

On the Differences between Macedonia and Kosovo

To the editors:

I am writing with regard to Robert Hayden's article "The State as Legal Fiction" (*EECR* Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 45–50). Professor Hayden makes many excellent points in his article, and the information in note one is especially valuable. But there is one phrase that is in serious need of correction, since it perpetuates a myth that threatens to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The phrase occurs on p. 46: "... since western Macedonia is as solidly Albanian as Kosovo and its Albanian minority also favors independence." The first part of the phrase is inaccurate, and the second part is misleading.

First, let us assume that by "western Macedonia" Professor Hayden refers to the territory of those districts, as they were prior to 1996, that actually border on Albania—that is, Gostivar, Debar, Struga, Ohrid, and Resen, together with Tetovo (north of Gostivar, just across Shar mountain from Kosovo) and Kichevo (east of Debar and south of Gostivar)—rather than all of western Macedonia up to the river Vardar.

Even with this limited definition, only the Tetovo and Gostivar districts have Albanian majorities at 74.4 percent and 63.7 percent, respectively, while three others, Kichevo, Struga, and Debar, have Albanian pluralities but not majorities (49.2 percent, 45.2 percent, 44.4 percent, respectively). In Kichevo, 39.7 percent of the people are Macedonian; in Struga, 44.4 percent; and in Debar, 21.1, while 26.3 percent of its population is Turkish). Ohrid is 86.4 percent Macedonian and Resen 76.1 percent. Even Tetovo, at a little over 74 percent Albanian, is hardly at the "solidly Albanian" level of Kosovo—at 90 percent. The town of Tetovo itself is slightly less than 60 percent Albanian. (My source, here, is *The 1994 Census of Population, Households, Dwellings, and Agricultural Holdings in the Republic of Macedonia*, [November 1996], vol. 1, p. 23. Although in 1996 the administrative divisions of Macedonia were revised upward from 34 to 123, with figures given in vol. 13 of the census, the old divisions convey an adequate sense of the aggregate situation. For commentary on the census, see my 1996 article "Observing the Observers: Language, Ethnicity, and Power in the 1994 Macedonian Census and Beyond," in *Toward Comprehensive Peace in Southeastern Europe: Conflict Prevention in the South Balkans* [Council on Foreign Relations and Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1996], pp. 81–105 and 119–26.)

Second, the phrase "its Albanian minority also favors independence" perpetuates what Steven Burg, of Brandeis University, calls the "Collective Fallacy," that is, the assumption that the members of any given ethnic group constitute a monolithic whole with identical interests. This is not even the case in Kosovo, much less in Macedonia, where the political scene is more varied. To be sure, there are separatist Albanian ethnopoliticians active in Macedonian political life, and, moreover, they have the support of part of the Albanian population. Nonetheless, to characterize the aspirations of the Albanians of Macedonia in the same terms as the Albanians of Kosovo is to contribute to the agenda of those political actors who would like to see such an attitude become more widespread than it already is. This is not to say that the attitude does not exist to some degree, nor to say that it is not spreading; but portraying western Macedonia in the same statistical and attitudinal terms as Kosovo is inaccurate in the former sense and both misleading and potentially pernicious in the latter.

With regard to the KLA, it is worth noting that, while they became more visible toward the end of 1997, their first public act was the bombing of a Serbian refugee camp in Kosovo, on February 11, 1996. One of the first news items to identify the KLA is perhaps worth citing here, given the inaccurate accounts of the KLA's beginnings that have sometimes been voiced: "A previously unknown terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the bombing of Serbian refugee camps in Kosovo on February 11 (see *OMRI Daily Digest*, February 13). The Kosovo Liberation Army sent a letter to Rilindja saying the attacks were only a 'first warning' to the Serbs, whom it accused of wanting to 'colonize' the province, AFP reported on February 17. The group called on the international community to recognize the self-declared independence of the province. Meanwhile, an unidentified leader of the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo told *Gazeta Shqiptare* on February 18 that the group is preparing for a guerrilla war. Neither of these groups are supported by the main political formations in the province" (Fabian Schmidt, *OMRI Daily Digest*, no. 35, part II, February 19, 1996).

Victor A. Friedman
Professor of Slavic and Balkan Linguistics
The University of Chicago