

AN OUNCE
OF PREVENTION

AN OUNCE
OF PREVENTION

*Macedonia and the UN Experience
in Preventive Diplomacy*

Henryk J. Sokalski



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS
Washington, D.C.

The views expressed in this book are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
1200 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036-3011

© 2003 by the Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace. All rights reserved.

First published 2003

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sokalski, Henryk J., 1936-

An ounce of prevention : Macedonia and the UN experience in preventive diplomacy / Henryk J. Sokalski

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-929223-46-3 (paper)

1. Macedonia (Republic)—Politics and government—1992- 2. Albanians—Macedonia (Republic)—Politics and government. 3. Macedonia (Republic)—Ethnic relations. 4. UN Preventive Deployment Force. 5. Intervention (International law) I. Title.

DR2253.S65 2003

949.7303—dc21

2003045289

CONTENTS

List of Acronyms	vii
Foreword <i>by Richard H. Solomon</i>	ix
Preface	xv
Acknowledgements	xix
Map	xx
Prologue	xxi
1. A New Meaning for an Old Axiom	1
2. The Balkan Rectangle	31
3. From Autocracy to Democracy	65
4. UNPREDEP at Work	95
5. The Human Dimension	153
6. Preserving a Heritage	205
Epilogue	229
Notes	241
Index	283
Bibliography	297

LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ASNOM: Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia
- CICP: Center for International Crime Prevention
- CSCE: Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- DA: Democratic Alternative
- DPA: Democratic Party of Albanians
- EC: European Community
- ECRI: European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
- EU: European Union
- FC: Force Commander
- FRY: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- FYROM: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- HCNM: High Commissioner on National Minorities
- ICFY: International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia
- IFOR: Implementation Force
- KLA: Kosovo Liberation Army
- LDP: Liberal-Democratic Party
- LP: Liberal Party
- MP: Member of Parliament
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NDP: People's Democratic Party
- NGO: Nongovernmental organization
- NLA: National Liberation Army
- NORDBAT: Nordic Battalion
- OP: Observation Post

- OPT: Temporary Observation Post
- OSCE: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- PCER: Party for the Complete Emancipation of Romas
- PDD: Presidential Decision Directive
- PDP: Party for Democratic Prosperity
- PDPA: Party for Democratic Prosperity of Albanians
- PfP: Partnership for Peace
- PIO: Press and Information Officer
- PRC: People's Republic of China
- ScanCoy : Scandinavian Company
- SCG: Search for Common Ground
- SDSM: Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia
- SFRY: Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- SP: Socialist Party
- SRSG: Special Representative of the Secretary-General
- UN: United Nations
- UNCIVPOL: United Nations Civilian Police
- UNDP: United Nations Development Program
- UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
- UNMIK: United Nations Mission in Kosovo
- UNMO: United Nations Military Observer
- UNPL: United Nations Patrol Line
- UNPREDEP: United Nations Preventive Deployment Force
- UNPROFOR: United Nations Protection Force
- UNTAES: United Nations Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Sirmium
- USBAT: United States Battalion
- VMRO-DPMNE: Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity

FOREWORD

IN HIS EXCELLENT STUDY OF A UNITED NATIONS MISSION in a small but geopolitically important corner of the Balkans, Henryk Sokalski uses a seemingly curious but apt metaphor from the medical sciences: prevention versus cure.

In this case, “cure” is the reconstruction and reconciliation tasks the international community undertakes in a particular country or region following a protracted, destructive conflict. Such “cure” is costly and takes years, perhaps generations, to restore the buildings, industry, houses, and social relationships that existed before the outbreak of war. We know all too well the course of treatment in these postconflict situations: after nearly seven years of reconstruction work in Bosnia, the country is still heavily dependent on foreign aid and the guidance of myriad international agencies and nongovernmental organizations. We know very little about prevention as a rationale for the international community to intervene in a country or region to bolster its institutional and societal mechanisms that temper the resort to mass violence; yet we can surmise that it is certainly less costly than the “cure.”

An Ounce of Prevention is an important work, for it describes the first and, so far, only UN preventive peacekeeping mission—that is, the first mission to be deployed to a country *before* an imminent outbreak of hostilities. When he first convened a series of UN conferences on the matter, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sparked some mild controversy with his notion of preventive action, mainly because in the realm of international politics, prevention runs up against the formidable principle of sovereignty.

Even as much a supporter of preventive diplomacy as Boutros-Ghali's successor, Kofi Annan, acknowledged, a preventive deployment of peacekeeping troops and other international actors is a tough call, for how does the international community know precisely the point at which a country or region is about to fall prey to conflict? What threshold separates international concern and attention from international intervention? Does such a threshold apply to all countries? And after such assessments are made and international actors arrive in the country, how long must they stay before the preventive mission can claim success? In the case of "failed" states whose governments have disintegrated under the crush of nationwide violence, sovereignty suddenly becomes a moot point, and the country essentially becomes a ward of the international community. Regarding the UN Preventive Deployment Force's (UNPREDEP) arrival in Macedonia, the country's leaders at the time agreed to accept the mission—after all, they perhaps knew best that it would be only a matter of time before the rapacious conflicts in the rest of the former Yugoslavia spilled across their newly independent country's borders.

If such agreement is the standard for future UN mandates on preventive deployments, what about other countries that appear to be prey to internal or external conflict whose leaders are not so prescient or not so amenable to having a preventive peacekeeping force operate throughout their national territory? How would the international community justify a mission that seeks to set an entire country aright, especially if the country's leaders believe they can ride out the turbulence and instability? In short, would such missions be considered preventive or premature? As the author of this study expertly acknowledges in his review of the debate on preventive diplomacy, prevention as a peacekeeping modality—much like its practice in the healthcare field—necessarily seeks a "holistic" approach in tackling the fundamental sources of mass violence that lie not so far beneath the surface of society. Using such an approach, a preventive peacekeeping mission can easily become an unwelcome presence—declared as such by a government that sees its basic functions taken over and its political base compromised by the preventive peacekeeping force. Absent the "unity of despair" (as Sokalski dubs it) that has characterized the chaotic and tragically violent environments of recent peacekeeping missions, preventive action is a constantly nuanced and delicate balancing act.

As the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and head of

UNPREDEP from 1995 to 1998, Henryk Sokalski was certainly mindful of these concerns, but he and the mission's political and military officials also realized they lacked the benefit of a model for a preventive mission or lessons from previous such missions. Because of UNPREDEP's very novelty as a peace operation, Sokalski and the force's staff members had to rely on a great deal of innovation as they planned and implemented the mission's tasks. That is not to say, however, that the preventive deployment did not borrow some of its components from traditional peacekeeping operations. An outgrowth of the UN peacekeeping mission in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, UNPREDEP had a solid structure and dedicated functions to attempt to diminish the country's increasing external and domestic instability following its independence, along with that of the other former Yugoslav republics at the beginning of the 1990s. UNPREDEP consisted of three "pillars." The first was the traditional stuff of peacekeeping missions: troops and military observers along Macedonia's borders to assist the country's security forces in warding off incursions or hostile acts from neighboring countries that harbored varying degrees of historical animosity to an independent Macedonia. The second pillar went a bit further: political action and "good offices"—the negotiation and mediation services diplomats can provide through their authority and skill; just as important, though, the second pillar also included a contingent of UN civilian police to guard against civil or human rights violations against Macedonia's national minorities—particularly ethnic Albanians—at the hands of the country's overwhelmingly ethnic Macedonian public security forces.

The third pillar—what Sokalski describes as "the human dimension"—was a genuine innovation in the typical peacekeeping mission, but, then again, UNPREDEP was not a typical peacekeeping mission. "The human dimension" in this case touched practically every social institution and government service in the young independent Macedonia, which seems to have not fared as well as its East-Central European counterparts in terms of civil society following independence from a socialist empire. At first blush, UNPREDEP could have garnered much criticism for a portion of its mandate that seemed to be obtrusive and extensive in its supervision of an entire society. Yet it is a testament to the UN's and Sokalski's judgment that these "third pillar" tasks, as Sokalski himself acknowledges, remained at the level of a *catalyst* to reinvigorate and reorient Macedonia's nascent civil society institutions and, in so doing, quell the pent-up frustrations of

ethnic Albanians and other minority groups that were threatening to erupt in widespread riots and mass bloodshed.

If UNPREDEP is to serve as a model of future preventive deployments, we must arrive at some criteria of effectiveness in the Macedonian mission. This is a difficult task, obviously, for such missions' success is counterfactual to a large extent. How can one prove that the absence of mass violence or incursions from hostile neighbors was attributable to a preventive intervention on behalf of the international community? Sokalski amasses the evidence in this book's concluding chapter, but perhaps the most telling sign of UNPREDEP's success came two years after the mission left, when the "unfinished war" in Kosovo breached Macedonia's largely unmonitored northern border and swept across much of the country's overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian northern and western regions. As the book's epilogue suggests, the Framework Agreement hammered out between U.S. and European Union envoys and Macedonia's political leaders to put a comprehensive end to the apparently externally triggered insurgency attempts to codify much of what UNPREDEP set out to do with Macedonia's public institutions—that is, to move them in the direction of more representativeness and inclusiveness—albeit in a more unobtrusive and diplomatic fashion.

Of course, such innovation in this unique peace operation leads one to ask whether the model is dependent on the head of the mission. What kind of personal and diplomatic skills did Henryk Sokalski contribute to the success—truncated though it was—of UNPREDEP? After all, there must have been some special reasons why Boutros-Ghali specifically selected Sokalski to head the mission, and if Sokalski himself is too modest to recount them, his colleagues are not: He is the exemplar of the "seasoned" diplomat—politically astute and bureaucratically savvy, which is no surprise, given his years of service in the UN's senior staff. Yet his modesty is but one feature of his unassuming nature; as you will note in the following pages, Henryk Sokalski does not seize the limelight. He is roundly described as soft-spoken, gracious, and sensitive to his colleagues' and interlocutors' concerns—his private demeanor matches his diplomatic persona, which is how he prefers to operate.

Make no mistake about it, though, Sokalski is effective; he knows how to work the diplomatic ropes, and he did so frequently when he had to sell particular UNPREDEP initiatives to the Macedonian government. Some other heads of UN missions would insist on unconditional acceptance of such ini-

tatives in the service of stopping a civil war or preventing the escalation of an interstate imbroglio. Henryk Sokalski had a decidedly different style, preferring to gather the members of the diplomatic community in Skopje and gently, but persuasively, argue his point and then making sure he had diplomatically “collegial” support behind him. His soft-spokenness may have worked to his advantage when he had to be tough, surprising recalcitrant officials when he had to read them the riot act; his careful preparation and strong persuasive abilities, though, kept such episodes to a minimum.

Above all, Henryk Sokalski is an optimist—a quality that can handicap the best of diplomatic stratagems—and readers will note this special trait in his particular concern with Macedonia’s youth: through the assignment of peacekeeping commanders to speak at grade schools about the purpose of the UN in Macedonia to the concern with orphans and other young victims of nascent conflict in the country to the prospect of reconciliation he saw after bringing together youth representatives of the country’s major ethnic political parties to sign a joint declaration. If there were to be genuine “healing” in Macedonia, Sokalski believed, it was up to the generation that lacked so many years of bitter and hostile attitudes. Indeed, if there is any personal attribute we can ascribe to the success of this preventive mission, it is most likely Sokalski’s optimism guiding his seasoned diplomatic pragmatism. His years of service as the UN’s director for social development and coordinator of the International Year of the Family perhaps served as the requisite platform for such blending of diplomatic skill and championing the cause of the UN’s ultimate clients—innocent parents and children who fall prey to deep poverty or famine, or who are caught up in a voracious and indiscriminating conflict.

The United States Institute of Peace brought Henryk Sokalski to its Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace because his experience and his message obviously fit into the Institute’s mandate of exploring new, effective forms of conflict management, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping. Conflict prevention in UNPREDEP’s case certainly held promise as a case study in a novel form of peacekeeping, and we encouraged him to pursue his research and writing with his original question in mind: Can UNPREDEP serve as a model for future preventive deployments? Does UNPREDEP serve as a new paradigm of peacekeeping—one that, as the author says, “promoted the conditions of a peace to keep”? Sokalski’s research also certainly fit into the Institute’s work on postconflict

reconstruction and reconciliation in southeastern Europe through its Balkans Initiative, which has produced or sponsored many Special Reports on Macedonia, Kosovo, and the Dayton peace process, and he adds to the special book-length studies published over the years by the Institute's Press on new paradigms of statecraft and diplomacy in managing and resolving conflict, including Michael Lund's pioneering *Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventive Diplomacy* and the comprehensive collections edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* and *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*.

An Ounce of Prevention is a fascinating work—part diplomatic memoir, part scholarly investigation, part peacekeeping desideratum, part cautionary tale—and the caution lies only insofar as a preventive mission's vulnerability to an untimely demise, as happened to UNPREDEP in a somewhat shortsighted (and yet, not unexpected in the world of great-power diplomacy) veto in the UN Security Council. Indeed, Henryk Sokalski has provided us with an interesting compendium of the theories and practical tasks surrounding preventive action by the international community. Most of the narrative in the pages that follow chronicles unfamiliar success in a world of statecraft and diplomacy that remains more than a bit skeptical about the UN's mandate for preventive missions.

As the author of this book will readily tell you, any peacekeeping mission is an extremely tough operation; prevention, though, has its own distinct challenges. As any physician will tell you, it is hard to make people follow a preventive regime of wellness: more often than not, they do not take action until symptoms appear. In the realm of nation-states, however, such symptoms have pernicious and deadly consequences.

RICHARD H. SOLOMON, PRESIDENT
UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

PREFACE

THE LAST DECADE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY saw unprecedented interest in preventive diplomacy and early conflict prevention. The hopes that the two notions had kindled were perhaps farther ahead of their time than what, on more realistic reflection, could actually be achieved in this complex world of ours. Yet prevention has become an important political topic of the day. Firmly placed on the international agenda, the subject has preoccupied the minds and talents of many political leaders, academics, foreign policy analysts, peacekeeping practitioners, and international organizations (governmental and nongovernmental alike). Preventive action, particularly in its noncoercive dimension, has had its own appeal and potential. It has lost nothing of its importance in the period following September 11, 2001—even though, since that day, we have somehow felt as if we were waking up in a different world every morning.

The hideous terrorist attacks against New York and Washington, D.C. were also a blow to the novel approach and fresh ideas of conflict prevention. Sadly, we suddenly realized once again that noncoercive prevention alone may not suffice to make the world a happier and safer place to live. Ever since that terrible September day, a ghastly shadow—the shadow of international terrorism—was also cast upon conflict prevention. This new challenge to the fundamental precepts of international intercourse has left somewhat less room to classical preventive diplomacy. Pre-emptive action and coercive reaction have more forcefully entered the repertoire of preventive practices. Nevertheless, the 1990s left a theoretical and practical track record in early preventive action that is here to stay and, hopefully, to progress in its development as an important tool of conflict resolution.

This book is in tribute to the first and, thus far, only preventive deploy-

ment of United Nations peacekeepers and good offices to avert a conflict. It is a story of a small Balkan country, the Republic of Macedonia, and its independence and struggle for peaceful survival. The story is told against the backdrop of the heretofore untried UN early conflict prevention experience, set in the Balkan quagmire. The case of Macedonia has attracted numerous writers in the past ten years. So has the story of the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), intrinsically linked as it is to Macedonia's most recent history—that taking place since the country's independence in 1991. Several important studies on both subjects have greatly facilitated my task; they relieved me from having to follow a strictly chronological discipline or engage in a detailed discussion of all the developments between late 1992 and early 1999.¹ In addition, I have relied on a great many other works to provide readers with a broader understanding of preventive diplomacy as well as Balkan politics and history, most all of which I detail in a bibliography at the end of this volume.

The U.S. Institute of Peace and its Balkans Initiative contributed their own fertile share to an analysis of Macedonia's present and future. All of these writings view UNPREDEP as one continuous operation, notwithstanding the mission's successive institutional phases. Although the mission began as part of the United Nations Protection Force in the Former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR), and with a lower level of political representation in Skopje, UNPREDEP's successes and failures should be seen in their entirety, as a sum total of six years of efforts on the part of peacekeepers, their political leaders, and their military commanders. Each year of UNPREDEP's preventive presence in Macedonia offered specific and changing needs for practical action, especially as the host country advanced in its internal transformation and improved its international standing.

True enough, UNPREDEP has so far been a one-time operation; its experience has no parallel in diplomatic history. Yet the available literature on the subject reveals once again what a difficult task it often is to translate theoretical and empirical results into a policy context and from that produce workable implications for practice. Aware of what has been written before, I have chosen rather to concentrate on the spirit and methodology of our actions, and on what we managed to accomplish within the confines of the latest United Nations deliberations on the concept of early conflict prevention. Some of UNPREDEP's work was actually vindicated only after the mission's termination. In attempting this bird's-eye view of *what, why, and how* we were

doing, I have tried to be faithful to that work which entitled me to follow up with a first-hand account as a practitioner and former head of mission.

The history of this region is long and complex, and in highlighting its more divisive periods, I may give readers the impression that interethnic discord arising from the emergence of an independent Macedonia—particularly between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians—is simply an additional manifestation of the “ancient hatreds” approach to explaining ethnic conflict. That is clearly not the case. For example, Macedonians and Albanians have spent long periods in mutual coexistence and have rarely threatened each other actively. The fact that they did so at the beginning of the twenty-first century is more the exception than the rule.

Similarly, I acknowledge at the outset that my historical survey of the region focuses primarily on the Macedonians. To do justice to the long and ancient history of the Albanians is beyond the scope of this book and would involve a lengthy discussion of Kosovo and Albania as well as Macedonia. Obviously, my historical perspective in this work is necessarily shaped by the principal subject matter at hand; hence, I examine interethnic relations in Macedonia within the framework of international organizations, precarious nation-states, and social institutions and civil society. My purpose here is to focus on what the United Nations could do in terms of traditional peacekeeping twinned with social development programs to stave off nascent interethnic conflict, not to trace the historical preconditions, if any, of such conflict.

Whereas, throughout the book, I use names rather sparingly, I wish at the very outset to salute most cordially the six eminent officers who, at different points in time, commanded the military component of the operation and offered their exemplary service to the cause of preventive peacekeeping. Brigadier-Generals Finn Saermark-Thomsen (Denmark), Tryggve Tellefsen (Norway), Juha Engström (Finland), Bo Wranger (Sweden), Bent Sohn Sohnemann (Denmark), and Ove Strømberg (Norway) have contributed their outstanding share to the mission’s success and proved to be delightful colleagues and friends. Working with the three of them whose service coincided with my own was a fascinating professional experience and a personal pleasure. Macedonia and the international community owe much to them, as well as to the thousands of peacekeepers and civilian personnel who served the mission with pride and distinction. I pay a well-deserved and heartfelt tribute to all of them, especially those who worked with me during my tour of duty.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PRIVILEGED AS I WAS to have served as one of many United Nations peacekeepers in Macedonia, I dedicate this book to all my friends in that brave land, regardless of their ethnicity. I would have not written it unless Professor Dennis Sandole of George Mason University had not convinced me that I should do so and if the United States Institute of Peace had not offered me its most helpful and, indeed, prestigious senior fellowship to pursue the project. To the Institute and its entire staff under the executive leadership of Richard Solomon and Harriet Hentges, I owe a special debt of gratitude. Their standards of professionalism and support served as shining examples for me to emulate.

I am particularly indebted to my dear colleagues at the Institute's Jennings Randolph Fellowship Program, including its remarkable director, Joe Klaitis, and my program officer, John Crist. Their inspiration and encouragement proved to be priceless commodities in the process of writing. I remain equally grateful to a unique person, the editor of this book, Peter Pavilionis, who showed patience and perseverance in introducing me to the brave new world of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Finally, my successive research assistants, Ramzi Nemo, Naren Kumarakulasingham, and Yohann De Silva deserve their own share of praise, which I extend to them wholeheartedly.



* The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was succeeded by the union of Serbia and Montenegro, which was voted into existence by the Yugoslav parliament in February 2003.

PROLOGUE

DECEMBER 11, 1992 will go down in the history of international relations as the day that gave birth to the first and, thus far, the only United Nations operation in preventive diplomacy and troop deployment. On that day, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 795 (1992), authorizing the secretary general to establish a presence of the United Nations Protection Force in the Former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) in the Republic of Macedonia. This mission, subsequently known as the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), was to be hosted by a young country, which had just emerged from the Yugoslav Federation—unlike the destructive examples of several other Yugoslav republics declaring independence—without a single shot being fired.

A call from New York

On a Thursday in early May of 1995, I was on a brief home leave in Warsaw following the preparations for and observances of the International Year of the Family, which I had coordinated worldwide on behalf of the United Nations. The message in the phone call from New York was loud and clear: “The secretary-general would like you to come to New York without delay. We do not know the reason.” I cannot say I was not worried. Boutros-Ghali had been known for his tough treatment of staff. Yet for the life of me, I couldn’t think of what I’d done to deserve a personal dressing down at headquarters—by the secretary-general himself, no less.

Having stopped for a day at my duty station in Vienna, on Monday morning I reported to my boss in New York, Undersecretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Nitin Desai. He was either really unaware of

the purpose of my visit to headquarters or thought that it might be better if the news be broken to me by the secretary-general himself or by others in his senior staff. Desai immediately informed the Office of the Secretary-General of my arrival. We were instructed to wait, and wait we did until the following day, when I was received by Boutros-Ghali's chef de cabinet and informed that I was under consideration for the post of chief of mission for UNPREDEP in Macedonia, at the level of assistant secretary-general. If I agreed to accept the post, I was told, I should contact Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Kofi Annan for further details.

It was not until I saw Kofi Annan that I understood what a unique professional chance I was being offered. The unprecedented nature of a UN presence in Macedonia opened up opportunities that, if properly seized, might also set a model for, and pace of, conflict prevention elsewhere in the world. I decided to head up this rather novel experiment in UN peacekeeping—except, in this case, the mission's mandate was to make sure there would be a peace to keep.

In mid-June, just prior to my introductory visit to Macedonia, I had learned that a Macedonian government minister was in Vienna, attending the session of one of the functional commissions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. I invited him to lunch, ready to listen attentively to what he would have to say on my forthcoming mission in his country. Right from the start, however, even before I had time to introduce myself properly, my interlocutor started bombarding me with questions regarding the Balkans. His basic query was whether I had ever been to that part of Europe. I had, I said, mostly on a few short business and private visits to former Yugoslavia; but, no, I had never served in the region. A severe expression of doubt appeared on the minister's face, and it did not seem to help much when I mentioned my thirty-five years in the foreign service, in both Poland's diplomatic corps and on the UN's senior staff; the long specialization in UN affairs; and my own homework on the Balkans, as well as the excellent briefings I had been given by many experts before my forthcoming departure to Skopje. Ultimately, the minister decided not to press me any further but did have a warning to sound: "You always have to remember that there are two sides to reality in the Balkans—one over the table, the other under the table." I was grateful to the minister for the warning as on several occasions in the following thirty-nine months I would become acutely aware of its significance. With the

passing time, I was to learn several more traits of the unique Balkan mentality.

First visits to Skopje

On June 19 and 20, I paid my introductory visit to Skopje. On the first day, as I was escorted to see President Kiro Gligorov, I entered his spacious office on the second floor of the parliament building. The president stepped forward to greet me. He extended his arms toward me and said: "Mister Sokalski, from friendly Poland!" I later thought that I should have perhaps added, ". . . and from the friendly United Nations!" Upon reflection, however, I understood his words addressed to me as his recognition of the fact that the secretary-general of the United Nations was sending on this important mission someone from another country in transition, a country with a rich tradition of contacts with the former Yugoslavia, including Macedonia. This national "bonding" proved particularly helpful to me in the months to come, especially among Macedonia's ethnic communities, while the first meeting with President Gligorov had established the practice of my frequent discussions with him on a variety of issues regarding the United Nations presence and role in Macedonia.

On July 5, 1995, I arrived in Skopje again, this time to assume my permanent duties as head of mission. My arrival coincided with the visit to UNPREDEP of one of our senior colleagues from UN headquarters who was interested in meeting some leaders of Macedonia's major political parties. He was short on time, so it was suggested that he meet the party representatives together in one group. The party leaders flatly refused. They neither wished to be seen together nor create an impression that they shared common views that might be misunderstood by both their own publics and representatives of the international community. Consequently, each party leader spent no more than twenty minutes with our guest from New York and, in principle, discussed the very same topics subsequently taken up by others during their separate meetings with him. This unwillingness to enter into a shared dialogue was the characteristic feature of Macedonia's political elites until the mid-1990s.

"Because we are in the Balkans!"

From my first day as head of UNPREDEP in Macedonia, I would pose many different questions to my local interlocutors. Many times, I would

ponder a particular aspect of the country's social and political life and ask them, "Why so?" Their customary response would be, "Because we are in the Balkans!" I had consistently tried to fight this strange kind of Balkan fatalism, although toward the end of my stay there my earlier persistence seemed to have waned somewhat. History has its own inexplicable dynamics. For Churchill, the problem was the region's excess of history compared to its relatively small geography. My problem, however, was the region's future—specifically, its high potential for unpredictable post-Cold War events. Indeed, who could have ever predicted the disintegration of Yugoslavia? Who could have anticipated the inexcusable and devastating wars in a region that, in many respects, was the least expected not to be able to cope with such a crisis?

The quest for answers seemed to be unending.