

Macedonia: can the media provoke peace?

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We in Macedonia are not facing not an imminent civil war but rather the possibility that irresponsible international media may incite more violence than the people with guns. The international press has been extremely provocative and irresponsible in this very sensitive situation.

CNN has reported that Tetovo has "been taken by the 'rebels' who are advancing on Skopje." The BBC has also been broadcasting alarmist and unconfirmed reports. This is utter nonsense, and incredibly dangerous. It is also in direct contrast to the local media that is behaving with restraint and a sense of responsibility.

An urgent call must be made to all international media to stop escalating the situation by putting out inflammatory and unfounded reports that will provoke people here to believe that their only resort is to join the violence. We are asking everyone to take a constructive role in this effort. Contact the editors of your influential media and demand that they consider what they say and how they say it: Stop fuelling the conflict! Thanks for your concern and support. Together we can have an immediate and invaluable impact on the future of Macedonia.

Newspaper Supplements

One primary factor in the increase in ethnic tensions in Macedonia during the recent violence in Kosovo was the segregated nature of the Macedonian media. Media outlets report in a single language from a single perspective. The result has been the emergence of media ghettos, in which Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians receive two separate and often contradictory stories in the news.

To address this problem, SCGM produced news supplements that were inserted into Macedonian and Albanian daily newspapers in Macedonia. The unique aspect of these magazine supplements is that they contained stories from the top journalists in Macedonia, representing a range of ethnic backgrounds and providing a variety of viewpoints. The supplements were printed in Macedonian, Albanian, and English. As a result, all people in Macedonia, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, were given access to identical information about the impact of the war on Macedonia.

<http://www.sfcg.org>

IFJ urges responsible reporting.

As journalists covering the Macedonian conflict find themselves under siege, the International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org) calls for all parties involved to guarantee journalists' safety. The organisation also emphasises the importance of responsible reporting to avoid fanning the fires of the conflict. Meanwhile, Greek Helsinki Monitor (www.greekhelsinki.gr) and Reporters sans frontieres (www.rsf.fr) report freedom of expression abuses by both sides in the conflict.

see also:

www.balkanpeace.org

www.antiwar.com

IFJ warns about potentially inflammatory coverage of the conflict. "Our colleagues in Macedonia believe that some of the international news coverage is in danger of making life more difficult by alarmist and unconfirmed reports," says IFJ. The organisation urges all media to act with restraint, maintain professional balance, and avoid causing unnecessary fear and uncertainty. It also reminds all sides that the rights of journalists in conflict zones are defined in Article 79 of Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention, which says that journalists must be treated as civilians and non-combatants.

Meanwhile, RSF reports that two Macedonian journalists were attacked at a 14 March demonstration in support of Albanian guerrillas in Tetovo. Atanas Sokolovski, a journalist from the private television station A1, was reportedly manhandled by the crowd while trying to interview Albanians. He was taken to hospital and listed in serious condition. RSF says a correspondent from Sitel television station was also beaten by demonstrators and her video camera was broken. In another incident, GHM reports that Macedonian State Security prevented distribution of the international edition of the Skopje-based Albanian-language daily "FAKTI" to western Europe on 22 March. According to the Macedonian Media Centre, the security forces' action was reportedly due to an article in "FAKTI" calling on the Albanian diaspora to support "extremists" in Macedonia. IFEX .

Journalist killed on Kosovo-Macedonia border

Kerem Lawton, 30, a British national and producer for Associated Press Television News, died from shrapnel wounds sustained when a shell struck his car in the Kosovo village of Krivenik, near the Macedonian border. At least two other civilians are feared dead in the attack, and at least ten others were injured.

On Wednesday, the Macedonian Army launched a mini-offensive against Albanian insurgents in the village of Gracani in northern Macedonia. Just across the border in Kosovo, NATO-led peacekeepers stepped up patrols to intercept Albanian guerrillas crossing into Macedonia.

At the time of his death, Lawton had just arrived in Krivenik to cover the deployment of additional NATO-led peacekeeping forces.