Martin Nakovski (Macedonia)
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology,
"Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University of Skopje
e-mail: nakovskim@yahoo.com

INTEGRATION AND/OR REINTEGRATION OF THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS FROM THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA OF 2001[1]

Abstract: After the conflict of 2001 in the Republic of Macedonia, of the initial 76 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) only 600 remained displaced. Today they are located in collective centers, as well as in private apartments. An equally important, even a key issue is if those who returned are still in their homes. The term 'reintegration process' usually means creating conditions for normal living and gradual inclusion of the persons who returned in all spheres of life in their place of origin. Remaining longer in the "foreign" territory inevitably brings changes in identity and identification of the IDP, changes in perception of the IDP towards the new environment, but also a change of the individual, collective and public discourses on IDPs in general.

Key words: internally displaced persons, armed conflict, displacement, integration, reintegration.

During the 90s in the past century, the Republic of Macedonia "was lucky" to leave the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia without a bullet being fired. When the war between the ex-republics gained momentum, it celebrated its independence, and gained the nick-name "oasis of peace". However, "happiness" did not last long. When others' wars were completed, it seems as if Macedonian turn came. In 2001 the "oasis of peace" was broken, and with it everything that Macedonia was praised for, its multiethnic character. During 2001 the security forces of the Republic of Macedonia were attacked by armed Albanian groups. A number of people, being scared for their lives and the lives of their close ones, left the area were armed activities took place. A number of families and individuals were brutally expelled from their homes.

The issue of refugees and displaced persons in global and in Macedonian terms are mostly analyzed, and with a good reason, from a social aspect. Primarily it is a matter of socially vulnerable groups, and the everyone's interest is focused towards improvement of their current situation. In time, as their number decreases, and the situation in the country of their origin is improved, the interest for these people is reduced, and if they are refugees the only ones that take care of them are the institutions responsible for their well-being, as UNHCR, the national societies of the Red Cross and all governmental institutions responsible for improving the social conditions of this category of citizens.

An anthropological research of these persons as a group, at least initially, is very difficult. Firstly, it comes to human reasons, since they have lost everything, so that the situation itself is not suitable for a detailed research. I experienced it myself that although time passes by, this fact does not improve the situation for conducting anthropological re-

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[1]   This article derives from a research conducted in 2010/2011.

search. Some of the interviews that were done with IDPs, although from the moment of displacement, some 10 years have passed by, are sufficient proof of this statement. Remaining longer on a "foreign" territory inevitably brings changes of identity and identification of the IDP, changes in perception of the IDP towards the new environment, but also a change of the individual, collective and public discourses on IDPs.

Integration and/or reintegration

The return of IDPs in their homes is the best solution, however not always realistic. According to traditional notions, the return of the refugees to their homes is considered as a one-time and final act (Mesić, Bagić 2008: 23–38). However, this is far from the truth. Lately, among the researchers and the theoreticians that deal with migration and refugees there is a widely accepted opinion that it is a complex and long-term process, which can be reversible in each phase. Aiming to provide sustainable reintegration, two conditions should be fulfilled – voluntary return and security. The experiences of return, unfortunately, speaks that the return and the reintegration are far from "natural" and smooth, especially in post-conflict situations (Eastmond 2006: 141–164).

After the conflict in the Republic of Macedonia, from the initial 76 000 internally displaced persons only 600 remained displaced, and they are today located in collective centers and in private apartments. Secondly, an equally important issue is, if those who have returned are still in their homes. According to the IDPs who were my interlocutors during the field research, a number of those who have returned in their homes have already sold their houses and now live in Skopje or in other cities. Almost all IDPs, even the ones who remained in collective centers after deregistration, are categorical that they do not have an intention to return to their villages.

> *"I don't have an intention to go back to Arachinovo. It does not come to my mind… That is a finished story for me" (statement of IDP from the village of Arachinovo).*

"Reintegration" usually means creating conditions for normal living and gradual inclusion of the persons who returned in all spheres of living in their place of origin. Thus, conditions for return of IDPs should be created, meaning providing security, renovation of the damaged houses and other conditions that guarantee normal living.[2]

Due to this rigid attitude of IDP, it is really difficult to speak about reintegration. These people do not accept the possibility of return, thus they do not believe in possibilities of reintegration in the old environment. Since the field research does not cover persons that have returned to their homes, reintegration will be analyzed only according to the attitudes of the IDPs. This is why a complete

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[2] See http://www.icmc.net/type/voluntary-return-and-reintegration "After signing the Framework agreement the state and the local authorities have taken an obligation that they will do everything so that these people are reintegrated in the places in which they lived prior to the conflict and to enable them to renovate their homes. Why this has not been done, I don't know" – statement of Prof. Vlado Popovski, one of the authors of the Ohrid framework agreement. "The displaced remained people without and address", newspaper Dnevnik, 7.6.2010.

and clear image on the process of reintegration could not be obtained. Information that I obtained on the field on the process of reintegration were only IDP's hypothesis. Why only hypothesis? Since there is no one from this group that has returned to their homes, or tried to remain there for a certain period. A part of these IDP temporarily visit their properties, but did not stay there.

> *"From time to time I go to see what is happening. I still have property, a house (which was burned down). To check if someone works on my fields…" (statement of an IDP).*

Whenever it came to return and reintegration, the IDPs always stated their reasons why they do not want to return to their homes. Main factor is lack of security conditions. According to the date of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, along with the information from the field, the most critical regions are the villages of Arachinovo, Matejche and Radusha, where according to the IDPs no one has returned yet. A 55-year old Arachinovo inhabitant, who has tried to return once, speaks of returning as something impossible.

> *"I tried to return. My house was renovated. First they brought construction material, and in some time they have renovated the house. However, the first night when the material was brought, it was stolen. I called the police, and got to know who stole it, so they returned it. I came back alone, and in few days my wife should have joined me. However, during the first night my house was stoned and attacked by a group of Albanians. I escaped the same evening, and in few days they have put it on fire again. Tell me how should I return there.." (statement of an IDP from Arachinovo).*

A similar opinion comes from a displaced person from the village of Matejche:

> *"...To return there? Who would guarantee me protection? You can disappear in a night there. It is not secure for me to come back".*

During the conflict a number of houses were completely or partly destroyed. After the conflict finished, a big renovation started, aiming to create conditions for return of the IDPs. Signing the agreements for the house renovations, the IPDs have obliged themselves that they will return to their houses once they are completed. Many of them returned, but not all. In few cases the renovation itself deemed insufficient as a motif to return. This is valid for few people from the area of Tetovo, who, after their house was renovated, have lost the status of IDPs, but did not want to come back.

> *"The house is mainly renovated. But not completely. I was called few times to sign the agreement and to return. However, the house is not suitable for living, there is no water and no furniture. Even if I return, I have no bed, no nothing" (statement of IPD from Tetovo).*

Most of the IDPs have more than one reason not to return. Besides the security conditions, they have focused upon lack of economic possibilities, as well as the bitterness and the repulsion they feel towards the place of their exile.

> *"To return there and live of what? Before the conflict I had a huge store. It was great. Now there is nothing. Someone I knew also had a store, he returned, and*

he was killed. The murderer was never found. Should I come back for that?"
(statement of an IDP from Arachinovo).

"For me Arachinovo is a closed subject. Even if they give me the village as a
whole, I would not return. I cannot imagine myself in that place again. I was
sacked by my neighbors I cannot see their faces, to lie to each other that we
have a good life…no, no, that is over…" (statement of an IDP from the village of
Arachinovo).

Still, most of the ex-IDPs from Tetovo region have returned to their homes. It is a
different situation in the Kumanovo and the Skopje region, where no non-Albanian inhab-
itant has returned. This is the situation in the village of Matejche as well, while in Arachi-
novo only few families have returned. When I insisted that they explain why some peo-
ple have returned and some did not, the answers were "so that they sell", "they have been
lied to", "they know the best", "they sold everything"…

"Yes, there are 4-5 families. They have returned to fix things and possibly to sell.
They do not intend to stay there…" (statement of IDP from the village of Arachi-
novo).

"…They do not live there, they sold everything and now live around Skopje. They
have built a house there" (statement of an IDP from the village of Arachinovo).

There are also IDPs that come back to the villages few times a month, since few
members of the family have returned.

"I go to Leshok every month. I have to go there to see my old folks (parents).
They are old, sick; I have to buy them something. There is not problem there…"
(statement of an IDP from Leshok).

Also, there are situations when half of the families have returned, while others are
here (in a collective center) and receive the assistance. In such case it is a matter of an
economic problem, not a security one.[3]

These are displaced persons that continuously live on the relation between
the collective center and the place of birth. This is clear from statements de-
scribed in my field notes:

"During my field research I visited a number of internally displaced families.
Some of them were visited more than once. During these visits, one could no-
tice the absence of a family member, mainly the father. When I inquired about his
whereabouts, they answered that he returned home. There was work to be done,
to collect fruits, and to see what can be done around the house" (field notes,
2011).

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[3]   Statement of Francois Stamm, Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the
Red Cross: "We don't force people to leave", bi-weekly newspaper "Return", http://adi.imeri.biz/Old/
Downloads/publications/Vracanje%20Br1.pdf

"In one of the collective centers, when I tried to find IDPs in their rooms, sometimes I could not find anyone for a longer period of time. After a while I succeeded in finding someone, and understood that they were all at home, in the Tetovo region. They told me that the IDPs from the other rooms are home as well, and that it is better not to search for them in vain" (field notes, 2011).

I was especially interested about the way IDPs feel about the process of reintegration of the persons that have already returned, and about their assumptions regarding this issue. The answer to this question surely could not be obtained from the displaced from Matejche, since no one has returned. According to testimonies of IPDs from Arachinovo, those that have returned have only one goal, to sell and to go leave again. The persons who have returned, according to IDPs, had to say that the village is secure and that there are good conditions for normal life. IDPs say that they do not trust these statements, since they know what the true opinion of these people is, that could not be stated due to personal safety.

"What can they say when around them there is a whole village of Albanians? They have to say that, until they sell. They know for sure that there is no life there. The ones that have returned are those that have a bigger property and are waiting for a better sum to sell it…There were people returning even before, but who stayed there? They even spoke on TV, they said that the village is peaceful and protected, they asked the others to come back. But if you go today to Arachinovo, they have sold their property and made houses in Skopje…They are the ones that made us look bad in front of the public…" (statement of IDPs from the village of Arachinovo).

The situation with the ones that have returned in the Tetovo area is slightly different. Since most of them have returned in the Tetovo villages, the persons that still refuse to return, although they are deregistered, say that they are waiting for compensation, or that they do not have any opinion regarding the ones that have returned.

"It is safe in Leshok, no one is touching you. Even the mayor supports this. But I don't want to return and be satisfied with the crumbs from the state. Who will pay me for this whole time…who will pay for the fear, the stress, the work…?"

Maybe since their number is quite lower from the ones that have returned, they are not attacked as in the cases with the inhabitants from Arachinovo.

According to their testimonies, the persons that have returned do not have any problems. They themselves say that even the school functions normally and that everyone goes about their business as usual.

"The village is peaceful. I have finished seventh grade there. But I was bored and have returned in Skopje, where I finished school".

According to my opinion, the key difference between these two regions is that when it comes to Tetovo one can speak of a certain reintegration, but in the case of Arachinovo this is very hard, even impossible. Testimonies of IDPs from Arachinovo, according to M. Mesich, say that they return only to finalize what they have started.

"Through selling or exchange of their houses, the persons that return only complete and strengthen military goals of ethnic cleansing and ethnic homogenization" (Mesić, Bagić 2008: 23–38).

In such situation the issue of the sustainability of the return of IDPs is valid. The easiest version is the one where after their return there are no new migrations. In a pilot-study of the Ministry of Interior of Great Britain on the voluntary return of refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, Black and his assistants define individual sustainability as follows:

"The reverse migration for individuals is sustainable if their social-economic status and fear of violence and exile is not strengthened in relation to the population in their place of origin in a period of one year after return" (Black, Gent 2004: 15).

This is another difference between the two regions. The attitude of the IDPs concerning their return corresponds with the new stances on the topic, that the conditions for return could not be assessed according to some individual returns, but that they should be analyzed along all changes that have happened, or could happen after the return.

"There was one woman, she came back allegedly… She was on TV, saying how secure it is and that we should all come back… What she did in fact, it is a shame to talk about it, she drove around with all Albanians from the village. What happened, did she receive money to talk like that, who knows…? Now she is not in the village any more, she sold everything… Should you say that the village is peaceful after that…?" (statement of an IDPS from the village of Arachinovo).

The persons who even today, after 9 years, are still internally displaced, do not think about going back. This can be seen from the statements collected by the association "Zora", signed by IDPs themselves.[4] In the past maybe they had an idea to return to their homes, but now they only think where to buy or to build a house outside the village.

"We have made a mistake, and maybe it was not our mistake, that we did not go back as a group, everyone together, all IDPs at once. This would be better, and like this, today, tomorrow, it is no good. It is too late, no one wants back. I think that everyone is already building houses in Skopje" (statement of an IPD from Arachinovo).

Almost all IDPs have already bought places to build a house or apartments in Skopje or Kumanovo. This fact is not hidden by the IDPs.

"I bought a place in Marino (village near Skopje), I started to build a house. Slowly, I will do it" (statement of an IDP from Arachinovo).

"This house, I've build it with the compensation money. Now I will sell what is left in Matejche, I will buy a house or an apartment in Kumanovo, and that's it. The problem is that the fields and the house are not selling well. One Albanian

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4   http://www.zora.org.mk/izjavi.htm

came, but he gives only one Euro per square meter, if he gives two and a half, he may have it" (statement of ex-IDP from the village of Matejche).

Barbara Harell-Bond defines integration as follows:

"...situation in which the community of hosts and the community of refugees can co-exist, sharing the same resources – economic, as well as social – without breaking into a bigger conflict that already exists in the community of the hosts" (Harrell-Bond 1986: 7).

According to Paul Stabs, this definition means that the terms 'host' and 'community of refugees' have only a political and a legal background:

"...The terms hosts and community of refuges have only a political and a legal basis, while the 'guests' who are refugees sometimes lived in the same state and had equal rights, relatively undisputed, to visit each other, to work and to live in the cities in which they currently present refugees and persons who have been sacked away" (Stubbs 1995: 153–163).

I quoted this statement since the situation in the Republic of Macedonia resembles the situation given in his definition. This is why the integration of IDPs did not face major difficulties. The persons that are at the moment internally displaced, prior to the conflict had continuous contacts with persons from environments where they are located at the moment, and with persons from the places where they started to build new houses.

"For me this is not a new environment… I have worked with these people. I have always shopped here, my children went to school here. I know them, and they know me for some time…" (statement of IDP from Arachinovo).

An IDP from Tetovo region, who is de-registered, but still stays in the collective center with his family, says:

"...I do not expect any problems. I will furnish my apartment and move with my family. I bought it as any other citizen. How many people buy apartments in Skopje and start their life with no problems, we will do the same. Anyway, my children go to school in this settlement (Avtokomanda)."

Similar to this are the attitudes of the displaced Macedonian and Serbian families from Lipkovo region, who see their future in Kumanovo.

"I have no problem to adjust to Kumanovo. I have children here, I have visited them, I've stayed for a couple of days. I lived in Kumanovo in the same building where you live now…" (statement of an IDP from Matejche).

More than half of the current IDPs are located in private apartments, with the rent provided by the state. Thus, this can be considered a positive circumstance that would allow easier integration. The IDPs from Arachinovo and Matejche even prior to the conflict worked in Skopje or in Kumanovo. During the conflict, and after it, they continued to work at the same positions and with the same people as prior to the crisis. Now they feel as only the location of their home has been changed and nothing else.

The process of integration can be analyzed from the testimony of an IDP from the Tetovo villages, who has been registered since 2003, but he has not returned, living all these years in a collective center.

"When we came here, we were lost. First due to our experience in Tetovo, and secondly since we did not know anything or anybody. We thought that we will be back soon, but nothing happened. My son and the older daughter finished school here, while the younger one started to go to school here…Now, after 9 years, it is easier, I have many friends, with many of them we do some work, when there is some. Whatever I needed earlier I had difficulties to obtain it, now I only have to call a friend…They force me to go back, but how can I? My children grew up here, they have friends, they've fallen in love, how can I ask them to go back now? They would not want to, and I don't allow them."

Conclusion

After the armed conflict of 2001, and the signing of the Framework agreement, one issue that was opened was the one of the internally displaced persons. Since this is a highly vulnerable group of citizens, who remained without property, the solution of the problem required time and analysis. As time passed and the problems in the crisis regions were reduced, the damaged houses were renovated, security returned, and the major portion of the displaced returned home. During the research one could clearly see the difference in the attitudes of IDPs from the Tetovo region and the ones from the villages of Arachinovo and Matejche. According to my opinion, the key difference between these two regions is that the Tetovo region shows a certain level of reintegration, but when it comes to Arachnovo and Matejche this is difficult, even impossible. Few families have made an attempt to return and reintegrate, however, according to their testimonies, part of them could not, another part was forbidden to do that, and a third part did not want to go back. During the years the problem of adjustment was solved. One part of the displaced, children and students, have completed their education in the new environments, while the adults found new jobs and a new home. For them the process of integration is almost finished.

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