

'Extremists' Target Macedonians Homes

Author: [Todor Stojcevski](#)

Displaced Macedonians fear recent arson attacks signal campaign to deter them from returning to ethnic Albanian areas.

When Zoran Dimkovski's house burned down on February 11, it was widely suspected that he was the latest victim of a campaign waged by ethnic Albanians to warn displaced Macedonians against returning to their villages.

The attack in the village of Opae attack came a few days after a similar incident at Aracinovo, near Skopje. The house burned there belonged to Vide Krstevski and his family, who like the Dimkovskis and other uprooted Macedonians had been living in temporary accommodation since the conflict two years ago.

Krstevski told the daily newspaper Dnevnik, "Even though the media claim it is safe to live in Aracinovo after these incidents I don't know whether this will be ever possible. We are simply not going back."

Aracinovo, 10 kilometres away from the capital, saw heavy fighting when Albanian rebels took over the village in June 2000, forcing many Macedonians to flee.

Vojce Zafirovski, senior advisor on police issues at the interior ministry, played down the danger. "These are the latest attempts of certain individuals and extremist groups to put pressure on citizens of Macedonian ethnic origin to move out of the crisis regions," he told IWPR.

"These are people are not widely supported by the local population which is obvious from the way they helped put out the fires."

Jana Petrusevska, president of the Association of the Temporarily Displaced Persons, took a different view, claiming the arson attacks - five over the last couple of months - made coexistence in the crisis regions impossible.

Grozda Stankovska, whose Aracinovo home was burned down, said the latest attacks were a clear case of ethnic cleansing.

"The state is to blame for this," she told IWPR.

" At night, there are no security forces in Aracinovo and the houses are left to the mercy of the people living there."

"During the 2001 conflict my house was slightly damaged. Later, my neighbours robbed and demolished it. Now its been burned to the ground - and the government suggests we should go back to the village."

"We neither can nor want to go back to Aracinovo," Petrusevska told IWPR. "Nobody guarantees our safety there. The authorities have no strategy for building confidence among the population and no ways of protecting us from our former friends."

During the conflict, 650 Macedonians were displaced from Aracinovo and about 60 of their houses were damaged or destroyed. Before 2001, the village had 1500 households of which 173 belonged to Macedonians. The latest census in November registered 11,000 inhabitants, all of them Albanian.

Petrusevska said a few displaced elderly Macedonians go to their properties in Aracinovo during the day looking for buyers for their homes and to sell what possessions they have left.

The mayor of Aracinovo, Reshet Ferati, condemned the arson attacks and said they were the work of people who want to stop Macedonians and Albanians living together. "There are other citizens of Macedonian origin who live here and have no problems," he said.

The spokesman for the Office of Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, Wolfgang F. Greven, tended to support the mayor's view.

"These acts have been carried out by criminals who obviously have no respect for anything. We know they have no support among the local population," he said.

He expressed hope and confidence that Macedonian police would bring the offenders to justice.

There have been outbreaks of vandalism in other areas too. Jovan Bulevski, a journalist for the Macedonian Radio station reporting from the predominantly Albanian Tetovo area, said the village of Jelosnik at the foot of Sara Mountain had been targeted by extremists.

"All the inhabitants of this purely Macedonian village were chased away during the war and they are still living as temporary displaced persons," Bulevski said. "The renovated houses have been demolished several times now and the village church of the Holy Mother was vandalised as well."

The interior ministry says it has registered cases of arson and other criminal acts in crisis spots, and Zafirovski admitted that the effectiveness of ethnically-mixed police patrols, which have been welcomed in many of these regions, has been limited by the fact that they do not operate at night when the arson attacks occur.

Todor Stojcevski is a journalist with Skopje weekly Denes.

Focus: Balkans: Regional Reporting & Sustainable Training

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/extremists-target-macedonians-homes>