

**Statement of Hon. Joseph J. DioGuardi
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**House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats**

“The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability”

May 17, 2017

The events surrounding the brutal attack on Ziadin Sela as the leader for political reform in Macedonia

On April 27, 2017, Talat Xhaferi was elected as the Speaker of the Parliament of Macedonia. Those who supported the election of the new Speaker, the first Albanian to be elected to this position, were brutally attacked by deputies of the VMRO-DPMNE ruling party and their paid thugs and paramilitaries in an attempt to strike fear and terror in the minds and hearts of those bent on reforming the corrupt Macedonian government headed by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who has led the government like a criminal enterprise for the past fifteen years. He has totally controlled every part of the Macedonian government, including the courts, through bribes, patronage, and mafia-like zeal and tactics.

For months, in advance of the horrific attack on April 27, Ziadin Sela, the Mayor of Struga and the head of The Movement for Reforms of the Democratic Party of Albanians, LR-PDSH (who was in coalition with Zoran Zaev, the head of the ethnic Macedonia LSDM Party and in opposition to the VMRO-LPMNE) was the target of an extensive propaganda campaign marking him as “an enemy of the people,” who should be eliminated. The result was a truly shocking and brutal attack on Sela, in particular, by masked special police forces, who were allowed by the Macedonian government uniformed police to attack the Members of Parliament for more than two hours without any intervention by police who were present on the scene. Ziadin Sela was

repeatedly hit in the head, knocked unconscious, and was presumed dead by the attackers, when he was pulled out of the melee with severe wounds by colleagues who then resuscitated him with medical help. (This can be clearly seen in the bloody photos of Sela on April 27 that I have enlarged for this hearing.) Mr. Chairman, using such terrible planned violence to instill fear and trembling to achieve political goals should qualify the VMRO-DPMNE party for listing as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department, as has been done for other political groups promoting terror.

The VMRO-DPMNE party led by Nikola Gruesvsky represents a violent anti-Albanian movement in Macedonia.

The VMRO-DPMNE led by Nikola Gruevsky is clearly a violent anti-Albanian political party, which has many convicted criminals as members, including Members of Parliament who were convicted of serious crimes, such as Jovan Tarculovski who in 2005 was sentenced by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia for war crimes against one hundred Albanians during the armed conflict of 2001 between ethnic Albanians and the security forces of the Macedonian government. Tarculovski is now a member of parliament for the VMRO.

The current political crisis and economic chaos in Macedonia has very negatively affected the daily life of the large Albanian population, which is already subject to extremely high unemployment, especially among the youth. It is obvious that economic discrimination against Albanians is being used as an institutionalized instrument of ethnic cleansing of Albanians, much like the late Serbian dictator and indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic used in Kosova from 1989 to 1999, until the United States led NATO to bomb Serbia and brought Milosevic to justice

in the Hague International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia. Milosevic was charged with “crimes against humanity”—crimes that are now being repeated by virulent Slavic racism

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and chauvinism under Nikola Gruevski’s direction today.

Looking at the deteriorating economic and political environment in Macedonia during the last fifteen years after the “Ohrid/Other Agreement” was signed to settle the serious military conflict between the ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians, it becomes clear that the roots of the current conflict are primarily political, not ethnic. The current crisis is a struggle for power and financial resources by VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevsky, who refuse to peacefully transfer power to the Zaev/LSDM-led coalition, who were trying to form a new government on April 27 under a mandate legally allowed to them after putting together a majority coalition of MPs in accordance with the Constitution of Macedonia. The VMRO party’s real concern is the fear of criminal charges that its leadership, including Prime Minister Gruevsky and the head of his Secret Services, will probably face once they are out of power.

The potential of Russian involvement in Macedonia

This raises a real possibility of Russian involvement in Macedonia since Gruevsky will welcome any Russian support to turn an internal political crisis into an interethnic conflict with regional implications since Macedonia is bordered by Albania and by Kosova, Greece, and Serbia. And, there is a real danger that Russia will use the vulnerable position of Gruevsky and VMRO to push for a full-scale ethnic conflict in order to strengthen its role in the Balkans. This possibility should be enough of an incentive for the United States and the European Union to respond to the chaotic events of April 27 as quickly as possible. Serbia has already signaled that it is preparing for the worst in Macedonia and will intervene to protect its national security. In

such a scenario, Russia can exploit interethnic hostilities to expand its regional influence by offering support to Macedonia and even to Serbia.

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The Oher/Ohrid Agreement is compromised by Skopje 2014

VMRO's anti-Albanian rhetoric and ethnic exclusivity for ethnic Macedonians was made very clear in the creation by the Macedonian government of the Skopje 2014 pageant and construction of museums, government buildings, and monuments of historical figures from the region, while completely expunging Albanian identity from all literature, architecture, and symbols. VMRO-DPMNE did this, even though Albanians were the largest group or majority in Skopje from the 1800s until 1992, until many immigrated to Tirana,, the capital city of Albania, after the fall of communism in Albania. Skopje 2014 is the most serious violation of the Oher/Ohrid Agreement, and it was made possible through the subordination to VMRO-DPMNE of its Albanian coalition partner, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), led by Ali Ahmeti, along with the silence and complacency of the United States and the European Union.

The roots of Albanian racism in Macedonia can be found in the Former Yugoslavia

On March 7, 1937 an internal domestic policy memorandum was presented in Belgrade by Dr. Vaso Cubrilovic, the mentor of brutal Interior Minister Aleksandar Rankovic and war criminal Slobodan Milosevic. The memorandum, entitled "The Expulsion of the Albanians, made ethnic cleansing and even genocide an "allowable" strategy to fulfill "the mass removal of the Albanians from their triangle" [Kosova, Macedonia, and Montenegro] as "the only effective course for us."

On page 5, of the 19-page memorandum, which I am submitting for the Record, Cubrilovic states that, "The Albanians cannot be repulsed by means of gradual colonization alone;...the

only way and the only means to cope with them is the brute force of an organized state, in which we have always been superior to them.” And on page 7, “the mode of removal” is spelled out as

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follows: “The mass removal of the Albanians...is the only effective course for us...to bring about the relocation of a whole population.... The first prerequisite is the creation of a suitable psychosis.... Therefore...we must win over their clergy and men of influence, through money or threats to support the relocation of the Albanians..., [and] agitators to advance this removal must be found.... Another means would be coercion by the state apparatus...so as to make staying intolerable for the Albanians.... We should distribute weapons to our colonists.... **There remains one more means, which Serbia employed with great practical effect after 1878, that is, by secretly burning down Albanian villages and city quarters [emphasis mine].**

As someone who has been actively following the events leading to the disintegration of the Former Yugoslavia since 1986, as a US Congressman. and since 1989 as an advocate for Albanian human, political, and civil rights in the Balkans, it is clearer than ever to me since the events of April 27, 2017, that Nikola Gruevsky is following the racist, chauvinistic path of now deceased indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic, which, if not stopped, will only lead to more interethnic tension and political violence in Macedonia, with dire legal consequences for all who, like Gruevsky, follow Milosevic’s disastrous road that ultimately led to his death in a prison cell in The Hague and his worst fear, the independence of Kosova.

Recommendations

- 1) The United States cannot wait any longer for the European Union to resolve the political crisis in Macedonia, for the reasons given in this testimony, and must take a leading role now before Macedonia devolves into chaos and the political, financial, and humanitarian

cost of cleaning up the mess of a regional conflict becomes too much for the United States to bear.

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- 2) An immediate step to take should be the active commitment of the United States to the full implementation of the now fifteen-year-old “Ohrid/Ohrid Agreement” to ensure equal rights for the Albanian people of Macedonia. To accomplish this, the US Congress should establish an Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) Implementation Council. The lack of such a mechanism is one of the reasons that the VMRO-DPMNE was able to control the leadership of DUI, the junior Albanian partner in their coalition.
- 3) The United States should call for codification of ethnic equality between Albanians and Macedonians in the Constitution because the current Constitution (1991) contains outdated post-Yugoslav provision that perpetrate a second-class, discriminatory status for Albanians in the Macedonia.
- 4) The shocking April 27, 2017, attack on the Macedonia parliament by special police forces was enabled by uniformed police forces, who allowed it to go on for almost three hours without intervention. As a result of this and the refusal of President Ivanov to hand over the mandate to the proposed coalition of the SDSM, led by Zoran Zaev, with the ethnic Albanian parties (resulting in 67 MPs out of a total of 120) to form a new government, the United States and the European Union should immediately call for sanctions against Macedonia.

