

March 2001

Quick update for those of you who haven't been following international news closely recently – over the past few weeks, there have been Albanian guerrilla groups clashing with Serbian and Macedonian security forces on both sides of the Kosovo-Macedonia border. There have been lots of expressions of concern, and a fair amount of international press coverage. But there have been no serious threats of any widespread violence in Macedonia.

I'll start getting worried if it looks like the government is getting paranoid and starting to crack down on the Albanian population without justification. There is a similar situation here to Kosovo in that relations between Albanians and Macedonians aren't all that great. The story that's getting the most press says that the border problems have mostly been started by Kosovo Albanians, but that they have been generating some support from Macedonian Albanians.

There is an Albanian party in the government, and a new one being formed. And the leaders of the Macedonian and Albanian communities are all denouncing the violence on the border. So they're at least saying all the right things.

There was a demonstration in Skopje yesterday that I went to see. It was an Albanian demonstration “for peace and freedom.” It was big, but it was peaceful and the atmosphere was fairly laid back. The demonstrators were calm and orderly, the people observing the demonstration were calm as well, and while there were more police than usual out, it didn't look like they were anticipating serious problems (no riot gear or guns that I could see). So it seems that tensions between the two communities are below the boiling point at the moment, despite the border problems.

As far as what I've heard from our staff, they're concerned about the situation, obviously. Some of them are fatalistic -- “I knew Macedonia wouldn't get by without a war” -- some are optimistic, some are reserving judgment. Nobody's panicking. People are worried about family members who live near the border, and friends and relatives who have been drafted, and everyone is watching the situation closely. It's very much “wait and see” right now.