

# **PEACE, STABILITY AND ELECTIONS**

## **About the poll**

This project was independently commissioned by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE, Thessaloniki, Greece) and co funded by the CDRSEE, Foundation for Open Society Institute in Macedonia (FOSIM) and the Greek Ministry for Macedonia and Thrace. The research was undertaken by Dr. Colin Irwin of the Queen's University of Belfast and the public opinion survey work was conducted by the Center for Ethnic Relations, Skopje, Macedonia, between March 14th and March 25th to produce 1600 'face to face' interviews that represented a cross section of the adult population of Macedonia in terms of age, gender, social class, political and ethnic affiliation and geographical area.

Colin Irwin reports on the findings of the research.

## **Seeking the People's Views on Conflict Resolution**

Peace and peace processes are not easy. Macedonia managed to stay out of the worst of the Balkan wars and Northern Ireland is having a good year after a generation of 'The Troubles'. Israel and Palestine are not doing so well. There tanks, F16s and helicopter gun ships 'face off' against suicide bombers with the most tragic of consequences. The election of a hard liner, Sharon, to the leadership of the Israeli State may have helped to re-ignite the conflict in the Middle East. In Northern Ireland next years elections could see new politicians in power and a reversal of fortunes there. While here, in Macedonia, the up coming elections may determine the fate of the peace process in this part of the Balkans.

What are the critical problems that the next Macedonian government must deal with? What policies can best meet these challenges? What will happen if these problems are not dealt with and can the people of Macedonia be persuaded to come out and vote for the politicians they believe can best deliver long term peace and stability?

Eight public opinion polls were run in support of the Northern Ireland peace process so that the people of Northern Ireland would have an opportunity to tell their politicians what they thought should be done. This public opinion poll uses the same methods as those used there so that the people of Macedonia can have an opportunity to express their views on the way ahead. The results are reviewed below and full comprehensive reports will be sent to all the parties who have been elected to the Parliament of Macedonia and to the EU, OSCE and other interested National and International organisations.

## **Reasons for the Lack of Peace and Stability in Macedonia**

People from different communities often hold very different views about the causes of a conflict and, in this case, the lack of peace and stability in Macedonia. To deal with this issue the first question in the poll asked people to indicate which problems they considered to be 'Very Significant',

‘Significant’, ‘Of Some Significance’, ‘Of Little Significance’ or ‘Of No Significance’ at all. Table 1 lists the results for the two main communities in order of importance from one to twenty four (per cent ‘Very Significant’). Some concerns are the same for both Macedonians and Albanians, but some are not.

**Table 1. Macedonian and Albanian causes of conflict in order of significance.**

Per cent 'Very significant'		Macedonian		Albanian
1	Activities of Albanian paramilitary groups still operating in Macedonia (ANA).	85	Discrimination against minority ethnic groups in employment, education and language rights	80
2	Incomplete disarmament of NLA by NATO	78	Activities of Macedonian party police and paramilitary groups operating in Macedonia (Lions, Poskoks).	67
3	Many illegally held weapons in the region	74	Bribery and party political corruption that undermines the democratic foundations of the state	66
4	Serious organised crime including businessmen, paramilitaries and politicians	70	Poor economic opportunities for all sections of the society	61
5	Bribery and party political corruption that undermines the democratic foundations of the state	65	The failure of the Macedonian economy	58
6	Amnesty that includes ALL serious crimes against humanity	62	Serious organised crime including businessmen, paramilitaries and politicians	56
7	The failure of the Macedonian economy	53	Biased media and abuse of information due to gross political interference	55
8	Poor economic opportunities for all sections of the society	52	Bad interethnic relations between the people of Macedonia	53
9	Bad interethnic relations between the people of Macedonia	48	Lack of understanding of democracy by the people's elected politicians	46
10	Lack of action by the International Community to create peace and stability in Macedonia	46	Bad interethnic relations between the politicians of Macedonia	40
11	The FA goes too far regarding the requests for reforms	43	Lack of transparency in government at all levels	36
12	Displaced people within Macedonia	42	Many illegally held weapons in the region	27
13	The dispute about the border with Kosovo	42	The dispute about the border with Kosovo	27
14	Lack of transparency in government at all levels	38	Interference of the religious communities in politics	25
15	Bad interethnic relations between the politicians of Macedonia	36	The FA does not adequately deal with the requests for reforms	25
16	Lack of understanding of democracy by the people's elected politicians	35	Unequal treatment of different ethnic groups by international institutions and NGOs	23
17	Unequal treatment of different ethnic groups by international institutions and NGOs	32	Displaced people within Macedonia	19
18	The FA does not adequately deal with the requests for reforms	32	Lack of understanding of democracy by the people of Macedonia	17
19	Macedonia has not resolved its name dispute	30	Amnesty that includes ALL serious crimes against humanity	15
20	Biased media and abuse of information due to gross political interference	26	Macedonia has not resolved its name dispute	15
21	Interference of the religious communities in politics	22	Lack of action by the International Community to create peace and stability in Macedonia	12
22	Lack of understanding of democracy by the people of Macedonia	16	Activities of Albanian paramilitary groups still operating in Macedonia (ANA).	10
23	Discrimination against minority ethnic groups in employment, education and language rights	13	Incomplete disarmament of NLA by NATO	9
24	Activities of Macedonian party police and paramilitary groups operating in Macedonia (Lions, Poskoks).	13	The FA goes too far regarding the requests for reforms	6

Problems of security feature at the top of the Macedonian list with 'Activities of Albanian paramilitary groups' as their number one concern (85 per cent 'very significant') followed by 'Incomplete disarmament of NLA by NATO' at number two (78 per cent) and 'Many illegally held weapons in the region' at number three (74 per cent). This is followed by problems of serious organised crime and corruption at four and five.

Similarly Albanians place corruption and organised crime high on their list of causes too at third and sixth respectively (67 per cent and 56 per cent 'Very significant'). The problem of security comes in at number two on their list but for them it is the 'Activities of the Macedonian party police and paramilitary groups' that continue to worry them (67 per cent). However, for Albanians their number one problem is not security it is 'Discrimination against minority ethnic groups in employment, education and language rights' (80 per cent 'very significant').

In many ways the major concerns of the 'Other' ethnic groups in Macedonia (for the most part, Turks, Romas, Serbians and Vlachs) are the same as those of the Macedonians with the activities of Albanian paramilitaries at the top of their list as well.

Clearly the different problems of security of each community must be dealt with if peace and stability is to be achieved in the long term and, for Albanians and some groups of 'Others', questions of discrimination must also be addressed. Beyond this all the people of Macedonia, whatever their ethnic background, consider the problems of corruption in government and the poor economic prospects of the state to be the greatest threat to the ultimate success of the peace process.

Interestingly, with regards to the peace process, it should be pointed out that the idea that the Framework Agreement goes too far with reforms came in at item 11 on the Macedonian list (43 per cent) while the suggestion that the Agreement does not go far enough came in at item 15 on the Albanian list (25 per cent). Clearly the Framework Agreement, as such, is not a major problem for either community although its outworking, in terms of security, equality and the rule of law, has yet to reach its full potential.

## **Priorities for Lasting Peace and Stability**

In the second question people were asked to go through a list of twenty four steps that could be taken to help secure a lasting peace and permanent stability in Macedonia. For each step or option they were invited to indicate which ones they considered to be 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' as part of a successful peace process. Table 2 lists the results for the two main communities in order of importance. Again some priorities for peace and stability are the same but some are different.

**Table 2. Macedonian and Albanian priorities for peace and stability.**

	Per cent 'Essential'	Macedonian		Albanian
1	Effective measures against paramilitaries and organised crime	83	State funded University in Albanian	85
2	Strengthening the rule of law	75	Full implementation of the FA	84
3	True court independence	75	Strong measures to prevent ethnic discrimination	82
4	Free and fair elections	72	Free and fair elections	80
5	Rebuild the houses of displaced people and secure their safety	72	Local government development	78
6	The International Community should make greater efforts to remove all illegally held arms from the region	69	Proportional representation for all ethnic groups in the public administration, police and army in Macedonia	78
7	Strategic plan to eliminate social decline and poverty	68	Strengthening the rule of law	77
8	The state keeps control of strategic industries and resources	58	Strategic plan to eliminate social decline and poverty	73
9	Resolving the question of the name of Macedonia	51	Rebuild the houses of displaced people and secure their safety	67
10	EU membership	50	True court independence	66
11	Strong measures to prevent ethnic discrimination	43	Strategic plan to build confidence between different ethnic groups	66
12	Religious communities should not interfere with politics	40	EU membership	62
13	Local government development	34	Integration of ex-paramilitaries into civil society	59
14	Transparency in the grant giving of international institutions and NGOs	32	The state keeps control of strategic industries and resources	54
15	International help to build new and strengthen existing institutions of government	27	International help to build new and strengthen existing institutions of government	49
16	Strong measures to prevent gender discrimination	27	Effective measures against paramilitaries and organised crime	45
17	Strategic plan to build confidence between different ethnic groups	26	The International Community should make greater efforts to remove all illegally held arms from the region	40
18	International monitoring of the activities of key Ministries	23	Strong measures to prevent gender discrimination	38
19	Full implementation of the FA	13	Religious communities should not interfere with politics	38
20	Build new communities for displaced peoples in Macedonia	10	Transparency in the grant giving of international institutions and NGOs	37
21	Proportional representation for all ethnic groups in the public administration, police and army in Macedonia	8	International monitoring of the activities of key Ministries	33
22	Integration of ex-paramilitaries into civil society	6	Resolving the question of the name of Macedonia	25
23	State funding for an Faculty for Turkish Studies within an existing University	1	State funding for an Faculty for Turkish Studies within an existing University	14
24	State funded University in Albanian	1	Build new communities for displaced peoples in Macedonia	12

The first three priorities for Macedonians relate to security and the rule of law. Their number one priority is for 'Effective measures against paramilitaries and organised crime (83 per cent 'Essential'). This is followed by 'Strengthening the rule of law' and 'True court independence' both at 75 per cent. For Albanians their first three priorities all deal with questions of equality and social reform. Their number one priority is for a 'State funded University in Albanian' (85 per cent 'Essential') followed by 'Full implementation of the Framework Agreement (FA)' at 84 per cent and 'Strong measures to prevent ethnic discrimination at 82 per cent. Both of these communities list 'Free and fair elections' as their fourth priority.

With one notable exception there should not be too much community based resistance to the implementation of these apparently separate lists of needs. Albanians also want 'Strengthening the rule of law' (77 per cent 'Essential') and 'True court independence' (66 per cent 'Essential'). For Albanians 'Effective measures against paramilitaries and organised crime' is 16th on their list at 45 per cent 'Essential', 22 per cent 'Desirable', 22 per cent 'Acceptable', 10 per cent 'Tolerable' and only 1 per cent 'Unacceptable. Similarly 43 per cent of Macedonians consider 'Strong measures to prevent ethnic discrimination to be 'Essential' with only 2 per cent considering such a policy to be 'Unacceptable'. 'Full implementation of the FA' is not an easy matter for all Macedonians but most find it either 'Essential' at 13 per cent, or 'Desirable' at 20 per cent, or 'Acceptable' at 22 per cent, or 'Tolerable' at 19 per cent. A minority of 26 per cent consider this option to be 'Unacceptable' and so for them it is still a problem.

Unfortunately the one priority upon which there seems to be little or no 'meeting of minds' is the desire for a 'State funded University in Albanian'. This option is at the bottom of the Macedonian list with 78 per cent considering such funding to be 'Unacceptable' while 85 per cent of Albanians consider it 'Essential'. Hopefully Macedonians will now begin to understand how important such a University is to Albanians. Conversely Albanians must make an effort to understand why Macedonians are so opposed to such a policy and try to put such concerns as they may have to rest. Some very careful diplomacy and/or mediation is clearly needed here.

Much more could be said about the two lists of priorities. But, for the most part, there is more agreement than disagreement about policies and reforms which can be taken forward with strong and effective political leadership. Everyone wants Macedonia to be a democratic and economic success and will welcome all efforts made to achieve that end.

## The Consequences of Failure

Of course everyone hopes that everything that has to be done to help make Macedonia a successful democracy with a growing economy will be done. But if the Government of Macedonia and the International Community fail to take the necessary steps needed to help secure a lasting peace and permanent stability what will happen then? From a list of fourteen different possibilities people were asked to indicate which ones they considered to be ‘Very probable’, ‘Probable’, ‘Not sure’ about, ‘Improbable’ or ‘Very improbable’. Table 3 lists the results for all of Macedonia, for the Macedonian and Albanian communities separately and for the ‘Other’ minorities together.

**Table 3. What will happen if the Macedonian Government and International Community fail to act**

Per cent ‘Very probable’	All	Macedonian	Albanian	Other
Increased poverty	77	78	74	74
Increased violence	62	68	43	62
Emigration of young people	61	64	50	64
There will not be fair and free elections	57	59	45	64
Few people will bother to vote in the coming elections	49	50	39	59
Immigration from Kosovo	32	40	6	32
The new Macedonian government will be weak and ineffective	32	31	33	38
Creation of ethnically clean communities	30	35	14	34
Restart of conflict initiated from Kosovo	27	34	5	27
State of emergency declared and elections cancelled	21	23	18	13
Aspirations of neighboring countries and break up of the state	21	24	13	19
Civil war and imposition of International Protectorate	16	19	9	11
Civil war leading to a regional war	12	14	7	11
Exchange of territories with neighboring countries	9	10	7	10

Nearly everyone is agreed that a failure to adequately address the problems that the Government and International Community must deal with will lead to ‘Increased poverty’ (77 per cent ‘Very probable’); ‘Increased violence’ (62 per cent); ‘Emigration of young people’ (61 per cent); and that ‘There will not be fair and free elections’ (57 per cent ‘very probable’).

However, although 40 per cent of Macedonians believe a failure to implement policies to deal with the Nations problems will also lead to ‘Immigration from Kosovo’ only 6 per cent of Albanians share this view. Similarly only 5 per cent of Albanians think a ‘Restart of conflict initiated from Kosovo’ is ‘Very probable’. Eighteen per cent of Albanians and 23 per cent of Macedonians consider the prospects of a ‘State of emergency declared and elections cancelled’ to be ‘Very

probable'. While 24 per cent of Macedonians and 13 per cent of Albanians consider the break up of the country as 'Very probable'.

Beyond that the more serious prospects of a civil war leading to an International Protectorate (16 per cent 'Very probable'), regional war (12 per cent 'Very probable') or exchange of territories with neighbouring countries (9 per cent 'Very probable') are not perceived to be very serious possibilities at the present time. Clearly the people of Macedonia do not fear war nearly so much as they fear a collapse of society resulting in increased poverty, violence, emigration and the failure of the democratic process. These prospects they consider to be very real indeed.

## Fair and Free Elections

The desire for fair and free elections comes in as one of the top priorities for everyone living in Macedonia just behind the need for security and, for some, equality. Many may consider fair and free elections to be an indispensable part of any plan designed to deliver long term peace. With this point in mind the people of Macedonia were asked what steps should now be taken to help secure fair and free elections. From a list of twelve options which ones did they consider to be ‘Essential’, ‘Desirable’, ‘Acceptable’, ‘Tolerable’ or ‘Unacceptable’ as part of a successful peace process. Table 4 lists the results for all of Macedonia, for the Macedonian and Albanian communities separately and for the ‘Other’ minorities together.

**Table 4. Requirements for fair and free elections**

Per cent ‘Essential’ or ‘Desirable’	All	Macedonian	Albanian	Other
Parties should cease all violence and intimidation during elections	93	94	97	86
The politicians should avoid using language and speeches that incite ethnic hatred	88	85	98	88
All the political parties should sign a pledge for fair and free elections	88	87	92	87
International monitors should be pro-active in the maintenance of international standards for fair and free elections	81	78	89	77
The news media should avoid publishing and broadcasting stories that incite ethnic hatred	80	75	95	80
The police, army and paramilitary groups should stay out of the electoral process	79	77	87	77
International monitoring teams should be deployed in Macedonia at the earliest opportunity	76	74	88	71
There should be a campaign to educate and encourage citizens to vote	76	78	73	70
International monitors should be present in each polling station	60	60	60	55
International forces should be used to monitor and close the border to paramilitary groups intent on disrupting elections	58	69	21	67
International forces should be used to monitor the voting process throughout Macedonia during the elections	50	51	51	46
A policeman should be present in each polling station	42	51	13	49

Again, with only a few minor exceptions, there is a great deal of agreement across all sections of Macedonian society on these issues. Ninety three percent believe it is ‘Essential’ or ‘Desirable’ that

'Parties should cease all violence and intimidation during elections' and that language that incites ethnic hatred should be avoided (88 per cent); that parties should sign a pledge for fair and free elections (81 per cent); that the news media should not incite ethnic hatred (80 per cent); that the police, army and paramilitaries should stay out of the electoral process (79 per cent); that international monitoring teams should be deployed (76 per cent); that there should be a campaign to encourage citizens to vote (76 per cent); and that there should also be international monitors in each polling station (60 per cent). There is no significant dissension on any of these points so perhaps they could all be included in some sort of pledge for fair and free elections.

However, the use of international forces to monitor the elections is only considered 'Essential' or 'Desirable' by about half of the population and only about half of all Macedonians and 13 per cent of Albanians want a policeman present in each polling station. Responsible behaviour, on the part of parties, politicians and the media is what people seem to want most of all coupled with the assurance that international monitors can bring. Forces, either domestic or international, are not so welcome perhaps because they are not considered to be a proper part of the electoral process in the free and democratic society that everyone now aspires too.

But even if all of this can be done. If the politicians do now seek to address the issues and policies reviewed in this poll and if they do sign and keep to a pledge for fare and free elections will the people of Macedonia come out and vote. Recent elections suggest they will not make the effort. But perhaps things could now be different. Perhaps people will vote if they do now believe their vote can make a difference. On this last critical point people were asked 'If these conditions for fair and free elections can be met do you think people should vote?' Eighty seven per cent said 'Yes' (Table 5). And when they were asked if they themselves would vote 80 per cent said they would (Table 6). Let us hope the politicians and the people can now meet this challenge?

**Table 5. If these conditions for fair and free elections can be met do you think people should vote?**

Per cent	All	Macedonian	Albanian	Other
Yes	87	88	83	89
No	4	4	3	5
Do not know	9	8	15	6

**Table 6. And would you vote under these circumstances?**

Per cent	All	Macedonian	Albanian	Other
Yes	80	81	79	78
No	10	10	7	12
Do not know	10	9	14	10