

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: CURRENT STATE, PROBLEMS, AND TRENDS

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The history and geography of Macedonia are briefly presented and described; then follows a description of the educational system which is capped by the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts and two universities, the Saints Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje and the Saint Clement University of Ohrid. In addition, there are some teachers colleges plus an unrecognized university, Tetovo University, that was founded by members of the sizeable Albanian minority. The undergraduate and graduate programmes of the two principal universities are described as are admission and enrollment procedures and the financing of higher education in Macedonia. The international links of Macedonian higher education are described and the wish made that when the situation throughout former Yugoslavia has been normalized, the formerly close links among the universities of former Yugoslavia will be reestablished.

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT MACEDONIA

The Republic of Macedonia is a small country situated in the central part of the Balkan peninsula. It borders on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the North, Bulgaria on the East, Greece on the South, and Albania on the West (Map 1, below). It covers an area of around 26,000 km² and has somewhat less than 2,000,000¹ inhabitants of whom approximately two-thirds (66.5 percent) are ethnic Macedonians; around 23 percent, ethnic Albanians; the rest of the population belonging to other nationalities: Turks (4 percent), Gypsies (2.3 percent), Serbs (2.0 percent), etc. Worth noticing is the fact that the percentage represented by the Macedonian nationality has been progressively decreasing (from 71.2 percent in 1961 to 66.5 percent at the present), whereas the percentage of the population comprised of ethnic Albanians has been constantly increasing (from 13 percent in 1961 to the present 22.9 percent) as the result of various factors, of which their very high birth rate and migrations from other parts of former Yugoslavia (less so from Albania) are the major ones.

The area of the present state is only a part of a larger historic territory with the same name which, from the Fourteenth until the beginning of the Twentieth Centuries, was under Ottoman rule. The region was divided (between 1912 and 1914) among participants in the Balkan wars: Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. What used to be the Serbian-ruled part was included after the First World War in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (a country which eventually became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Macedonia obtained statehood after the anti-fascist

¹ Exactly 1,936,877, according to the 1994 census.

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struggle during the Second World War (in 1944) and entered the former Yugoslav federation as one of its republics.

Figure 1. Map of Macedonia



After the multi-party elections of 1990 (which the Macedonian nationalist parties did not win) and a national referendum, Macedonia became an independent state in 1991 following a peaceful route and avoiding the wars which erupted (and, unfortunately, are still going on) in many of the other parts of former Yugoslavia. Macedonia has been a member of the United Nations since April 1993. Because of Greek objections (mainly to the name of the country) and to the reserved attitude of many other countries and international organizations, it was admitted to United Nations membership under the awkward reference, sometime called a provisional name, of *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* (the acronym *FYROM* is even more awkward). Following the recent *Interim Accord* between the *First Party* and the *Second Party* (this terminology is used in the *Accord*, the *First* and the *Second Parties* being Greece and Macedonia, respectively), Macedonia became a member of the Council of Europe and of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It is also a member of many other international organizations and institutions (for instance, UNESCO and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, etc.).

The constitutional name of the country is, in fact, the *Republic of Macedonia*. It is a parliamentary democracy with a president (currently Kiro Gligorov) as the

head of state, and a single-house parliament (called the *Sobranie*) which elects the government.

At the last presidential and parliamentary elections, Kiro Gligorov was reelected president and the Alliance for Macedonia (a coalition of three parties - the Social Democratic Union, the Liberal Party, and the Socialist Party) overwhelmingly won. Representatives of a number of other parties (some with an almost purely ethnic - Albanian or Turkish - membership) and independent parliamentarians were also elected. In the government formed after the elections, four parties are participating (the three parties forming the *Alliance* and one of the parties that represents the Albanian population). In a most unfortunate and quite unexpected development, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of President Gligorov. The President survived and is presently recuperating successfully.

The official language of the country is *Macedonian* - one of the group of South Slavic languages. It was always spoken by the people in Macedonia but was codified only at the end of the struggle for independence and national recognition (in 1944). The language is based on the dialects spoken in the central part of the Republic.

The country is mainly mountainous. The highest peak is Korab (2,764 meters above sea level). There are three large natural lakes (the lakes of Ohrid, Prespa, and Dojran) and a number of artificial lakes. The capital is Skopje (with a population of around 600,000). Other major cities are Bitola, Štip, Titov Veles, Prilep, Ohrid, Tetovo, Kumanovo, etc.

The highest ranking scientific institution in the Republic of Macedonia is the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts (usually referred to as MANU).

There are a number of professional theatres around the country and an opera house in Skopje. The best instrumental ensemble is the Macedonian Philharmonic which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last year.

The principal religion is Orthodoxy (mainly as grouped within the Macedonian Orthodox church), but there is also a substantial number of Muslims (of Albanian and Turkish, but also of Macedonian origin). A number of other churches are also active in Macedonia; however, their followings are small. The number of atheists is considerable.

The unit of currency is the *denar*. The current rate of exchange (rather stable over the last two or more years) is approximately 27 denars to one German mark, 40 denars to one US dollar, and 60 denars to one British pound.

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Education is available on three (or, perhaps, four) levels, and its legal basis is a set of laws that are undergoing change. New laws have been passed in regard to

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education at the elementary and high school level, but not in regard to higher education.

Primary education (through the eighth grade) is compulsory and is offered in Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and, in some instances, in other languages (Serbian, for example).

Secondary (high school level) education, lasting four years, is not obligatory and is also offered in Macedonian and, if there are sufficient pupils to form classes, in the languages of the other nationalities (of the latter, the Albanian classes are the most common; however, the proportion of pupils of ethnic Albanian origin attending secondary level schools is small).²

Higher education is divided into undergraduate and postgraduate sublevels. Both are offered only in Macedonian, with certain exceptions that will be dealt with below.

Undergraduate studies take place in two-year colleges and in faculties in which course programmes are scheduled over four- to six-year periods. All the institutions of higher education have been merged into two universities. The older one is the University of Skopje, the official name of which is the *Univerzitet "Sv. Kiril i Metodij"* (that is, *Sts. Cyril and Methodius University*) honouring the first and most famous Christian missionaries to the Slavic peoples. The other university is called *Univerzitet "Sv. Kliment Ohridski"* (i.e., the *St. Clement of Ohrid University*) the name being appropriately chosen as a tribute to the most famous disciple of Cyril and Methodius who founded (see below) the Ohrid Literary School.

Teachers for the Macedonian secondary schools are trained in the appropriate faculties of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University. As a rule, certain specialized divisions train teachers, the curricula for the students enrolled in them being different from those of the rest of the student population. All students planning to be employed as teachers are required to take courses in psychology, pedagogy, the mother tongue, and the appropriate teaching methods (also called didactics and methodics). Depending on the faculty, other specialized courses are offered. They are aimed at promoting the knowledge, abilities, and skills needed by those planning to become high school teachers. There does not seem to be any provision for extended periods of in-service training for aspirant-teachers prior to their graduation, as substitute teachers. In fact, the in-service training of teachers is imperfect and not very well organized.

The teachers for the elementary schools (first to fourth grades) as well as for pre-school institutions (kindergarten level) have so far been trained in two-year colleges

² According to certain data, during the 1991-1992 academic year, over 67,000 pupils attended secondary school classes in Macedonian, but only some 2,900 pupils attended classes in Albanian. The interest in schooling expressed by ethnic Albanian girls is particularly low.

in the Macedonian or Albanian languages (occasionally also in Turkish). There were three such colleges: in Skopje, Bitola, and Štip. These same colleges used to be a venue for the training of teachers in two subjects (e.g., physics and mathematics, chemistry and biology, history and geography, etc.) taught to pupils from the fifth to the eighth grades of primary schooling. As the present law requires that all teachers (except those in the elementary schools) have a university-level education, the above-mentioned study programmes in the colleges were abolished several years ago. Pressure by the political representatives of the ethnic Albanians has been mounting, however, to have the colleges opened for the preparation of teachers for subjects taught to pupils from the fifth to the eighth grades with the explicit insistence that the complete schooling be in Albanian. Perhaps as a response, the colleges which prepare teachers for the elementary schools have recently been transformed into four-year faculties, and a temporary decision was made to permit studies in Albanian. Work in the four-year pedagogical faculties has not yet begun.

In recent years, studies for the preparation of future teachers of mathematics and physics and of chemistry and biology have begun at the Faculty of Science, and there are plans to continue with similar such studies. The duration of these studies is four years, and the education which the students receive is comparable to that received by the other university students.

UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Universities

As stated above, there are two universities in Macedonia. The first of these, Sts. Cyril and Methodius University (formerly known as the University of Skopje) was founded in 1949, even though university-level studies in Macedonia were started as early as 1946 but only in the case of a handful of departments (mostly those organized to train high-school teachers) forming the Faculty of Philosophy. As the number of faculties expanded, (the next to be formed were the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry), it became necessary to organize a unifying body - the university.

It should be mentioned that university-level studies existed in Skopje even before the Second World War, but the respective institution (the Faculty of Philosophy) was an extension of the University of Belgrade, and the language of instruction was Serbian.

In fact, is it even possible to consider that the Ohrid Literary School was the *first university* not only on Macedonian territory but also in the whole of Europe. As early as the end of the Ninth and the beginning of the Tenth Centuries, St. Clement of Ohrid set up a school in which books (mainly religious) were translated from Greek into Old Church Slavonic, and new ones were also written. This was also a place in which the pupils learned not only theological matters and the skills

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of reading and writing but also the basics of law and medicine. These, it should be recalled, were the subjects taught in the European universities established centuries later. The *slight* difference between Clement's school and the University of Bologna, for example, is that the former educated some 3,500 students and ceased to exist after St. Clement's death (in 916), whereas the universities in western Europe enjoyed a continuous existence.

The present-day Sts. Cyril and Methodius University consists of twenty-two faculties, two colleges (now pedagogical faculties), and nine independent scientific institutes. The number of undergraduate students is around 21,000, whereas the number of permanent teaching personnel - assistant lecturers, assistant professors (docents), and associate and full professors is close to 1,100. A variable number of foreign students from various countries regularly study at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University. The institutions of the University are located mainly in Skopje, but two of them (the Faculty of Mining and Geology and a pedagogical college/faculty) are in Itip.

The "St. Kliment Ohridski" National and University Library maintains close links with the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University but is not an integral part of it.

The St. Kliment Ohridski University (formerly the University of Bitola) is both newer and smaller than the University of Skopje. It was founded in 1979 and consists of three faculties (located, one each, in Bitola, Prilep, and Ohrid), three colleges (in Bitola), and three scientific institutions (two in Prilep and one in Ohrid). A University library is also a component of the University. The number of permanent staff is correspondingly lower than that serving at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University.

Both universities are entitled to grant the degrees of Master of Science (or Master of Arts) and of Doctor of Science. Some of the policies of the two universities are coordinated by the Association of Universities of Macedonia (better known by the acronym ZUM).

The universities in Macedonia are rather loose associations of faculties and other constituent institutions. The university organizations themselves have very limited powers, and the constituent institutions have very high degrees of independence. This situation suits the wishes of the faculties, institutes, and their personnel but hinders the promotion and implementation of common goals and policies.

In 1994, a group of ethnic Albanian intellectuals (born in Macedonia but whose professional lives have been, as a rule, in Kosovo, a province of Serbia, *i.e.*, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) began to press for the establishment of a university in Tetovo in which the language of instruction would be Albanian. Since the establishment of such an institution would not be consistent with the present constitution and the laws of the country, the government declared the nascent self-proclaimed Albanian University of Tetovo illegal and tried to close it. However, it seems to be functioning. It is likely, however, to worsen, rather than to improve,

the *quality* of education of the ethnic Albanian students, despite its proclaimed goal to improve the quality of Albanian education.

The creation of educational ghettos has never been an effective way to equalize the chances and the results of the respective student population and could, furthermore, lead to inter-ethnic tensions rather than to their removal. Some international influences have been pressuring (sometimes overtly, sometimes in a more veiled manner) for the toleration of Albanian aspirations in this regard and for the legalization of the self-proclaimed University of Tetovo.

Enrollment of Students

Prospective students are required to take and to pass an entrance examination in the two subjects that are closest to their future studies. Only those who pass the entrance examination are ranked. The maximum number of points serving as a basis for the ranking is 100. The ratio of the number of points earned as the result of the entrance examinations on one hand and the secondary school grades, on the other, are 60 to 40. For each faculty or college, an entrance quota is set by the Ministry of Education (in collaboration with the universities), the state only fully financing the enrollment of the number of students covered by the specific quota.

There are two additional possibilities for entering the institutions of higher education in the cases of candidates who, while successfully passing the entrance examination, are ranked lower than the lowest candidate in the entering quota. In such a case, he or she may enroll by paying a tuition fee covering a part of the expenses for his or her education. In addition, candidates belonging to the national or ethnic minorities can be admitted on the basis of a special ranking list, but first they must pass the entrance examination, and second, their number cannot exceed 10 percent of the allotted quota. This second route has been opened in order to discriminate positively in favour of candidates who are underprivileged as a consequence of either the lower quality of their high school backgrounds or the poorer command of the Macedonian language in which the entrance examinations are taken.

Curricula

The curricula in most of the Macedonian faculties tend to be rigid and structured into fixed lines of study. Although, in principle, the number of courses that can be selected is not limited, the number of subjects offered as options, in practice, is far smaller than that of the mandatory ones. This practice leads to the setting up of new lines of study whenever the need arises for a given profile of specialists. In such a way, curricula become

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cumbersome, difficult to change, and in far from perfect correspondence with the needs and/or interests of individual students.³

The present rector of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University, Professor Radmila Kiprijanova, included in her election platform the pledge to make changes in the direction of modernization and better correspondence with European models, above all, to modularize the curriculum. Little, if anything, in this direction has been accomplished so far. One should not be surprised, for it takes a great deal of determination, knowledge, and endurance (as well as close collaboration with the legislative and executive branches of government) to circumvent the inertia within universities and to make a significant step in this commendable direction (as well as in many other ones).

The curricula for the post-graduate programmes are considerably more flexible than those for the undergraduate programmes.

The Infrastructure of Higher Education

The continuous interest of the government in the advancement of higher education has given rise to a number of achievements in regard to the support accorded to the universities and to the amelioration of their material conditions. Thus, a computer network has been set up at the University of Skopje. New student accommodation facilities have been constructed. New equipment as well as a limited number of books and periodical publications are being purchased. An academic and research network (MARNET), connected to the international networks (notably *Internet*), was also set up.

A great deal is still required but is beyond the possibilities of the state because of the unenviable general economic situation of Macedonia as it undergoes transition. The situation was further worsened by the Greek economic embargo of Macedonia and by Macedonian adherence to the United Nations imposed sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Thus, the present financial and material situation at the institutions of higher education is difficult. It is too early to make a prognosis about the ways in which the situation may develop after the *Interim Accord* and the proclaimed lifting of the Greek embargo.

As indicated above, the state finances the training of students through the Ministry of Education. Their number may not exceed the allocated quota. Despite great efforts on the part of the state, the amount of money allotted from the budget is hardly sufficient to run the universities on a day-to-day basis, let alone to make systematic improvements and modernization in the material base of the educational process. This situation is felt most keenly in institutions in which the training of students is based on experimental procedures (for example, in the exact and the engineering

³ The problem and its possible solution are dealt with in detail in B. Šoptrajanov, **Higher Education Policy** 4 1 17 (1991).

sciences, medical, pharmaceutical, and agricultural studies, etc.). Of these, the Faculty of medicine has been receiving international support through various channels, but even its financial and material standing is far from being enviable. Other institutions of higher education have acquired valuable basic equipment, thanks to the Ministry of Science and its collaboration with other ministries.

International Co-operation

In the previous period, the two Macedonian universities engaged in close co-operation with all the universities of former Yugoslavia. Connections (mostly on a personal basis) still exist, but the obstacles to closer collaboration are formidable (problems of transport and communications, the war still raging in certain parts of what used to be Yugoslavia, the internal situation in the former Yugoslav republics, etc.). The hope is that when the situation is finally normalized, the previously existing links will be renewed and perhaps even strengthened.

Some new links have been established (with neighboring and other countries) since the independence of Macedonia and a number of bilateral contracts for co-operation exist. There are also difficulties. Macedonia is, for instance, excluded from certain European Union programmes, such as TEMPUS. The universal belief in Macedonia is that with the end of the war in those former Yugoslav republics in which it is now going on (if not before), the situation will improve in this respect. Perhaps the agreement with Greece will improve the situation in this respect too.

On the other hand, the Republic of Macedonia is a full-fledged member of the Central European Initiative (CEI) and participates in the bodies (not very actively) involved in the scientific activities of the CEI. A number of other organizations and agencies also support international co-operation in science which, in turn, promotes co-operation between university personnel in different countries and contributes to the increase in the quality of higher education in Macedonia.

Thus, a workshop on the quality of education was recently held in Skopje, organized jointly by the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University and CEPES, the Unesco European Centre for Higher Education in Bucharest. A second workshop, devoted to the self-evaluation process, is planned for the beginning of the next year. It is hoped that this workshop will open a new perspective and will improve the quality of the educational process. The Open Society Institute is very active in supporting and promoting international co-operation.

CONCLUSION

What has been stated above is only a brief (and, perhaps, subjective) outline of some of the questions related to higher education in the Republic of Macedonia and to the country itself. More information can be found in specialized publications. One such publication is **Science in Macedonia** published recently by the Ministry of Science of the Republic of Macedonia (Skopje, 1994).