

**Attitudes Towards  
the Political, Social, and Economic Conditions in Macedonia**  
*Results of Focus Group Research*  
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**Background**

- Penn, Schoen and Berland was commissioned by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to conduct a series of seven focus groups in Macedonia between December 15-19, 2001

**Objectives**

- The objectives of the focus group research were to:
  - Examine the mood of the country towards various political, social, and economic issues.
  - Assess the awareness and attitudes of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians towards the Framework Agreement and related issues.
  - Understand the language used by ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians to talk about the issues covered by the Framework Agreement.

Understand where there is the common ground and shared values between the two groups that could be built upon.

Assess the interest level in increased communication and responsiveness by political leaders on these issues.

**Methodology**

- The discussion guide for the focus groups was developed by Penn, Schoen and Berland in close cooperation with the National Democratic Institute.
- Focus groups were led by trained focus group moderators employed by Brima Research. Each group lasted approximately 2 hours.
- Participants were encouraged to offer their candid opinions in order to stimulate and frank exchange of views.
- The participants were recruited by Brima Research to represent a range of income levels, ages, and backgrounds.
- Groups were segmented as follows:
  - Tetovo. Albanians. Males.
  - Tetovo. Albanians. Female.
  - Skopje. Albanians. Mixed Gender.
  
  - Bitola. Macedonians. Mixed Gender
  - Bitola. Macedonians. Mixed Gender
  - Tetovo. Macedonians. Mixed Gender.
  - Skopje. Macedonians. Mixed Gender.
- During the course of our research we heard the opinions of about 70 people – probing them to discuss their opinions and underlying assumptions about those opinions.

- Groups with respondents from Skopje and Bitola were held in each of the respective cities.
- Groups with respondents from Tetovo were held in Skopje due to security concerns.
- The groups were attended by Penn, Schoen and Berland and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

### **Executive Summary**

- The focus group discussions highlighted significant areas of shared values between Macedonians and Albanians about concerns and hopes for the future.
- This common ground can help various actors – politicians, non-governmental organizations, the media, and the international community – work towards a lasting peace in Macedonia.

### *Mood of the Country*

- A sense of “crisis” pervades life in Macedonia – both Macedonians and Albanians share concerns about the ability of the political leadership to build a better future for their country and for their families.
- Security is the number one concern on the minds of both Macedonians and Albanians.

### *Major Issues*

- The next biggest problem confronting Macedonia is the weak state of the economy. Future prospects are seen as dire and bleak, at best. Unemployment is a top concern, especially for younger people.
- The economic, security, and social crises are commonly attributed to the perception that government and politicians are not doing enough to move the country in the right direction.

### *Communication with Politicians*

- Little direct communication between politicians and citizens and skepticism about the reliability of the media’s reporting adds to the confusion.

### *Attitudes towards Framework Agreement*

- Respondents had only general knowledge about the Framework Agreement.
- When asked their opinion about the document itself, there is sharp divergence along ethnic lines
  - Macedonians dislike the Framework Agreement
  - Albanians are happy to see their basic rights affirmed yet are skeptical whether it will be fully implemented.
  - Some Albanians have inflated expectations that the FA will change conditions immediately.

### *Components of Framework Agreement*

- However, when asked about the substantive proposals embodied in the Agreement, but without association with the Framework Agreement itself, there are significant areas where Macedonians and Albanians agree.
- There is also a general recognition that the components included in the Framework Agreement are the basis for building a more secure future.

### *Territorial Integrity*

- Neither Macedonians nor Albanians want to divide up the country.
  - There is a strong sense of shared of community and heritage
  - They feel that they are stronger together and future prospects will be enhanced
  - They believe Macedonia should parallel the example of Europe – towards greater integration – with an eye towards ultimately joining the European Union

### *Mixed Police Force*

- There is a mutual understanding and acceptance among both Albanians and Macedonians that in order to move forward and live peacefully, they must continue to rely on one another, as they have done in the past.
- In this regard, they want a mixed police force, assuming this force could be held to high professional standards.

### *Use of Albanian Language*

- The use of the Albanian language in addition to the Macedonian language in official capacities (such as in the Parliament and in documents) is acceptable to nearly everyone.
- Both groups believe there would be greater accuracy and more cultural understanding if both languages were used.

### *Merit-based Standards*

- There is a strong desire between both Macedonians and Albanians to have common standards employed in all aspects of civil life—in the government, the police force, the education system, health care.
- People are fed up with the current system that they view as rewarding cronyism and political party affiliation.
- They want a more transparent, merit-based and professional system.

### *Economic Aid*

- Both groups believe that outside economic aid is essential. Many are also in favor of having these funds managed by external agencies, rather than internal politicians that they view as ineffective and concerned only with their own self-interests.

### *Areas of Disagreement*

- Opinions diverge, however, on how to handle the issues of:
  - Amnesty
  - Local self-governance
  - Equal employment in government agencies
  - Government funding for Tetovo University

### *Communication with Politicians*

- A clear finding is the desire among all Macedonians to have their politicians and leaders talk and listen to them. People want to interact with their politicians, if they will communicate in an

honest and substantive manner.

- They feel the media does not adequately inform them. Media sources are seen as lacking professionalism and objectivity.

#### *Attitudes Towards Government*

- Both Macedonians and Albanians are strongly skeptical of the current government, parliament, and politicians in general. They blame them for spending more time on internal party politics and their own self-interests rather than addressing the concerns of ordinary people.

#### *Attitudes Towards Government*

- Images that government is ineffective and self-interested persist because people have little information on what government is trying to achieve and how they have already made some progress.

#### **Strategic Implications**

- Both ethnic groups are ready for and have a strong desire for a much fuller and more candid public dialogue about the issues facing the total society
  - By the political leadership
  - In the media
- The Framework Agreement can be used as a positive tool in peace-building efforts, but...
- Only if it is explained through its component parts as opposed to as a general entity
- Speaking about the “Framework Agreement” by using its name creates resistance based on ethnic lines and reinforces the perception that the agreement was externally imposed and benefits only one side.
- But by talking about the agreement’s component parts common ground that already exists can be further strengthened and built upon.
- Commonly-held beliefs between the two ethnic groups can form a solid platform for public dialogue and confidence building:
  - Macedonia is better united than separated
  - The future of the country is with Europe
  - If successful Macedonia can present a model for other inter-ethnic communities
  - Establish more mixed institutions – such as a police force
  - Work towards more transparency and action within the government
- Focusing on commonly-held issues first, will help to build cross-cultural communication that is the basis for resolving other, more contentious issues.
  - Amnesty
  - Local self-determination
- Participants are desperate to know what is being done and how government is working to help them.

- By communicating directly with citizens, politicians have the chance to boost their standing and overcome citizens' deep cynicism about their government.
- More direct and frequent contact between politicians and ordinary citizens can overcome people's lack of information and boost politicians' credibility.
- With more interaction, citizens can begin to see how politicians are working to improve the situation for Macedonian families – regardless of their ethnicity – and the future of the country.

### **Detailed Findings**

#### *Mood of the Country*

- A feeling of “crisis” permeates respondents' description of the mood of the country.
- Macedonians and Albanians share significant common perceptions on this issue:
  - Both acknowledged that they had co-existed peacefully for generations
  - Both groups blame the crisis on the politicians, including the outbreak of violence
- Each group view is likely to believe politicians are the source, not the solution, to the country's problems.
  - *“I don't think that the common people in Macedonia make the problems. I think that the politicians make the problems.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“These elected members of Parliament have achieved higher levels of corruption. They are the generators of the economic, political crisis.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“We have now the Albanians as a problem only because we had an incompetent government... We had 50 years living together and we want this life back.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“I don't think there is a difference between Macedonian and Albanian members of the Parliament. They all believe their own, they're all interested in their own interests.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“We feel as if we are in a bad situation and we don't understand what has happened. For example with the Albanians. What was the problem with them that we had to come to this?” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“We have got a war now. We got refugees, nothing is resolved and so the situation is the same as in the beginning of the conflict. Maybe even worse. Regardless of whether they (the politicians) have taken care of the issue or not, they haven't achieved anything.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*

#### **Major Issues Facing Families**

- Both Macedonian and Albanian respondents share similar worries over the major problems facing their families:
  - Personal safety and security
  - Unemployment
  - Continuing political and inter-ethnic crisis
  - Poor state of the economy

### *Personal Safety and Security*

- Above all, participants shared concern about an unstable security situation that could erupt again into violence.
  - *“The security situation. I would say that it’s a dominant issue anywhere in the country.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“During the summer, while it was quite insecure in the country, I was feeling insecure even in my home. We used to lock up the doors and we were afraid to sit even in a locked up house.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“People are afraid to go to the center of the town from the country.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*

### *Political and Inter-ethnic Crisis*

- The feeling of continued “crisis” permeates daily life. Politicians are blamed for not working to solve the root causes of this insecurity.
  - *“This government should go. It is not competent to solve the problems. We now have the Albanians as a problem only because we have an incompetent government.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“If we didn’t have corruption I believe we wouldn’t have come to where we have come now.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
  - *“The internal situation we are facing in Macedonia and Tetovo. If we handle the political crisis then I think it will be easier to handle the economic crisis.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*

### *Poor State of the Economy*

- The weak economy adds to worries about quality of life and providing for basic needs.
  - *“The biggest problem in my family is the future of the company I work for. Every day the question is, ‘Is the company going to be closed?’ 2000 workers not just me and my family. We all depend on this company.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“I study law. The problems that we are preoccupied with are the economic problems. . We have stopped our studying because of the economic problems.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“The financial situation is a big problem. I’m living with my father and mother in law. We’re living in a small flat.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*

### *Unemployment*

- High unemployment compounds feelings of insecurity and hopelessness about the future – especially for younger people.
  - *“A difficult financial situation. My son is working, he has a job, but is not getting any salary.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“All the problems are a result of unemployment, because you don’t have the most elementary things that you need for life, and then this leads to other misfortunes and other problems.” [Albanian from Skopje]*

### **Major Issues Facing Country**

- Respondents link the lack of progress in the economic, security and social sphere to the government’s poor performance.

#### *Unresolved Crisis*

- Worries about the economic, social, and security situation and the government's lack of attention to these issues create a cynical mood.
  - *"We are not secure in anything. There is a total lack of security."* [Macedonian from Bitola]
  - *"We're facing many crises. I can't think of anything that is not disrupted from the crises."* [Albanian from Tetovo]
  - *"There is always hope. But in general, I'm not very optimistic. Now we have provocation again, like we had in the summer. And it would be better if two weeks would pass without someone being beaten up or kidnapped."* [Macedonian from Tetovo]

#### *Unemployment and Poor Economy*

- Many respondents feel that people's ability to have a sustainable livelihood is the root of the country's problem.
  - *"The biggest companies in Macedonia are closing and the government doesn't really care that 600 or more employees are out of work. Will they have something to eat?"* [Albanian from Skopje]
  - *"You have more and more politics, foreign troops, foreign politicians. You have more and more closing of factories, so that means we do not have a bright future."* [Macedonian from Skopje]

#### *Government Mismanagement*

- There is also a feeling that the government's mismanagement has made the situation worse:
  - *"I think this government is not competent enough in the economic respect, in the social respect and in the security respect. In all these areas, in all respects, this government is not competent."* [Albanian from Skopje]
  - *"This government is oriented on the wrong track. During all these months of crisis they did not do much."* [Albanian from Skopje]
  - *"We are heading in the wrong direction because all these problems exist, nothing has improved"* [Macedonian from Bitola]

#### *Government Self-interest*

- Respondents also felt that political infighting adds to the government's inability to get things done:
  - *"The political situation is a big problem, because every day we are under pressure with the problems. With the political problems that brings more chaos."* [Macedonian from Bitola]
  - *"I feel that Macedonia's future is endangered. Because we have some kind of a false democracy here."* [Macedonian from Tetovo]
  - *"The leaders, they are the most corrupt people."* [Macedonian from Bitola]

#### *Weak Rule of Law and Political Self-interest*

- The problems are hard to address because they are firmly rooted in a system that encourages political self-interest and cronyism:

- *“We constantly see how more and more unqualified people are getting employed, have a nice job and only because they are a member of a certain party.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
- *“People get employed only if they are party members.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
- *“Corruption is now the dominating force over our government. If we do not eliminate corruption we will have more poverty.” [Albanian from Skopje]*

### **Attitudes Towards Framework Agreement**

- Views of respondents divided along ethnic lines when asked specifically about the “Framework Agreement” and its impacts.
- What respondents did share, however was a low level of awareness of the specific contents of the agreement.

#### *Awareness*

- Most participants knew generally about the Agreement.
- However, there was wide divergence in understanding the details about the Agreement.
- Some ways in which it was commonly described:
  - *“passed by force by big forces” [Macedonian]*
  - *“only way to stop war” [Albanian]*
  - *“attempt to improve interethnic relations” [Macedonian]*
  - *“implemented to bring peace” [Albanian]*
  - *“more favorable to Albanians” [Macedonian]*

#### *Sources of Information*

- The media is the main source of information about the Agreement
- However, there is skepticism about the unbiased nature of reporting.

#### *Macedonian View*

- Many Macedonians believe the Agreement was a cave-in by the government and their politicians:
  - *“I don’t think there was a need for it. It is the result of pressure and it is a possibility for minorities to gain more rights.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“One of the objectives of the FA was to improve interethnic relations, but they cannot be improved with just a piece of paper, because you cannot achieve anything if you only write things on a piece of paper.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
- Macedonians believe the Agreement was forced upon them by external forces:
  - *“We have feelings that this is implemented by force. Something similar like in Serbia.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“I believe the FA will not have a big role in society. It was passed by force from the big forces, from the super powers.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“I think that many Macedonians still get frustrated regarding the FA. And they (outsiders)*



*said we have to pass it in order to improve the situation here, to overcome the crisis. And today, even today, it's just a piece of paper. We have to have some time to see whether it will help or not." [Macedonian from Skopje]*

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- Macedonians view the Agreement's ethnic formula as imposing quotas which will put unqualified individuals into upper level jobs.

#### *Albanian View*

- Albanians are more aware of the details of the FA than Macedonians and are more favorable towards it.
  - *"With this Agreement, we're kind of forcing them to respect us. With the changes to the Constitution, we actually make them, by force, respect us." [Albanian from Tetovo]*
- Albanians are concerned about the slow pace of the adoption of the Agreement and its implementation
  - *"This agreement could only stop the war and make us sit and talk together in the interest of the mutual government of the state of Macedonia. But this agreement in Ohrid, I don't think it can be a resolution. (of the situation)." [Albanian from Tetovo]*

#### **Components of FA and Related Issues**

- Reactions to the term "Framework Agreement" polarized views along ethnic lines.
- Each group has different interpretations of the name "Framework Agreement."
  - Albanians view it as granting them equal rights in the country.
  - Macedonians view it as a humiliating and unnecessary agreement imposed by the international community.
- But when the discussion on particular components that form the FA, we found greater common ground.
- When talking about specific issues rather than using the term "Framework Agreement," respondents from both groups are more willing to consider the agreement favorably.
- We asked about specific components of the Framework Agreement and related issues:
  - territorial integrity
  - mixed police force
  - economic aid
  - security for refugees
  - use of Albanian language
  - amnesty
  - local self-governance
  - equal employment in government agencies
  - Tetovo University

#### *Maintaining Territorial Integrity*

- Both Macedonians and Albanians are in favor of keeping the country intact.
- They think a divided state would be weak. And they want Macedonia's future to mirror that of Europe -- toward greater economic and political integration.

- Some also believe that if Macedonia is successful in this, it would be a good example for constructive inter-ethnic relations world-wide.
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- Quotes on Territorial Integrity
  - *“The disintegration of the country is a bad idea. We live here, we don’t mind that we live in this country.” [Albanian from Skopje]*
  - *“This is stupidity. Europe is uniting and we are dividing. I think we should continue living like we did.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“I don’t think that there is a Macedonian who wouldn’t like to see Macedonia as one part. No other solution can satisfy me.” [Macedonian Skopje]*

#### *Mixed Police Force*

- Both Macedonians and Albanians want a mixed police force.
- They referenced the fact that the country had mixed institutions in the past that worked well.
- However, both were concerned about the level of professionalism in a police force overall.
- Quotes on Mixed police force:
  - *“It’s a good idea, if they trust each other.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
  - *“This is the best solution for today’s situation. I think this will have a positive impact.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“The Albanians are very much afraid of the police because they haven’t been treated like they should be....it should be made of Albanians and Macedonians.” [Albanians from Tetovo]*

#### *Economic Aid*

- Both groups believe economic aid is needed.
- However, there is a high degree of skepticism about how it will get used and who will benefit from it. They want
  - Transparency in use
  - Guarantees for proper implementation
- Some say that they would rather have aid managed by external forces than by their own politicians .
- Quotes on Economic Aid:
  - *“It would be a good idea if it were properly realized.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“If its big aid and focused on the right areas, then I think that it might help, but maybe only partially.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“It’s a good idea, but they should only give help if these changes (FA) are done.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“I think that without that help Macedonia will not survive... I think we’ll have a better chance*

*to improve our common life...But if you get only aid for the state, then nothing will help.”*  
*[Macedonian from Skopje]*

#### Security for Refugees

- Both sides agree on the need to guarantee security for those refugees returning to their homes.
- The majority are skeptical that this can be assured when the situation generally is still so unstable.
- Quotes on Security for Refugees
  - *“I think for now, you have no guarantee if you go back. For example, my parents are from Tearce, and I visit them from time to time but they have no security there. It’s hard for them to get outside.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
  - *“I think that the police have to guarantee their safety when they get back in their homes.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“The Albanians are very much afraid of the police because they haven’t been treated like they should be.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*

#### Use of Albanian Language

- There is general agreement among both groups that the use of the Albanian language in official situations will be a plus. Albanians support this quite broadly with a little less enthusiasm among Macedonians.
- There is a recognition that allowing each group to speak in their native language would provide greater precision of meaning and would be a start for greater cultural understanding.
- Quotes on usage of the Albanian Language:
  - *“Yes it would be great if we can use our language. Let’s not go back to the past. Let’s see the future.” [Albanian from Skopje]*
  - *“This Albanian language should be equal to the Macedonian language...It’s different if an Albanian goes to the Parliament and expresses himself in his own language.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“I feel bad today that I don’t understand the Albanian language...I think today that it would be good to understand Albanian.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
  - *“The Macedonian language should be the official language, while the Albanian language should be in official use, so that everyone should speak Macedonian, and if somebody want to talk with an official in Albanian, he should be give the right to do so.” [Macedonian from Bitola]*

#### Amnesty

- Macedonians are against the idea of amnesty. They believe that people who have committed crimes should be held accountable for their actions.
- Albanians are in favor of amnesty. They feel that “freedom fighters” who served the Albanian cause should not be punished. However, they have concerns about whether amnesty will be fully implemented.

### *Macedonian View-- Amnesty*

- Quotes on Amnesty
  - *“You cannot treat terrorist here in one way and terrorists in Afghanistan in another way. A terrorist is a terrorist.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*
  - *“Persons who committed international crimes should not be pardoned. In America they put such people even on the electric chair. And we have to pardon them? Does American pardon Osama Bin Laden now? And what about the Taliban? They didn’t grant them any amnesty.”[Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *“I disagree with that because I have seen my neighbor shooting around, and now imagine that he is amnestied. What’s that? He has deliberately destroyed several people’s lives, and now to be amnestied? Come on.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*

### *Albanian View-- Amnesty*

- Quotes on Amnesty
  - *“The law itself is very humane, but how it’s going to be implemented?...The could be passed but will it be respected?”[Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“They should be amnestied from their leader to the last soldier...” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“All of them should be amnestied, but on the other hand, I know how the other side feels and how big a problem it is for the other side.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*

### *Local Self-governance*

- On the issue of local self-governance, Albanians are in favor of greater decentralization. They believe it will give them more direct representation and that it will put people at the local level in charge of local problems.
- While Macedonians support the concept of stronger local self-government, they are mixed in how it would be implemented. Some are worried that more decentralization would only segregate communities further, adding to more conflict and greater inefficiencies.

### *Macedonian View-- Local Self-governance*

- Quotes on Local Self-governance:
  - *“I like the issues of local self-government. Nobody knows better the problems of the people than the Mayor and the other local officials.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“I think this would be a debacle for Macedonia.” [Macedonian from Skopje]*

### *Albanian View-- Local Self-governance*

- Quotes on Local Self-governance:
  - *“ We have a chance to show what we think, what we can do and we don’t think that we should not.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *“For decentralization of the government, I expect that with this, people will have an easier life.” [Albanian from Skopje]*
  - *“The self governance is a great idea. It will help the economy.” [Albanian from Skopje]*

### *Employment in Government*

- There is strong agreement on the need for objective standards of professionalism in all areas of government.
- There is a feeling that political party structures should not form the basis of employment decisions.
- However there is divergence on the issue of equal employment in government.
  - Macedonians view it as imposing quotas
  - Albanians see it as the only way to start being appropriately represented.
- Quotes on Equal Employment in Government Agencies
  - *“I believe everybody should have the right to get employed, but according to their qualification.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“As an idea its good for us. We’d have more chances. The Macedonians say we don’t have qualified people. But then we can show that we do.” [Albanian from Skopje]*

### *Tetovo University*

- Macedonians don’t believe Tetovo University should be state-funded or recognized.
- Albanians do and want it to be paid for with government funds.
- Quotes on Tetovo University
  - *“I am against it. They have the right to get enrolled on every other university here in Skopje, Bitola, Ohrid and elsewhere...They should study in the faculties recognized by the state.” [Macedonian from Tetovo]*
  - *“The elected members of Parliament should pass a law for legalization of the university of Tetovo. Only then there will be peace in Macedonia.” [Albanian from Tetovo]*

### **Attitudes Towards Government**

- Both Macedonians and Albanians hold the government, the Parliament and politicians in general, in very low esteem.
- But both also want greater communication as a way to increase accountability from their political leaders.

### *Ability to Govern*

- Macedonians and Albanians are quite cynical about the ability of politicians to handle the big issues of concern—security and the economy.
- Some believe the politicians’ actions have only increased tensions – not reduced them.
- Most feel that the politicians can’t handle the concerns of the citizens because they are too busy “lining their own pockets.”
- Quotes on Ability to Govern:
  - *“I would like to hear at least once that the Parliament has resolved effectively a certain issue. That somebody has got a new job or has got employed. They are often in conflict*

*among themselves.* [Macedonian from Bitola]

- *“The government isn’t doing anything. They are trying to get their own benefits in this forthcoming short period, until the next elections.”* [Macedonian from Tetovo]
- *“Right now, hearing the MP’s, their declarations, their thoughts in the Parliament, I would say that they have stimulated the inter-ethnic hatred between us.”* [Albanian from Skopje]

#### *Communication*

- Both groups feel that neither the government nor politicians give the public enough information, accurate or otherwise.
  - *“Politicians should not only think about themselves, but they should be aware that they have been elected, that there is a connection between them and the people, and all the riots we have today.”* [Macedonian from Bitola]
  - *“They should come and inform us personally.”* [Albanian from Tetovo]
  - *“The electorate should inform the member that’s elected and the elected member should inform the people that elected him.”* [Albanian from Tetovo]
- Both groups desperately want to engage in a real dialogue with their political representatives.
  - *“They have to hear the voice of the people. They should go more often among the citizens. Now they become unreachable.”* [Macedonian from Bitola]
  - *“I don’t think the communication between the mass, the common people and the politicians is on a good level. These people don’t talk to you because they know your problems. They cannot face you because they know your problems and that’s why they hide.”* [Albanian from Skopje]
  - *“I would like them to come to us, and explain to us why this happened, to explain to us the situation.”* [Macedonian from Tetovo]
  - *“I expect from the MPs to have a real dialogue -- to sit down, to think about it, and to find a solution.”* [Macedonian from Bitola]

#### *Self-interest: The Priority*

- *“They have lied to the people. They have privatized everything, the companies, putting big money into their own or the parties’ pockets.”* [Macedonian from Skopje]
- *“They are doing everything else, except the thing they should do. They are not working as a Parliament and they are not resolving the problems of the state. They are solving their own problems as M.P.’s”* [Macedonian from Bitola]
- *“We have trusted them for a long time, but now they have failed our interests, they failed our trust.”* [Albanian from Skopje]

#### *Internal Party Politics*

- Leaders are seen as pursuing their own self-interests rather than those of the people.
  - *“The politicians should turn back again, face the people. Face the problems of the people and bring some opportunities here.”* [Macedonian from Bitola]
  - *“The political party actually does not solve your problems, my problems or the society’s problems. All they want is the government and the position.”* [Albanian from Tetovo]

### *Lack of Professionalism*

- The government is seen as lacking the professionals or experts necessary to address the problems of the country because of the reliance on the party affiliation over merit.
  - *"Our politicians are acting highly unserious. They are passing decisions that are not in compliance with the wishes of the people...We need to find the professionals, MP professionals and the MP are not professionals." [Macedonian from Bitola]*
  - *"I would gather an expert government. Experts in economy, politics, social life, education." [Albanian from Skopje]*
  - *"I would take ministers that are experts, I wouldn't see whether they're members of the other parties, which parties, what nationalities they belong. I would only see their devotion for helping this government." [Albanian from Tetovo]*
  - *"I would try to improve the quality of the Ministries. I would find qualified people for every Ministry." [Macedonian from Tetovo]*