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It's been a quiet weekend in Skopje. There have been a few more demonstrations, but none that have resulted in any violence. We're still on curfew, which really isn't any fun, but we've also been told that if we stick to curfew, we're less likely to be evacuated, which is sufficient motivation for me to make sure that I'm back home by 9 o'clock. I still haven't read all the books I bought in the US, and there have been some decent English movies on TV, so that helps.

The city was all but dead on Sunday. In the summer, everyone who can leave the city, does. And I think that the government has been successful helping some of the displaced people from Tetovo move back into their homes. There's a dorm at the end of my street where some families have been housed. Over the past few days, I've seen fewer people and fewer cars there. And Macedonia hasn't featured as largely on CNN, which is a good sign.

I've had a busy couple of months. No sooner did I get back from my little vacation in Croatia, then I had to go to Bratislava, Slovakia for a conference. The conference was nothing remarkable, but the trip was fun. Bratislava is only about an hour and a half from Vienna by bus, so I just flew in to Vienna. I had about six hours there before I had to leave for Bratislava -- and I had a shopping list. Yes, I was in Vienna for a day and I did nothing of any cultural significance. I did walk by the Opera House (twice), but that was about it. Just a lot of walking. Fortunately, the city is pedestrian-friendly. And it's beautiful. Wide streets, lots of parks and trees, and full of gorgeous old buildings. It was a very pleasant way to spend the day.

I really liked Bratislava, too. It's a really interesting little city. As you approach, you see its two major landmarks from far off. One is a huge, blocky castle that's sometimes called "The Upside-down Table," if that gives you a picture. The other is this really bizarre space-age suspension bridge built by the Communist government sometime in the '60s or '70s. The hotel I stayed in had a great view of both, and sat right on the edge of the old town, right on the Danube (which, if it ever was blue, isn't by the time it gets to Bratislava).

The old town in Bratislava is very compact, and is packed with churches and other historic buildings along with cafes, shops and restaurants. It's all very European and very charming. Once you get out of the old city, the neighborhoods look more grim, but the old town really is lovely. It's all winding cobblestone streets and archways and alleys. And they have this nifty laser light sculpture that runs over the main streets at night, which presents an interesting effect juxtaposed against the old architecture of the surrounding buildings. I'd love to go back some time, spend a couple days just exploring Bratislava, and then spend a few more taking day trips into Vienna. I found the best sushi restaurant I ever hope to find in this region in Bratislava - I have to go back. :-)

A few weeks later, right before I came to the US, I was in Bulgaria for a couple days for a meeting. One day on the Black Sea coast, and one day in Sofia. Needless to say, I didn't get to see much of the Black Sea -- I spent the entire day I was there in a meeting. And I had two of the most nerve-wracking flights I've ever been through. We flew Hemus

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Air's domestic flight from Sofia to Varna – an hour on a tiny “Russian plane with Bulgarian modifications,” as our Bulgarian program manager told me, right before he flatly refused to fly to Varna. On the other hand, the program director from Armenia got on the plane and said “I feel right at home!” The turbulence on these flights was awful, especially right before landing. And we had a lot of stormy weather those two days. But, even if they've got lousy planes, Hemus Air at least has good pilots.

Those of you who saw me or spoke to me the last few weeks I was in the States can just skip the next paragraph – you've heard it all already.

I had a great visit in the US. But things went very wrong right before I left. First, I lost my passport somewhere in Baltimore (don't ask me how, I honestly have no idea). I wasn't able to make my original flight back to Skopje, but was able to get one only a couple days later. Not that it did me any good. The day that I got my passport, our international employees were evacuated from Skopje after a demonstration that ended with some attacks on Western agencies and couple of OSCE cars being burned. After that, it was three weeks of waiting for permission to go back, and changing my flight reservation every few days. I was thoroughly tired of both my hotel room and Austrian Airlines' hold music by the time it was through.

So, now I'm back in Skopje, playing a waiting game – waiting to see if anti-Western sentiment increases, waiting to see if the peace negotiations are successful. Like I said, things have been pretty quiet for the past few days. We just have to wait and see what happens next.