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Vlatko Stojanov:

The Role of Civil Society Actors in Ethnic Conflict Transformation. Albanians and Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia

About the author:

Vlatko Stojanov is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History of Eastern and Southeastern Europe at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. His dissertation is part of a broader study on the role of non-state actors in ethnic conflict in Kosovo and Macedonia. He is currently working as a research assistant on a project funded by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, Berlin, for the same department.

e-mail: vlatkostojanov@web.de; vlatko.stojanov@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

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Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen

Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Klagenfurter Straße 3

28359 Bremen

Germany

e-mail: fsopr@uni-bremen.de

Language editing: Hilary Abuhove

Abstract

This paper examines the potential for civil society actors (CSAs) to contribute to the de-escalation of ethnic conflicts. Using the conflict between Albanians and Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia¹ as a case study, this work analyses the programmes and activities of various peace-building NGOs in order to identify their strategies and aims. To this end, guided interviews with scholars and NGO representatives were conducted.

To make the findings more generalizable, a functional approach that takes specific civil society peace-building functions into consideration was used. The major programmes of the peace-building NGOs in Macedonia aim to change human behaviour. This objective is mostly realized by activities intended to promote better mutual understanding between Albanians and Macedonians and is carried out on different scholastic levels. Further analysis of how the peace-building functions are fulfilled by the CSAs in Macedonia revealed a number of influencing factors vis-à-vis the NGOs' (peace-building) work. These factors turned out to be both external and internal in nature. Internally, the most important elements are 1) the imbalanced political infrastructure, i.e. a weak state with fragile institutions combined with relatively strong political parties (with wide systemic influence); and 2) the lack of cohesion among these parties and among the various NGOs active in Macedonia. Meanwhile, external actors exert multiple levels of influence: they not only directly shape the conflict itself, but also influence the conflict actors; in addition, external aid donors impact the work of the NGOs in a way that often emphasizes the ethnic cleavage.

1. Introduction. The role of civil society in (ethnic) conflict

Ethnic conflicts are the most visible causes for civil wars nowadays. At the same time, they are some of the hardest to handle: On the one hand, they affect identity, a 'resource' that resists compromise. On the other hand, they are usually protracted conflicts that have been smouldering for a long time. Building peace is a difficult task even in the absence of major violent clashes.

State actors have various institutional mechanisms at their disposal, most of which can be summarized under the term 'minority rights'. But a truly sustainable peace requires the dedication of a great number of civil society actors. However, their potential and 'sets of mechanisms' are much harder to define. What are their possibilities and limitations in dealing with ethnic conflicts?

2. Civil society peace-building and (ethnic) conflict. A functional approach

The relationship between civil society and peace-building efforts is often studied from one of two angles: One tends to look at either the civil society *actors* who participate in peace-building or at the peace-building *instruments* they use. Both approaches have their shortcomings, however, as it is almost impossible to list all of the actors or activities (instruments) subsumed under the rubric of peace-building. On the other hand, a number of specific peace-building *functions* can be ascribed to CSAs. This approach is very promising, because some kind of (careful) generalization could theoretically be made even after looking at only one specific conflict. One of the most systematically elaborated functional perspectives

¹ The constitutional name of the country is 'Republika Makedonija' (Republic of Macedonia), but it is officially recognized in the UN under the acronym 'FYROM' – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – because of a dispute over the name with neighbouring Greece. Hereafter, the country will be referred to as 'Macedonia'.

was developed by scientists at the World Bank.² They identified the seven most common civil society peace-building functions, which are: protection, early warning and monitoring, advocacy and public communication, socialization, social cohesion, intermediation and facilitation, and service provision. These functions will be discussed in this exploration of civil society in Macedonia. This paper will concentrate on the role of peace-building NGOs in the conflict, as these entities are currently the main focus of research. However, the role of the media will also be touched upon.

3. The Republic of Macedonia

The Republic of Macedonia gained its independence in 1991, separating from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was at that time already breaking apart. Its elites – namely the first president of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov – managed to avoid violence with the then Serbian-controlled central powers, while Croatia and Slovenia were already at war. Even during the later war in Bosnia (1992–95), the country remained peaceful.

The republic officially has a population of about two million citizens. According to the last census in 2002, approximately 64% of the populace are ethnic Macedonians, 25% are ethnic Albanians and the rest are members of smaller ethnic groups (Turks, Roma, Serbs and others).³ The ethnic Albanian population is concentrated in the north-western part of the country bordered by Kosovo and Albania.

3.1 Ethnic conflict in Macedonia

It is hard to ascertain exactly when the conflict between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians started, but it was clearly already under way during the Yugoslav period. The conflict culminated in the 1980s, when some minority-friendly regulations were gradually withdrawn by Macedonian officials frightened of the growing Albanian ethno-nationalism. Even though the constitution of 1991 contained new – and more numerous – protective regulations, the conflict had by then already become highly politicized and perceived as an *ethnic conflict* between the two groups. While the Albanians demanded more political, cultural and educational rights, the Macedonians were afraid that the Albanians might push for (territorial) autonomy and try to secede. Even though there were no special legal provisions guaranteeing parliamentary seats to minorities, ethnic Albanians were always represented proportionally in the Macedonian parliament due to voting along ethnic lines and the allowance of ‘ethnic parties’. Since independence, every government has had at least one ethnic Albanian party in its coalition. And although there were (mainly two) different Albanian parties swapping opposition and government positions over the years, their demands were almost identical: better (constitutional) status for Albanians (i.e. recognition as a constituent ‘nation’), better access to university education (in their own language) and greater autonomy.⁴

The conflict has had some major crises, such as in 1995, when officials closed an illegally instituted Albanian university, and in 1999, when during the ongoing war in neighbouring Kosovo 300,000 to 400,000

² Paffenholz, Thania / Spurk, Christoph: Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Peacebuilding, Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction, Paper No. 36, Washington D. C., 2006.

³ Republic of Macedonia. State Statistical Office. Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia 2002. Final Data, Skopje, 2005.

⁴ For a historical overview of the conflict, see: Balalovska, Kristina: A historical background to the Macedonian-Albanian interethnic conflict, in: Balalovska, Kristina / Silj, Alessandro / Zucconi, Mario: Minority Politics in Southeast Europe. Crisis in Macedonia, Ethnobarometer Working Paper Series, Rome, 2002, pp. 109–124.

mostly Albanian refugees crossed the border into Macedonia, endangering the country's delicate ethnic balance. Even after weathering these crises without any major violent clashes, the nation was unable to avoid the breakout of a civil war in 2001, when a small group of Albanian insurgents (most likely with roots in Kosovo) attacked several police stations in Macedonia. Even though the uprising received support from the Albanians in Macedonia, it settled down after a short time (five months) and claimed a relatively small number of casualties (officially about 200 on both sides combined), mostly due to pressure from NATO. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was signed by the leaders of the biggest political parties, the republic's president and representatives of the US and the EU. This agreement introduced institutional changes into Macedonia's political system, turning it towards *consociationalism*.⁵ The implementation of provisions to decentralize the state structures – as envisioned in the OFA – actually led to a resurgence of the conflict in 2004, but it was dealt with peacefully.

3.2 Macedonian civil society. 'Peace-building NGOs'

The NGO scene in Macedonia experienced a real boom after the country became independent. Because the central registry for citizens' associations is still not functioning properly, there is no reliable data on how many organizations there are (or were). According to estimates, the number grew from about 4000 in the beginning of the 1990s to over 6500 in 1998, but then dropped due to changes in the registration procedure to about 3500 in 2001.⁶ Since then, the number has grown to about 6000; however, the newly adopted central registration process is once again going to eliminate some of the only nominally existing organizations. There are estimates that only 10% of the registered NGOs are really working.⁷

Unlike in other countries in (South-) Eastern Europe, the political orientation of the Macedonian NGO scene is predominantly left-wing.⁸ Although there was a period in the 1990s when many organizations were primarily concerned with gaining international recognition of the country's independence, they tended to disintegrate once this goal had been achieved.⁹ The high turnover of NGOs demonstrates the fluctuating nature of Macedonian society, which changes its structures fairly rapidly.

There are several NGOs performing some kind of peace-building activities in Macedonia. In this regard it is hard to distinguish between local NGOs and international NGOs (INGOs). The staff of the local branches of the INGOs (e.g. the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia [FOSIM], Search for Common Ground [SfCG], etc.) is nearly always completely local, while the financial resources (even of

⁵ Consociationalism is a special set of institutional mechanisms to balance the power between different (ethnic) groups. For a detailed analysis of these mechanisms in Macedonia (in German), see: Stojanov, Vlatko: *Konfliktmanagement durch Minderheitenschutz? Fallstudie Makedonien (Conflict Management through Minority Protection? Case Study Macedonia)*, Munich, 2008.

⁶ Macedonian Center for International Cooperation: *15 Years of Transition. A Country Moving Towards Citizen Participation*, Skopje, 2005, p. 23.

⁷ Stability Pact Anti Corruption Initiative: *Empowering Civil Society in the Fight Against Corruption. Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia Civil Society Assessment Report*, 24 January 2001, p. 4, http://civilsociety.developmentgateway.org/uploads/media/civilsociety/Macedonia_SPAI-CSreport_2002.doc

⁸ See Macedonian Center for International Cooperation: *15 Years of Transition. A Country Moving Towards Citizen Participation*, Skopje, 2005, p. 10.

⁹ See Ivanov, Gjorge: 'Mokjta na Nemokjnite'. *Demokratijata i Civilnoto Opštество vo Makedonija ('The Power of the Powerless'. Democracy and Civil Society in Macedonia)*, in: Praven Fakultet – Skopje (ed.): *Razvitokot na Političkiot i Pravniot Sistem na Republika Makedonija (Development of the Political and Legal System of the Republic of Macedonia)*, Skopje, 2000, pp. 265–284, here pp. 270–271.

the local NGOs) predominantly come from external donors (INGOs, the EU, the US, various embassies in Macedonia), which sometimes cover up to 90% of an NGO's overall budget.¹⁰

3.3 The seven functions of civil society peace-building in Macedonia

The two main research questions thus remain: How are Macedonian CSAs (mainly the peace-building NGOs) fulfilling their peace-building functions? Which factors influence their work the most?

3.3.1 Protection

CSAs are supposed to protect the life, property and rights of the citizens, especially when the state partially loses its monopoly on using physical force during an ongoing conflict. Citizens can certainly also benefit from activities geared towards small arms control, demining and similar efforts. It should be remembered that it is always very difficult for CSAs to protect citizens' lives or property during an armed confrontation.

While the fighting was going on in Macedonia in 2001, protection mostly came in the form of humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons. There was, however, no broad resistance movement to the increasing recruitment efforts by the Republic's army (which the government sent to face the insurgents), even though Macedonians had engaged in acts of civil disobedience in the past: When, at the beginning of the Yugoslav wars (which did not directly affect the Republic of Macedonia), Macedonian citizens in the ranks of the Yugoslav National Army were sent to the front, a protest movement was initiated by mothers whose sons had been called to arms. These protests exerted enough pressure on the authorities to carefully withdraw the Macedonian soldiers from the fighting.¹¹ On top of that, there were reports of growing desertion during the armed conflict in Macedonia. But on the other hand, lots of young men willingly joined the armed forces, above all because of the (by Macedonian standards) high salaries. Many of the enlistees came from the eastern part of the country, where the economic situation was especially bleak.

Up to now, an overall conflict analysis of what happened in 2001 has not yet been conducted in Macedonia; most authors have concentrated solely on the outbreak of the conflict to the exclusion of the broader context. The Albanian population perceived the unrest as a local uprising in demand of more rights, while the ethnic Macedonians viewed it as a terrorist attack from outside (Kosovo). At the beginning, most NGOs endorsed the latter interpretation of events, even if many of them in principle supported the Albanian struggle for more rights. One reason for their sympathies has to do with the ethnic segmentation of Macedonian civil society itself: the most influential NGOs consist predominantly of ethnic Macedonian members and their leaders are almost exclusively ethnic Macedonians.

A NATO operation called 'Essential Harvest' was organized after the fighting ended to collect the (voluntarily surrendered) weapons of the former insurgents. Although the widespread proliferation of small arms is commonly known to contribute to the violent escalation of conflicts in the Balkan region, only a few minor activities addressing this problem have been undertaken by CSAs in Macedonia.

¹⁰ Interviews with representatives of FOSIM, Common Values (CV), SFCG, Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis' (IDSCS), Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI), Nansen Dialogue Centre (NDC) and the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) during the period of 16 October to 3 November 2008 at different locations in Skopje, Macedonia.

¹¹ Interview with Nataša Gaber-Damjanovska, 20 October 2008, Skopje, Macedonia.

3.3.2 Early warning and monitoring

Civil society can use its 'watchdog' function to prompt public authorities to act more responsibly. The media can play a significant role in this function, not only by monitoring government actions but also by promoting the activities of other civil society groups. In the case of an early warning, CSAs can 'sound the alarm' when societal developments point to a worsening situation or the escalation of a conflict.

The violent outbreak of the conflict in Macedonia caught politicians and the public by surprise. The Kosovo crisis that had taken place two years before seemed to be under control and one of the main goals of the Albanian community in Macedonia had apparently been reached: with the help of OSCE mediation, the South East European University was opened in Tetovo, the second largest city in the country, in a predominantly Albanian neighbourhood. Lectures at this university are given in Albanian, Macedonian and English.

Nevertheless, the alarming level of mistrust between Macedonians and Albanians was emphasized by many NGOs as well as the UNDP and its annual 'Early Warning Reports'. This tension contradicted the political credo of Macedonia as the 'oasis of peace' in the Balkans, a slogan that was mainly propagated by the ex-Communist elite that remained in power until 1998.

In any case, hopes of a relatively stable interethnic balance persisted. Societal actors largely failed to notice the (mostly external) triggers of the outbreak in 2001.¹² This failure led to the criticism that the more vocal civil society organizations simply weren't close enough to the population to foresee such developments.

After the OFA had been signed, monitoring its implementation became a popular task for different NGOs, with the ADI (the Association for Democratic Initiatives, the most visible peace-building NGO composed mainly of Albanians) and Common Values (CV) being the two most important ones. This commitment to enforcing the OFA underscores the importance of the agreement for the stability of the country.

Regarding the protection of rights, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia was the most vocal in denouncing rights violations. It can be argued that this NGO played this special role (rather than other human rights NGOs) by virtue of being perceived as foreign and therefore impartial.¹³

Public opinion polls on various questions have also become very popular in recent years. They often concern political parties, their leaders or the media.¹⁴ It is somehow doubtful that these surveys carry much weight with politicians, however – with the exception of the opinion polls conducted in the pre-election periods.

Another critical point that must not be overlooked concerns public access to information. Even though a law was passed that was supposed to ease the process for citizens wanting to obtain information from

¹² The proliferation of small arms since the collapse of the Albanian Army, the border agreement between Macedonia and Serbia/Yugoslavia that left the Kosovar-UCK without a fallback area, etc. For more details, see: Balalovska, Kristina / Silj, Alessandro / Zucconi, Mario: *Minority Politics in Southeast Europe. Crisis in Macedonia*, Ethnobarometer Working Paper Series, Rome, 2002.

¹³ See Shaqiri, Selvie: *Macedonia's Way Towards Accession. The Building of A Civil Society*, in: Benedek, Wolfgang (ed.): *Civil Society and Good Governance in Societies in Transition*, Belgrade, 2006, pp. 115–147, here p. 132.

¹⁴ With IDSCS as one of the more prominent NGOs conducting such opinion polls.

the authorities, implementation is sorely lacking; as election campaigns have shown, no real data is provided on how much money the government (or the opposition) is spending. CSAs can hardly be expected to fulfil their watchdog function under these circumstances.

3.3.3 Advocacy and public communication

Advocacy is seen as a very important function of civil society; by giving voice to marginalized groups in society, it can push for changes on the political agenda. The main mouthpiece for various causes is the modern mass media.

However, the media situation in Macedonia is often described as 'chaotic'. This is not only because there are two parallel media, with different newspapers and broadcasting agencies for Macedonians and Albanians in their respective languages. There is also an imbalance among the media in terms of their impact on the public: the print media has a small readership, while there is a huge number of (unlicensed) small radio networks and TV stations with an ostensibly much vaster audience. This scenario leads to overall poor journalistic quality. The state contributes to the proliferation of substandard journalism by liberalizing broadcasting rights but not shutting down illegal TV or radio stations.¹⁵

With respect to the ethnic conflict, the media in Macedonia played an ambivalent role. On the one hand, they did not really contribute to the escalation of the conflict, despite some ethnically biased reporting. On the other hand, they did not utilize their potential to de-escalate the conflict. For instance, many of the NGOs' peace-building activities were not well covered by the media. Perhaps the media felt that public interest in these stories was low and thus feared poor sales. But it seems that the NGOs were also somewhat to blame for the weak media coverage of their activities. Many of their accomplished programmes were not primarily oriented towards the public. Oftentimes their goal is to fulfil the requirements of their (mainly external) donors, who do not necessarily care about having a good public image or a high profile.¹⁶ On the other hand, there are various smaller NGOs that shy away from steady public communication due to previous bad experiences with the media.¹⁷ This leads to a disproportionate amount of media coverage among the NGOs; the smaller NGOs barely register while the bigger organizations have professionally established 'PR channels'.

There is also an imbalance of emphasis with respect to advocacy activities and recipient groups: the causes of women and disabled people seem to be well advocated, while some issues of great importance for the citizens – such as the fight against corruption and poverty – are less vigorously taken up by the NGO sector.¹⁸

3.3.4 Socialization

One of the most important functions ascribed to civil society is its ability to introduce new forms of 'desirable' behaviour to the citizenry, thereby transforming it from a passive into an active body and replacing any former propensity for violence with peaceful values.

¹⁵ See Trajkovski, Ilo / Trpevska, Snežana: Country Reports on Media. Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), 9 May 2000, http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/csbsc/country_reports/Media_Macedonia.htm

¹⁶ Different observations indicate this: many NGOs disappear after having finished just one or two activities, and some NGOs destroy reports and documents pertaining to older projects (for different reasons).

¹⁷ Interviews with representatives of FOSIM, CV, SFCG, IDSCS, ADI, NDC and MCMS during the period of 16 October to 3 November 2008 at different locations in Skopje, Macedonia.

¹⁸ See Macedonian Center for International Cooperation: 15 Years Of Transition. A Country Moving Towards Citizen Participation, Skopje, 2005, p. 12.

The overwhelming majority of peace-building activities by NGOs in Macedonia meet these criteria. Their programmes to promote mutual understanding are implemented at all scholastic levels, from primary schools to universities. The great social distance between Albanians and Macedonians, along with the low level of inter-ethnic interaction, creates fertile ground for ethnic conflict.

The problem is that most of the NGOs are implementing totally different programmes and are active in different areas of the country, mostly depending on the preferences of the foreign donors. Their degree of cooperation is low and there is no overall approach to combining their activities. This lack of coordination could also be a consequence of the above-mentioned absence of a thorough conflict analysis; there is therefore no consensus on what the most important conflict factors are or how they should be addressed. The NGOs' apparent aim is to change the citizens' behaviour, but given the narrow regional concentration and low spread of violence in 2001, it should also be asked whether the citizens' *attitudes* perhaps contribute more to ethnic conflict than their *behaviour* does.

Still another problem arises: the socialization of (parts of) a society is without a doubt a long-term process. It is hard to believe that these often incoherent, short-term funded activities have already reached critical mass.

3.3.5 Social cohesion

This function concentrates more on the *attitude* dimension of conflict and implies that civil society can build social capital across ethnic lines. Participating in the same associations raises the contact possibilities between members of different ethnic groups and contributes to their mutual understanding. However, this logic assumes, perhaps erroneously, that (ethnic) conflict is due to the lack of contact between individual members of ethnic groups.

The function of social cohesion can be seen as one of the greatest weaknesses of civil society in Macedonia with respect to peace-building efforts. Most of the NGOs are split along ethnic lines, and there are different 'ethnic' organizations addressing the same issue, e.g. different (local) associations for women's rights consisting of either all Albanian or all Macedonian women. Nowadays, most of the externally financed programmes are implemented jointly by different 'ethnic NGOs' or target different ethnic groups (as demanded by the donors). But the third sector is still as segregated as Macedonian society itself. This can hardly contribute to the societal cohesion needed to 'cut across' the ethnic cleavage.

Some NGO workers have cited the need for more cooperation on the cultural level, suggesting that there should be many more activities allowing the different ethnic groups to celebrate together, without focusing on the topics of politics and conflict.¹⁹ Some achievements have yet to be mentioned: Some of the bigger NGOs have begun to work on the 'inter-cultural' field, organizing get-togethers and cultural 'happenings' – like FOSIM did in 2008. Even though attendance at these activities was low (partly due to the lack of adequate promotion), it can still be argued that progress is being made in this direction. The (private) media have also started to contribute to this 'bridging' instead of 'bonding' social capital by broadcasting important events like the (football/soccer) World Cup in both languages and advertising bilingually.

¹⁹ Interviews with representatives of FOSIM, Common Values (CV), SFCG, IDSCS, ADI, NDC and MCMS during the period of 16 October to 3 November 2008 at different locations in Skopje, Macedonia.

But a great problem still remains with respect to teaching junior high school students from the different ethnic groups. In most ethnically mixed cities, there are separate shifts for Albanian and Macedonian students attending the same school. This segregation is certainly not contributing to interethnic harmony, but as recent developments have shown, the international community favours these separate arrangements if the danger of unrest would otherwise be too high.²⁰

3.3.6 Intermediation and facilitation

On a higher level, contact should also be established between the state and different societal groups, but also between the conflict groups themselves. This kind of intermediation can be conducted by joint (i.e. multi-ethnic) NGOs or civil society networks that 'cross the ethnic divide'.

This function is also very weak in Macedonia, because the NGOs themselves do not use the existing NGO networks to forge strategic alliances and achieve their goals together. There seems to be a common understanding that informal connections and communications are a better way to push things forward than official networking. Meanwhile, cooperation between the NGOs is hindered by competition: they are vying for the same (external) resources. Their dependence on external funding is mainly due to the country's dire economic straits; at the same time, the government's restrictive tax regulations stifle charitable donations to NGOs. Efforts have been made to build up networking centres throughout the country (by FOSIM and the European Centre for Minority Issues); these work fairly well as information sources for NGOs, but actual collaboration between the NGOs still happens mostly on an ad-hoc basis.

During the ongoing fighting, NGOs did not join the peace talks or attempt to negotiate between the conflict parties. This role was somehow fulfilled by the ethnic Albanian political parties, which initially accused the insurgents of terrorism, but started to talk to the fighters as they gained more support. However, due to its partiality, this form of intermediation obviously did nothing to de-escalate the conflict.

The OFA was primarily engineered by the international community, i.e. NATO, the EU and the US, so there was not much room left for civil society. It is hard to estimate how much the CSAs would have contributed to the peace negotiation process, as most of the NGOs still perceived the attacks as having come from outside.

Furthermore, in Macedonia, ethnic politics are widely considered to be 'high politics' and the top leadership is expected to reach decisions (on their own). This type of political culture leads to a high degree of public distrust in political institutions (parliament, government, president, etc.) but also in NGOs – even if the latter are held in higher regard than the former by the public.²¹ The paucity of trust makes it hard for CSAs to attain enough legitimacy to intervene in this realm of 'high-politics'.

3.3.7 Service provision

The direct provision of various services is sometimes also seen as a function of civil society in the peace-building process. During an ongoing violent conflict, CSAs primarily fulfil this function by delivering humanitarian aid and medical assistance to victims or refugees during a conflict.

²⁰ For example, after brawls erupted between Albanian and Macedonian students in Struga at the beginning of 2009, the OSCE opted to (temporarily) segregate the ethnicities, and even called for the use of separate teaching buildings.

²¹ See Misev, Vladimir: Macedonia, in: Freedom House: Nations in Transit 2008. Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia, 2009, p. 394, http://www.freedomhouse.hu/images/fdh_galleries/NIT2008/NT-Macedonia-final.pdf

Internal displaced persons ended up receiving the greatest amount of help from NGOs during the fighting in 2001; a huge quantity of humanitarian aid was distributed by local (but also international) organizations. Even though this was fairly successful, Albanians and Macedonians (who were both affected by the clashes) mainly perceived the distribution of the aid as biased and preferential. There were several reasons for this misconception. To a certain degree, the media fuelled these sentiments as they felt that the politicians (but not the NGOs) didn't care enough about their 'own' refugees. In addition, international donors collaborated with different NGOs when dealing with Albanian or Macedonian refugees, so that the 'humanitarian segregation' was partly also fostered from outside. The local NGOs missed the chance to openly promote cooperation in public; their main achievement was to reach out to people in regions with very limited access due to the fighting.²²

4. Conclusion. Influencing factors for civil society's peace-building activities

This case study revealed several factors influencing the peace-building work of CSAs in Macedonia. First of all, the **ethnic segregation** of Macedonian society is spilling over into civil society. The third sector is itself divided along ethnic lines and thus consists of two (or more) civil societies with different characteristics regarding the degree of organization or communication. The second factor is a particular **political culture** with high trust in (or at least high expectations) what could be called a kind of personalized 'bossism' (*liderstvo*); at the same time, however, there is little trust in public authorities and institutions (which is most likely a result of the economic situation but is also rooted in history). But perhaps the two most critical influencing factors are the **external impacts** on both the conflict and on conflict transformation along with the post-socialist **transition** of society and of the state structures. Both of these factors severely limit the playing field with respect for civil-society-led peace-building activities.

Regarding the external impacts, it should be noted that the conflict was partly imported from the outside. It is hard for a national civil society to cope with problems lurking on the other side of their borders. A high degree of international/regional cooperation would be needed, which is hard to imagine given the low degree of cooperation *within* the borders. The frequent interventions of the international community (NATO, the EU, the US) helped to rapidly defuse the conflict, but unfortunately also reduced the CSAs' room for manoeuvre. Because of the desire to quickly halt the spread of violence, solutions involving segregation were favoured (e.g. creating separate teaching shifts, giving humanitarian NGOs separate 'ethnic' tasks), which undermined the interethnic efforts of the Macedonian peace-building NGOs. However, the focus on these kinds of NGO-based peace-building activities was also part of the international donors' agenda. There were thus external impacts on the conflict *factors*, the conflict *parties* and on the peace *work* of civil society itself.

On the other hand, the multi-level transition process, whereby state-building, nation-building and civil-society-building are taking place simultaneously in Macedonia, leaves lots of room for the political parties to influence the connection between civil society and the state as well as the role the state ascribes to civil society.

²² See Klekovski, Sašo: Humanitarnata Pomoš i Krizata (The humanitarian aid and the crisis), in: Gragjanski Svet, February 2002 (Vol. 13), <http://gragjanskisvet.org.mk/default.asp?ItemID=03FEA24D87BAAB41A99D384E1122C93>

However, when the political parties have an interest in certain activities but cannot carry them out on their own (through state institutions), there is considerable room for CSAs to pick up the slack; this was exemplified by the delivery of humanitarian aid by NGOs during the crisis and civil society support in the struggle for recognition of national independence. On the other hand, disadvantageous laws (especially with respect to taxation) and restricted access to information can greatly hinder the work of CSAs.