

Macedonia: Dimovska Exit Sparks Political Turmoil

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Macedonian nationalists force walkout by key government moderate.

Progress towards a stable peace in Macedonia has been set back by the resignation of moderate vice-president Dosta Dimovska following a blistering attack on her by hard-line prime minister Ljupco Georgievski.

Dimovska walked out of the government last week, also quitting her post as vice-president of the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation party, VMRO-DPMNE. She was angered by a television interview in which Georgievski accused her of pandering to international opinion by approving concessions for Macedonia's ethnic-Albanian minority.

In his interview with the private TV station Sitel on January 17, Georgievski also blasted Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski for sharing Dimovska's views. And he defended his interior minister, Ljube Boskovski, who is widely regarded by diplomats as the biggest threat to peace in Macedonia.

Eight months of ethnic violence last year were halted by the Ohrid agreement, which offered the Albanians political and religious concessions and greater recognition for their language. Towards the end of the year, Georgievski appeared to be moving towards acceptance of the accord but his outburst on television changed all that.

Boskovski was labelled a militant nationalist when he formed a special police unit called the Lions, staffed exclusively with Macedonians, including many with criminal backgrounds. Their unruly conduct increased tension and threatened the Ohrid agreement.

At the beginning of January, Boskovski officially promoted the Lions as an Orthodox Christian police force working against the intentions and terms of the Ohrid agreement. Georgievski declared that efforts to overthrow Boskovski could mean the destruction of Macedonia.

Pro-Georgievski media seek to keep ethnic hatreds on the boil by leaking "confidential information" that Albanian guerrillas of the extremist UCK movement are plotting a new offensive in the spring. "This time," Georgievski said recently, "the offensive will be in Skopje (the national capital)." He endorsed a statement by Boskovski saying Macedonia's ethnic conflict was far from over.

Nationalist sentiments seem to find an echo on the Albanian side among radicals associated with the Albanian National Army, ANA, a shadowy force whose composition and leadership is unknown.

"We are faced with politicians lacking any vision besides ethnic nationalism," said Meto Jovanovski, former president of the Helsinki Committee on Human Rights in Macedonia. The latter is

under heavy pressure from officials because of its annual report which stated that radical nationalism in Macedonia stems from the present government.

Some opposition leaders share Jovanovski's views. "In Macedonia at the moment, a kind of macho, ethno-religious pattern is developing which, if it continues, would represent an own-goal for Macedonian national

interests," said Professor Ljubomir Frckovski, former interior minister and ex chief of diplomacy under the Social Democrat Branko Crvenkovski.

Frckovski, who is currently a political advisor to President Trajkovski, believes the current policy of the prime minister and his interior minister is heading for the ethnic and religious division of Macedonia, a split which could end in disaster.

Most of the press enthusiastically support the nationalist cause. "We

have media who stimulate the war," said Aco Kabranov, the editor-in-chief of the influential private A1 TV station, adding that some newspapers and broadcasters "spread lies and widen ethnic differences".

However, it seems the voters do not support the officially promoted nationalism. This week opinion polls conducted by the Brima Galup Agency showed that backing for the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party has fallen to a low of 6.5 per cent compared with 14 per cent for the opposition Social Democratic Union which pursues a more moderate approach. More than 50 per cent said they either didn't know whom to vote for or would not vote at all.

Paradoxically, the aims of Georgievski and Boskovski now seem to coincide with those of some Albanian leaders. The popular daily newspaper Vest

on January 23 quoted Western diplomatic sources as saying the two men now want to see Macedonia divided on ethnic lines. The paper said they were supported in this by Arben Xhaferi, the leader of the Democratic Party of Albanians.

One senior Western diplomat told IWPR that a division of Macedonia would be unacceptable to the international community. But, the diplomat said, extremists on both sides are provoking new conflict to further this goal which could have tragic consequences for the country.

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