

CSCE
High Commissioner
on National Minorities

His Excellency
Mr Stevo CRVENKOVSKI
Minister for Foreign Relations
of the FYROM

The Hague
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Dear Mr Minister,

May I express my gratitude for the hospitality your Government has shown to me during my mission to your country on 8 – 11 November 1994. I also greatly appreciated the openness shown by all authorities I met in discussing various issues. I was particularly struck by the determination shown by various members of your Government to continue to see this as a clear indication that your Government intends to meet all existing international standards in building the foundations for a stable democracy in your country. In this respect, I also noted the repeated assurances of your Government that, much as it regrets that consensus has not yet been reached within the CSCE concerning the admission of your country, it is determined to fully respect all the commitments laid down in various CSCE documents.

The census and the presidential and parliamentary elections have dominated the political scene in your country for much of the current year. Now a new phase of its development is beginning. It is of vital importance, first and foremost for the population of your country but also for Europe as a whole, that its stability be maintained. However, there are clearly two main dangers threatening that stability. One is a possible deterioration of the economic situation of your country, resulting in a further drop of the standard of living, which could lead to social tensions. I can only express the hope that the international community will understand the need to offer sufficient assistance to enable your country to start a process of economic recovery, and that ways can be found for a normalization of relations between your country and Greece, including an end to the present embargo which your authorities estimate, cost your country 2 million dollar daily. The second potential danger would be a worsening of inter-ethnic relations within your country. In this context I should like to offer your Government some recommendations, the implementation of which would

in my view help to promote inter-ethnic harmony. I feel encouraged to do this because President Gligorov and various members of your Government I met emphasized their determination to find solutions for the problems confronting various population groups and to treat all citizens of the country as equals, irrespective of their ethnic origin.

Please allow me, before I make some comments relating to a number of specific desiderata of ethnic groups, to comment briefly on what steps could be taken to remedy some of the weaknesses in the electoral process which became evident in the recent elections. I am doing this because I am convinced that such improvements could also help to promote inter-ethnic harmony. Clearly it is the view of many of the monitors observing the elections that a special effort will have to be made both to increase the accuracy of the electoral lists and to ensure their permanent updating. It might also be considered as a step forward if the draft law on elections which did not get sufficient support in the previous Parliament were submitted again to the newly elected Parliament; this would also lead to the partial introduction of a system of proportional representation. Finally, there is a clear need to revise the borders of constituencies in such a way as to ensure that each electoral district encompasses a roughly equal number of voters.

In order to acquire the citizenship of your country, a resident has to prove that he has permanently lived in it for 15 years. He or she has, therefore, to wait for an equally long period before he can participate in elections. Many CSCE states have, however, opted for a period of five years. I would recommend your Government to follow that practice.

In my letter of 1 November 1993 I expressed regret that no decisive progress had been made in the Parliamentary discussion concerning the law on local self-government, notwithstanding the fact that clarity about the role and competences of local government units is clearly needed. I would recommend that the draft law on this subject of July 1993 should be submitted again to the newly elected Parliament. There is even more reason to do so because articles 79, 80, 81 and 82 of this draft law contain provisions for the official use of the languages and alphabets of the ethnic nationalities in units of local self-government in which there is a majority or a significant number (according to article 79, para 2, 20%) of members of ethnic nationalities.

A main demand of the Albanian population group is the improvement of educational opportunities for children of Albanian nationality. According to data provided by your Government, 30.75% of the Albanian pupils who had completed their 8 years elementary school continued their education in the first year of the Albanian secondary school in the school year 1993/1994, and this percentage rose to 40.12% in the school year 1994/1995. Though these figures reflect considerable progress, it ought not to be forgotten that the corresponding percentage of children of Macedonian nationality in both school years was about 94%. Further efforts to promote an increase of the percentage of Albanian pupils continuing their education at the secondary school level are, therefore, in my view, required.

In your letter of 24 November 1993 in reply to my letter of 1 November 1993, you wrote that your Government supported my recommendation relating to the training of

Albanian teaching staff for elementary schools. You also informed me that on 1 November 1993 your Government decided to establish courses in the languages of nationalities, including Albanian, at the Pedagogical Academy of Skopje in the course of the school year 1993/1994. However, I noted during my recent visit that this problem still has not been completely resolved. I express the hope that the remaining questions standing in the way of its satisfactory solution will be removed soon.

Another question I should like to raise regards the percentage of members of the various nationalities in the armed forces, the police and the public service in general. I am not advocating that persons should be appointed regardless of their qualifications, or that the desirable percentage for each population group would have to be in strict conformity with their percentage of the total population. However, corrective measures are in my view required when there is a big discrepancy between the percentage of members of a certain nationality in a branch of the public service and the percentage of the total population of that nationality. It is my impression that your Government agrees in principle with this view and that, for instance regarding the police and the military academy, efforts are being made to achieve a more balanced composition. However, much remains to be done. For instance, in the police, notwithstanding the efforts which have been made, the percentage of the Albanians is now nearly 5%, while the percentage of Albanians in the total population, according to the 1994 census, is nearly 23%. I therefore recommend that your Government should intensify its efforts to achieve a more balanced ethnic composition of the personnel in the various branches of the public service, and try to remove the obstacles standing in the way of such a process. Another step could be to set specific targets for each branch of the public service for the next four years.

According to my information, TV programmes in the Albanian language are at present still restricted to one hour daily, even though serious consideration is being given to an increase. Taking into consideration that, according to the 1994 census, nearly one-fourth of the population is of Albanian nationality, an increase of two hours ought, in my view, only to be considered as an interim measure; a further substantial increase would certainly be justified.

Finally, please permit me to make some comments concerning the Council for Inter-Ethnic Relations which has been created in accordance with article 78 of your Constitution, but which does not seem to have played an active role since its inauguration. This may perhaps have been caused by the fact that parliamentary elections intervened. However, I express the hope that, after the new Parliament has been constituted, a major effort will be made to use the Council as an important organ of dialogue. Regular discussions in the Council can help not only to identify questions of concern to the various nationalities, but also to remove misunderstandings and mutual suspicions. Against this background, it would also be helpful if legislation relevant to the position of the various nationalities were discussed in the Council prior to its submission to Parliament. Questions concerning the ethnic composition of the personnel of the various branches of the public service should also be a subject of a periodic exchange of views.

Let me conclude, Mr Minister, by emphasizing that I do realize that your Government is trying to do its best to strike a balance between the interests of the various nationalities and that it has to cope with considerable financial constraints. My main

aim in making these recommendations is to offer a number of suggestions which in my opinion would contribute to achieving the inter-ethnic harmony to which your Government attaches such a primordial importance.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Max van der Stoel
CSCE High Commissioner
on National Minorities

Republic of Macedonia
Ministry of Foreign Relations

From The Minister of Foreign Relations

Dear Mr. Stoel,

I would like to express my pleasure for our recent meeting in Skopje and the talks we had on that occasion. At the same time, I would like to express my gratitude for your efforts aimed at overall stabilizing and permanent promoting of the inter-ethnic relations, what is a very important precondition for preserving the peace and security not only in Macedonia but in the Balkans in general as well.

Following your recommendations, I would like to inform you that I fully agree with you that the Law on Elections and the Law on Local Self-Government should be raised at the newly elected Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia in the nearest future, which will eliminate the inadequacies noted during these elections. The passing of the Law on Local Self-Government, as you have noticed as well, will regulate a number of vital issues regarding certain rights of the minorities, what will directly influence the further stabilizing and promoting of inter-ethnic relations.

Bearing in mind your recommendation for reconsidering the provision of the Law on Citizenship, which is one of the basic principles for obtaining citizenship stipulating 15 years of permanent residence in Macedonia, I would like to inform you that after the Law was passed, 99.000 persons in Macedonia applied for citizenship on various grounds. Out of these applications, 5.4000 were rejected, some 1.900 due to failing to fulfill the legal requirement concerning the length of permanent residence in Macedonia.

The Macedonian Government, being aware of the great significance of the education and its promotion for every state in general, makes great efforts in order to provide continuance of education for a great number of persons, even after finishing primary school, by way of preparing educational programmes. It especially takes care of persons belonging to the Albanian minority, by allowing so called quotas in a number of secondary schools, what enable them to continue their education under very favourable conditions compared to other students.

With regard to the situation concerning the informing of the Albanian minority, I enclose herewith the Review of the Ministry of Information, in order that you can be introduced with the situation in this field in detail.

At the end, I would like to express my gratitude once again for your efforts and engagement aimed at contributing to the further promotion of the inter-ethnic relations in our country, for what there exist great interest on our side and for what we make great efforts, first of all by accepting international norms and standards regarding the rights of the national minorities and their full observing as well as by our readiness for their permanent promotion. I believe that we will continue our cooperation on these issues in the future.

Stavo Crvenkovski
Minister

