

Report

Fact Finding Mission to Macedonia

27 – 28 May 2002

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COOPERATING ORGANIZATIONS:

The European Roma Rights Center – Human Rights Without Frontiers

1. Introduction

On May 27th and 28th, 2002 the *International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF)* team and the *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia (MHC)* undertook a joint mission in Macedonia.¹ The team wanted to get an updated overview on the post-conflict human rights situation in Macedonia, and visited the area around Kumanovo in the north of Macedonia, which was one of the two hot spots in the first half of 2001. It also visited a village close to Prespa in the south-west of Macedonia, where a group of members of the special-police unit '*Lions*' had severely mistreated two villagers, who were collecting woods, and Bitola in the south of Macedonia, where the problems with the young skinheads had culminated in the stabbing of young Roma, whose alleged attacker was first detained, but later on released, without starting a legal procedure against him.

The team wanted also to gain some insight into non-conflict related human rights issues: like the situation in prisons, psychiatric institutions and the situation in the Macedonian media. A meeting was organized with a group of Macedonian and Albanian journalists where they commented on the limitations of press freedom in Macedonia and the situation of the media vis-à-vis the upcoming Macedonian elections.

2. The post-conflict situation in the Kumanovo-area

a. Meeting with representatives of the city council of Kumanovo

The team met the mayor of Kumanovo, *Slobodan Kovacevski*, the mayor's counselor, *Oliver Spasovski*, and the representative for inter-ethnic relations, *Feriz Dervishi*, in the municipal hall of Kumanovo. Mr. Kovacevski stressed that he is accepted by all of Kumanovo's communities, and that during the conflict he has exerted influence on the Macedonian and the Serb population in town to keep calm, while Mr. Dervishi did the same thing vis-a-vis the Albanian community. According to the census of 1994 the city of Kumanovo is composed of 60% Macedonians, 24.9% Albanians, 10.5% Serbs and 4% others (Roma, Vlachs, Turks).

According to Mr. Dervishi, there was no practice of ethnic cleansing in Kumanovo, neither during the conflict nor after the conflict. Mr. Dervishi and the *Commission for Inter-Ethnic Relations* of Kumanovo claim that in Kumanovo there would be no division along ethnic lines. He only acknowledged an "ethnic grouping" of the city inhabitants, which he explained as "*the wish of the inhabitants to live closer to their relatives*". Mr. Dervishi ascertained the existence of free movement inside the entire city and absence of tensions between members of different communities. He insisted that ethnic division was also non-existent in the Kumanovo's schools, but after some additional questions of the IHF members, he mentioned the phenomena of two entrances at one primary school in Kumanovo. He (as well as Mr. Kovacevski) stressed that an eventual division would primarily depend on the involvement of parents, stressing that "*the wish of the parents and pupils has to be respected*". They denied the existence of conflicts between pupils, and it had to be members of the IHF team to "help" them remember smaller incidents. They mentioned that pupils from the village of Lipkovo didn't appear at schools during the conflict period.

When asked about their opinion on the *Ohrid Agreement*, all the city representatives answered that "*the agreement is being applied*".

They underlined several times that the people of Kumanovo trust the local government, as neither the mayor nor other representatives of the local government were part of the ruling government or other large Macedonian parties. The mayor, not being member of any of the parties, complained that the VMRO-DPMNE, the main governmental party, exerted pressure by controlling the budget and blocking the transfer of funds. The state covers only 57% of the city expenses and that's why the City Council has to find additional money sources to cover the rest of the expenses.

¹ During 2001 the IHF undertook three mission, two during the conflict period (22-27 April and 19-23 May 2001) and one mission after the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (12-15 September 2001)

b. The situation of ethnic Serb IDPs (internally displaced persons) from the village of Matejce

The IHF/MHC team met the IDPs from Matejce, a village in the north-west of Kumanovo in the hotel “Kristal” in Kumanovo, where they live since being expelled of their homes in May 2001.

Before the start of the conflict 118 Serb families (560 individuals)² lived in Matejce. 160 Serb IDPs from this village are accommodated in the hotel “Kristal”, and often three generations have to live in one tiny room. They said that none of their Albanian neighbors had informed or warned them of the coming events, and so they could take only the most necessary things with them, when they left. None of their belongings, which they had to leave behind, was returned to them in the meantime. They have been living for over a year in inappropriate conditions (four or five members of one family per room not bigger than 10 square meters). The money that they receive is not enough for buying medicine or cigarettes. Only basic health care is covered, and most of them cannot send their children to school, as there is not sufficient help from the state. Most of them are in a very bad and depressive mood, as they do not see any way out of their situation. When asked if they would return back to Matejce if they would be given the possibility, they firmly declined that possibility. They claim that there are no elementary conditions for living (all their houses were destroyed and burnt, allegedly, just after the ending of the conflict); they don't feel secured (both concerning their lives and their properties); one part of them were already victims of violence (deprived of liberty, locked in the mosques of the village during the conflict, and tortured).

The IHF/MHC team also spoke to some members of the Serbian Democratic Party in Macedonia (SDSM) in their headquarter in Kumanovo.

Miroslav Mladenovic said that in Matejce during the conflict the Serb cemetery was completely destroyed, and the four orthodox churches, the monastery and the cross protected by UNESCO, were damaged. The frescos inside the churches were destroyed, including all important symbols of the religious community. Everything from the Serb houses in Matejce was taken away and not a single house belonging to Serbs was rebuilt until this very moment.

Ivan Cvetkovski drew the attention to the lack of freedom of movement in the Kumanovo area, due to the failing security measures: if a Serb individual wants to reach Matejce, “*he has to pass at least four ‘clean’ Albanian villages*” and this is the reason why the Serb minority usually doesn't dare go to the village to visit their property. All three men insisted that nobody was taking care of the problem, neither the Macedonian state nor the international community.

c. The situation in other villages in the surrounding of Kumanovo: Lipkovo, Opaë and Slupcane

In *Opaë*, where almost 100% of the inhabitants are ethnic Albanians, with only 43 non-Albanian households before the conflict³, the IHF/MHC was told and retold the story according to which only Albanian houses were burnt down, damaged and destroyed by the Macedonian police, which usually painted the insignia of the National Liberation Army (NLA) on the robbed houses before they were burnt down.

At the entry of the village of *Slupcane*, the Albanian flag was flying. In *Slupcane* the attention of the team was caught by a huge mosque at the end of the village.

One of the interpreters of the IHF/MHC team said that several members of his family who had lived in *Slupcane* were killed during the conflict.

In *Lipkovo*, inhabited by 90% Albanians and 10% non-Albanians (Roma, Serbs and Macedonians), the IHF/MHC team met *Bajram Sulejmani*, a representative of the municipality, and Mr. *Shakiri*, a former representative of the municipality and former NLA member. Mr. Sulejmani underlined the lack of investments in the municipality by the central government, which even refuses to invest in the water supply, which is of huge importance for the region. He further stressed that in order to build streets and

² According to Albanian representatives in Lipkovo, there were only 340 Serbs living in Matejce.

³ The men, whom the IHF team met at the SDSM headquarters claimed that Albanians offered the Serb families in *Opaë* very low prices to buy their houses.

organize the water supply the Lipkovo community has to secure the necessary funds itself. From the central government they only receive altogether 150.000 Euro per year for municipal needs. He said that the closest police station was in Matejce, and that the policemen that are on patrol are mainly from Kumanovo, where there is also the closest detention center is.

Asked by the IHF/MHC team about which language is used at the court that was installed in Kumanovo, they replied that Macedonian was the only official language. If the accused party does not speak Macedonian, and is not able to secure translation, he or she will get an interpreter. Macedonian has to be spoken even if the judge is Albanian and both parties are Albanian. The wedding ceremony has to be conducted strictly in Macedonian – even if all participants speak Albanian.

There are seven elementary schools in the Lipkovo region and only branches of secondary schools. The parents either bring pupils from their remote villages to school or the children walk the distance of 10-15 kilometers. Unwillingly Mr. Sulejmani admitted that there were cases where children didn't go to school because of the distance. He further explained that some of the parents would take the money for transport and instead for the earmarked goal they would use that money for other goals.

Mr. Sulejmani and Mr. Shakiri complained that the Macedonian TV channels are the only channels that can be received in the villages. The Albanian language program can be seen only on the second channel of Macedonian television, while Kosovo television can be seen only via satellite.

The officials stated that not many Serbs and Macedonians lived in Lipkovo. They also told the IHF team that there had been no inter-ethnic incidents in Lipkovo since the Second World War. The only Serb family from Lipkovo burnt down their house and ran away. According to the estimation of the village officials, there were only 340 Serbs living in Matejce today.

At the end of the meeting, the IHF team was introduced to several elderly men, waiting at the entrance of the City Hall. They brought the team to the community office, and presented several cases where their community members were fired from their jobs at the water supply station, without ever getting proper documentation.

While the officials in Lipkovo claimed that the money for the mosque is always gathered by the community members and never donated by anybody outside the community, it is very likely (for example due to the style and size of the mosque) that it was built with Saudi money, as has been done so often in Bosnia and Kosovo.

3. The Bardovci Hospital for Nervous and Mental Diseases, Skopje

The IHF/MHC team spoke to the vice-director of the Bardovci hospital, *Dr. Djorgi Hadjiangelov* and the doctor in charge, *Prof. Dr. Predrag Kirovski*. The hospital is a social institution being also part of the Medical University in Skopje and has special departments for addiction and court psychiatry. Despite the bad economic situation in Macedonia, the health insurance covers 100% of the treatment costs in this institution. However, the drug list that psychiatric hospitals is using, has been cut. Most of the used drugs Macedonia received from countries of former Yugoslavia.

All the buildings in the complex were run down, but the vice-director of the hospital Dr. Hadjiangelov assured that according to the evaluation of the World Health Organization (WHO) any additional renovation would only mean spending money for cosmetic purposes. Prof. Kirovski informed the team that the hospital has accommodation possibilities for 1.000 patients, and that there are 640 patients at present in the hospital.

There was not much space in the rooms for the inmates, which may negatively influence the state of the inmates. Furniture and equipment were in bad condition, beds and the mattresses were in poor condition. The quantity of light, however, seemed sufficient. The inmates looked untended and sloppy, wearing pyjamas. At the department for court psychiatry the inmates (convicts) were mainly wearing civil clothes. Despite the fact that sanitary requirements seemed to be respected, there was an obvious need for higher sanitation standards: not only for the inmates but also for the rooms, and the complex as a whole.

According to Prof. Kirovski, the dominant disease at the hospital is schizophrenia, with only 3-6% cases of depression. He assured the IHF/MHC team that only 1-1.5% of the hospitalization cases happened involuntary, meaning under the procedure of criminal law. There is a need for a court decision in Macedonia to keep someone in a psychiatric institution, and a patient can be kept there up to seven days, or sometimes longer - until his or her state improves. Military cases can only be accepted on the judgment of doctors from the Military Hospital.

At the time of the visit of the IHF/MHC team, late in the afternoon, the patients were very active, which seemed rather surprising. However, the team got the impression that the inmate-convicts at the Department for Court Psychiatry were very calm and slowed down, provoking the suspicion that they could have been under the influence of additional medication.

During the discussion with Prof. Kirovski and Dr. Hadjiangelov there was no information given according to which one could conclude that any other therapy than the use of pharmaceuticals was being applied. According to them, the Electro Convulsive Therapy was stopped 20 years ago. The IHF team registered that the patients were getting only low-cost narcoleptics. In both departments, which the IHF team visited, watching TV was seen as probably the only form of pastime for the inmates. Dr. Hadjiangelov explained that during an attack, the patients are secured with leather and canvas belts, only according to the proscribed procedure. The patient gets a tranquilizer and will be observed until he calms down.

Despite the short time for the visit to the psychiatric hospital, it can be stated that the psychiatric help is very bureaucratized. It was observed that patients are forcefully kept in the institution. The team was told that there is a possibility for a re-examination-procedure for the release of patients, but such a decision is taken usually after only one meeting. There is also the possibility to go to the courts, but de facto there is never a decision taken by courts.

4. The Prison “Idrizovo”, Skopje

The time for the prison visit was insufficient, as “Idrizovo” is a huge complex with the capability to house 1.000 prisoners. According to the director of the prison, *Aleksandar Donev*, there were around 800 prisoners in “Idrizovo”, at the moment of the IHF/MHC visit. He explained that this is the biggest prison in the country and that prisoners here are convicted for breaking the law for the second time, and for those whose punishment exceeds six months. Non-Macedonian citizens and individuals who committed serious crimes (murder, ...) had also to serve their sentence in “Idrizovo” prison. The team was told that the funds allocated to prison administration were inadequate, being only 1.5 Euro per prisoner and day.

The team only got the opportunity to get a closer, though insufficient, look at the admission department, while in the prison itself it could only make general observations.

The *Admission Department* (also called “*observation department*”) is taken rather good care of, and in its surroundings there are lots of trees and bushes planted, and its toilets and bathrooms seemed to be satisfactory. But the inside of the main prison building was in bad shape. The prison director informed about planned reconstructions (and, while being with him in his office, presented the plans to the IHF/MHC team), and further told the team, that recently the prison ambulance was burnt down. The sanitation in the rooms of the inmates in the main building was in very bad condition and raised serious concerns. The ventilation in the whole main building was very bad, the solitary confinement was extremely dirty with dirty walls, bunk beds and stale air.

The team asked the inmates of the *Admission Department* about the conditions during the wintertime and they answered that “*the conditions were not bad and that they had several blankets to cover with at night*”. The answer shows that the heating inside the facility is not sufficient. Cells are furnished with beds, cupboards, tables and chairs that are all completely run-down. All of the furnishings evidently needed fixing.

Mr. Donev told that the convicts were engaged in various production units, at wood engraving and wood-processing units, farms or other places. According to the building plans that Mr. Donev showed to the

team, premises were planned for religious ceremonies, for the Orthodox and Islamic Communities, the two most numerous religious communities at "Idrizovo".

According to what the team saw, the situation of health care is very poor, raising serious concern. The information the team got from the MHC, is that the number of medical officers is inadequate, while their approach and dedication is highly un-motivated, especially towards drug addicted prisoners and their need for therapy.

Despite the fact that there are phone connections with the outside world, so that the prisoners can communicate with their relatives, friends and lawyers, they have to obey rigid rules regarding the duration and frequency of their phone calls. Some TVs inside some parts of the prison could be noticed.

Prison guards were rather young and poorly paid (around 200 Euro/month), and seemed to be minimally trained or not trained at all in how to treat convicts. They usually had little practical experience in how to handle prisoners, and were without fundamental knowledge of human rights. These factors resulted in bad relations between inmates and prison personnel.

A group of prisoners wanted to talk to the team and had severe complaints against different prison guards. Five prisoners who requested to talk to the IHF/MHC team showed bruises, after having been severely beaten on the back. The two most severely beaten were ethnic Macedonians, whereby the one said that the „reason“ for having been beaten was gambling in the prison, and the other that he was beaten everyday for having helped somebody else to escape. Their backs were covered with bruises and were heavily swollen. They pointed at the guards who had done the beating and had launched a complaint, but with no success.

Despite the fact that the director made a good impression on the team and gave all requested information, there is no doubt that it falls under his responsibility to influence the behavior of the warders towards the prisoners in a positive way (via additionally trainings; seminars; and, if necessary, sanctions up to dismissals).

The IHF/MHC team announced to the prisoners and to the director to write a letter to the Ministry of Justice, asking for clarification in their case, and said that they would come back to this issue. The letter was sent to the Macedonian Ministry of Justice on June 9th 2002.

5. A Case of Severe Police Mistreatment by the Special Police Unit 'Lions'

A second IHF/MHC team visited *Mr. Cano Canoski*, a Muslim ethnic Macedonian, living in the village of Oktisi near Struga. Cano Canoski and his relative *Vebija Saloski* became victims of serious maltreatment by a unit of the special police unit 'Lions'.

Mr. Canoski described to the IHF/MHC team the incident, that happened in the morning of 3 April 2002, in Odjovi Kutli, near Oktisi. He also handed over a signed statement about the incident, as well as the medical papers with a description of their injuries, and photos from the injuries, having been taken four days after the incident.

In the morning of 3 April 2002 the two men from Oktisi with their donkeys went to the mountains to take woods. At 9 a.m. they arrived at the place in Odjovo Kutli, put their donkeys aside and started to pick woods. Soon after their arrival, when Mr. Canoski was around 50 meters away from his friend, he heard some talking, but did not know what it is about. Then his friend yelled that he should come. He saw masked policemen pointing with a shotgun at him as he was running down. One policeman shouted „your arms over your neck“ at him, so that he had to throw away the tool for cutting woods, that he still had in his hands.

Now he saw that altogether there were some 6 to 8 policemen, some with masks, others with camouflage. Later on he realized that the policemen were in fact a „Lions“-unit, who have their training centre in the nearby Gorna Belica , and at some point he also recognized that two of the policemen were from the village of Vevcani, having been normal police officers until they were suspended due to some problems they had caused (as they were later on told by the ex-chief of these two). To the „Lions“-special unit they

had been accepted immediately.

His friend was on the ground, his hands were handcuffed, one of the policemen had put his leg on his head, with two other policemen next to him. One policeman ordered Mr. Canoski to lie on the ground as well, but as the place, where they were, was very steep, they started to roll down, with the police pushing their back. They fell into a gap. Then they were told that they could come up, but with their heads down, and not to look left or right. They had to follow one policeman, with the others in their back, pointing with the guns at their necks. First Mr. Canoski and then his friend had to make this 50-200 meter walk towards a small road, which goes to a village. All of a sudden, one police said „stop“ and started to beat them on the feet and the kidney areas. This lasted for a couple of minutes. The policemen were shouting at them ‘terrorists’ and ‘mudjahedin’. He asked the police why they were beaten, but was answered „shut up“ Then Mr. Canoski was yelling „We are Macedonians as well, we are from Oktisi.“ One policeman answered „What is Oktisi? We will burn Oktisi.“ Another asked „What are your names then?“ When they said that their names were Cano and Vebija, the answer from one policeman was „If you are a Macedonian, do the Christian cross-sign“, but at the same time did not give him the chance to do that, but beat with the fist on his nose. Mr. Canoski started bleeding. One policeman took his cap with a sign of Macedonia and a cross, and told Mr. Canoski to kiss the cross, but violently smashed the cap into his face. They also asked his friend, where he prays, and when he answered, that he prayed in the mosque, the policeman said „where is Allah now to help you.“ Mr. Canoski told him „Don’t do this, there is only one god. And we are also Macedonians.“ The policeman said now: „If you love Macedonia, kiss the ground“. He kneeled to do that, with one policeman pushing his head with his boots on the ground.

The maltreatment lasted for one hour. After beating them for about 30 minutes, the policemen again ordered them to lie on the ground and said „Don’t move, we will be back.“ So they did not move for 15 minutes. The policemen were going some meters away, and the two men heard them making arrangements. They came back, told them to stand up, and then said „Now run“, but as soon as they started running, they said „Stop, we are going to shoot.“ Then the policemen came to them to beat them again. They pushed them to another policeman, who then said „Why are you pushing me?“ Mr. Canoski fell on the ground, and one policeman came, took the hair of him and said „I am going to slaughter you“, taking his knife at his neck and moving it slowly. The knife was a 30 cm long bajonet, used usually by gangs for street fights. Another policeman made a gesture to be silent, and then said „Stand up. We are going to destroy all of you. What are you doing here. Nobody is supposed to be her.“ They answered „We are collecting woods.“ „Shut up. Who sent you to collect woods?“ „The ranger from Vefcani.“ „What is Vefcani?“ They were constantly beating Mr. Canoski and kept saying „I did not come from Skopje to collect you sons of a bitch.“ Four or five times they were ordered to run, then being stopped and beaten several times. One policeman said „Run and leave the donkeys here.“ Mr. Canoski could not walk properly because of the beating and kept falling down. When he arrived at the donkeys he looked back, where the police was and saw that he still pointed with his gun at him. He took the donkey, walked back to them, and saw that they were beating his friend constantly. From the place where they were beaten to the small road it was still 20 meters. They told him to stop. Five or six policemen stayed with his friend, one or two came to Mr. Canoski to beat him at the inside of the leg. He fell down and stood up again, upon which he was beaten on the other leg. Altogether he was beaten five times on one side, and two times on the other, with all his leg turning blue. He was also bleeding at some spots, and his body was covered by the marks of the shotguns, with which he and his friend were pushed.

When he stood up, he heard yelling from his friend Vebija, and thought that he would be killed. He then saw that Vebija was in full blood, punched with a knife at his forehead. One policeman repeatedly took a knife and let it fall down from 2 meters in the direction of the head of his friend, saying „This is your god.“ The knife fortunately did not fall with its full power at the head (or the eyes) of the friend of Mr. Canoski, which could have easily had a lethal outcome.

Later on they were given instructions how to explain the blood and the injuries, and were told „If you say anything, we will come to the village and burn it. And the mountain is full of us, you cannot escape.“ Again they were forced to say „There is no Allah“, and were cursed at.

Mr. Canoski and his friend were finally grateful to be alive.

Regardless of the warnings of the policemen the two mistreated men went to the ambulance and told the truth about the origins of their injuries. They were accepted very friendly, and after having been examined, they were told that they should go to the hospital in Struga and stay there. The ambulance gave them papers about the injuries, stating also that most of the injuries were so called soft-level-injuries, done vis-a-vis the muscles to create pain, without leaving severe visible injuries. The exception was the wound at the head of the friend of Mr. Canoski.

Then they made a complaint at the police stations in Vevcani as well as in Struga to the respective chiefs of these police stations. The first time they came there at 11:30, one and a half hour after the mistreatment had ended. But their complaint was not officially recorded there as the normal procedure would require. Instead the whole involvement of the regular police remained off the record, and the police stations only accepted a handwritten statement of the two men, without notifying anything in written.

After three days they were invited to come to Struga police station. The commander of the 'Lions'-unit and the chief of the police of Vevcani were called in as well, all in an apparent effort to calm the two men down. The chief of the police of Struga reassured them, that they were knowing what has happened, and he apologized several times for the incident, stating that „What has happened, should not have happened.“ He further said that if they would be in Europe, he would have to resign over such an incident. As they were not, and as he could not offer them any reparation payments, he offered them a deal to be accepted as police officers, either in the police station or as traffic police. He continued that while they could press charges privately, it still would be better not to do that, and not to „make noise“ about it. When Mr. Canoski asked the police chief, what he would have done to the perpetrators, if they had done that to his own child, he got the answer „I would kill them.“ They did not accept the offer, but also did not remain silent about their case.

They presented their case to Latif Pajkovski, MP of the Liberal Party (LP), who represents their district in the Macedonian parliament, who mentioned this case in one of his speeches in the Parliament. The case was also presented to the OSCE, who promised to send a paper to the OSCE headquarters, and it was presented in the local TV.

The official procedure would be, that they would have had to go to the prosecutor to file a complaint there. He claimed that they were financially very weak, and that is why they did not take this way. The offered help of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee was refused.

When contacting the head of the public security within the Macedonian Interior Ministry, the Macedonian Helsinki Committee received in a reply letter the version of the police unit. They claimed that they had tried to get the legitimation papers of the two men. As they had no papers that tried to run away, but were caught. Then the two men attacked the police and resisted arrest. The police used only proportional force to stop them. The conclusion of the letter was that the policemen did not abuse their power, and that there were no witnesses. Nevertheless, to calm down the situation, some of the involved police officers have been suspended, so the letter.

6. Racist Attack by Skinheads Against Roma in Bitola

When visiting the newly formed *Roma Association Bairska Svetlina* in Bitola, Mr. Muhamed Tochi, member of the Council of the MHC joined the meeting. The representatives of the Association informed the team about the problems of the Roma population in Bitola. They focused on the problems they have with a group of around 50 skinheads, aged 15-22 years, who several times attacked and ill-treated Roma, but mistreated other citizens in Bitola as well, and repeatedly painted sprayed NS-swastika on walls in Bitola.

An especially grave attack happened on 7 April 2002, one day before the „World Conference on Roma“, for which day some Roma NGOs had prepared „Day of the Roma“ campaign material, commercials, and a Free Party at the end of the day. One young Roma was stabbed, and there was a series of smaller incidents on this day as well (breaking of windows, demolishing homes, breaking cars, insults, writing of „Death for Roma“ on one wall). The person who was stabbed by a group of 15 skinheads, is too afraid to bring up a medical report and to cooperate fully with the police. After the incident the police detained a suspect, but

released him after six days. All this remained unpunished and under no investigation from court institutions. The excuse for lacking prosecution was their minor age, but the representatives of the *Association Bairska Svetlina* claim that the skinheads are children of people with political functions and power in the city and that this is the real reason for the legal organs to neglect the problem.

The young Roma activist perceive that their problems are totally neglected. They said that many Roma do not declare themselves as Roma, because they fear that otherwise they don't get any

7. About the Situation of the Press in the Wake of the Upcoming Elections in Macedonia

On 28 May 2002, the MHC organized a meeting with media representatives. Present were representatives of the daily *Utrinski Vesnik*, the daily *Fakti*, the weekly *Lobi*, the TV station *SkyNet*, while the representative of the daily *Dnevnik* arrived at the end of the meeting.

The IHF team discussed the situation in Macedonia regarding limitations of press freedom, especially what is to be expected in connection with the upcoming election campaign. The state media is under the complete control of the government, being in fact political party media. For example, the speech by the Prime Minister to his VMRO-DPMNE Youth organisation was aired in detail.

A specific form of pressure, recently applied to different newspapers, was cutting the water supply or the electricity (done in Gevgelija and Prilep). The ordered equipment, for TV and radio stations, is not allowed to pass the border. There are also direct threats to journalists, editors or witnesses of events. Other methods include, of course, the linkage of financial subsidies with support for the respective political party. As a result, there is a high degree of auto-censorship.

A Macedonian journalist told us about threatening SMS messages, disturbances at home, and threatening letters. The intimidation cases are not cleared if reported to the police. An ethnic Albanian journalist said that when starting as a journalist, he wanted to „be a hero“, but when in November 2001 five heavily armed men, who afterwards turned out to be policemen, came to search his apartment, this enthusiasm disappeared. When he later asked the Ministry of Interior for clarification why this search had taken place, he was answered that they had no records about the search.

Another form of intimidation of the media is through legal repercussions: the TV station *SkyNet* faces 14 charges (no judgments yet), all of them being defamation cases⁴, with possible punishments of 1-5 years. The vice editor of the daily *Utrinski Vjesnik*, as well as several of his colleagues, got court decisions about extremely high media-diffusion bills, although he does not even own a radio. In January 2001 there was a severe case of wiretapping, where inter alia phone conversations between (opposition) politicians and journalists were tapped and later published. As the TV station *SkyNet* was one of those affected, they sued. There were only two hearings since then. As a temporary measure the TV station originally reached that tapping would be prohibited as a protective measure, but after two months the Appeal Court turned down this decision with the argument that the Constitution already forbids the tapping.

One of the Albanian journalists told us that the Albanian language media has more or less the same problems. The income by company advertisements is low, and therefore financially the media depend on government campaigns, thereby influencing their editorial policies. *„In Macedonia there is a syndrome of politicians not only to using the media, but also controlling them. This attitude comes from the Communist past“*.

The ethnic Albanian parties press on „their“ media, whereas ethnic Macedonian parties press on theirs. - never the other way around.

The *SkyNet* journalist informed that recently the Macedonian government brought in an international journalist, *Umberto Pascalli*, as an „analyst“, whose job is to publicly point towards the media and the

⁴ „publishing wrong information about somebody“

NGOs as being the 5th column of the betrayers of Macedonia, in order to create more paranoia in Macedonia.

The *SkyNet* journalist was surprised that only 700 foreign monitors are foreseen and not 4.000 as previously promised for the upcoming elections. The last local elections showed that the international community was only interested in stability and security, but not in democracy. A person was shot inside the polling station, and nevertheless the OSCE afterwards signed that the elections were fair, with only one small incident registered.

The dailies *Fakti* and *Utrinski Vjesnik* try to pass the spirit of interethnic tolerance by sharing editorials with each other. And once a week a joint team of both newspapers goes to crisis regions and the reports appear in both newspapers. The same happens with the two weeklies *Lobi* and *Kapital*.

It is a problem that the Macedonian language media is not aware of the fact that they have an Albanian audience as well. The same story goes the other way around. And nobody on the ethnic Macedonian side is interested in Albanian culture (theatre, music, ...)

(Note: The report was written by Lamija Muzurovic (IHF Secretariat), Joachim Frank (IHF Secretariat) and Sasho Gurcinovski (MHC))

ANNEX: Agenda of the Joint IHF/MHC Mission

Sunday, 26 May 2002,

Arrival of the representatives of the IHF

Monday, 27 May 2002

7:45 Meeting in the premises of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, with Prof. Mirjana Najcevska

Group I: Mirjana Najcevska (MHC President), Blerim Kojali (MHC), Uli Fischer (IHF Vice President), Krassimir Kanev (IHF Executive Committee), Lamija Muzurovic (IHF Secretariat), Natasa Novakovic (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia)

Group II: Saso Gurcinovski (MHC lawyer), Ana Adamcevska (MHC), Muhamed Toci (MHC monitor) Joachim Frank (IHF Secretariat)

8:30 Meeting of Group I with the mayor of Kumanovo

9:00 Departure of Group II for Oktisi

11:00 Meeting of Group I in Lipkovo

11:00 Meeting Of Group II with police victim from Oktisi

16:00 Meeting of Group II with representatives of the newly formed *Roma Association Bairska Svetlina* in Bitola

17:00 Visit by Group I of the hospital for mentally disturbed persons 'Bardovci' in Skopje

18:00 Visit by Group I (with Saso Dukovski, boardmember of MHC) of the prison Idrizovo

20:00 Meeting of both groups with the board of MHC

Tuesday, 28 May 2002

10:00 Meeting with editors of newspapers (*Utrinski, Lobi, Dnevnik, Fakti, Aktuel, Forum, MTV, Sitel, A1, Telma, Kanal5, Sutel, Sky Net*)

Topics: 1. Current situation in Macedonia

2. Freedom of expression

3. Expectations and involvement of the media in the forthcoming election campaigns