible only in a decentralised state.

REAL POLITICS AND DECONCENTRATION

The decentralisation trend has been apparent in the economy for quite

some time. Communication systems today make rigid hierarchical relations redundant even within the bigger concerns. More often work is done in independent professional groups that adopt decentralised decisions. The automobile industry (especially Toyota) is an example of decentralised governance in the economy. The management theories of the last ten years follow this trend. The key issue for them is how a given enterprise can deal with the continuous complexity of the work process and how can all those processes be controlled, including their dynamics and variability. Usually the answer is looked for in decentralised governance and decision-making, in the strengthening of decentralised responsibility.

That's why we can emphasize that centralisation is not only an issue of democracy, but also an answer to the pragmatic requirements of modern social and political governance, which arises precisely from the complexity, the diversity and the dynamics of modern societies.

Provided we want to overcome the economic and the social difficulties, and finally create suitable conditions for progress, we will need to mobilise and organise economic and political factors. Macedonian politicians are already well acquainted with this. However, the magic word is 'governance' (by decentralisation), and not the old and socially inefficient rule'. At this point, we can identify the main obstacle: real politics.

Macedonia is under the banner of real politics. Politics are reduced to power over amongst the parties on the Macedonian political scene and to more or less arbitrary decisions of the

executive power without real governing activities. The real-politics lacks political knowledge, lacks a developed market and economy directed by technological and managerial knowledge, and is only going to increase the non-governance of the society, since real politics implies centralised political control. Those who reduce politics to ruling want a central government. The real politics in Macedonia's situation can not produce decentralisation. Our decentralisation is going to be more of a de-concentration - we will have authority at the local level that is in fact going to be delegated and controlled by the government and the parties, and we will not have genuine power transfer from the central to the local level.

THE COMMON AS OWN

Decentralisation must be considered a necessity of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia and their big chance to enter in the world that they vaguely desired 15 years ago more courageously. And with it, there's a chance to let go of the culture of evasion that has been present in this region for centuries. In short, to stop recoiling when facing authority, as if they were someone else's ruler, and waiting until they leave or until they are replaced by somebody else.

Decentralisation must turn into a concrete counterforce against the real politics of Macedonia's parties and create a place where the individual can act, directed towards something so simple: possessing the things that make life good.

Local governance, economic and technical expertise, the professional associations, and citizen's associations may give decentralisation true meaning.

For that we can underline three pre-conditions: the individual's relation to property, to the surroundings, and to the general interests.

The relation towards property might be considered to be the most basic, but it is not sufficient. For the first time in history, the Macedonian citizen can say, what is mine is truly

mine, and no one can take it away from me by force. And yet property is binding. This house of mine is not a castle in the sky, Robinson Crusoe's shack. I live with others and beside others. There must be a road to the store, to the working place, to my child's school, to the house of my friends, and not some jungle that I must break through with a machete. This is a space that I share with others, but which I take care of as if it were my own. For what is mine is incomplete without what is common. It can't be that my only worry is the tidiness of the guestroom, or the common room. My world is bigger than one room...

The neat backyard, the clean school, the asphalted street-they are my concern as well. Property is more beautiful if it is combined with interest in the surroundings and, generally the habit of general interests. So decentralisation must emphasise and strengthen the relation of the

Macedonian citizen towards property. In Macedonia, property must become a sacred issue.

CREATING VALUE

And I can accept that these are all vain wishes and theories, so in the end we can conclude that, as far as decentralisation is concerned, Macedonian citizens are interested in only one or two things: what they can personally gain at the local elections and who the mayor will be. And I would really like to know whether it applies to Macedonia, too, what usually takes place in countries with established decentralisation: the best mayor is the one who is most successful in finding finances and money from different places and in different ways. But, can we cynically reject the constitutional guarantees for local self-government and miss the opportunities for a real democra-

cy of local governance and citizen alliance? No, because decentralisation is an essential part of the solution to the governance problems. The most successful mayor is going to be the one who will co-govern with the citizens, the associations and the experts, and not the one who will want to rule. And the money is always welcome. What can turn out to be the secret weapon of the citizens is the grey economy, the black market. The municipalities that will succeed in carrying out "capitalisation of the poverty" will also be the leaders of progress in Macedonia. Property above all. Both the smallest and the greyest should turn into a resource for creating value-that is one of decentralisation's biggest challenges in the Republic of Macedonia.

(The author is a university professor)

DECENTRALISATION AS A LAST CHANCE!

SASHO ORDANOSKI

Interethnic relations in Macedonia are often talked about, especially in the context of decentralisation and the new restructuring of the state that has resulted from significant changes to the Constitution and the laws, and they are undoubtedly the most exploited argument regarding the "truth" of all political parties of all ethnic communities. However, rarely has anyone ever demonstrated a genuine desire for these relations to be unveiled in the places where they take place in a practical sense, namely in the local communities of mixed ethnic structure. For this reason, Forum's Centre for Strategic Analysis and Documentation, in cooperation with the German Government, has been implementing a research project in the last few months dedicated to the process of decentralisation in Macedonia, and to the interethnic relations therein.

Through this project, under the motto "Bringing power closer to the people," the main focus is set on five municipalities in Macedonia: Struga, Kichevo, Gostivar, Chair and Kumanovo. All of them are big municipalities, complex in their socio-economic and political struc-

tures, with communal, infrastructural and other problems characteristic of all of Macedonia.

As we all know, they are also all localities with a mix of different ethnic groups living in Macedonia, mostly ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. As a matter of fact, these five municipalities can also be described as residing along a "rubbing" line in the interethnic life in Macedonia, a line of social and political encounter (or separation) between ethnic Macedonians and the "communities which are not a majority in the state."

Our feeling is that the development of events in general throughout Macedonia, especially the political ones, will depend on the success of decentralization. If the new mayors become "a true reflection" of how the central government has behaved in the last fifteen years, then a deepening of political frustrations and citizens' discontent, regardless of their ethnic background, can nonetheless be expected.

The level of political de-legitimizing is well known in Macedonia: the record low degree of trust in political and state institutions, the excessive perception of corruption in public administration, the base reputation of the politicians and

parties. These bad marks so stand out that they occasionally bring the entire democratic process into question. Decentralisation is therefore considered the last chance for politicians to get more in tune with the real needs of voters and to try to meet some of those needs.

A public opinion poll was conducted

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with 500 citizens in these five municipalities for the needs of the above-mentioned project in December 2004 and in January this year. In accordance with the national structure of these municipalities, the ethnic structure of the interviewees presupposed 49.4% of them to be ethnic Albanians, 42.2% ethnic Macedonians, and the rest, representatives of the smaller ethnic communities in Macedonia. The results are very symptomatic.

First of all, citizens do not feel well enough informed about the process of decentralisation. As much as 61% of those interviewed stated that they are not informed enough or not informed at all about the details of this huge social enterprise of the state. This can partly explain their disinterest in this topic, because as much as 50% of the interviewees think that decentralization will either not change anything (41.2%) or that the situation on the local level will deteriorate (8.2%). This opinion is especially spread amongst the ethnic Macedonians, who are pessimistic more often than the Albanians in their responses to most of the questions of the survey.

As far as political expectations from the decentralization process are concerned, the viewpoints are proportionately distributed as to the fulfilment of the efforts of the Ohrid Framework Agreement: 38% of the interviewees (54% of which are ethnic Macedonians) think that the new decentralisation law meets the requirements of the agreement, and exactly the same number (38%) believe that those demands have not been accomplished. (58% of the interviewees who chose this answer are ethnic Albanians.) The remaining 24% are undecided.

On the other hand, the opinion that the reforms increase the possibility for corruption amongst the new local authorities is more widespread and equally distributed ethnically amongst two thirds (64%) of the interviewees. Also, the results of choosing from which category we expect the most on the local level, the mayors and the municipal councils are in first place, the expectations from the "government in Skopje" are still high, whereas the least is expected from presidents of local party organizations, the international community and the local nongovernmental organizations.

By the way, ethnic Albanians look to considerably greater activity and expectations from non-governmental structures than do ethnic Macedonians, whose answers reflect half as much interest in the not-so-highly ranked nongovernmental sector in the state. In fact, only 8.5% of the interviewed ethnic Macedonians are members of NGOs, while as much as

20% of the ethnic Albanians interviewed are active in the nongovernmental sector.

We could say that the citizens interviewed in the five municipalities-Struga, Kichevo, Gostivar, Chair and Kumanovo-who were the target of our research have a very negative attitude toward the involvement of local party structures in the work of their municipalities, because two thirds of the interviewees (66%) have stated that such party influences are negative. A similar percentage (69%) of those interviewed responded that citizens are not involved enough in problem solving at the local level.

A huge percentage of those interviewed (93%) say that they know who



their mayor is, but only 33% have had personal contact with that mayor or with some of his or her associates. Obviously, our mayors prefer to appear on TV rather than meeting their constituents. 53% of the interviewees (more Albanians than Macedonians) think that mayors should be involved in solving ethnic problems, and 73% state that they would respect the mayor, regardless of his or her ethnic background.

Responses about the feeling of security for citizens in the five municipalities are interesting. When asked if they feel secure in their municipality, 6% responded that they are not secure at all (9% Macedonians, 3.2% Albanians), as much as 39.2% don't feel secure enough (39.2% Macedonians, 20.6% Albanians), secure to a certain extent, 52.2% interviewees (42.5% Macedonians, 61.5% Albanians), completely secure, 11.8% interviewees (8.5% Macedonians, 14.2% Albanians). The rest 1.2% did not have an answer.

Such feelings of personal safety should be correlated with the level of trust in the work of the police in the local

municipalities: a high 62.4% of the interviewees are not happy with the police work in their municipalities, both Albanians and Macedonians. This is a significant fact regarding the Ministry of the Interior's goals for reform, which is currently being implemented.

Such a mood, especially on the part of the ethnic Macedonians, is partly reflected in the answer to the question whether there is migration based on ethnic pressure in their municipalities. A worryingly high percentage of 45.2% of the interviewed answered affirmatively. It is symptomatic that in these five municipalities, which have a high or majority percentage of ethnic Albanians, as much as 62.7% of ethnic Macedonians

interviewed answered affirmatively to this question (compared to 27.9% of the Albanians interviewed).

That is why it is no wonder that in the municipalities where the survey was conducted, the interethnic relations are on top of the list of problems, followed by public services, the work of the police, and the work of the mayor.

It is interesting that, compared to the nationally conducted public opinion polls in Macedonia (for example, the regular polls of the United Nations Development Program UNDP), citizens thus surveyed at the local level rank their social problems (unemployment, poverty, etc) very low on the scale of problems that they are facing every day.

The information above reveals that the successful implementation of Macedonia's decentralisation is an imperative for Macedonian politics. Not because it would be a condition for us entering the EU, but because it is a crucial need of Macedonia's citizens.

(The author is editor-in-chief of the magazine „Forum“)

FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE LIFE OF THE CITIZENS

MERSEL BILALLI

The process of enacting laws that deal with local governance is almost complete. We are only left with harmonizing some laws from other areas that do not deal directly with the subject of local governance. Therefore, the regulatory aspect is wrapping up, and now the most important element remains—the concrete implementation of these new improvements, putting them effectively into practice.

There is no doubt that such implementation is among the most difficult and most complicated aspects of the political system, because bringing to life such significantly progressive regulations represents a political challenge, even in countries with far more developed democracies. A decade and a half of supremacy of the central government in day-to-day life led to the obvious marginalization of local government units. In practical terms, the whole organizational and functional structure resulted in an inadequate treatment of the basic civic right to govern and make decisions on issues closely tied to life in the local environment.

All of this was done for not entirely sensible political calculations. Reality demonstrates that the main purpose of forestalling local governance had to do with the interests of various groups in the government and around it. In the overall functioning of the system, this obstacle proved itself entirely unproductive and dysfunctional. A great deal of political energy was expended by insisting on compensation for this insufficiency in governance in the relationship between central and local government. In the end something that resembled a solution for the ineffectiveness of the system was created, something that was more a product of the factional interests of the parties in the government.

123 municipalities were formed,

which did not greatly differ from the local councils in the previous system, in quantity or in the degree of transferred authority. Even so, the new municipalities in reality showed vitality, especially in the area of infrastructure, taking advantage of the first legally mandated financial resources but also turning to many domestic and international foundations and agencies to finance their projects.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

The new changes in the area of local governance, undoubtedly represent an improvement quality in the functioning of the political system of the Republic of Macedonia. Putting

Finding a balance between the right to local governance, the economic reality and regional projects will be an imperative for the future

local government in place, and letting it act effectively by transferring its important expanded authority, will certainly have an impact in many aspects of civic life, particularly including the economic, social, cultural, urban, educational, health, ecologic, and even inter-ethnic components. It is very clear that the effective civic life is mostly developed within a local environment, where citizen directly faces situations and problems that affect the quality of their life.

Here we can see the status of business, employment or unemployment, education, the quality of health

care, protection of the environment, etc. However, building a life in accordance with the new regulations, namely implementing these regulations, will definitely not be easy. Not taking the necessary steps for practical implementation of the new regulations may cause a transitional vacuum, which could lead to degradation in many spheres of life, which would cross into the authority of the new municipalities.

Firstly, one new change is the transfer of a considerable degree of authority in the economic sphere. Now the municipalities are responsible for many things in the field of economic development. They need to create a suitable environment in order to attract investors and stimulate economic development in their region. Only through investments and all-round support for economic players will the unemployment problems be solved, instead of hampering the social and political environment in the country. Employment in a healthy economy would enable far better and more productive participation than party membership cards, an ill-fated path to creating a parasitical and pyramidal administration. The trade law stipulates that municipal bodies will regulate small enterprises, their registration, oversight, and the issuing of work permits. The same is true for tourism, ecology, various services, smaller concessions, etc. A good experience for stimulating the local economy is the forming of business incubators (the German experience): organizations that stimulate new private enterprises, while providing help during the early years of an enterprise, to strengthen its competitive skills.

The second problem is the fiscal aspect. Now, the manner of financing municipalities has changed for the better. They are also provided with a new favourable base of financing. The budget of the municipalities is now visibly expanding its sources, while deriving a part of their income

from the concessions on using the natural resources within the territory of each municipality. On the other hand, the local government will gradually need to finance many additional services, which will incur large expenditures. At the same time, a portion of employees in the state administration will be transferred to municipal financing. All of these improvements impose a much greater efficiency, tax collection being at the top of the list.

The third problem is expected to be of an organizational and functional nature. This issue remains an equation with a lot of vagaries, even for those who expect to be municipal leaders. The local government must be capable of governing with its new-found responsibilities under the new laws. So the question becomes which new bodies need to be formed and how to define their authority, so they make work effectively.

The former structuring of the local governments successfully cooperated with many responsible international foundations and organizations. USAID's programme Make Decentralization Work, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Agency for International Cooperation of the Dutch Municipalities, UNDP, and many other organizations, helped build capacity in the methodology of work, in addition to financing various other projects. Organizationally the international conferences that mostly contributed to the local development such as those organized by the World Bank, the Network of Local Government Associations for South Eastern Europe (NALAS), and others. These institutions create a place where the municipalities can inform themselves by sharing in the experience of others in the European family, especially in how to manage public funds, in the realization of an effective financial plan as well as budget execution. These domestic and foreign trainings will help

experts, managers and other leaders from various fields including businessmen, to facilitate the practical and effective implementation of the whole of local development.

WHAT THE PRACTICES OF OTHER COUNTRIES PROVE

Certainly, the local government will contribute in the development and articulation of the interests of the ethnic communities on a local

stance. And all of this seemed to legitimize acting in style, to enlighten one person someone else's light must dim.

Surely, this offer cannot be more than a counterproductive substitution for the true interests of citizens. In some municipalities success has even been shunned. As if we have gotten used to failures and successes now just get on our way. In reality no one can understand the disappearance of the municipality of



level. The practice of many countries in the world proves that inter-ethnic issues are solved in a much more efficient way on a local level. Many interethnic problems that are thought to have been solved on a central level cannot be felt if there are no concrete forms of action on a local level. The political presentation during the passing of the law on territorial organization was mainly based on the ethnic issue and undoubtedly can be called by its common denominator, a collective delusion. The paradox is such that one ethnic community thought that the other had been offered more than the maximum, so much that it risked the country itself, while the other community was under the impression that maybe this could be true. All seemed to prefer a deception that caused happiness to the depressing truth. One side thought it had lost form, while the other sub-

Dzhepchishte (an economic miracle) and of some other municipalities. Perhaps this was not understood even by those who created such a facade, gilded with self-deception, a product of amateur fantasies.

In the very near future we will need to adjust our legislation to accord with the EU standards. This means the elimination of marginalized rural areas as an important developmental base. Naturally, finding balance between justice in local governance, the economic reality and regional projects will be an imperative of the future. The large municipalities as such cannot survive long. The finger of dissatisfaction will from now on be seldom directed at the central bodies and more often towards the local ones.

(The author is a political analyst)

WE MUST PREPARE MUNICIPALITIES TO BECOME GENERATORS OF DEVELOPMENT



BORJAN JOVANOVSKI

● **These local elections will give us mayors who will take on much greater responsibilities with the new local government law, and during the election campaign we will hear various promises by the candidates. What can citizens' realistic expectations be concerning the new mayors' promises when compared with their new authority?**

The decentralisation law puts the municipalities in a completely new position. A large portion of the authority that has so far belonged to the central government will be transferred to the local government, starting first off with education, elementary education (the primary schools), then the high schools. That means that the municipalities will bear the responsibilities in that sphere, but it will be turned over in stages, starting with administration, which means appointing management boards, principals, school upkeep, managing teachers, etc. What remains is the curriculum,

New mayors will have important responsibilities for the economic development of their municipalities, but the state will assume the responsibility for equal development of the country as a whole, says Minister of Local Governance Rizvan Sulejmani

authority over which remains with the central government, and it's the same with secondary education. As far as urban planning and development are concerned, only planning remains within the authority of the central government. Citizens will be able to obtain the complete building documentation

from local government. In the area of social services, the municipality has already taken over a big portion of the services for pre-school age children, the old, the disabled and orphans. The same goes for culture. The municipalities are given the responsibility to preserve and manage cultural centres and similar institutions. In a nutshell, everything that is not pure politics, but has to do with citizens' day-to-day living, goes in the hands of the local government.

WILL INVESTMENT IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT BE STIMULATED?

● **How might local government become engaged in the economical development of the municipalities?**

Local economical development is the most important segment. In the section of the new local government law on local development, rural development also becomes one of the areas of authority of local government. However, we, as the Ministry of Local Governance,

have to ensure that regional development that is so important. My point in this ministry is that genuine decentralisation will be achieved only when the municipalities become capable of generating that local development. For instance, the new law entitles the municipality to give benefits for the first time, let's say to investors, and to attract them by exempting them from a portion of their taxes or other fees.

● **Can you explain more specifically how a mayor might now secure some kind of local development independent from the central government?**

They will ratify plans for local and rural development which will enable them to plan beforehand-to foresee development possibilities. In that planning package, together with what we have mentioned previously (the municipalities' potential to determine communal taxes, etc.), they will be able to manage their own development policy. If, for example, an investor thinks that the communal tax is higher in Gyorche Petrov than in Saraj, he will want to invest in Saraj because the expenses for communal taxes will be lower in Saraj and consequently he will go there to invest and build.

● **And what will be the criteria with which the municipality will base such decisions?**

The municipality is entitled to determine by itself the level of taxes for public services and property. It is a matter of the municipality's policy. The municipality may estimate that by lowering these taxes it will attract the investors to finance there, and it will later benefit from it since the investor will pay taxes in that municipality. It is a question of the municipality's policy. It depends on the municipality whether it will be more

or less attractive to investors.

● **Another important question is how much money the local administrations will have in hand so they can implement the new authority you have talked about so far.**

According to one rough estimate, 13 billion denars are being transferred from central to local government. This is finances from the budget that has been in the hands of the central government until now.

● **That is what the municipality receives from the budget, but how capable will the municipality be to earn money on its own, or how of the citizens' money stays in their municipality?**

Yes, the municipality has its own sources of income. Those are the various taxes like the 3% from the value added tax, 3% from the personal income tax, then 100% from the personal income tax from the craftsmen.

● **The financing law has been criticised by the opposition as well as by the Association of Local Government Units (ZELS). According to them, the monies that the municipalities will receive are few.**

I think it is normal for the local government-or ZELS as an organisation that represents local government interests- to continually request more finances, but it is estimated that the means that are guar-

anteed so far are enough for the municipalities to function normally. We are in constant contact with the Ministry of Finance concerning certain requests by ZELS so that we can make arrangements and evaluate whether their issues have merit, and if certain taxes, like the one for street lighting or for commercial buildings, city rent, etc, should be granted to them. The Ministry of Finance is generally understanding, and we can discuss and come to an agreement about such requests, and eventually meet requests for increasing the finances.

THE STATE WILL ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR EQUAL DEVELOPMENT

● **Based on these principles now applied to local government, is it possible that huge differences might be created between the municipalities? As in Skopje, for instance, between Centar on one hand and Shuto Orizari on the other?**

There are a few mechanisms to do so. That is why the country has a special department for insufficiently developed and mountainous regions. However, I would like to point out that a different law for regional development needs to be prepared which will address that issue. In certain cases, when the municipality can not develop through its own

resources, interventions will have to take place through other avenues. But we have to enable the municipalities to become their own development generators, to enable them to take care of their own development. That is the point and the main advantage of decentralisation.

● **As far as the financing is concerned, 3% from the personal income tax was discussed in the debate over the law for financing local government. Why 3%, if the citizens have most of their needs met, if not all of them at the municipal level? (Whether for pure politics or not as you said.) Does that mean that the remaining 97% are used for pure politics instead of for realistic needs, which are met within the framework of the local community?**

That is true, but there is a big block of subsidies. Teachers' salaries, intended upkeep, etc., are not included in that 3%, that is extra money. The 3% are monies that the municipality will plan itself how to spend, as well as the 3% from the VAT, and the 3% from the personal income tax that will be paid by everyone in the municipality. The craftsmen will pay a full 100%. That is money that the municipality itself will budget.

(The author is correspondent for „Voice of America“ from Macedonia)

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

WE EXPECT CONCRETE PROJECTS

If in the past the mayors claimed they had ideas but were prevented from realizing them by the central government, now, with the new law, citizens expect the mayors to stop complaining and start implementing their projects

In order to hear the voice of the people, journalistic teams from Dnevnik, Utrinski Vesnik and Fakti newspapers travelled around to several cities in Macedonia. These visits to Bitola, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Struga and Skopje produced a mosaic of diverse viewpoints about what the citizens expect from the new local government law and the new redistricting. Although it does not purport to convey the over-



all reality, this journalistic survey could still be a litmus test of public opinion on the new law, as well as the approaching local elections. The elections begin

the concrete implementation of the laws that, though hotly debated over the last year, remain all in all unclear.

SKOPJE



Nikola Madich,
producer

Not forgetting all of the problems that went along with the new redistricting, I think there is hope for the new organization of local government to become a new chance for the municipalities to be effective. I hope that after the local elections the new law will come into full effect. Once it does I also expect that the mayors will more actively work towards solutions for the municipalities' problems, such as basic things as the infrastructure, straightening things out, and urban planning. If that happens, I think both the municipalities and the country will prosper. I want to point out that with the passage of time and the broadening of their jurisdictions, every mayor in their own way tried to clean up their municipality and to introduce new cultural aspects. That's what happened in Skopje, which has become a much better place to live in my opinion.



Suzana Musli, The Turkish Women's Organization

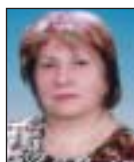
In my opinion, the municipalities have not functioned adequately so far. Lots of things were left unfinished, because everybody shifted responsibilities onto somebody else, and that was of course made easier by the territorial vastness of the municipalities and the magnitude of the problems. At the same time, local people were very confused and irate and they didn't know to whom to complain. And let's not forget the misconduct of the local governments, which claimed to have done everything within their authority, and then blamed others.

From this viewpoint, yes, the new municipalities are a fresh chance for local government to work. I want the elections held in a peaceful and dignified atmosphere, as it should in a democratic country. And last but not least, I expect strong ties to form between the newly elected local officials and the non-governmental sector in each municipality, right after the elections. I expect these elections to create a positive turnaround in the overall functioning of the country.



Ferki Demirovski, student in public administration at the University of Southeast Europe

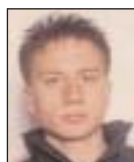
I expect to see the start of government decentralization, because this country we live in is exceedingly centralized, which has caused sluggishness within the system. What is needed for successful decentralization would be increasing the capacities of the smaller municipalities. Of course, the greatest advantage to decentralization is that local problems would get resolved at the local level, which would greatly increase the efficiency of problem-solving efforts. I expect the highest level of democratic behaviour at the local elections, because it's essential for the decentralization process that's envisioned. If it founders, the legitimacy of the municipalities would be diminished.



Dobra Milenkovska,
law clerk

The units of local government should function independently, with all of their own regulations. They have to raise their own revenues by levying local taxes and fees, by levying property taxes, or with revenue bonds, donations, penalties, etc. That way, even the undeveloped municipalities can survive and grow stronger. In my opinion there shouldn't be too many municipalities, because in our transitional society there are not enough financial resources for them to survive.

I do not foresee great results from the local elections. For instance, mayors can not be nominated in other places from Skopje. I think the turnout will be much lower than during the previous elections, because people are fed up with empty promises.



Daniel Mardzhiev,
political studies student at the law school of Skopje University

I don't believe that the new municipalities will be an opportunity for more effective local government, since the new municipalities on this new redistricting map do not correlate to their natural boundaries. The divisions were made on ethnic criteria, a fact that even the politicians know well, but they won't admit it and are trying to make excuses. It would have benefited all citizens far more if the boundaries were redrawn according to their needs and wishes, if those wishes are not ethnically motivated, of course. These elec-

tions will be the prime indicator of the citizens' acceptance of the new redistricting, as long as they take place in a democratic atmosphere.



Lindiana Grazhdani,
director of marketing for Macedonia Postal Service

I believe that the new municipalities offer a fresh opportunity for the authorities to be effective, because the very fact that those municipalities are independent, together with the decentralization process, gives them better opportunities to develop. I presume time will tell whether the mayor's significance will also grow, and the municipal improvements that the mayors will bring, not political factors, will be taken into consideration.

It is important for every municipality to cooperate with other municipalities for the sake of more effective development. I expect that we will elect more responsible officials than the present ones, who will fulfil the wishes of the people.



Emil Miftari, lawyer

The new redistricting, namely the reduction of the number of local government units, will help citizens experience more directly the positive effects of decentralization. Every election, and it applies also to the approaching local elections, are in a way a test of the level of democracy in a society. I think that we might experience and comment on the changes brought about by the new laws only after the local elections.



Sashko Stojmanovski,
mechanical engineer

In any case, this should have happened much earlier. Financial support for the local government should be increased, because the responsibilities of the new municipalities are extended. There are many justifications for this, but the strongest obstacle is politics, which is at variance with the citizens' needs. For instance, an elementary school, which has applied for money for renovation for 20 years without receiving a positive response, will now get the finances for renovation much easier from the municipal budget.

I expect that the approaching local elections will result in mandates of highly qualified candidates, who will work transparently and who will strive to satisfy citizens' needs, party interests notwithstanding.



Pavlina Novakova-Georgiev, opera singer at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet

The new municipalities, per se, no matter what their boundaries, are not crucial for the functioning of the new local government. What is important is the authority they will have. It is the cardinal prerequisite so they can function better, more efficiently, as well as assume responsibility for what they accomplish or don't during their mandate. The effectiveness of the new local governments will depend on its constituents.



Pece Gruovski, clerk at the UPOZ Union

I would grade the decentralization process positively only if its essence is the optimal realization of local government and transfer of authority to the local level, but if it is done only for the sake of creating regions, I think it is regressive. As for the local elections, I hope they will be conducted in the spirit of democracy and that the people who offer the best solutions will get the mandates.

STRUGA



Nebi Arifi, high school teacher

Decentralization cannot be conducted painlessly. It is not an easy process and requires participation from multiple forces. The authority is expanding, but so does the responsibility. I expect better results because until now Macedonia has been a highly centralized country. We in Struga concluded that the cultural institutions should stay under state care for now, because with the financial decentralization they would be the worst losers. I hope that in future they will also be transferred under local authority, but for that to happen there needs to be a nurturing financial climate.



Rade Lozhankoski, private entrepreneur

I believe that the new jurisdictions will make the municipalities func-

tion better. The mayors and the council members, but not only them, should have greater accountability about efficiently meeting citizens' needs. Struga as a tourist spot, in my opinion, should be much tidier and we should eradicate the ugly image the city of poetry now has. The new mayor, with the jurisdictions that the new law gives him or her, should be more attentive to this and the other ordinary needs of us, the citizens.



Meratip Lloga, economist

The jurisdictions of the municipalities expand, but not to the extent to allow them to attend to every need of its citizens, because with the finance law the possibilities for effective functioning are diminished.

Only time will tell what should be done with the allocated funds. I believe that in that situation much will depend on the mayors and their abilities to make things work. I believe that a real financial decentralization, which will be adapted to the municipalities' needs, is the basic precondition for genuine decentralization.



Musa Kerim, pensioner

I anticipate that the authorities will listen to the citizens, so they will be able to efficiently deliver services: waste collecting, street cleaning, fulfilling vital needs, urban planning, etc. So I expect better municipal operations because with the new distribution the system of responsibility is more transparent. But I think that the municipalities should have gotten more money to empower them to operate unhindered. I expect better quality services from the municipalities for the citizens.

KUMANOVO



Ljubomir Latkoski, shopkeeper

I do not expect major changes for the people from government decentralization. Kumanovo, being the largest municipality in the country, will get much more obligations and scant privileges. And I do not expect much action from those who will be at the helm of our municipality—they are identical to their predecessors.



Asher Avramovski, translator

The Jews have always been loyal citizens of the countries where they lived, but unfortunately the countries have not always been loyal to their Jewish subjects. So I do not foresee big changes coming from decentralization. But we should wait and see!



Goran Stojkovich, unemployed

I do not expect anything positive in the near future, but I would like to hope that we would make at least one step forward soon. Above all, it depends on the overall policy of this country.



Aleksandra Maksimovska, law clerk

Decentralization will be most intensely felt in the ranks of the municipal officers and the least felt among ordinary citizens. Employees in public administration will again manipulate ordinary people. Nothing will change for the unemployed, especially because Kumanovo is in the vicinity of Skopje. Although it will be the largest municipality in Macedonia, Kumanovo will once again be neglected and other municipalities will be privileged.



Sali Xhemaili, restaurant owner

It is nice that decentralization will start at last, but I think citizens should be acquainted with the positive and even more so with the negative aspects of it. Now whether this will be good for all of us, wiser from our experiences, that's the question.



Zhivana Shainovska, social welfare beneficiary

I think nothing will change with decentralization. With ordinary citizens everything will stay just the same. The officials and the laws change, but the poor become poorer and poorer.

BITOLA



Semavi Mustafov

I expect that decentralization will bring many more projects that

will involve the young generation, who now spend their day at cafes and hanging around. I believe much more sports facilities will be built that will let young people get involved in sports. There will also be money for proper care of the parks and the urban green spots. At last Bitola with its own budget will have the opportunity to restore the now decrepit Tumbe Kafe, and the promenade as well. I hope for many more cultural events, because the young really want that.



Mirjana Stojanovska,
worker

Decentralization was done with the single aim of territorially dividing Macedonia, and not for the benefit of its citizens. It will be the same as it has been the last 14 years, only with the decentralization Macedonia will be split into cantons and territorially divided into Albanian and Macedonian parts.



Goce Sterjadovski,
student

I expect positive results. To begin with, there will be more funds for each municipality, which will allow for various projects at the local level. There will be funds for various cultural, entertainment, and sport events, and for great improvements to the city infrastructure also. The term "decentralization" means transferring power and authority from the central to the municipal level, and the municipalities will become responsible for their conduct. Until now the municipal authorities apologized: we are powerless, we do not have jurisdiction, every decision is made in Skopje...



Aleksandar Todorovski

Decentralization is very important, and I expect that it will help Bitola make a few steps forward. It means the municipal budget will be bigger. Finally the city will be tended to according to citizen's wishes. I would like to see many more urban green spots, many more street trees, and a park in Nova Bitola, which is really needed by the tenants there. About 30,000 people live there and they don't have a park.



Milan Mishkovich

I believe that Bitola will prosper greatly after decentralization. When we will have a larger budget we will also have a city that will be more beautiful. The city organized will then offer many more opportunities for investments and for opening new production capacities. These young people who are right now hanging around will get a chance to work, to get a job. Only rich and developed Bitola could be a city of the future, and nationalism, as in the ugly incidents in 2001, will never again raise its head.

TETOVO



Bajram Aliu,
businessman

I expect the situation to change for the better for citizens after the coming local elections. The new municipalities after the elections will face many challenges. I believe the future will bring more conducive conditions for businessmen and that the conditions will change in every aspect. I also expect the elections to be conducted in a highly democratic atmosphere, because this is a test for democracy here.



Syrie Sulejmani,
businessman

Let's wait and see how the municipalities will function under the new laws. I expect elections to be realistic, without manipulation, and I expect real decentralization in future. I also expect that the authorities will act for the benefit of citizens. I hope corruption will disappear. So, I consider all this an opportunity, the new law will certainly be beneficial for citizens.



Nikolina Gavroska,
student

I think we are now moving towards a Western system, which means fewer municipalities and more authority in them, which is very important. I expect that decentralization will bring new chances and more investments in different areas:

culture, education, etc, and many more new jobs. This is a splendid opportunity. These are very important elections and I hope they will be peaceful and fair.



Elena Milovanovska,
student

These local elections, as everybody knows, are very important for Macedonia and I think they are a test for this country, which is trying to integrate into the European family. In any case, decentralization is very important for multiethnic societies and poses as one more opportunity for improvement of the economic situation and for economic investments, which will benefit all citizens.



Bajram Ameti, student

I absolutely agree that the passage of the decentralization law opens a new chapter and a new opportunity for creating new policies at municipal levels, and all this is very important for the citizens of Macedonia. I think all this will mean great responsibility and obligation for those that will be at the helm of the municipalities in future. Those officials will face many challenges. I think that this is a good opportunity for democratic elections.



Ilir Ramadani, student

Starting from the fact that decentralization consists of transfers of authority from the central government to the local government, this will be a great chance for the municipalities and for the future chairs to function in a new manner, in a new system. Jurisdictions will be transferred to the municipalities and many things are expected to move in the right direction.

(Teams of journalists from „Dnevnik“, „Utrinski Vesnik“ and „Fakti“ newspapers jointly conducted this survey)

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MAYORS WITH A MANAGERIAL SPIRIT

MIRCHE JOVANOVSKI

The real test for the future local government in the framework of the new redistricting in Macedonia will be the economy and the creation of stimulating conditions for economic development at the municipal level, not ethnic elements and local loyalty. In other words, business will be the key barometer for the success of the project called territorial decentralization.

Unfortunately, the economic aspects of Macedonia's new redistricting map are still overshadowed by the ethno-political and local-loyalty debates. It is simply unbelievable how much energy has been wasted (and is still being wasted) on such subjects as the percentage of an ethnic group in a certain municipality, whether the street names will be written in one, two or three alphabets, or where the seat of the future local government will be. Quite a contrast with, for instance, analyses whether the new municipalities are economically self-sustainable and whether the new system is a good alternative to the present economic inefficiency, which stems mainly from the inefficiency of the central government.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED

The non-economic issues are not trivial, especially if we recall the reality in the Republic of Macedonia and all that has happened in the past few years in interethnic terms. The fear of ethnic predominance is real, as is the uncertainty about losing public sector jobs in the communities that have undergone changes in their ethnic structure. Untangling those knots is a must.

However, it is inexcusable to stubbornly neglect economic aspects and consequences, as occurred first

during the discussions about the number and the boundaries of the local government units, then during their parliamentary passage, during the referendum, and finally at the commencement of the implementation of decentralisation.

So far the public has not seen a comprehensive analysis of the consequences of the new map on the future economic development of the state as a whole. Namely, how and to what extent will the local government units further influence the growth of the state economic organism and to stand up to today's ever more fierce competition.

These and similar questions will be left unanswered for now. As these things go, we will have to wait for the reality that will take hold in the coming years, although it might be too late then for preventive action, for the damage could be irreparable.

After Macedonia's entry into the World Trade Organization and the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, many protective measures were annulled. The concomitant obligations require the country to continue this trend in the coming years. The domestic market is liberalizing, becoming more open to foreign goods. The world faces of

Business will be the key barometer for the success of the project called territorial decentralisation

the opening up of national markets to an extent as yet unheard of. Every country tries its best to adapt as well as it can to those new challenges.

For Macedonia, decentralisation—the transfer of many responsibilities to the local level and creating conditions for local economic development—could be one of the answers to

the dilemma how the whole country might come to terms with global challenges.

The interest in accenting local economic development is unwittingly contained in the piece of the pie intended for the municipalities: they will receive three percent of the personal income tax and three percent of the value added tax. They can also levy property tax, various communal and administrative fees, various local fees, and others.

The predominant opinion is that the future mayors ought to behave and act as managers, not politicians. That is implied in the new responsibility for managing considerable sums. The municipality now plays an active role in levying various taxes and deciding how to allocate these funds.

At the moment there is plenty of excitement about the future structure of the local government in many municipalities, and they are working on ideas for how to provide better conditions for developing economic capacities and for attracting more companies to establish themselves in the municipality.

The municipality's ability to mobilize resources, as well as the way those resources will be used, depend greatly on the imagination of the municipal leaders. On that subject, in the near future we expect to witness the birth of the practice of raising money for different purposes, for local and wider reasons, through the issuing of municipal bonds.

According to expert opinion, the new legal solutions actually overcame the regular obstacles that prevented municipalities from using those instruments, even though they have been widely utilized in a number of countries.

In Croatia, for example, in many instances the local government resorted to issuing bonds in order to raise money to build buildings. In Zadar they built a multi-story car

park, something that Skopje needs very much. The local government in Bulgaria frequently resorts to issuing bonds as well, and it is the same in Slovenia.

THE BUSINESS OF BUYING MUNICIPAL BONDS

Why would citizens buy municipal bonds? Because they are relatively easy to redeem, they carry defined returns and they can be traded at the stock exchange. Generally there are two ways in which local authorities can pay them off: one is through revenues that the building will provide (like a multi-story car park), or if it is another kind of infrastructure, the revenues of the municipality, i.e. the taxes that they levy.

borrow, and in such instances one of the conditions would be their credit standing.

The biggest problem with credit ratings is that Macedonia at the moment does not have an institution that will assess credit standings, except in part the Macedonia Central Bank, which classifies borrowers in a number of categories. The estimates say that the greater portion of the 84 municipalities that will be on the new territorial map will be able to borrow, but there are more than twenty that, according to the revenues estimates and their current debt load, could not stand that burden.

Contrary to the experts, Ministry of Finance officials are very cautious about the idea of borrowing as prom-

The government has been issuing state bonds to raise money for public financing for a number of years now.

In any case, Ministry of Finance officials show no hesitation about the plan to give the municipalities their independence in phases. The first two years will be a test period in which the municipalities will govern the resources for the upkeep of schools and other institutions. In the second phase they will also be allowed to govern the funds for salaries of the employees of those institutions.

After they become independent, the municipalities will be able to manage their own budgets and collect their own revenues. They will also have money to cover their needs and create better living and econom-



Certain limits are envisioned to stop the municipalities and the mayors from excess borrowing. According to these measures, only up to 15 per cent of the actual municipality revenues can be allocated to paying off debts. As some research suggests, this rate will allow unhindered servicing of the debts. As a matter of fact, in issuing bonds and taking credit from the banks, the municipalities will have the same status as other institutions eligible to

uligated by some current mayors. The ministry says that this possibility will not be available to the municipalities, at least not in the beginning. The general idea for the municipalities is to become financially independent and to have a clear outset in their development, which sets aside the idea of borrowing. What will happen afterwards is yet to be seen, say Ministry of Finance officials. Most certainly the central government's experience will be looked at closely.

ic conditions based on their efforts. The responsibility for levying some taxes will create the need for adequate institutions within the scope of the local government units-financial services for instance. This function of actively levying taxes will help the municipalities to combat tax evasion, which is a huge problem in Macedonia.

(The author is an editor with „Utrinski vesnik“)

BOTH THE TEACHERS AND THE PARENTS WILL BE FIRST GRADERS

LJUBICA GROZDANOVSKA

Regulating schools, figuring out models for school financing, appointing principals, organizing school transportation and student meals, and the unresolved school property problems pose the chief issues that the municipalities will face after decentralization of the educational system, local government experts warn.

Officials in the Ministry of Education, on the other hand, do not foresee major problems. They have announced trainings and seminars that will introduce the complete process for migrating jurisdictions from the central to the local level-local government officials and the school principals.

The municipalities in future will have the right to regulate school grounds, to establish new schools and, of course, to manage them all. All the primary and secondary schools will be under their jurisdiction. The stage government will retain control over the art schools, the physical education secondary school and the schools for children with special needs. The City of Skopje, not its municipalities, will acquire jurisdiction over the state secondary schools.

SETTLING DEBTS

Each municipality will allocate money to its schools according to the number of students registered at each. The mayor will appoint the principals and the Ministry of Education will apportion the salaries of the teaching staff. The national government will prepare the curriculum and will monitor its implementation. The parents boards and school boards will have greater say in solving critical problems and in the choice of the principals.

The Association of Local Government Units (ZELS) points out one source of potential problems, the mayor's right to appoint principals. According to ZELS there are discrepancies between the Elementary Education Act and the Local Government Act on this point. ZELS representatives do not exclude the possibility that the practice of putting party soldiers in principals' chairs may continue.

ZELS representatives are also voicing concern that some municipalities might be ill-prepared for decentralisa-



No one is opposing decentralization, but everyone says the new lesson will be hard to learn and still harder to administer

tion.

"First of all, all school debts must be paid off and all the property problems resolved. Also, it is still unclear how authority will be transferred from the central to the local level. And the main prerequisite for the best implementation of all these processes is the establishment of the municipal councils," say officials from ZELS.

The Ministry of Education investments department warns that dangers will arise with the transfer of school property from the central government to the municipalities. The process for resolving property problems is slow paced because the schools have huge debts, and also because the greater part of the school buildings and grounds are not included in the records of the Land Survey Office.

"We can't exclude the possibility that the local governments could start selling portions of the school property if funds for school operation are lacking. We are settling the property charts, but that is a difficult and slow-paced process. However, we have to finish by July, because the municipalities should acquire their new jurisdictions without inherited obligations," reveal Ministry of Education officials.

MARGINALIZED PARENTS

The principals and the teachers are very scared at the thought of decentralisation. Most of them do not know how it will play out and they doubt that the municipalities will have the funds for school operation and upkeep. The principals will have to become managers and look for donors, sponsors and other means of income.

"It will be even worse. The principals will neglect the educational process and will throw themselves into business schemes. Who will care about the problems of the employees and the pupils then?" are the most frequent questions in their minds.

The Parents Association doubts that it will be involved in the managerial decisions of the principals and it fears that the parents boards will again be ignored.

"So far school management has frankly taken advantage of the parents and solved school problems in their stead. I am afraid that the principals will stand back and put their hands in their pockets. We require greater authority for the parent boards and we want the schools to involve them more intensively in decision making. We will demand those rights and obligations to be incorporated into the decentralisation legislation," says Nikola Taukov, president of the association.

(The author is a journalist with „Dnevnik“)

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MAYORS

LAURA PAPANIKU

Not long after being challenged in the race for municipal mayors and for mayor of Skopje, the municipal leaders will face a new challenge. It will be precisely the mayors and the mayor of Skopje who will have the fate of primary and secondary school education in their hands before their constituency. Their last word about who would be the director of this or that school does not signal the end of authority (which come from the new laws on local government), because with the new education laws (partially

firmly that primary education will be among the first to feel these changes. The primary cycle will no longer be eight, but nine years. The municipalities will oversee the primary schools, not the respective ministries, while secondary school education will be organized at three levels: municipal, state and private. The state will establish only schools that meet state-wide needs, such as music schools, applied arts and schools for children with special needs. The secondary schools that serve the municipal interests will be established and managed by the municipalities themselves. The

expected to visibly alter the map of school distributions. Securing finances for school maintenance, just as securing finances for student transportation will be clear-cut obligations of municipalities starting September this year, when the first phase of the new formula for school financing begins.

Ministry of Education officials say that in this first phase the Ministry will cover the portion of expenses that cover the salaries of teachers and the administrative staff. This money will be allocated to municipalities through block remittances, intended to be distributed to the schools. The second phase of the implementation of the formula for financing schools is intended to start in 2008. Then the municipalities will cover all the expenses, also including teacher salaries.

The public has gotten the wrong impression that the authority that the Minister of Education once held will be transferred to the mayors. Instead, in fact, the mayors are burdened with responsibilities rather than authority

after September 2005 and completely after 2008) they bear the responsibility to ensure the effectiveness of the schools according to legally established standards, as well as the establishment of schools in places where the population needs them.

EIGHT-YEAR SCHOOLS ARE REPLACED WITH NINE-YEAR SCHOOLS

The issue of decentralising the education has been regulated by law since November of last year when changes and amendments to the education legislation were adopted. However their implementation in practice has been set aside until after the local elections of 13 March. Starting from the fact that the goal of decentralizing education is to create a new education system, 13 million euros have been set aside for it. (10 million will be provided by the government of the Netherlands and 3 million from the government of Macedonia). There is also credit worth 5 million U.S. dollars from the World Bank.

In the Ministry of Education con-

municipality may conclude that other schools are needed, but if they cannot support them financially they may seek to establish private schools.

Based on the relevant law, under decentralised education in Macedonia a new, school financing formula will also be applied, whose main criteria will be the number of students enrolled. In this way, the recent discrimination can be avoided, be it on an ethnic or national basis, or on the inequality between village and city.

"THIS MANY STUDENTS, THAT MUCH MONEY!"

The new financing formula-this many students, that much money!-will bring an end to the irrational division of money for school maintenance, although it risks closing many schools with few students. From September this year, each municipality will need to secure the financial means for school maintenance. Their responsibilities will also include organizing transportation for the students. These stipulations on one hand and migrat-

ing movements on the other, are expected to visibly alter the map of school distributions. Securing finances for school maintenance, just as securing finances for student transportation will be clear-cut obligations of municipalities starting September this year, when the first phase of the new formula for school financing begins.

APPOINTING AND DISCHARGING SCHOOL DIRECTORS

Apart from the right to establish schools, the municipalities will have an influence in appointing directors. However, as we understand it, the Ministry of Education will enjoy the right to discharge directors whenever there has been managerial or financial abuse.

The mayors will need to keep track of vacancies so that applications and candidacies can be announced in time. The mayor should ask for this from the school councils, who propose the candidates for a director, who is then appointed by the mayor.

If the mayor does not appoint the candidate proposed by the school council the first time, then he will be forced to do so the second time, because, according to the legislation, if the school councils propose the same candidate twice, then the appointment is automatic. With laws like this the Ministry of Education assumes that it has avoided the politicization of education, which was jeopardized by the rights that the mayors

have under the law on local governance.

For schools that serve a special interest, the right to make appointments rests with the Minister of Education, who, just as with the municipal schools, will need to select a candidate proposed by the school council.

THREE CENTRES OF BALANCE

Apart from the responsibility of appointment school management, the school councils are undoubtedly also burdened with assuring capable management as well as planning for school development and future opportunities. Many projects have been undertaken for this end, including G-13. This group will train directors, improving their skills as managers who can develop and implement projects that will secure wellbeing and future prospects for their schools. As for the authority of the Ministry of Education, with decentralised education, it will maintain three main pillars: curriculum, evaluation of school quality, and inspection.

For the rational functioning of the two last pillars, educational evaluation and inspection for compliance with educational laws, a draft law is now being prepared which envisages that much of the Ministry of Education's authority will be handed over to the Bureau for the Development of Education (BDE) and the Republican Inspectorate (RI). The Ministry of Education is also heralding the formation of a new institution, the Centre for External Evaluation of Schools (CEES), which will be in the function of the reforms "state prom" and "school prom". CEES and BDE and RI are expected to play a balancing role in the decentralisation of education, acting as a connecting bridge between the municipalities and the Ministry of Education, in the context of legal rights and responsibilities.

(The author is a journalist with „Fakti“)

THE MUNICIPALITIES WILL PROTECT US, THE STATE WILL CURE US

"The municipalities will be responsible for healthcare, not people's diseases. That means decreasing the risk of disease, preventing outbreaks, preventing the spread of disease and promoting a healthy lifestyle: don't drink, don't smoke, maintain personal and collective hygiene, put garbage where it belongs," explains Angelina Bachanovich, manager at the Ministry of Health

LJUBICA BALABAN

The shortest diagnosis of the upcoming decentralisation of healthcare is that the municipalities will protect us from diseases whereas the state will cure us. Local Government will be in charge of healthy drinking water, clean air, undertaking measures to prevent contagious diseases, as well as caring for those with psychological disorders. One innovation is that local government representatives will participate in regulating those public organizations responsible for primary healthcare and public health policy.

This decentralisation should begin in July this year. To promote healthy lifestyles (according to the World Health Organization [WHO] a crucial area in preventing contagious and non-contagious disease) the Ministry of Health is undertaking measures to prepare and implement action plans for: food and nutrition, protection from HIV/AIDS, mental health, protection from smoking and alcoholism, protection of the living environment and the work place. All action plans are scheduled to be presented to the government by the end of the year.

DIAGNOSING PRIORITIES

"The municipalities will be responsible for healthcare, not people's diseases. That means decreasing the risk of disease, preventing outbreaks, preventing the spread of disease and promoting a healthy lifestyle: don't drink, don't smoke, maintain personal and collective hygiene, put garbage where it belongs," explains Angelina Bachanovich, manager at the Ministry of Health. The ministry is implementing a project in which local

government representatives learn how to recognise people's health needs and problems at the local level in order to establish priorities and undertake measures for combatting certain conditions. For example, the pollution in Veles from the metal smelting factory is a local problem, and additional help is requested from the state for it to be solved.

Municipal representatives should be trained to recognize the priorities at the municipal level, so that planning is not centralised.

As part of the implemented decentralisation program for 2003, the law on contagious diseases was passed. It defines the municipal authority that should provide preventive measures.

The municipalities will gain authority over the care for the psychologically ill. Dependence disorders will be treated with a multisector approach, calling for cooperation with the local units of the ministries of labour and social welfare and of education.

The WHO and the Council of Europe are cooperating with health officials to construct a strategy for mental healthcare and associated legislation whose main goal will be the development of socially oriented psychiatry and mental health centres. Four have been established so far, and one more will open soon in Strumica.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Schoolchildren are being educated about health through the project "Schools where Health is Promoted," implemented by the Ministry of Health together with the Ministry of Education. Local government representatives will participate for the first time in decision-

making and in regulating public health organisations responsible for primary healthcare. Managerial boards will have two representatives from the local government designated by the municipal council, or in Skopje by the city council.

Healthcare will be decentralised by including representatives of the local government in the managerial boards of the public health institutions responsible for primary care and by facilitating the transfer of ownership of pharmacies and the renting of pharmacies and dentist offices.

The pharmacists and the dentists who now work in public health will be given the opportunity to establish private health institutions with rented equipment and in rented premises. That way they will have their "own business" to run, which will increase their motivation to be successful without having to wait to receive their salary or for someone else to solve the

institutional problems. Citizens-through the participation of community representatives in the managerial boards-will be able to influence the municipalities and to express their needs, especially regarding improvement in the supply of medicines.

MEDICAL CENTRES WILL BE DIVIDED INTO HOSPITALS AND HOMES

Healthcare in the local community will be financed from municipal income and in part from the state budget. If assessments show that a certain municipality does not have enough doctors or pharmacists, the local community will have to employ appropriate personnel, provided they have funds, of course.

There are 17 clinics and 16 medical centres in the country.

"What's new is that the medical centres will break up, that is, they will

be divided. After the division, we will have 16 clinics and an equal number of hospitals.

"Only part of primary care protection will be on the local level, because it will not be possible for all patient services to be provided at that level. For example, if there is no internal medicine laboratory in Krivogashani, then the patients will have to go to Prilep to receive those services," explains Jordan Mishevski, a lawyer at the Ministry of Health.

In some towns like Kriva Palanka that face personnel problems, there may be no hospital, only a clinic. Still, it is expected that the new framework for health protection will become more efficient and more accessible to citizens. How far that will play out in real life, we will have to wait and see.

(The author is a journalist with „Dnevnik“)

SKOPJE AND THE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE BORDERS

MUCH GREATER AUTHORITY FOR THE "BUTTERFLY"

KATICA CHANGOVA

Looking at the new map of Skopje one can quickly tell that this special local government unit looks like the two wings of a butterfly. The main culprit for the visibly altered plan is Saraj, the rural area which extends the urban boundaries of the Macedonian metropolis westward. Saraj, which used to be a local government unit, became one of the ten Skopje municipalities after the last redistricting. This reshuffling of administrative borders in the capital called for extensive adjustments in the physical, demographic, ethnic and organizational plans. No one knows for sure whether these changes create an advantage or a problem. The challenge in these changes will be tested out after new local government units are established, by electing mayors and advisory teams. Skopje and its 10 municipal-

ities will be governed by 11 mayors and 265 city and municipal council members. Only day-to-day experiences-which the decentralization process determines will come into effect after 1 July this year-will give us a real answer to the question, is this better or worse?

SKOPJE HAS GAINED 40 KILOMETRES IN LENGTH

Including Saraj, the capital now stretches over 575 square kilometres or 230 more square metres than before. Skopje is now 40 kilometres long, with the new 15 kilometres that stretch to the villages of Jegunovce and Zhelino are situated in the outskirts of Tetovo. Moreover, Saraj has caused Skopje's population to increase by 35,408 inhabitants and now exceeds half a million: 503,060. The rural municipality of Saraj which

encompasses Kondovo as well, changes the ethnic makeup of Skopje's population. The percentage of the Albanian population has risen by a full five percent, from 15.30 to 20.67, thus fulfilling the constitutional requirement for the use of two official languages in the capital. As for the official use of Macedonian and Albanian languages and alphabet, this rule will apply both on the city level and on the local level in four of the Skopje municipalities. Those municipalities are Saraj, Chair, Butel and Shuto Orizari. (Shuto Orizari will be trilingual: Macedonian, Roma, Albanian.) Butel is a new municipality created by dividing Chair. Likewise, Aerodrom separated off from Kisela Voda. The central city still includes the municipalities of Centar, Karposh, Gazi Baba and Gjorche Petrov.

The organization of Skopje into 10 municipalities has several causes.

Cultural institutions appear to be the most problematic area that needs to be defined between the city and the municipalities

According to policy makers, the special constitutional status of the capital was taken into consideration. Also, a single-tiered local government system best establishes a broad democratic basis for citizens' more direct participation in the decision-making process. Thus, legislators explained, conditions ensured that citizens throughout the Skopje area could exercise their rights equally and receive better and more efficient services. The precise functional and financial division of responsibilities between the city and its municipalities was designed to clarify the relations and responsibilities regarding activities of public interest and local significance. Certainly, the interaction between the city and its municipalities will be tested in practice. It makes sense to expect modifications whenever problems occur.

WHAT ARE THE NEW COMPETENCIES?

The city of Skopje will have a great deal of authority in the future: urban planning, protection of the living environment and green areas, local economic development, city services, culture, education, health care, social services, fire protection and sports. In particular regarding education, secondary schools and kindergartens are under Skopje authority while primary schools fall within municipal authority. The explanation is that the city has few secondary schools and that this level of education is a matter of personal choice. Why are kindergartens under Skopje authority? For practical reasons, since most parents live in one municipality and work in another. Children are usually cared for where their mothers or fathers work. The authority of the capital and its municipalities in urban planning launches the campaign against both the urban chaos and the urban mafia that caused inestimable damage over the past few years. That chaos has mostly affected Skopje's residents who could not oppose those who forgot about citizens' well-being for the sake of profit. The situation regarding the powers

of public enterprises is also clear. In cases where the founder of the public enterprise is the city of Skopje, the capital will assume authority. The Skopje Public Transport Authority was founded by the city, which means that Skopje officials appoint directors, approve the price of bus tickets, etc. The range of public enterprises that affect the city include the departments of: sanitation services, water, parks, streets, electricity and power, Drisla landfill, and Butel cemetery. The Saraj Recreational Centre, Lake Treska, the Matka area, and Rashche spring are all facilities that Skopje manages, as is the Kale sports arena and the fire department. According to the law on Skopje, every municipality can establish a public service and is obliged to care for its own streets, markets, local graveyards, pest control, and removal of unregistered and wrecked vehicles from public areas.

CULTURE IS THE MOST PROBLEMATIC AREA TO DEFINE

Cultural institutions, particularly the more significant ones that are concentrated in Centar municipality,

part of the capital. The Macedonian National Theater has broader significance, so it belongs neither to Centar nor Skopje, but to the Republic of Macedonia.

Skopje and its municipalities will subsist on income they collect. The funding sources will be local taxes, fees, and compensations as well as income arising from ownership, self-contribution, penalties and donations. For instance, income from local taxes on property, inheritance, and gifts, as well as the tax on real estate transactions, are allocated equally between Skopje and the municipalities. Taxes are collected by the tax authorities in Skopje and the administrators in the local units. Both the city and municipal budgets will receive funding from the state treasury: earmarked funds, block funds, capital funds, and funding for delegated mandates.

As for language usage, no one has so far defined what in practice a bilingual Skopje would look like. The legal and constitutional provision for city-wide official use of Albanian has yet to be applied. Experts claim that bilingualism implies that the Skopje council will have to use Albanian together with Macedonian not only in verbal



appear to be the most problematic area requiring clarification. Which municipality is responsible for the Museum of Skopje, Skopje or Centar? The experts on local government suggest that the Museum of Skopje should be

but also in written communication and documents. Just like the practice in the Macedonian Parliament, simultaneous translation during sessions, equipment, and headphones will be provided, as well as translation of written

materials.

The speeches and announcements of Skopje council members will be translated, materials will be rendered in the other official language and regulations in official bulletins will be published in both languages. Citizens from the Albanian community will be able to communicate with the municipal administration in their mother tongue. The Skopje city stamp, which verifies all documents, will also be bilingual. The inscriptions on the offices of the Skopje Council and the mayor will be in Macedonian and Albanian. The signs on secondary schools and the names of all city institutions will be in two official lan-

guages.

According to the law on street names, names of roads and bridges will be bilingual. The names of the main streets that fall under city authority will have bilingual signs, as will squares and bridges. Apart from Macedonian and its alphabet-which is in official use-Albanian and its alphabet will also be used in accordance with local government regulations and laws regulating language usage, explain the experts. Albanian will also be used in public enterprises established by the city. In practical terms, it means that Skopje residents will receive their utility bills and bus tickets in two languages, and the same will

apply to the bus connections and bus stops as well.

The funding necessary to enable the use of both languages will be provided by the city of Skopje and the affected municipalities. No calculations have been made as to how much funding would be required for this purpose, but it is certain that it will drain the city and municipal budgets. The financial burden arising from the use of two or three languages in official communication will be borne by the four Skopje municipalities where more than 20 percent of the minorities reside.

(The author is a journalist with „Utrinski vesnik“)

SARAJ IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

THE SURVIVING MUNICIPALITY

DAUT DAUTI

Just as you exit the Gjorche Petrov neighbourhood you arrive in Saraj. You don't follow the Skopje-Tetovo highway. Instead you turn left at the iron trestle bridge, a legacy from the German era. The bridge itself is quite bumpy, leaving you with the impression that in comparison to the other roads of Saraj it hasn't been touched for quite a while. Further along the road, you will notice something new. "Sleeping policemen," road bumps, have been laid down, made of rubber not concrete, to slow down vehicles that used to drive recklessly. This is the first sign that this municipality intends to take on an urban image and it is a sign that things have changed since 1996 when Saraj was established along with many other rural municipalities. However, before the latest redistricting, Saraj municipality faced the challenge to survive. Some 25,000 inhabitants, mainly from the rural areas, who had once had their needs met through Karposh or Gjorche Petrov, became attached to the new Saraj municipality. But how capably could this newly formed municipality fulfil every need of its citizens, what with municipal authority being quite limited on all sides? Little governance and a small budget, that was the reality.

The challenge for the municipality's first mandate was to develop a plan for a completely new municipality. In the second term, many improved changes have taken place on behalf of its citizens. At least, many of the

The municipality of Saraj, one of the 123 municipalities that were formed 9 years ago, stands out in many ways. Not only did this municipality not disappear with the new redistricting, it now finds itself a part of urban Skopje. Saraj is included along with many other decidedly rural settlements that were part of Kondovo. There's a major shift in its perspective

Derven canyon inhabitants think so.

The development away from a passive rural municipality with almost no infrastructure in place, "has been a very hard and nerve-wracking task," according to current Mayor Imer Selmani. "For the past four years, we have been in a very typical situation common to rural municipalities: local governance with no authority and a small budget." What the mayor and the municipal council achieved four years ago was a new strategy to surpass their potential.

SELF CONTRIBUTIONS AND INTERNATIONAL FUNDS

"We drafted a very ambitious plan to create efficient municipal services and build up the infrastructure," recalls Mayor Selmani four years later. According to the municipality, the settlements at this end of town were neglected ever since they were part of the

Skopje municipality. Projects were drafted for some of the settlements. But the real, key problem was to find additional funds for water system installation, road reconstruction, sewage systems, and bridges. They needed to find alternative resources.

Reviewing all public works undertaken, Mayor Selmani explains that the municipality's involvement in the projects was only 19 per cent, while the rest of the funds came from international foundations as well as from donations from the municipality's citizens themselves.

As a result of the initiative of the municipal bodies and the citizens, the investments over four years are worth 169 million denars. "If this investment trend continues in the future as well, the rural appearance of the municipality will gradually change. Saraj's center will become an urban zone," claims Mayor Selmani. In the realisation of projects the municipality received help from USAID, the Norwegian Embassy, OSCE, DNG-International, the Swiss Embassy, and the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation. Some helped financially, others with technical assistance or logistics.

The municipality has also cooperated fruitfully with city departments whenever there is a needed project of common interest, like the construction of the Saraj sports and recreation centre. Both municipalities have agreed about the mutual use of water from the Rashche water supply, which has solved the water problem in several villages. "Let me stress that until three

years ago there was no political will from the city to supply these villages from the Rashche water supply, but this has now changed," explains Mayor Selmani. As a result, the villages of Bojane, Arnakija, Kopanica, Krushopek and Laskarce have been or will be connected to the main water supply.

CLOSER TO CITIZENS

Shabi Zendeli, president of the municipal council, tells us that an office for citizens' information, or constituency office, has been organized, although many citizens that we asked did not know why it existed or what its function was. He confirms that citizens still don't know its purpose, namely to offer help and advice to citizens in processing many documents which take a lot of time and patience. Those that are informed, they mostly call to obtain documents, but also to obtain social security, keeping in mind that many citizens need this kind of assistance.

One step that the municipality has undertaken, but which has not yet been supported by its citizens, is the drafting of an urban zoning plan. Depending on their proximity to the municipal centre, three zones have been defined. In the first zone, constructing a building would cost 355 denars per square meter, the second category would cost 155 and the third one would be untaxed. The purpose, according to the municipal officers, has been to establish order in development, but also so that the development owners can have a clear idea on which land parcels they would be building, and prevent ownership and juridical disputes. "However, this intention has not been understood well," says Zendeli.

Another new aspect to municipal life is the organizing of the Saraj public municipal enterprise three years ago as a replacement for Komunalec, the sanitation department which the citizens believed did not collect the garbage.

This enterprise has been concentrating to start with only in the closest settlements-Saraj, Ljubin, Grhec, Krushopek, Matka, Glumovo and

Shishovo-and serves around 2,000 families. It operates with a large truck (a Norwegian Embassy donation), a pick-up truck, and, when needed, sometimes with tractors.

But what enterprise director Beqir Mahmuti states is that citizens are not regularly paying their monthly fees of 250 denars, which hampers the continued development of the enterprise. It plans to expand its services to even the furthest settlements. Another problem, according to him, will be the new division of responsibility with Komunalec once Saraj joins up with Skopje.

(DIS)SATISFIED CITIZENS

Saraj residents are aware of the changes that have occurred since the establishment of the municipality, but at the same time they would like to see several projects taken on that would improve the quality of life. "A lot of people come and go in my shop, and I can't say that all of them offer praise,"



says Bajram Zeqiri, a Saraj resident with a shop along the road to Ljubin village. This road itself needs repair, especially if you cross over to the Ljubin part. He says that it was left untended ever since the sewage system was put in, which also has never worked. In the municipality, according to him, there is talk that they are looking for additional means to obtain some filters to be installed. Murat Ramadani from Ljubin also mentions the problem with the road, which the Minister of Local Governance Rizvan Sulejmani promised him would be solved. On the other hand, Murati mentions the installation of lights in this neighbourhood. "The municipality gave something, we gave something," he says.

The inhabitants of some other vil-

lages point out various problems. Refik Behadini and Avdiriza Lutfiu from Bojane express their unhappiness and the hope that some things will change for the better, while not always being sure as to who will be responsible for those improvements, the municipality or some other body. Avdiriza says that there is water in the village water supply only in winter, while Refik says that the weak electricity supply is in a critical state, which causes a lot of problems with home appliances, especially refrigerators and TVs. For the maintenance of the water supply, Refik hopes that, by employing a Bojane citizen at the water-supply and sewage-system enterprises, things will improve.

Nimet Nebiu from lower Arnakia mentions that one kilometre of road was laid with asphalt. He also mentions the water-supply project, which was financed by the villagers themselves.

The brothers Irfan and Daim Ramadani from the village of

Krushopek mention the bridge over Treska River. It was built through the contributions of the villagers and the help of the municipality, which has shortened the road to Saraj. (Earlier, you had to travel through Grhec).

On the other hand, they are still waiting for the water supply pipelines to be built, a paradox since they have the water supply grid only 200 meters away at the

Saraj Sports and Recreation Centre.

There are many similar stories from the municipal inhabitants. Some of the problems are directed at the municipality, but the municipality understands the issues differently. Regarding the functioning of the electricity network, say, the regular users need to increase their payments by about 25 per cent more. The construction of additional electric transformers in the villages depends on these means.

THE FUTURE WITH SKOPJE

Saraj gained fame last year by its administrative conjoining with Skopje. Political aspects dominated the issues. The merge was intended to raise the proportion of Albanians in the city so

THE BATTLE AGAINST STEREOTYPES

MARIJA KUKA

their language would become official. But this aspect, says Mayor Selmani, will be soon forgotten. What remains is the other beneficial issue: development.

"By joining with the city, Saraj gains a lot as a municipality. It guarantees greater budgetary stability. Saraj's budget will increase not only with citizens' taxes, but also by the redistribution of the city budget reciprocally. This will provide the municipality with new stimulus for development," says Mayor Selmani.

Many other citizens whom we spoke to think that conditions will be better as part of Skopje, but they cannot say exactly which areas would benefit most. Kondovo's inclusion, according to Selmani, creates a geographical, cultural and economic whole. It will include both recreational centres (encompassing Saraj, Matka, Treska) the stone quarry in Sulare and Lower Arnakija and the water source of Rashche. (Rashche will be used by inhabitants on this side as well, unlike before when this was impossible).

On the other side, more opportunities will arise with the undertaking of some projects that remain in various phases of completion. These include roads, water supply, clinics (a problem in many villages), building schools, including a high school and a college. Saraj will become a true administrative centre, but also a cultural, educational and economic one, which will prove that it deserves to survive as a municipality.

(The author is a journalist and publicist.)

CONSTRUCTION

Municipality of Saraj 2000-2004, whose author is the municipality's secretary, Xhelal Jakupi, contains among other things public work that have been built: the construction of the Krushopek school was undertaken with resources from the Ministry of Education. For the water supply in the village of Bukovich, the municipality helped in the drafting of the project implemented under the European Union CARDS program. The plan is to connect the network to the water source in Rashche. The sewage system Saraj-Ljubin was put in with means provided by Macedonia Telecom, half a million euros. The total work done adds up to 2 million euros, including the still incomplete bridge over Treska River to connect Krushopek to Saraj, the construction of the water supply for Kopanica and the pedestrian bridge that connects Saraj with Gjorche Petrov.

Saturday is the busiest market day in the Roma settlement Shuto Orizari in Skopje. A crush of people, shouting, a plethora of cardboard boxes, booths loaded with all kinds of goods, offers written on pieces of paper all over the place: "three jackets 900 denars," "socks 30 denars," or "the newest items from Ceca." People from other settlements in Skopje are here today to buy clothes or shoes, because this is where it's cheapest.

"No, I can't give you this t-shirt for less than 200 denars. How much will I earn? If I don't earn today, I won't have anything to live on tomorrow, there are no customers on work days," Zulfija tells us, considering us as potential customers. She says that the only source of income for her seven-member family is this booth. Some sellers were very suspicious watching us asking about the prices and taking photos.

We continue towards the centre of Shuto Orizari. We are walking along Nov Zhivot ("new life") street, and we come across children selling chewing gum and tissues. On our way we see horses, but a new Mercedes as well. From many houses we can hear the song Vesela Dolina ("joyful valley"). That's what Vlatko Stefanovski, the front man for the rock band Leb i Sol ("bread and salt"), called this neighbourhood in one of his songs.

HOW JOYFUL IS THE JOYFUL VALLEY?

So are there reasons for 30,000 inhabitants of the joyful valley to be joyful? Less than a month ago, The Roma Decade 2005-2015 officially began with a conference in Bulgaria's capital, Sofia. A vast number of inhabitants from the only Roma settlement on the Balkans and in Europe, Shuto Orizari, have no elementary education, so they neither know, nor have they heard about the Roma Decade, let alone have any idea what it means. They are trying to survive day by day in a settlement which, according to its structure, is not even in the 19th century, let alone the 21st.

The crucial question that many people pose is, will a poor settlement like Shuto Orizari be able to bear the burden of the new responsibilities?

The aims of the decade for Roma social inclusion are: greater involvement in the educational process, diminishing poverty, and improving living conditions. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has prepared a draft strategy for the Roma in the Republic of Macedonia, in which one of the emphasized points is that local government as the primary level of implementation of this strategy. With the new Decentralisation Law, the municipalities in Macedonia will have far more authority, so Shuto Orizari will have new responsibilities and therefore new possibilities. The question many people pose is: will a poor settlement such as Shuto Orizari be able to bear the burden of its new responsibilities?

According to the only Roma Member of Parliament, Nezhdet Mustafa, the quality of education must improve urgently in Shuto Orizari municipality, including both the two primary schools as well as the child-care centres, because at this moment the working conditions are very bad. "The municipality does not even have a hospital. There is a building for it, but it doesn't function, so people there lack primary health care," explains Mustafa.

He believes that decentralisation will be successfully implemented in this unique Roma municipality, because decentralisation will in turn strengthen the positions of the local structures which will be able to affect the quality of life of all its residents.

"The new decentralisation law will encourage people to think about Shuto Orizari as an industrial zone. The local residents are interested in that, and I believe that there will be an influx of foreign capital as well," adds Mustafa.

Shuto Orizari's successful decentralisation will influence the life of Roma people in Macedonia, but it is a fact that 65,000 Macedonian Roma live in towns all over the country, in settlements which are often ghettoised and isolated from the non-Roma. Some others live amongst the tall buildings in other parts of Skopje in improvised cardboard houses, getting water from the nearby public taps, and washing their clothes in the Vardar! These families usually have more children, none of whom go to school. These children are registered under the category street children, and research estimates that there are around four hundred of them in Skopje. They wash windshields on the crossroads, beg, collect paper, etc.

According to the newest data, not even 600 out of 7,868 Roma students who enrolled at school completed primary education. Only five percent of Roma are employed in the state enterprises, and most often at the lowest wages, and the most undervalued jobs in the hierarchy. The only income for many Roma are the things they sell, social assistance or the mercy they get when they beg. Although Macedonia is considered to be the country in which Roma are best integrated in society, there is discrimination in the workplace, during court procedures or in their encounters with the police. According to some surveys as much as 59 per cent of Macedonians interviewed feel aversion towards Roma.

Cveta Usein from Skopje describes her situation. "Yes, the children at school bullied me. They said I am a gypsy, that I won't be able to learn, that I won't get educated. I wanted to prove that Roma are not people only destined for begging, homelessness and poverty. I completed high school, now I am in the third year at the pedagogical faculty majoring in primary education, and I think that with my work I will contribute to many young Roma making a huge step forward, becoming educated and taking part in society. I think that is a real possibility. What do I expect of the Roma Decade? Involvement in society and more respect for Roma. I will never escape from my national identity, I just want respect for my nation."

"I expect to work in the system and that way have a direct influence over improving conditions of my nation, the Roma," says Redzhep Ali Chupi, a law student in Skopje, who graduated highest in his class from one of the Tetovo high schools. "What is the secret of my

success? Probably it is because I didn't grow up in a ghettoised Roma environment, I could see how others live. It's obvious to me that there is a lot of prejudice towards Roma. My Macedonian friends often said to me: "How is it possible for you to be Roma!" As far as they knew, Roma were homeless and illiterate people, and not somebody who is a good student."

EDUCATED ROMA BREAK DOWN PREJUDICES

Cveta and Redzhep Ali are the kind of young people who will break down the stereotypes about Roma people with their knowledge and experience. They are amongst 64 students gathered at the Romaversitas Centre who receive scholarships from the Open Society Institute of Macedonia. This foundation is supporting the education

of 256 high school students, 900 primary school students and 179 children in childcare centres and kindergartens throughout Macedonia.

The Macedonian Centre for International Co-operation (MCIC) is implementing the programme Applied Education for Young Roma which is taking place in 11 towns in the country. One of the associates of the programme is Nihida Zakirova. She says that the basic goal of the programme is to improve the educational structure for young Roma, improving their chances of employment, which will help them gain access to all spheres of social life.

"Right now many Roma children drop out of school. This is heavily influenced by socio-economic factors but also by the family and the environment in which they are growing up. Their goals are short-term, they don't



NOMADIC LIFE

Dzhelem, Dzhelem ("I'm going, I'm going") is one of the most famous Roma songs, which perhaps best depicts the nomadic life of Roma who have wandered around the world for centuries, ever since they left their ancient home country, India.

"Roma arrived in the Balkans a long time ago. Some say that they have been here since the time of Alexander the Great, but they are mentioned in written documents from the 11th century. That's when they were called Gypsies (or Aciganos), meaning "the untouchables." As documented, a Greek priest saw a group of people far off, walking along the road. They were different from his fellow villagers, with dark complexions, with all sorts of animals around them, and dressed in clothes which he hadn't seen before. He thought

that these different people should stay away from the local inhabitants, so that's why he named them Aciganos, or Gypsies, a derogatory name for the Roma minority," says Dr. Trajko Petrovski, ethnologist at the Folklore Institute.

"The word Roma itself in Romany means "human." Roma have their own tradition and culture, their songs are famous the world over," Petrovski explains. "Regardless of their religion, Roma celebrate St. George's Day on the sixth of May, to celebrate the rebirth of spring. This holiday, is in fact, a modified celebration in honour of Black Sara, which was celebrated in their ancient home country India. One of the favourite goddesses of the Roma is Bibija, the protector of children and a fertility goddess."

see a future in education, so in fact they fall into a vicious circle: uneducated, they can't find a job, nor can they take care of the next generation. The entire family must be engaged to point out to them the importance of education, that only schooling will get them out of miserable poverty and the lowest social rank. Luckily, things are progressing, the number of high school and primary school Roma students is increasing, but it shouldn't stop there, there should be more of us," says Zekirova.

"I don't believe that Roma children will not want to study, I believe that they want to and that they can, but that depends on the chances they are given to show what they are capable of," says

Vladimir Lazovski from MCIC, another associate of the same project. "In reality, education is a long-term goal, and long-term goals are a privilege of the rich. You can't expect a child who today doesn't know whether they will have something to eat or anything to wear to react the same as a child who has all the comforts at home. The Roma Decade is a chance for the state to do something for these people who are the poorest of the poorest. I think that the government will have the last word on this Decade, given that the Roma Decade will not be financed by international organisations but by the governments of eight countries from Central and Southeast Europe who are involved in the Decade.

They will have to find money on their own to implement the planned strategies regarding Roma, or at some point to hope for suitable loans from the World Bank. Nevertheless, the issue is clear. Do we want to dedicate money at the moment to have capable young people in future who will participate in society, or do we want socially dependent people who will be marginalized from the mainstream? I think that both from a human and economic aspect the answer is, yes, we want educated, young Roma who will be our equal partners. The Roma deserve a real chance," says Lazovski. It's the government's turn!

(The author is a journalist with „Utrinski Vesnik“)

AFTER THREE REFERENDUMS, THE PEOPLE FROM OBLESHEVO AND CHESHINOVO ARE BACK AT THE BEGINNING

THE SAGA OF BALKAN OBSTINACY AND LOCAL PATRIOTISM

BORIS GEORGIEVSKI

The broken TV for now remains the only direct and visible material damage from the Cheshinovo mutiny against the new decision to redistrict, which obliged their municipality to join with neighbouring Obleshevo where the centre of the future mutual municipality will be located. The damage caused by the blockade that was held for over twenty days on the road from Shtip to Kochani, the responsibility of the person who in a moment of local patriotism burned the state flag, and of course the already-damaged relations with their neighbours in Obleshevo, has yet to be confirmed. Let's not forget that earlier almost the same scenario took place three kilometres east, in Obleshevo, with the same "results."

THINGS WERE "ENKINDLED" BY THE GOVERNMENTS HESITANCY

A large part of the responsibility for all that happened last year and the remains of the relationship Cheshinovo-Obleshevo belongs to the government with its contradictory decisions stemming from the desire to strike a balance between needs and reality. Since the beginning of the argument for the new law on redistricting, and so since the first official decision about the fate of these two municipalities, the government, meaning the responsible Ministry for Local Governance, changed its decision three times, moving first

Cheshinovo to Obleshevo then vice versa twice again.

Everything began in December 2003 when the concept for the new redistricting was announced. With the new map, Obleshevo remained a municipality which encompassed Cheshinovo, only three kilometres away. The first people of the municipality and the local population understood this message immediately as a signal to start verbal firing, to which we bear witness even today. The dispute in the meantime escalated and grew into another saga of

Everything began in December 2003 when the concept for the new redistricting was announced. With the new map, Obleshevo remained a municipality which encompassed Cheshinovo, only three kilometres away

Balkan obstinacy, local loyalties and village rivalries. In order for the story to be more interesting for Macedonia's conditions, the absurdity of the misunderstanding was enflamed by the extended families of the mayors from the two municipalities.

The arguments which meanwhile were displayed publicly pro or contra the government proposals were different, but most often described the economic, administrative or historical circumstances.

"Cheshinovo has all the predispositions to remain a municipality. Our achievements are much greater than Obleshevo's. We even have five well-known, successful economic enterprises, many artisan shops, gas stations, services, over 600 employed, health clinics. In that sense we are way ahead of Obleshevo. And history tells us that Cheshinovo, not Obleshevo, has always been the centre of this region where state governing bodies for every government have been located," as Cheshinovo Mayor Igor Manov argued towards the end of 2003 once the government's decision was made official.

KINDRED RIVALRY

Manov's uncle from the opposite side, Branko Georgiev came out with counter-arguments. "The budget of my nephew's municipality is 1.5 million denars, and our municipality's is three times bigger. In Obleshevo there are 250 employed people in several firms and institutions while in Cheshinovo they have a hundred less. It is funny to claim that there are 600 people who work there. Obleshevo is a municipality with tradition; during the period 1957-1963 we were a municipality. Cheshinovo boasts with mines, but Stromosh mine is on our territory, not theirs.

THE BLOCKADES AND THE REFERENDUMS BEGAN

The first to hold a referendum were the Cheshinovo residents. On 11

January about 2,000 people of the municipality expressed their position against the government's proposal that their municipality be discontinued and annexed to Obleshevo.

A calm period ensued which lasted until July last year, when the draft law for redistricting passed in a government session. But, to the surprise and great revolt of the Obleshevo people, this time their municipality was discontinued and the centre moved to Cheshinovo. The then Minister of Local Governance Aleksandar Geshtakovski told Obleshevo that the new decision was based on the request of 5 settlements with a total of 2,800 inhabitants from the current municipality of Obleshevo. In three of the five places mentioned, Ularci, Kuchichino and Buriilchevo, their request for joining with Cheshinovo was supported with a referendum. Geshtakovski explained, "Obleshevo and Cheshinovo have a similar number of people, about a thousand each, but to more effectively realize their citizens' rights, the citizens of these settlements asked for the centre of the new municipality to be in Cheshinovo."

This explanation was not enough for the people of Obleshevo. Blockades emerged on the Shtip-Kochani road that lasted for more than two weeks. The image was the same as the one that we had seen a few

days earlier in Cheshinovo: wooden barricades enforced with stands from the nearby market, trucks, tractors and various other machines, handled by men, women, even children. This situation lasted until the new Solomonic solution of the government.

Residents of the two villages were directed to hold a referendum this time, to answer the common question mutually, where will the new municipality centre be and what will it be called. Still undecided, the government mediators faced sharp resistance from the people of Cheshinovo, who suspected the signals sent from the authorities to their neighbours, so they, too, organized blockades. "We got tired of referendums," responded the people from Cheshinovo about the government's request for a new decision by the citizens. This was in turn acceptable for the people from Obleshevo and was an

acceptable form through which one would "hear the voice of the people."

EXCHANGING REFERENDUMS AND BLOCKADES

The public heard new arguments for and against the referendum and coexistence between the two municipalities. "Whatever happens, the potential for cooperation with Cheshinovo will be very difficult, because there over 90 per cent of the population is over the age of sixty and they will not be able to get over losing their status as a municipality," said Zdravko Arsov, president of the crisis centre of Obleshevo. The arguments of the people from Cheshinovo against the referendum are similar. "If we accept the referendum, our people who will be advocating through the villages may come across people who will be advocating for Obleshevo and in such circumstances we will be faced

neighbours' blockade.

Then Mayor Manov of Cheshinovo asked to wait until 6 February 2005 when his municipality was planning a new referendum.

Even before holding the Cheshinovo referendum, the government decided that the centre of the municipality would remain in Obleshevo, even though they were persuading the public that the final decision depended on the results planned for 6 February. Simultaneously with the government decision, the blockades were set up on the Cheshinovo path and lasted 23 days. No one from Cheshinovo came out for the referendum.

Mayor Manov called this a victory for Cheshinovo. Once the Parliament concurred with the government decision on 18 February, the blockade was removed and the protests stopped.

In Cheshinovo they now claim that "just because we lost a battle doesn't

mean we lost the war as well." An additional impetus for their hopes is the announcement from the Ministry of Local Governance that, after local elections, the new municipality with its centre in Obleshevo could conduct a new referendum as to where the residency of the municipality will be.



HOW DO WE GET PAST THE THREE KILOMETRES?

After three organized referendums, several months of protests

on both sides, countless meetings with people responsible in the country, uncalculated losses to the local economy, and maltreatment of thousands of people from the region who because of anger of people from Obleshevo and Cheshinovo were part of the kilometres' long lines on the road, now both sides are back at the beginning. They will need to try once again to rebuild their damaged trust, to forget the offences that they directed at each other and to understand that whether they want it or not, they will have to live together. The three kilometres from Cheshinovo to Obleshevo, or vice versa, will seem long at the beginning, but with time they will be crossed far more quickly. Especially when both sides will understand that being stubborn will not put food on their tables.

with a real war," concluded Mayor Manov of Cheshinovo. The voice of the people was heard for the second time on 28 November last year. Only people from Obleshevo came out to vote, both sides celebrated. The people from Obleshevo because 57 per cent of the people who voted, voted for Obleshevo to be the municipal centre; the people from Cheshinovo because while boycotting the referendum they counted that only 38 per cent of the local electorate had come out to vote, so they declared the referendum unsuccessful. A week later both sides started with new blockades and protests. Instead of in the fields, tractors and combines were once again found on the road. Obleshevo wanted the government to confirm their referendum as successful and to award them the centre. Cheshinovo people set up a blockade because they thought that they needed to respond in kind to the

mean we lost the war as well." An additional impetus for their hopes is the announcement from the Ministry of Local Governance that, after local elections, the new municipality with its centre in Obleshevo could conduct a new referendum as to where the residency of the municipality will be.

(The author is a journalist with „Utrinski Vesnik“)

TWO STORIES OF ONE BUILDING

The (extra)ordinary condition of their apartment building is just that, a condition, and every condition can change if we replace old habits and accept new trends

ALEKSANDRA TANUROVA

In a local apartment building which had deteriorated to an (extra)ordinary state, the occupants lived happily and seemed unperturbed. The odour of sour cabbage coming from the basement welcomed those who crossed its threshold.

The mailboxes, which had not been used for a long time, gave the impression that the people living here trust each other and need no guarantee of privacy. Their motto was "We're all in this together." This motto was embedded in their mutual relations. Anyone could walk into an apartment unannounced, without ringing the bell, enter the intimate world of their neighbours and be a part of their reality show. That's how everyone got the real story: who did what with whom, when, where, how, why, and how many times.

At one time this building had only two elevators and only one worked, sometimes. The first elevator, which never worked, provided spare parts when the second would break down. The second one was in fact a moving wish list or bulletin board for the needs and passions of the younger tenants. The walls and those parts of the building that still had paint on them served a similar purpose.

The building's tenants lived in harmony. Nothing bothered them.

Together they welcomed brides and grooms, and bid farewell to the deceased. Nothing seemed difficult until the moment when-

One day new tenants moved into the building. At first sight they appeared to be a nice family, but with different habits. Wishing to welcome them, the old, well-meaning tenants tried to open their door. It was locked! The locked door roused suspicion: "Why are they locking themselves in, what are they hiding?"

Then the new tenants tried to

steps that seemed radical to some of the other tenants. They put in a new mailbox, and painted the wall on their floor. They even tried to convince the others to repair the elevator which was not working. The tenants on the first two floors objected, saying: "We don't use it, we aren't going to pay!" This attempt, albeit unsuccessful, caused a rift between the old tenants who had lived harmoniously until then. For the first time the motto divided into: "Yours and Ours"

Some of the long-time tenants

supported the newcomers. They replaced their old mailboxes and painted the walls around their entrances, too. That's how they emphasized the effect of contrasting colours, and habits. Every day there was more. The next step was to get rid of the welcoming odour of the forgotten sour cabbage, then straighten up outside the building, put in benches and clean off the bulletin board in the elevator.

The long-time tenants who held tight to their habits gradually started to give in, understanding that the (extra)ordinary condition of their building is just that, a condition, and every condition can change if we replace old habits and accept new trends.

The building's tenants unanimously decided to replace the entrance door and install an intercom. It wasn't until they looked at the black and white photograph that they figured out the identity of their former house council president.

They continued to live in harmony under the motto "We're all in this together," but now with a different meaning better suited to their changed habits.

(The author is a journalist at Macedonian Radio)



alert the rest about the lighting in the entrance. This created a problem because it wasn't easy to find the president of the house council, who had been appointed 100 years ago. Since the long-time residents could not recall who had been appointed to take care of the (extra)ordinary state of the building, the new ones replaced the light bulb by themselves.

Motivated by the desire to improve their living environment, the newcomers undertook certain