

10 years from the conflict – negative and positive sides of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement

On the 10th year anniversary of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) there are many discussions, conferences and workshops around the country regarding its true meaning and value for the country and its citizens. Why we had the conflict, what does the OFA represents for the Macedonians, for the Albanians, for the other ethnic communities which were not included in the signing but should have reaped the benefits from it, and many more questions are and will be open in the days and weeks to come.

From a researcher perspective, it is safe to say that the benefits that Macedonia could have from its proper implementation and upgrading, the citizens of this country have not seen yet. The alternative of not signing it was well known and Macedonia in that time did not have a plan B or something else that could have been agreed instead of what we got in the Framework Agreement. However neither of the signatories' sides used the momentum of its signing and the possibility to build the confidence between the parties and the different ethnic communities. Unfortunately even after 10 years, the situation in Macedonia is not highly improved, the ethnic tensions still exist (the now well known incident on the Fortress Kale and what was being said and written on the social networks sites proves how easily flammable especially the youths are when it comes to ethnic feelings). Moreover, today the OFA is still used for personal and parties' interests, especially during election times.

Not all is glum in the OFA implementation. One of the biggest gains from it is certainly the process of decentralization in Macedonia. The idea of the OFA was to establish power-sharing and to guarantee to all ethnic communities in the country the right to political, social and cultural participation as well as the right to self-expression. The guaranteed rights must not be rights just on paper but the citizens, especially the ones that belong to the smaller ethnic communities, should have a real opportunity to enjoy these rights. Therefore, even though the process of decentralization was a turbulent one and exposed to many criticisms, the possibility of the local communities to deal with their own issues that touch upon their everyday lives leads to their better representativeness in the municipalities. It is of an essential importance to allow the municipalities to be independent from the central government as that will lead to their development and to the building of the much needed trust between the citizens from different ethnic background living together in these local communities.

Although, generally speaking the implementation of the OFA is more abused rather than properly conducted. Up until the blockage of the NATO-EU integration processes mainly due to the name dispute with Greece, the successful implementation of the OFA was one of the highest priorities of the government. Macedonia was gaining lot of

good points for that at NATO and EU naturally. As it was one of the drivers of the EU-NATO integration, the politicians were highly interested to push its implementation. As that processes slowed down significantly after 2008, so did the implementation of the Framework Agreement. The politicians mainly restored to using it as a tool for chasing their own political agendas by exploiting the national and ethnic feelings of the citizens.

However, the case is that since it was signed almost 10 years ago, the OFA has been differently interpreted between the Macedonians (as a failure – loss of many rights that they had before) and between the Albanians (as a win – gaining what was rightfully theirs but still not being fully implemented, the ‘fight’ for the rights goes on). All the political parties due to different interests and agendas did not work on crushing this myth and the trend shows that nothing much will be changed in that area in the near future. The recent political campaigns for the elections scheduled for 5th of June 2011 showed that the rhetoric used is still nationalistic and that the ethnic feelings of the population are still being exploited for personal interests.

Furthermore, the fact that Macedonia i.e. the state is still the biggest employer and businessman and that the percentage of poverty is worryingly high for a country contender for EU membership redounds to the influence the above mentioned political maneuvers have on the citizens. The reality is that their everyday life depends on the ‘help’ they receive from the state institutions and as long as this remains as Macedonia's reality and as long as the EU/NATO integration is stuck there will not be a progress in any other areas including the implementation of the Framework Agreement itself.

At the end, it must be pointed out that many researches have shown that there is a high level of cooperation between the different ethnic communities and a good level of coexistence between them. This however is under a direct threat from the negative influences of different political agendas in the country. Even though some of the questions set at the beginning of the conflict have been answered a lot remains to be done and improved.

Thus the recommendation to the politicians, the civil society sector and all the stakeholders in the country would be to be careful how they use/misuse the OFA, as every maltreatment of what was been agreed to can have many negative consequences for the Macedonian society and the country itself. Many politicians should start by eliminating their own stereotypes first and then they should work on eradicating them between their voters and the rest of the population.

Written by Sonja Risteska Research and Management Coordinator
sristeska@analyticamk.org