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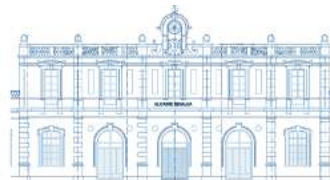
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## Welcome Words

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Miguel Oliveros  
(General Director, *Casa Mediterráneo*)

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When the persons responsible for *Balkania* journal contacted *Casa Mediterráneo*, proposing a collaboration to publish and distribute this academic project, the institution welcomed it and showed its support without hesitation.

The reasons are various and of different nature. Casa Mediterráneo is part of the network of *Houses* of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) as a tool for the implementation of public diplomacy, the one that makes civil society one of the participants in international relations. The academic world is undoubtedly an example of this civil society to which public diplomacy directs its attention. In the same way, the activities of this *Casa* cover the Euro-Mediterranean area and, since its establishment in 2009, it has shown great interest in the Balkans. Another reason is the fact that this journal has been previously published by the Embassy of Spain in Belgrade. In this sense, the vision of the diplomat Javier Hergueta, then second ranking officer in Spanish diplomatic corps was decisive for the promotion of the collaboration of this academic project with Spanish public institutions. Finally, this collaboration acquires great value for this *Casa* since it accesses the contents of the previous copies of *Balkania*, for the undoubted quality of its socio-political studies and relevant intellectual category of its writers. For all of the above, *Casa Mediterráneo* is excited to start this collaboration with the journal, participating in the publication, distribution and presentation of this seventh issue. For those interested in getting to know *Casa Mediterráneo* better, I invite you to visit our website: <http://casa-mediterraneo.es/>.

I would like to congratulate the publisher of *Balkania*, Miguel Rodríguez Andreu, for the effort and determination demonstrated by publication of each issue of the journal. In doing so, he contributes, in an excellent and invaluable way, to cover a space of the Balkan studies by Spain, which deserves the greatest recognition, recognition I extend to Javier Hergueta, for his exceptional political, academic and cultural vision of this project, and Carlos Flores Juberías, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Macedonia in the Valencian Community, for his interest in the continuation of the same. Likewise, Casa Mediterráneo appreciates the unselfish efforts of the translators of this bilingual edition and, of course, the help of the MAEC and the Spanish Embassies in Belgrade, Skopje and Athens.

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## By Way of Presentation: Macedonia, 1991-2016: A Quarter Century at Issue

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Carlos Flores Juberías & Miguel Rodríguez Andreu  
(editors of the volume)

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On 8 September, the Republic of Macedonia celebrated its first twenty-five years as an independent state, evoking the historic day of autumn 1991 when more than 95% of its citizens voted in favor of its peaceful and democratic emancipation from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that had already started to break apart.

For most of the last quarter century, Macedonia has managed to live and grow, as a society and as a state, virtually apart from current news trends. This is an achievement that is no small feat if we take into account its geographic location –in the very heart of a peninsula whose name has become synonymous with division and confrontation– and the signs of the times into which it was born, alternatively dominated either by fratricidal confrontations or by the embers of authoritarianism, or by both at the same time.

That healthy departure from what was regularly seen in the media broke down temporarily in February 2001, when the prophecy that Milcho Manchevski had sketched years prior in his film *Before the Rain* transcended the screens to become a reality. The only republic that until then had escaped unscathed from the bloody process of dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, channeling in a peaceful way – though not free of tension– the ever complex relations between its two main ethnic communities and turning its political institutions into a useful forum for dialogue, was for a moment on the verge of slipping through a spiral of violence similar to that which had already truncated the hopes for the future of several of its neighbours. But fortunately, an international community that had already learned from

its mistakes in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, and a political elite that was able to embrace pragmatism and regain the capacity for dialogue just as the abyss began to open beneath its feet allowed for a healthy return to normality and informational anonymity.

And again –although this time for a much happier reason– this distancing from the media outlets was momentarily interrupted in December 2005, when the European Council meeting in Brussels agreed to grant Macedonia the status of candidate country, expressly mentioning the progress made in the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which sought to avoid the danger of a new inter-ethnic conflict, and its willingness to advance in the reform of its political system and in the modernization of its economic model. Macedonia thus placed itself at the forefront of the race for European accession –Croatia aside with a notable advantage over the rest of the states of the region– and seemed to ward off the danger of international isolation that had been haunting it practically from the moment of its birth as a state.

Unfortunately, this healthy departure from the spotlight which –with the two exceptions we have mentioned, and perhaps a few more– has been enjoyed Macedonia in its recent history, is now a thing of the past. And so it is that for a time –and perhaps at the same rate with which the attention of Western European media began to forget about Bosnia and Herzegovina and its fragile inter-ethnic balance, Albania and its acute internal fractures, Montenegro and its everlasting problem with corruption, Serbia and its never-dubbed nationalism, Kosovo and its still pending international recognition, or that of Greece and its critical economic situation– media attention has been increasingly focused on a Macedonia involved in a kind of "perfect storm" that has shaken the country to the very foundation of its constitutional framework and which has made Winston Churchill's phrase about the Balkans and history famous once again.

Indeed, the last three years of Macedonian political life could be described in any way except by the adjective "quiet". First, the scandal of illegal eavesdropping revealed by the leader of the main opposition party; then, the massive demonstrations –from one side or another– that paralyzed life and tightened the political relations of the country for most of 2015 and 2016; thirdly, the forced resignation of



the prime minister and the need to prepare for –and then postpone twice– parliamentary elections; and, finally, the complex situation generated by the uncertain outcome of the 11 December 2016 elections. And this is without even mentioning the serious refugee crisis, especially acute in the summer of 2015, which tested Macedonia's capacity to cooperate effectively with its neighbors and pushed its own crisis management capabilities to the limit.

And all of this, unfortunately, without other chronic problems disappearing from the political scene of a country in which unemployment remains a structural problem, corruption an endemic evil, Euro-Atlantic integration an increasingly remote ideal, the interethnic coexistence a daily challenge, and the question of the name a frozen dispute.

Thus, the decision to dedicate a monographic issue of *Balkania* to Macedonia was both simple and complex. Simple because we were perfectly aware of the interest that the country has been arousing among both the small community of Balkan scholars and the larger one of those interested in the future of Europe, which guaranteed a good dose of attention to our project; but complex, as much as it was difficult to keep the balance between the analysis of structural and short-term problems and, above all, to keep it at the level of documented criticism which is characteristic of scientific journals, equally distant from an hagiography as from the indiscriminate attack.

The result of this ambition and these *caveats* is what the reader will be able to find in the following pages: a volume we consider to be timely, balanced, reasoned, critical, and rigorous. A volume that we wanted to serve as a meeting place –firstly– for some of the most prestigious, and several of the most promising, Macedonian political scientists such as Irina Chudoska Blazhevska, Zhidas Daskalovski, Ljubomir Frčkoski, Loreta Giorgievska, Nano Ružin, and Andreja Stojkovski; on the other hand, for some of the Spanish Balkanists who have more frequently been paying attention to Macedonia, such as Diego Checa, Jesús Nieto, and those who subscribe this introduction; and, finally, for some other European researchers who have also been moved to pay their attention to this small country in the heart of the Balkans, of which Nora Repo and Max J. Wahlström

from Finland are excellent examples. This is a volume, lastly, that has also tried to maintain the balance between the issues that always appear on the table when it comes to Macedonia –interethnic relations, the problem of identity, the Damocles' sword of violence, et al– contrasted with issues that only recently have had a genuine emergence –such as corruption, populism, immigration, and social mobilization– thus composing a reasonably complete mosaic of works capable of providing a multidimensional image of this complex country, in this complex geographical context, and in this complex historical conjuncture.

Ultimately, this presentation could not conclude without some words that should serve to specify and explain a fact that the attentive reader will no doubt have noticed: that as of this number, *Balkania* is no longer under the umbrella of the Spanish Embassy in Belgrade but rather (and hopefully for many years in the future) under that of *Casa Mediterráneo*, an initiative of the Government of Spain, along with the *Generalitat Valenciana* and the local governments of Alicante and Benidorm, which is oriented to political and economic cooperation, intercultural dialogue, mutual knowledge and the strengthening of ties between the civil societies of Spain and other Mediterranean countries. Their warm welcome will allow us to contribute to this public diplomacy effort by encouraging the knowledge of this small but important corner of the Mediterranean that are the Balkans, making more visible in them the presence and the interest of Spain, in what we are sure is called to be a mutually beneficial partnership. Of which, this volume is, of course, only the first installment.





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**Nora Repo** (Helsinki, 1977) is a project coordinator for the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives - CESCO Balkans. She is PhD in Comparative Religion from Åbo Akademi University (Finland). She has focused on Albanian women and Islam in the Balkans, especially in the Macedonian context. Her current research interests comprise religion and gender, feminism in Islam, interfaith

dialogue and peacebuilding, the Balkans as a cultural area, and victimology of Balkan Muslim populations, and has additionally written different types of articles about these themes. Repo works as a project coordinator developing projects with themes such as interfaith dialogue, gender equality and migration in the Balkans. In Finland, Repo has been active in ecumenical and interreligious initiatives already longer than a decade and has cooperated closely with the Finnish Ecumenical Council. She is also lecturer and independent writer.

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# Interreligious Distrust and Reconciliation in the Western Balkans: The Republic of Macedonia as a Case Study<sup>1</sup>

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Nora Repo

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**Abstract.** In the Western Balkans, particularly in the area that once formed one country, Yugoslavia, processes of peacebuilding and mediation, reconciliation and recovery are still topical when attention is directed to interethnic and interreligious relations. The Republic of Macedonia is an excellent example of multicultural society *à la balkanique*. That is, multiculturalism, multiethnicity and multiconfessionalism remain among the most relevant challenges for the development of the society and they are widely instrumentalized for instance for political purposes. This article discusses the current situation particularly from an interreligious point of view and ponders on how interreligious dialogue initiatives could contribute to transformation of the Macedonian society into a more harmonious and stable entity.

**Keywords:** The Balkans, Republic of Macedonia, interreligious dialogue, reconciliation, distrust

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<sup>1</sup> For enlightening comments to the text, I would like to thank journalist and Bachelor of Arts Çasip Kamishi.

## 1. Introduction

Our world goes currently through a particularly tumultuous period. For some South-Eastern European countries, chaotic times are also part of more recent history. In the Western Balkans, particularly in the area that once formed one country, Yugoslavia, processes of peacebuilding and mediation, reconciliation and recovery are still topical when interethnic and interreligious relations are observed. Peace in the Balkans is inevitably existing, but fragile. And antagonisms, threat images and stereotypes of different varieties still very alive. Facts of which we have seen symptoms for example in 2015, when violent incidents involving interethnic and interreligious dimensions broke out in the city of Kumanovo (the Republic of Macedonia) and in Potočari, in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>2</sup> (see Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016; Repo, 2016). These tendencies to provoke antagonisms are visible in the politics and in the ways media voices certain topics in different Balkan states. Thus, even though different ethnic and religious groups would live together in close proximity, they are inclined to maintain their cultural and structural differences and the boundaries dividing the groups. Hence, living together does not necessarily mean "a positive valorization of pluralism", but rather "an antagonistic tolerance" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 40).

Ina Merdjanova defines interreligious dialogue (IRD) narrowly as "human communication between religious leaders for the primary purpose of clarifying theological/philosophical similarities and differences". But while being observed from a wider angle it includes "all forms of human communication both through speech and shared activities that help mutual understanding and cooperation between people who self-identify religiously" (Merdjanova, 2016: 27). This process is much more comprehensive than discussions that have purely theological dimensions and when used for the purpose of peace-building its goal is social change. IRD includes in addition to verbal communication, also "a shared action in the pursuit of

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<sup>2</sup> That is, my aim is not to discuss here what precisely happened and why in both cases, but to point out that interethnic and interreligious elements were consciously used in the purpose of increasing antagonisms between groups of people, when these conflicts were discussed, especially in the local media.

common needs, in which people engage across religious and ideological boundaries" and it aims, besides post-conflict mediation and reconstruction, also to inhibit possible conflicts in the future (Merdjanova, 2016: 30).

According to Merdjanova's understanding, peacebuilding comprises of "all social mechanisms a society develops in order to promote greater understanding and cooperation towards peace". When interreligious dialogue is involved in peacebuilding it is fundamentally based on three principles; self-conscious engagement, self-critical attitude and realistic expectations in relation to the long-term dialogue process.<sup>3</sup> Supported by diverse forms of interreligious dialogue initiatives, the peacebuilding proceedings can lead to promotion of "an ethos of tolerance, non-violence, and trust" (Merdjanova, 2016: 28). Merdjanova thinks that this approach can be especially influential if it serves of a variety of tools; a top-down approach to the issue put together with grassroots activities between mid-level clergy and laymen from diverse religious communities (1). These processes should also involve and include a large variety of groups (2), such as majorities, minorities, refugees, women and youth (Merdjanova, 2016; Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 126-127).

Furthermore, one should be aware of the length and laborious nature of the process without being pessimistic (3), but also cautious of being too optimistic and expect quick results (4). Context-sensitive local ways of functioning as for intercommunity interaction should be taken better into account while engaging into interreligious dialogue initiatives (5). There should also be a better understanding of the role of religion in the local context, which is different in each Balkan country (6) and one should avoid interdependency dominated and patronizing relations between foreign NGOs and local NGOs (7). International actors and donors should shun from essentializing local ethnic and religious identities, and local people and organizations should avoid doing the same to the identities of foreigners and international organizations (8) (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 126-128). In order to support the process of interreligious dialogue, international organizations, governmental actors and media should preferably be provided with policy recommendations, and it should

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<sup>3</sup> Awareness of own biases and limitations (Merdjanova, 2016: 28).

also involve post-conflict psychological healthcare, as there is a lot of people who have been personally exposed to the recent conflicts and suffer of post-traumatic stress in diverse ways (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 127-128).

## 2. A State with many identities

*"Freedom from fear could be said  
to sum up the whole philosophy of  
human rights"*

Dag Hammarskjöld

Muslim populations often seem to be in a particularly central position when the conflicts that have occurred during the last two centuries on the Balkan Peninsula are examined closer (Elbasani, 2015: 6). In the Republic of Macedonia, the last larger armed conflict dates from 2001 and it culminated around antagonisms between the two biggest ethnic groups of the country; Macedonians and Albanians. These groups represent respectively mainly two different religions, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, but questions of belonging are much more complex than that. In the Republic of Macedonia, one third of the population confesses Islamic faith. Of a population of 2 022 547 (census 2002)<sup>4</sup> this means around 607 000 persons. Muslims speak diverse mother tongues (Albanian 70%, Bosnian 2.5%, Macedonian<sup>5</sup> 10%, Romani 8% and Turkish 12%)<sup>6</sup> (see Bougarel & Clayer, 2001), but Albanian-speaking population forms a clear majority and 25% of the entire population in the country.

Most of the Macedonian citizens are Macedonian-speakers (64.18%) and Orthodox Christians (64.78%). Among Orthodox Christians can

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<sup>4</sup> There are opinions according to which the statistics used in this census could be more accurate.

<sup>5</sup> When referring to this group also the notion Torbeši can be used, but it can have a negative connotation.

<sup>6</sup> Percentages are approximate and there are diverse opinions on how accurate they are.



however also be counted representatives of other ethnic groups (e.g. Albanians, Serbs and Vlachs). Additionally, there are smaller religious communities such as Roman Catholics (7008), Protestants (520) and Jews (approximately 250–300 persons). Furthermore, other religious bodies, which have often been rather recently established, exist. In 2015, the Republic of Macedonia had 30 registered religious organisations, which all in all consisted of 15 churches, 7 religious communities and 8 religious groups (U.S. Department of State, 2015). Of these the two biggest ones are the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community, and members of other groups represent approximately 2–3% of the population. These two largest communities and three others; the Catholic Church, Methodist Evangelical Church and Jewish Community, possess a recognized status mentioned separately in the constitution. This status is usually justified by the historically long presence of these particular communities in the country.

The Republic of Macedonia is a very good example of multiculturalism *à la balkanique*. That is, multiculturalism, multiethnicity and multiconfessionalism remain among the most relevant challenges for the development of the society and they are widely instrumentalized for example for the political purposes. That is, authoritarian measures, some speak of *Soft-Putinism* ("a populist rule with a democratic facade which serves to give it legitimacy for its authoritarian policies") (see Krstić, 2016), used in governance have purposefully enlarged cleavages between different societal groups and many times served of infected relations between them. Political elites are using ethnic tensions in order to turn the attention away from other issues, such as corruption and abuse of positions of power (Clapp, 2016). Furthermore, societal criticism is silenced, the state structures have not been properly separated from the ruling political party and state's resources are served for ideological purposes (Musai, 2016).

As the political situation has lately taken turns into more chaotic, also the European Union's inert attitude towards the problems of the country has been criticized. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was forced to resign in 2015, but the European Union has often considered that the Macedonian citizens should themselves stabilize

the situation in the country, and fix its fragile democratic system (Clapp, 2016). However, the current circumstances in the Republic of Macedonia are a result of a much longer development in course of which the European Union has tended to show rather laissez-faire stance. Thus, "[i]n preferring stability over democracy in the Republic of Macedonia, the EU today has neither", as Alexander Clapp (2016) states.

Both ethnic and religious identities of the largest Slavic population inhabiting today the Republic of Macedonia (also known geographically as Vardar Macedonia) have experienced repressive measures in the course of history. Macedonians find themselves in the crossroads of particularly three actors, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, which all have claimed their rights over certain cultural issues or territories of the contemporary state. Macedonians became officially recognized as a nation in the early years of the socialist Yugoslavia, but still struggle politically as for the recognition to the language they speak (cf. Bulgaria), religion they confess (cf. Serbia), and certain place names, interpretation of history and cultural features (cf. Greece, but also Bulgaria and Serbia). Albanians were among the largest officially recognized nationalities in the socialist Yugoslavia, but have often experienced, even in the independent Republic of Macedonia, that their cultural and other rights have not been executed to the full extent. Additionally, other minorities have struggled in order to be recognized and taken into account in the legislation and administrative bodies of the country. The socialist system was repressive against religious identities, but generally tended to support the cultural identities of different groups.

The most important relational tensions are those between the Macedonian and Albanian populations. Ethnic antagonisms find support additionally in the religious differences between the groups. Ulf Brunnbauer considers that this ethnic and religious divide can be observed in a historical continuum and one can see that the Macedonian-speaking population tended to urbanize more quickly than the Albanians, and this development has had social, economic and cultural consequences later on. Rural lifestyles have had an impact on marginalization of the Albanians on the labour market, retention of patriarchal values and as there has been a lack of trust in institutions, family relations gained more importance (Brunnbauer,

2002: 14-15). However, one can detect similar developments also among Macedonians, and other Balkan populations. Many claim that ethnic Macedonians should acknowledge that there is and has been structural discrimination against Albanians. Improvements have occurred with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement after the armed conflict in 2001, but its reforms might have also served for institutionalisation of ethnic divisions (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016).

Since the independency in 1991, Macedonian political life has been marked by clientelism and community-based politics (Ragaru, 2008: 48), and this has influenced the trust structures in the country. In recent years, the Macedonian ruling political elite has also in an accentuated manner instrumentalized identity politics in order to maintain power. One example of this is the policy of *antikvizacija*, or antiquization, which makes a reference to a Greek imperial past of the Macedonian population instead of the antifascist mythology of Yugoslav Macedonia or a Slavic Orthodox identity (Clapp, 2016). Diverse developments have led into a situation in which Macedonians and Albanians have a limited interaction and keep to themselves, live in different parts of the country and even in the different blocks within cities (see Brunnbauer, 2002; Clapp, 2016).

As examples that demonstrate the current situation, one can observe that these two populations frequent different schools and universities, follow different media and support different (ethnically oriented) political parties. Furthermore, friendships and marriages between people belonging to different groups are modest in number and suffer of important social pressure. Also, the interpretations of historical events differ from the chosen national or ethnic angle. It seems that the line between national or ethnic and religious hate grows thinner and thinner, and it becomes more and more challenging to distinguish politically and ideologically motivated, national(ist/ic) and religious identities from one another. All these issues disadvantage the casual interaction between the groups, and as Taleski and Pollozhani point out: "Separate public spaces, and separate virtual and media spaces, are the greatest threat to equal participation in public life" (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016).

### 3. Interreligious tumult

*"The truth was a mirror in the  
hands of God. It fell, and broke  
into pieces.*

*Everybody took a piece of it, and  
they looked at it and thought they  
had the truth"*

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

The link between nation and religion became more emphasized in the course of nation-building projects of the new independent Balkan states that emerged from the Ottoman Empire. Since 1918, ethnic and religious associations induced more divisions in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and turned out to be an unparalleled origin of rivalry and antagonisms especially in the course of the Second World War. In Tito's socialist Yugoslavia, one managed to suppress interethnic tensions and conflicts, but they were not fundamentally resolved (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 41). Religion has become progressively politicized in the Western Balkans since the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed it in the early 1990s. It also occurred that religious officials tended to condemn the brutalities and war crimes committed by the representatives of other group(s), but did not publicly judge those committed by the members of their own group (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 46-47). Furthermore, "the victimization paradigm [of each national and/or religious group] occupied a central place. All sides resorted to commemorating selected past events that held great symbolic value and would reverberate in the mass consciousness. Shrines, pilgrimages, relics and martyrs were effectively used" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 70).

The conflict between Albanians and Macedonians that ended 2001 harmed severely the interreligious relations and increased religious intolerance in the Republic of Macedonia. After the conflict a willingness to build an interreligious structure became more

accentuated, and led into establishment of the new body known as the Council of Interreligious Cooperation (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 69-70). Furthermore, the religious leadership of the country showed interest in promoting interreligious dialogue on all levels. Priority was put on the grassroots-top approach. The cooperation comprised of issues related to religious education, property restitution, drafting the law on religion and inclusion of the faculties, Islamic and Orthodox, into the state university system. The most important activities were yearly public meetings of religious leaders with rotation of the hosting community, and theological conferences (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 70).

Both of the largest religious communities in the country, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community, struggle with intrareligious tensions. The Macedonian Orthodox Church remains isolated from the Orthodox world, as the Serbian Orthodox Church has not recognized its autocephaly declared in 1967. Additionally, there have been heavy disagreements about the right of the Serbian Orthodox Church to establish a parish in the country. The Islamic Religious Community is challenged by dissatisfaction of its minority groups (both linguistic and dogmatic), infiltration attempts of the radical Islamist groups, but also by growing islamophobia that finds support for example in the concept of global war on terror. The territory of the Republic of Macedonia has an old presence of Sufi brotherhoods (e.g. Bektashi, Halveti, Rufai and Sadi), and ever since liberation of religious life more radical interpretations of Islam have also become more visible in the country. Additionally, Roma population has established their own Sufi community. These problems of cohesion seem to have brought the Islamic Religious Community and the Macedonian Orthodox Church closer to one another in order to find support in their common projects as for religious education and property restitution, for instance. They also both remain rather open to the ideas of interreligious dialogue (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 58 and 71; Nora, 2012).

The use and the visibility of religious premises, and even religious symbols, are ways in which one tends to aim to mark territory to be the possession or under the influence of certain group. Ever since the collapse of socialism, one can witness reintroduction in use of

religious premises in the Western Balkans. In the Republic of Macedonia this has meant that one has started to use the old premises, but also that there are tensions between the state and religious groups concerning the restitution of the property that was earlier nationalized by the state. Also, completely new premises are being built with finances from different, also foreign, sources, and there are ongoing disagreements, for instance within the Muslim community, regarding that who is entitled to use certain Islamic premises.

These aims to mark territory seem also to be a part of the project *Skopje 2014*, which during the past years has filled the centre of Macedonian capital with statues, monuments, bridges and buildings (see Clapp, 2016; Krstić, 2016). These types of historical monuments and constructions, which make a clear and direct reference to the past of certain group of people and not so much to the others, tend to ethnicize and religionize public space, which should be shared by all citizens. In sum, one should of course not feel culturally limited as for expressing one's ethnic or religious identity, but it would be wise to draw lines between constructively rebuilding dilapidated and desperately needed infrastructure, facilitation of casual religious practice, and provocation.

In the Republic of Macedonia, the common civic identity of the citizens remains very weak and each and every group seems to struggle in order to obtain a fully recognized status within society. Maintaining the relations between the groups infected or instable frequently serves political aims (*divide et impera*) and is orchestrated for example by irresponsible mediatisation and a lack of freedom of speech. Problems are created, and interethnic and interreligious antagonisms provoked often very intentionally. Nadège Ragaru estimates that interethnic relations are "held hostage" (Ragaru, 2008) by the local politics, and similar to what Nebojša Šavija-Valha and Elvir Šahić point out in Bosnia and Herzegovina: "maintaining status quo is a vital interest of ethno-politics" (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 41).

That is, gaps of communication and distrust between different societal groups are results of diverse factors fuelled for example by recent conflicts, local politics, by differing interpretations of history and a lack of freedom of speech, but in the Republic of Macedonia,

similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it "is also permanently reproduced by internal group pressure against interethnic communication and cooperation" (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 40). Thus, these antagonisms are also maintained by ordinary people. Language and religion are often such signs of belonging that they are very emotionally-tied and that is why they can be without greater difficulties efficiently instrumentalized, if one wishes to provoke antagonisms. Fertile ground for provocation offer also difficult financial and political conditions, in which different groups may even end up in mutual competition positions regionally or locally. These tensions can furthermore be facilitated by inaccurate and sensational political and historical "facts" offered to people frequently by local media.

Lately religion seems also to have gained visibility in certain political contexts, and there have even been claims that the religious communities are involved in politics. That is, the situation is getting more and more complex, and it becomes harder to distinguish, what is the motivation behind certain action. On one hand, there is also an ongoing process of secularization, but on the other it seems that people's ideological minds may be easily changed, if it represents itself profitable. That is, what might seem religious, might actually not be that. In all religious groups, more extreme interpretations of doctrine tend to increase, which for their part add on the intern dispersion within the groups, but also on the cleavages between them.

Probably the most worrying symptoms of all these issues, are the opinions of youth, which often have a tendency to become less open-minded and rigid as for the perceptions the youth has of the representatives of other groups. Lack of thorough education in one's own religion may also leave the tie to one's religious tradition rather superficial and therefore fragile, and exposed to manipulative distortions. One example how divisions in the society are maintained are ethnically rather divided schools and universities. It is of course of utmost necessity that pupils and students get to study in their own mother tongue, however concrete contacts with members of other groups should be assured. If young people are prohibited from casual contacts with people from other ethnic and religious communities, they very likely are to repeat communitarian behaviour, which does

not aim at natural openness and cooperation with other societal groups.

One factor is also the important diaspora of Balkan populations. Living in diaspora may render one's attitude towards one's ethnic or religious belonging more nostalgic, and one may idealize it without valid grounds, as one is factually living outside the borders of the country. Also, if one is lacking proper in-depth education in one's own language or religion, while living abroad, or even in the country itself, these identities, ethnic and religious, might remain relatively superficial, and be more emphasized as being about belonging to certain group than anything else. Once returning to visit the country, the ideas of what one's ethnic or religious belonging really stands for may be relatively detached from the reality, and even more extreme than the thoughts of those actually constantly living there.

The general atmosphere in the society challenges interreligious relations. As there is an important lack of trust in governmental and administrative structures for instance due to corruption, abuse of power and decreasing freedom of speech, it reflects also to relations between people, which can have tendency of becoming distrustful. If there is no togetherness felt or a slight mutual trust on fellow citizens, it is rather impossible to try to change anything fundamental in the society.

#### **4. Interreligious initiatives and peacebuilding; from antagonisms to dialogue**

*"Remembrance is a form of  
meeting. Forgetfulness is a form of  
freedom"*

Khalil Gibran

While observing the interethnic and interreligious relations in the Republic of Macedonia, the dilemmas of remembering and forgetting, and the balance between them, occupy a central position. As David Rieff brilliantly formulates; forgetting can do injustice to the past, but



remembering may do so to the present. He suggests that instead "[o]n such occasions, when collective memory condemns communities to feel the pain of their historical wounds and the bitterness of their historical grievances it is not the duty to remember but a duty to forget that should be honoured." Situation is, nonetheless, not as simple and categorical as this, and neither are the answers. Rieff considers however that even though remembrance may insure that justice happens, it does not necessarily mean that this action will maintain peace. Forgetting on the other hand might support peace processes better. Rieff's idea is not to be completely without memory, but to avoid excess in both; remembering and forgetting. As, "[c]ollective historical memory is no respecter of the past and it usually aims at promoting national unity regardless of the geographical context". (Rieff, 2016)

When one aims at resolving a conflict, one can basically choose of six methods; (1) escaping from the situation, (2) fighting, (3) giving up, (4) avoiding responsibility, (5) aiming at compromise and (6) reaching for consensus. Each of these methods will lead to different results. Escaping from the situation will lead to the loss of both parties, as the conflict remains unsolved (lose/lose). Fighting leads to victory of one, and loss of the other, and a similar is the situation if one party decides to give up (win/lose). If one avoids taking responsibility over the situation, all parties lose (lose/lose). If one compromises, each party must give up something, but they will also benefit of the situation (win-lose/win-lose). Finally, if a consensus is reached, everybody wins (win/win). Three first options are mainly motivated by emotional reactions, while three latter are more rational (Krogerus & Tschäppler, 2011: 36-39).

While observing the situation in the Western Balkans, it is frequently flagrant that of these methods of conflict resolution, one tends to serve the most of avoiding the responsibility. And the consequences can often be perceived without difficulties, a stagnant conflict, which can be flamed up easily. As all parties are avoiding taking responsibility, they also all lose. Similar to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the tense relations are especially the interethnic ones in the Republic of Macedonia, reinforced by the interreligious elements. That is why, as Šavija-Valha and Šahić point out, the task of peacebuilding should aim actually to two goals: reconciliation and

transition. Thus, "it is a process of reconciliation understood as redefinition –transformation of antagonistic ethnic relations at all levels into productive, democratic and political relationships". (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 19)

Even though there have been many initiatives that have aimed, and aim, at transforming ethnic and interreligious relations in the Balkans, their motivations have often been more oriented to fulfilling the requirements of the donors, emphasizing the need of immediate action without deeper analyses and not serving of research already conducted. Thus, they are not fully and mainly serving for transforming the living circumstances of those benefitting from the project or program (see Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 21 and 23). As Šavija-Valha and Šahić conclude: "[I]t is rather oriented towards predefined terms of references from donors' agendas, searching for appropriate findings in the field, then otherwise, which would be transferring the findings into meaningful action not prescribed by donors. So, regardless of available data and knowledge, most of the actions take place in certain *anthropological ignorance*". (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 23)

Thus, as Merdjanova and Brodeur also mentioned, being well informed about the local context and local society and all its complexity are vital elements for successful interreligious dialogue in the purpose of peacebuilding in the Republic of Macedonia. Important would be also to acknowledge that one speaks about a long-term process that should involve the whole society in a multi-layered manner. Furthermore, the actions taken should first and foremost serve the local populations and groups, not the purposes of creating some kinds of matrix for projects financially or/and politically beneficial for those executing them.

Another model that offers a perspective to the interreligious relations in the Republic of Macedonia could be Karpman Drama Triangle that has been developed to structure different roles taken by actors in a transactional conflict situation. Steven B. Karpman suggests that people alternately adapt to three roles of *persecutor*, *rescuer* and *victim* in this interplay, and if this triangle is not escaped from, one escalates the conflict instead of trying to resolve it (Karpman, 2015). Usually this model is implemented in the circumstances, which

involve two or more persons. However, I would suggest that in the context of the Western Balkans, and that of the Republic of Macedonia, this triangle becomes visible also in the collective behaviour and/or memory of nations. The role of *victim* is usually visible when one speaks about the recent conflicts or historical events, and victimization of one nation often is represented in relation to closest neighbouring nations. Nation turns into a *rescuer* for instance when it has defended some territory, helped others or when it compares its actions *vis-à-vis* those conducted by other nations, and considers to have been more successful or better than others. *Persecutor* is the role when the blame is directed totally to the others and in this sense the responsibility in certain situation is avoided (see Karpman, 2015). These roles depend on one another and different actors taking part in this "role-playing" change their positions in the course of it. However, the conflict cannot be resolved before one is able to step outside the Drama Triangle.

Even though one cannot deny that there obviously are differences between ethnic groups in the Republic of Macedonia, such as mother tongues spoken and religions practiced, one should also be aware that the divisions are often instrumentalized for ethno-national(ist/ic) purposes for instance by political players, media and internal group pressure (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016). While aiming to find solutions to the tense relations between different groups, the complexity of the situation and the context and the interdependence of diverse factors it consists of should be taken into account (see Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 44). Merdjanova thinks that transformation towards a positive social change through interreligious dialogue processes can become possible only when methods used for exclusion and subordination are revealed and fought back. That is, "IRDPB [interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding] needs to articulate and act upon visions of peace and politics that critique unequal and unjust structures of power, address social grievances, oppose gender inequalities, and advance inclusive and active citizenship beyond religious, ethno-nationalist and other identitarian boundaries". (Merdjanova, 2016: 33)

This would also mean that how memories of the past are dealt with should be transformed in such a manner that the old wounds would not be served of as weapons against the neighbours. For ethnic and religious groups in the Republic of Macedonia this represents a real

challenge, as there are clear indications that most of them have an experience of living under acute existential threat of some kind. However, sometimes the ability to try to forget and let the life go on can be more precious and constructive than remain clinging in the processes of mourning, how necessary and important they might be (Rieff, 2006).

Other summons for the process represent impunity and irresponsibility, as the general atmosphere and ways of functioning of the Macedonian society are strongly influenced by these. When one is not necessarily punished for one's actions when needed, or is punished too severely, general willingness of not being responsible, if possible, prevails. This is strengthened by the general distrust in the governmental and administrative structures, which often enjoy impunity no matter what they do. Irresponsibility and subjectivity are also implemented in the processes of interpreting history usually to the benefit of one's own group of reference. Thus, the collective behaviour and collective memory frequently tend to remain within Karpman Drama Triangle, and in the roles of victim, persecutor and rescuer, and, hence, maintain conflict as finding solutions to the situation are not anymore in the focus, but emotional drama is. Additionally, one should promote other means of conflict resolution than avoiding responsibility, as it does not serve any of the parties involved (lose/lose).

## **5. Conclusions**

In sum, in order to be efficient, interreligious dialogue initiatives for peacebuilding in the Republic of Macedonia would need to be multi-layered and involve the whole society in the process, as in the end they serve the interests of all while aiming to peacebuilding and stability. In order to be successful, beneficiaries would need to frequent members of other groups, to be provided with accurate information about both regional historical events and other communities, and they should aim at detaching their own personal memories from collective memories, and, if possible, not to let the general frustrations and emotional interpretations influence the interreligious dialogue processes. Precondition for dialogue is also

sufficient knowledge concerning one's own cultural background, so that differences and similarities between the communities could become more easily structured. Also, it would be recommendable that the dialogue process takes regional dimensions in order to achieve better and more stable results in the Balkans (ver Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009). That is, we speak about a complex process, which endures in time, but there are many things that could be done in order to transform the prevailing circumstances. Hence, there is hope, so one only would need to add will.

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**Max Wahlström** (Helsinki, 1982) holds a PhD in linguistics and Slavic studies, received in 2015 from the University of Helsinki. In addition to Helsinki, he has worked as a visiting scholar in the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the University of Zürich. Wahlström's research involves a number of topics in Balkan and Slavic linguistics and linguistic

typology. In 2016, he was awarded the Kone Foundation post doctoral grant for a research project titled "Argument marking, referentiality and information structure in Balkan Slavic Area and typological perspectives on language change". He has conducted field work in the Central Balkans and in Eastern Serbia. His further academic interests include the armed conflicts in the South-eastern Europe, development of the South Slavic literary languages and linguistic and ethnic minorities in the Balkans.



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# The Challenges Faced by Three Minority Communities in Albania, Greece and Macedonia

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Max Wahlström

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**Abstract.** This paper maps the realities faced by ethnic and linguistic minorities in Albania, Greece and Macedonia by concentrating on three minority communities, one in each country. The three groups in the focus are the Macedonians of the Albanian part of the Prespa region, the Orthodox Slavic minority of Northern Greece, and the Muslims of Southeastern Macedonia. The study is based on a sociolinguistic study conducted in June 2015 in the tri-border area around the Lakes Ohrid and Prespa. Among the 53 informants interviewed, there were speakers of Albanian, Aromanian, Greek, Macedonian, Romani and Turkish. A key finding is that all the three communities suffer from either total or partial lack of recognition. In addition, it is argued that the often-reported historical multilingualism in the area is still observable, but limited only to the speakers of minority languages, contributing to the legitimation crisis of the mono-ethnic nationalisms. It is further observed that the transmission of the minority languages is often interrupted by mixed marriages with a speaker of the majority language, and while the informants did not consider the attitudes of the majority language speakers necessarily hostile, they often expressed their wish that the minority languages would be given a more central role in education.

**Keywords:** Macedonia, Greece, Albania, Slavs, multilingualism, linguistic area, minorities

## 1. Introduction

The tri-border area among Albania, Greece, and Macedonia in the Central Balkans has been historically characterized by widespread, mutual multilingualism across the various linguistic groups. This multilingualism has given rise to a linguistic contact phenomenon called Balkan sprachbund, whereby the Balkan languages are characterised by numerous converging linguistic phenomena (see, e.g. Friedman, 2012: 115-124). This article concentrates on one minority community in each country, seeks to identify and to compare the challenges that the speakers of minority languages face in the three countries. The study is based on interview material collected during field work around the Lakes Ohrid and Prespa in June 2015 in the three countries.<sup>1</sup>

The Central Balkans was the last part of Southeast Europe to be divided by state borders. This division, taking place in the early twentieth century after the final collapse of the Ottoman empire, meant that the members of various ethnic, religious and linguistic communities of the region became citizens of newly forged nation states, with only one ethnic group occupying an entitled majority status. In the Republic of Macedonia, which gained independence only in the early 90s, the Slavic Macedonians occupied a dominant position already in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, a constituent country of the former Yugoslavia.

This study concentrates on three communities, the Macedonians of the Prespa region in Albania, the contested group of Macedonians or *Dopii* in Greece, and the Muslims of Southern Macedonia. The

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<sup>1</sup> The data was collected during a field expedition of the Helsinki Areal and Language Studies (HALS) initiative of the University of Helsinki. In addition to the informants, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the other researchers taking part in the field excursion and data collection: Borče Arsov, Dušica Božović, Andrei Călin Dumitrescu, Pavel Falaleev, Paula Hämeen-Anttila, Jani Korhonen, Antti Olavi Laine, Jouko Lindstedt, Maxim Makartsev, Motoki Nomachi, Milica Petruševska, Justyna Pierżyńska, Kukka Pitkänen, Heini Puurunen, Elizabeta Ralpovska, Janne Saarikivi, Ksenia Shagal, Ljudmil Spasov, Johanna Virkkula and Chingduang Yurayong.

common nominator between these groups is that in their everyday interactions, in contrast with the members of the majority group in the country, the members of these minorities typically use more than one local language. The article is organised in the following way: In the next section data is presented. The subsequent three sections are each dedicated to one of the communities, followed by discussion together with concluding remarks.

## **2. Data**

The data for this study consist mostly of answers to a questionnaire, filled out as a part of semi-structured interviews, conducted in June 2015 in several communities in the tri-border region among Albania, Greece, and Macedonia. The data collection targeted speakers of more than one of the local languages, and the questionnaires were filled by the interviewer – with the exception of a handful of questionnaires that were filled out by the informants themselves with the guidance of the interviewer. During the interviews of a total of 129 informants, 58 questionnaires were filled. The analyses in this article are based on 53 completed questionnaires, five questionnaires being left out of the analysis because of missing data.

The background data collected for the informants included their age, sex, religion, nationality, residential history and family ties. The questionnaire targeted the situational choice of language in the everyday life of the informants. Also, open-ended questions were used to map the informants hopes and wishes regarding the status of their mothertongue in the society, especially in education, as well as outside attitudes towards their ethnic or linguistic group and community relations in general. The questionnaires were translated into Albanian, Greek, Macedonian and Turkish, and the interviews were mostly conducted in one of these languages, and in a few occasions, also in English. The language of the questionnaire and the language of the interview were not necessarily the same, depending on the wishes of the interviewee.

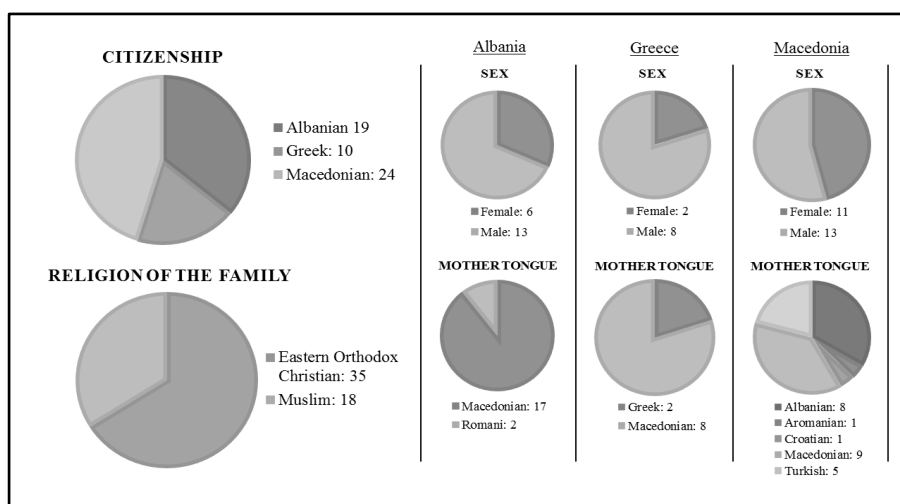
## THE LOCATIONS IN WHICH THE INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED



The informants were sampled purposively: they were recruited through pre-established contacts by our team members, and locations for interviews, not familiar to us, were chosen on the basis of earlier reports on multilingual speakers in the area. Also, in more than one occasion, new informants were found through referrals by previous informants.

While one of the key goals of the survey was to find speakers of minority languages, there was a fear that if the informants were given *a priori* minority labels, we may have missed individuals who do not consider themselves members of a linguistic minority, but who can still provide an important insight into the minority groups, whose self-identified members could tell only a part of the story. As hypothesised, multilingualism functioned as a very good proxy for reaching members of linguistic minorities or people with a minority language as a heritage language. In addition, this definition allowed us to reach members of contested or other than linguistic minorities.

## OVERVIEW OF INFORMANTS' BACKGROUND DATA<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> If the informant reported multiple *citizenships*, the citizenship shown in the chart represents the citizenship of the current country of residence. Twelve of the informants reported having a dual citizenship, eleven of whom had a dual Albanian-Macedonian citizenship, all coming from the same community of Macedonians, living in the Albanian part of the Prespa region. The choice of term *mother tongue* was practical: while ambiguous and often avoided in linguistic literature, it has a rather uniform everyday interpretation in translations into the languages of the questionnaire (Alb. *gjuhë amëtare*, Gr. *mitrikí glóssa*, Mac. *majčin jazik*, Tr. *anadil*) as the language of childhood that is learnt at home and that one is most fluent in. Although given the chance to explain their choices, all informants gave only one mother tongue. The number of informants in regard to their *year of birth* by decades was the following: 1930: 1, 1940: 5, 1950: 14, 1960: 11, 1970: 10, 1980: 6, 1990: 5.

Due to the nature of the sampling and the number of informants, divided into three countries, no real statistical inferences can be drawn. The independent variables – mother tongue, religion, ethnic self-identification, amongst others – pattern producing several unique combinations in the material. This is to say that, for example, while declaring Albanian as one's mother tongue in Macedonia overwhelmingly coincides with the person identifying as Muslim and Albanian as well, identifying oneself as a native speaker of Macedonian may still mean that the person is Muslim or identifies as Aromanian. Yet, what the sample used in this research allows us is to discover potential tendencies and recurring topics and contrast them with previous literature, and, in case of unexpected answers, to see whether these can be understood by contextualising them, for instance, by looking at the background data of the informant.

### **3. The Macedonians of the Prespa region in Albania**

The current official status of linguistic and ethnic minorities in Albania has its roots in the policies adopted in Socialist Albania. The regime, characterised by paranoia and isolation in regard to the neighbouring countries, recognised the existence of ethnic and linguistic minorities within the country, yet only part of minority communities received an official status and were granted, for instance, the right to receive education in their mother tongue. The Macedonians of Albania traditionally live in settlements around the Prespa Lakes and the city of Korça, including other areas bordering the Republic of Macedonia. During the socialist era, minority rights were granted only to the agrarian communities in and around the village of Pustec, on the shore of Lake Prespa, where the local population received part of their primary education in Macedonian. The number of Macedonians is highly contested: in the most recent census in 2011, only the inhabitants of the Pustec municipality had the choice of identifying themselves as Macedonians, denying the residents of such larger centres as the city of Korça this possibility.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on the problems regarding the census, see Korhonen, Makartsev, Petruševska & Spasov, 2016: 13–49, 15–16.

Thirteen interviews with a questionnaire were conducted in the village of Pustec with informants who all identified Macedonian language as their mother tongue and Macedonian as their ethnic identity, and who all were Eastern Orthodox Christians. Interestingly, all males interviewed, eight in total, had a dual Albanian-Macedonian citizenship, while the five women had only Albanian.<sup>4</sup> Also, the men interviewed had a more diverse residential history, some of them had also lived in the Republic of Macedonia, whereas the women interviewed had lived their entire lives only in the municipality. All of the interviewees had attended Macedonian language primary education, which for most informants continued exclusively in the Albanian language after the 4th grade. All interviewees used both Albanian and Macedonian in their daily interactions, however, the use of Albanian was limited only to encounters with Albanians, for instance, in the city of Korça. Only one of the interviewees, resident of Korça, reported occasionally also using Albanian with his own children, whereas all other informants with children told that they use exclusively Macedonian in their homes.

The community in Pustec appears linguistically and ethnically very homogenous, several informants mentioned also an Albanian medical doctor who practices in Pustec, but has learnt to speak Macedonian. Despite being all born in the Macedonian minority "enclave", recognised by the Albanian state, not all informants were permanent residents of the area anymore. The three informants from other parts of South-eastern Albania, interviewed during their visit to Pustec, all deplored the fact that Macedonian is not taught in schools outside the region, and some of them expressed also their wish that other services, such as medical care, should be available in Macedonian. While some informants were fine with Albanian being the language used in most private and public institutions in the country, all agreed

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<sup>4</sup> The willingness of the Republic of Macedonia to grant citizenship to Macedonians outside its borders has been recently connected to allegations of election fraud: the mayor of the Pustec municipality, Edmond Temelko, was briefly detained for hearing and subsequently released in February 2016 (Siniša-Jakov Marušić, *BalkanInsight*, 2016). The allegations of transporting the residents of Pustec and to register them as voters with addresses in Macedonia are connected to the larger political scandal in the Republic of Macedonia involving leaked recordings that are said to indicate the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party for various crimes.

upon the need to have Macedonian language as a school subject in primary education for the members of the Macedonian minority.<sup>5</sup>

Among the informants from Albania, there were also three other persons who identified themselves as Macedonians, two of whom had been born in Korça. Yet the parents of these two informants came from the Prespa region. Not surprisingly, these informants, born outside the region, expressed similar worries and wishes as the informants interviewed in Pustec. While all informants described the relationship among the different ethnic groups in their places of residence in positive or neutral terms, many of them expressed severe concern regarding the future of the Macedonian minority in Albania.<sup>6</sup> Assimilative policies and indifference towards linguistic human rights were mentioned, but also the mixed marriages between the Macedonians and Albanians, which seem to lead to the adoption of Albanian as the language of the family. This effect of the mixed marriages finds support also in the reports by two informants, describing the language use in their extended families (see also the next section).

#### 4. Greece: *Dopii*, Macedonians or Greek?

The situation regarding ethnic and linguistic minorities in Greece is extremely complicated, going back to radical changes in the ethnic and linguistic composition of Northern Greece during the 20th century. The Slavic speaking, Eastern Orthodox population of Northern Greece was affected first by the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, a series of mass deportations finalised in

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on the education in the Prespa region, see Steinke & Ylli, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> However, many informants mentioned a pejorative term, *shul*, an exonym used by Albanians in reference to the Macedonians from the Prespa region. In personal communication, Maxim Makartsev reported to have encountered the term in Southern Albania, with various etymologies proposed by the informants. For instance, it has been said that the term comes from the Albanian expression, *shul gardhi* "latch of a fence gate", meaning somebody dumb and slow in the uptake, or, that it would derive from the name of one of the Slavic speaking villages in the Prespa region, Shulin (previously known as Diellas).



1923 and approved by the then international community. The Orthodox Christian refugees and deportees from Asia Minor were settled mostly in Northern Greece, but being linguistically and ethnically a heterogeneous group, massive Hellenisation campaigns were launched by the Greek state. These campaigns were directed at the at the local Slavic population as well (Karakasidou 1997: 187). The Greek Civil War between 1946 and 1948 drove a large proportion of the Orthodox Slavic speakers into exile. In 1982, the people exiled during the war were given permission to return, yet those "not Greek by origin", were denied this chance, despite their ancestry in the region dating back to the first millennium (see Batsiotis, 2001: 146).

The identity of the Orthodox Slavic speakers in Northern Greece has been, often literally, a battlefield, being at stake also during the dispute over the so-called Question of Macedonia in the early 20th century between Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, all laying claims to the Slavic speakers of the region. Bulgarian demands for the region were largely unsuccessful, while Serbia took control of the northern part of the region, also known as Vardar Macedonia, and Greece obtained the Aegean part. This outcome was reflected also in the way the Slavic speakers identified themselves ethnically and linguistically. The ethnonym Bulgarian was used to some extent, crucially still towards the end of the 19th century at a time when gradually such labels, connected to a particular modern nation, started to gain relevance as means of self-identification in the European part of the Ottoman empire. From the early 20th century on also the term Macedonian (*makedonski*) started to appear as an endonym for the language, a half-century before the establishment the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and the codification of the Macedonian standard language (Friedman, 2008: 387). Yet some Slavic speakers embraced also the dominant, Greek ethnic identity, many of whom, no doubt, because of the assimilative efforts outlined earlier.

The Greek state is still reluctant to acknowledge the fact that there are ethnic and linguistic minorities within its borders, and when it does, the recognition happens along religious lines of division (see Korhonen et al., 2016: 30-32). Aggravated by the naming dispute between the Greek state and the Republic of Macedonia, self-identification as Macedonian or a speaker of the Macedonian

language continues to be very problematic in Greece. A significant issue regarding the name of the Orthodox Slavic population is the fact that many with Slavic ancestry or even with command of the local Slavic dialects do not accept the Macedonian label, but either identify themselves as Greeks or *Dopii* "locals", a term sometimes used to denote the Slavic speakers, often as a subcategory of being Greek. In her thorough account, Jane K. Cowan (2001) explores the question of the identity of the Slavic speakers of Greece, criticising the ambitions of some activists of what she regards as an attempt to impose the Macedonian identity also on those who are not willing to accept it. Yet Cowan concludes that the only tenable position is to support the demands for the recognition of a Macedonian minority (Cowan, 2001: 171).<sup>7</sup>

In the survey conducted in June 2015, ten Greek citizens were interviewed with the help of the questionnaire, all with Slavic speakers in their family and knowledge of Slavic. The interviews were conducted in Kastoria and Florina, with the exception of one interview, conducted in Bitola, Macedonia, during the informant's visit there. In comparison to the Prespan community of Macedonians, the use of the minority language is much more limited. In Greece, there is neither education nor public services available in the minority languages. Also, of the nine informants with children living in Greece, all spoke mostly, or in some cases, exclusively Greek with them.

A generational decline in the use of the minority language can be seen as well: Of the informants' parents, eight used exclusively Slavic between themselves, whereas the parents of only five of the informants spoke it exclusively with them during their childhood.

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<sup>7</sup> Cowan (2001: 166) also acknowledges that the Macedonian standard language is the best candidate for a written norm, if one does not wish to pertain only to oral expression. Yet what strikes as odd is Cowan's considerable sensitivity regarding the worries, typically expressed by the Greek authorities. After accounting for the physical torture that was used during the inter-war period against those who were caught speaking Slavic and acknowledging that identifying as a Macedonian speaker still carries significant risks, she expresses her worries that the official recognition of the Macedonian-speaking minority may lead to the forced imposition of an identity on unwilling people. To my knowledge, there are no reports of such attempts.

One speaker who regards himself as Greek told that he does not even wish his children to learn the language, yet all others had a positive attitude towards teaching the language to the children, some expressing the wish of it becoming part of the school curricula. Also in Greece, mixed marriages seem to contribute to monolingualism: three of the informants had spouses that spoke only Greek, and these informants used exclusively Greek also with their children. Similar results are observed among the speakers of Aromanian in Greece: mixed marriages between minority and majority language speakers is a factor contributing to majority language monolingualism within the family, although this is not always the case (Dumitrescu, 2016: 112-113).

Of the informants who were citizens of Greece, eight declared themselves as Macedonians, whereas two of them identified themselves as Greek. It is noteworthy that the Greek-identifying informants had least contact with their ancestral language: it was limited mostly to communication with their parents, who, in both cases, spoke Greek rather than Slavic as their mother tongue according to the informants. Cowan (2001: 168) warns researchers of what she calls *Florinocentrism*, that is, an illusion that the Macedonian identity is more common in Greece than what it actually is on the basis of observations in Florina and in its vicinity. While Cowan, perhaps justifiably, links this to the Macedonian activism, stronger in the area, only one informant mentioned having made a choice to use the Macedonian language more, and that this was encouraged by the onset of cultural activism in the mid-80s. For the other Macedonian informants, born between 1937 and 1969, this has merely meant that, while the use of Macedonian has decreased within the family, it has been compensated through the availability of Macedonian language media and the local cultural activities.

All the informants were deeply integrated into the Greek society and completely bilingual, or in several cases, reported Greek as their preferred language in many situations. In addition, they overwhelmingly reported having good relations with the other ethnic groups, yet deploring the opposition of the society to their minority language and, as a consequence, a total lack of support for teaching their children the language, for instance through the educational system. Three of the informants, identifying themselves as

Macedonians and speakers of the Macedonian language, explicitly told that they did not know Cyrillic alphabet and could not read or write Macedonian standard language, yet, all the eight informants identifying themselves as Macedonians reported of following television and radio broadcasts in Macedonian.

It is evident that the cultural activism has contributed to the acceptance of the Macedonian identity by the Slavic speakers in Greece. Yet on the basis of the predominant place that the Greek language and culture occupies in the lives of also those informants identifying themselves as Macedonians, one could further ask, if the Macedonian identity is really felt as a separate national identity or merely a continuation of the culturally salient phenomenon of identifying oneself as part of the *Dopii*, but at the same time as Greek. From the point of view of language, it could be said that a certain point of no return has been passed already several decades ago: many people with some knowledge of Slavic could be characterised as heritage speakers (for a definition of the concept, see Polinsky & Kagan) rather than bilinguals. This is, however, not to say that measures of promoting literacy and culture in Macedonian should be any less needed or that seeking the recognition of the Macedonian-speaking minority would be any less justified. On the contrary, the violent past of oppression in mind, allowing such measures and abandoning the false narrative of ethnically and linguistically homogenous Northern Greece would be regarded as an act of reconciliation, also *vis-à-vis* the Republic of Macedonia.

## **5. The Muslims of Southwestern Macedonia**

As part of the field study, 18 Muslims, half of them women, half men, were interviewed in two areas in the Republic of Macedonia, Struga and Resen, all with the common nominator of speaking more than one local languages. The informants identified themselves either as Albanian, Egyptian, Turkish, Roma, Torbeš / Macedonian Muslim, or a mixture thereof. Thus, the survey managed to reach all traditional Muslim groups of the country, leaving out only a group of Megleno-Romanian Muslims in the province of Gevgelija. The focus of this

section is on the Muslim communities in the Southwestern Macedonia, especially in the Prespa region, Resen as its centre, and the group of Macedonian Muslims or Torbeši. I seek to illuminate their everyday language use and views and wishes and regarding the status of minorities in Macedonia.

In Macedonia, the ethnic majority position is held by the Eastern Orthodox, Slavic speaking Macedonians. While in Albania and Greece the ethnic and linguistic minorities are fairly invisible and they lack recognition or their number is downplayed by the state, in Macedonia, several minorities are recognised by the constitution, granting them, for instance, some linguistic rights. The last census, conducted in 2002, established that one fourth of the population was Albanian who are predominantly Muslim (Korhonen et al, 2016: 32-33). Yet the proportion of Muslims in Macedonia is one third of the total population according to the census, meaning that there are more than 100.000 other than Albanian Muslims in the Republic of Macedonia. The constitutional status of the Macedonian minorities was reached only after the tensions between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority had culminated into an armed conflict in the North-western part of the country in 2001. The conflict ended by the signing of the Ohrid Agreement, whose implementation included significant changes to the legislation regarding the status of minorities (see Petrushevska, 2014).

Three of the informants declared Macedonian as their mother tongue, yet all informants were fluent in Macedonian and had attended Macedonian language education, either Macedonian as the language of instruction or Macedonian as a second language. Historically, the multilingualism in Macedonia and more generally in the Balkans has been described, for instance, as intense, intimate and sustained (Friedman & Joseph, 2014: 16). Further, especially in the context of the Balkan language contact phenomenon, the Balkan sprachbund, it has been proposed that there existed a prestige scale, where a language regarded less prestigious, mainly due to the social position occupied by its speakers, and thus lower on that scale would mean that its speakers know more languages than those speaking a language higher on the scale (Lindstedt, 2000: 242-243). Such scale can be proposed also in the case of Macedonia, where Macedonian as

the majority language would occupy the highest status, followed by the co-official Albanian. The lower positions would be occupied by other minority languages, Romani found on the lowest position due to the general social stigma attached to the ethnic group.

If accepted, the prestige scale seems to coincide well with the observations in the material, although the sample is arguably too small for definite conclusions. One Muslim Romani speaker was interviewed, and the informant reported using Albanian, Macedonian, Romani and Turkish in his daily interactions, the largest number of local languages among the total of 53 interviewees. Four out of the total of six informants with fully or partly Turkish family background used in addition to Turkish both Albanian and Macedonian daily, yet also four out of eight informants with Albanian or mixed Albanian-Macedonian Muslim background also reported of using Turkish in addition to Albanian and Macedonian. Of the two informants whose both parents were Macedonian Muslims, one used also Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish, while the other Macedonian, and only occasionally Albanian. One of the reasons for the prominent place occupied by Turkish is that many of the interviewees were residents of the town of Resen with a significantly larger Turkish than Albanian population. Nevertheless, one informant told that she had learnt Turkish in the city of Ohrid.

In the Balkans which is popularly, yet often exaggeratedly, viewed as plagued by ethnic and religious tensions, the Prespa region, the town of Resen as its centre, seems to form an exceptionally peaceful, tolerant and linguistically relatively egalitarian exception. The only ethnically Macedonian, Eastern Orthodox speaker interviewed in the study who was fluent in more than one Albanian was a resident of Resen. Anastasia Makarova (2016: 115-130) observed in her study on the villages of Krani and Arvati in the Prespa region that there were several Orthodox Macedonians who were fluent in Albanian, a situation which is unique to the whole country. The Muslim residents of the Prespa region interviewed in this study confirmed the general observation. They evaluated the inter-ethnic relations consequently in more positive terms in comparison to other interviewees, often contrasting the region with other parts of the country where there are more problems. Also, most of the informants reported having friends

from all the ethnic and religious groups, and expressed pride for the harmonious situation in their region. It could be argued, though, that the Albanians of the region are somewhat distanced from the general Macedonian-Albanian tensions also because unlike the other parts of the country, the variety of Albanian spoken in the Prespa region belongs to the Tosk dialects of Albanian, not to Geg. Yet this could not be verified on the basis of the interviews.

Among the multilingual Muslim informants there were two who identified as Macedonian Muslims or Torbeši and were residents of the town of Struga with their families coming from the villages north of the city. In addition, a group of Macedonian Muslims with their background also in the same region was interviewed during the field excursion in the city of Ohrid, yet no questionnaires were filled during that interview. Also, two other informants had a Macedonian Muslim mother, one of them considering herself as Albanian, in accordance to his father's ethnic group, and the other as Macedonian, although listed as Turkish in the official records like her father. There is a possibility that these cases are indicative of the dominance of the larger ethnic groups in mixed marriages, also suggested by the informants during the group interview.

Both the names of the group and the group itself is contested in Macedonia, with no reliable statistics on their number. The lack of statistics is because the Macedonian Muslims are not considered officially as a minority, unlike in the former Yugoslavia where there was a possibility to declare oneself as Muslim, one of the constitutive nations of the then state. The opposition to the separate status of the Macedonian Muslims is likely to be connected to fears that granting a minority status to this group would undermine the entitled status of Macedonians, generally associated with the Eastern Orthodox faith.<sup>8</sup> The problems regarding naming the group are complicated: in the group interview, the informants explicitly told that the proper term for the group is Torbeši, and the term Macedonian Muslims (Mac. *Makedonci-muslimani*) should not be used, and that it is

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<sup>8</sup> One of the reasons why a new census has not been conducted yet, although desperately overdue, may be connected to similar fears: The reported higher overall fertility rate of the Albanian population may mean that the proportional size of the Macedonian population has most likely reduced from 2002.

precisely under this name, Torbeši, that the interviewees seek recognition for their group. For them, the term Macedonian Muslims represents an attempt to reduce the group into a sub-category of the Macedonians. Yet one of our two other informants regarded the term Torbeši as pejorative, which is also how some members of the Macedonian majority view it, yet the other informant explicitly told that there is nothing offensive about the name.

The concerns expressed by the members of the Muslim communities in Macedonia were often related to the majority Macedonians, but not uniform. Some informants deplored the reluctance of the Macedonians to learn any of the minority languages, also, among the members of the smaller linguistic minorities, the dominance of Macedonian was seen as a threat to their language, yet one Albanian informant told also that her children were not either particularly interested in learning Macedonian. Almost all informants emphasised the importance of teaching the minority language speakers their mother tongue: while some of the native Turkish speakers had received part of their basic education in Turkish, there are very few educational resources available in Romani, and the same is true also for the predominantly Orthodox Aromanians of the region. According to the the Torbeši informants, a concrete consequence of bunching them as Macedonians was that their children could go through the whole education system without hearing a word about the existence of their community.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

Victor Friedman (2012: 163) notes that the proverb "languages are wealth", and different variations thereof, is ubiquitous in the Balkans. Also in this study the informants expressed this idea through several paraphrasings, showing that despite the prevalent ideals of ethno-centric nationalism, something of the traditionally multilingual past is still retained. One of the most obvious changes to the historical situation is that the dominant ethno-linguistic groups in all three countries are typically monolingual; when there is multilingualism regarding the local languages, the multilingual speakers are typically



members of a minority, hence concentrating on multilingual speakers was also a good way of finding members of various minorities.

Despite the radical differences regarding the status of ethnic and linguistic minorities in the three countries, one of the most commonly expressed wishes among all informants was the better recognition of the minority groups and their languages in basic education. While learning the majority language rarely posed any problems, its resources being available in abundance, acknowledging and utilising the potential of minority languages in education could also help reconciling differences both between the different communities but across the borders as well (see Wahlström, 2016).

Many minority issues in these countries remain unsettled, most notably the status of the Macedonian or Orthodox Slavic minority in Greece. This has left the members of various minorities in the position of hostages in a battle, fought by politicians in the respective countries. Indeed, the informants reported typically much friendlier inter-ethnic relations in their own communities than what could be imagined on the basis of the larger disputes where their status is at stake. This shows also the particular risk of politicising the identity discourse by reducing it as part of the fights among the ruling political elites – from which the very citizens of all three countries often wish to distance themselves. For example, a key issue for understanding the Greek position is the underlying fear that the recognition of the Macedonian minority may eventually lead for demands for the return of the people exiled during the civil war, or, since 60 years have passed since, rather their confiscated property. These fears find confirmation in the words of leading politicians of the Republic of Macedonia for whom supporting these demands is a guaranteed way to win popularity among their voters.

A situation somewhat parallel to that of the Macedonians in Greece is found in Kosovo. The resistance to the independence of Kosovo within the Republic of Serbia discourages the politicians from finding a lasting solution, since any concessions may be unpopular among their voters, most of whom have never set their foot on Kosovo. Yet one could argue that the group suffering the most are in fact the very Serbs of Kosovo, who continue to be confined to enclaves and are thus prevented from becoming part of the actual

surrounding society, independent of the alms from Belgrade. In Greece, solving the question of the name of the Republic of Macedonia could bring solution also to the minority question by removing the biggest disagreement between the two countries and thus alleviating the tensions. Yet as long as there is no foreseeable solution to the naming dispute, these issues can be used by politicians for scoring free points on both sides, in Macedonia for instance by supporting the demands of the children of the exiled and in Greece by acting tough against the Macedonian minority.

The 2010s has seen an unexpected rise in populist political agendas throughout Europe and elsewhere, based on claims that the majority population of the country has become somehow marginalised by minorities or their liberal supporters. The logical shortcomings of this train of thought are obvious, the true marginalisation happening perhaps rather in the economy and in the distribution of wealth – although not by the minorities or their supporters. This debate, present also in the Balkans in different forms, should not blur the fact that the majority always possesses better means to improve the status of the minorities than the minorities themselves. For instance, the monolingualism of the majority forms a barrier between the minorities and the majorities, unknown to the region only hundred years ago. While this may not be a problem in the sense of communication, in countries like Macedonia it is very difficult to legitimise the dominance of one ethno-linguistic group in the eyes of a minority, still almost half the size of the majority, if the majority shows no interest in meeting them halfway, for instance by learning at least the basics of the language of their neighbours and colleagues (see Xhaferri, 2014).

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**Diego Checa Hidalgo**

(Quesada, 1978) is a lecturer in the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Granada. During 2014 he was Visiting Research Fellow in the Political Sciences Department of An Najah National University (Palestinian Territories). Previously he was Marie Curie Research Fellow in Coventry University from 2011 to 2013. His main research

interests lie in Mediterranean Contemporary History, Conflict Resolution, Nonviolence Theory and Practice, and Peace Education. Currently, he is carrying on a research about civil resistance in rural areas and its contributions to violence prevention, peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Colombia and Palestine. His latest publications are "Resistiendo la ocupación de los Territorios Palestinos. Oportunidades y desafíos de la lucha no-violenta" (2016), "El ejército de Paz europeo. Una historia inacabada" (2015), "La historia del Balkan Peace Team. Un ejemplo de las intervenciones internacionales noviolentas" (2015), "Intervenciones internacionales noviolentas en los Territorios Palestinos. Contribuciones de la sociedad civil global a la lucha no-violenta contra la ocupación" (2015), "Nonviolent international support of social empowerment processes" (2015), "Estudios para la Paz. Una disciplina para transformar el mundo" (2014), "Nonviolent international support of social empowerment processes" (2014), and "Preventing direct violence in Latin America" (2014). He is part of the Ethics, Politics, and Contemporary Conflicts Research Group (University of Granada) and member of the Peace and Conflict Institute (University of Granada). He is also external member of the Centre for International Cooperation and Development Studies (University of Bucharest).

## Ghosts from a Recent Past. Preventing Violence in Macedonia

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Diego Checa Hidalgo

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**Abstract.** The recent history of Macedonia shows the presence of multiple conflicts that pose many challenges to the very existence of this country. This paper will study the evolution of the Republic by paying attention to the efforts to prevent the escalation of violence in those conflicts. It will present the Ohrid Agreement and analyze the partial failure of state reform. Finally, it will identify the main challenges that Macedonia is facing nowadays.

**Keywords:** Ohrid Agreement, Macedonia, peace agreements, conflict prevention, violence, State reform

### 1. Introduction

The Republic of Macedonia was born as an independent state after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. During that decade, its transition was seen as an example of conflict management by the international community due to two reasons. First, it managed to escape the violence that struck other young republics from the Balkans. Second, it undertook a political and economic transition without major upheavals, despite having complicated relationships with some of the countries in the neighbourhood during this time. However, the armed conflict that erupted in 2001 threatened Macedonia's stability and confronted Albanian armed groups with

Macedonian security forces. Once the Ohrid Agreement put an end to the violence, the country's political forces began their implementation with the assistance of the international community. This process succeeded in integrating minorities into political life, but the stability of Macedonia has remained weak and interethnic tensions continued. In recent years, there are some worrying trends emerging, such as the rise of ethnic Macedonian nationalism, the capture of the State by the Prime Minister and his party, a setback in media and judicial independence, the increased segregation in schools, and slow development of the decentralization processes.

This article analyzes the history of Macedonia as an independent republic. In order to do this, first it presents the threats that endangered its survival, then studies on the conflict between the ethnic Macedonian and Albanian communities, as well as the development of the Ohrid Agreement and the process of state reform. We will conclude that despite the fact that the return to the armed struggle is unlikely, Macedonian society continues to face significant challenges such as the persistence of strong interethnic tensions, serious deterioration of its political system, and instability arising from its lack of integration into the Euro-Atlantic axis.

## **2. Independence, instability and survival**

Unlike the events that happened in other regions, the dismemberment of former Yugoslavia gave birth to the Republic of Macedonia peacefully. This process started with a democratic and plural electoral process. It was created in 1990, when the Assembly launched a new Constitution for the State, and reached its point of no return with the declaration of independence supported by 95% of the voters in the referendum on the 8th of September of 1991 (Frčkoski, 2001). The process was validated by the Badinter Commission and this facilitated the recognition of the country's independence from 1992 onwards by European communities and their member states. Despite these quiet beginnings, Macedonia fell into a situation of instability that continued through the next decade and it would only be appeased after the Ohrid Agreement in 2001 (Flores, 2001).



The international community closely followed the evolution of Macedonia given the Balkan regional context. Thus, it carried out two actions to prevent the spread of violence to this country. First, an OSCE mission (1992) was deployed on its territory. Afterwards, the United Nations also deployed preventive forces from 1992 to 1999. Furthermore, since its independence, Macedonia received economic aid to support the political and economic transition process from the European Union (EU) as part of its strategy towards the status of a candidate country of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> However, the recognition of Macedonia as an independent and sovereign country by the international community has been a slow and difficult process, mainly due to problems arising from its relations with Balkan neighbours. Greece, in particular, rejected the use of the name (Macedonia) by the new country and some symbols it considered Hellenic, delaying its international recognition (Danforth, 1995). Finally, Macedonia joined the UN on the 8th of April of 1993 and was officially recognized by the United States in February 1994. The recognition of European institutions was more problematic but it did occur in late 1995, the same as in Euro-Atlantic defence structures.

The complex interethnic relations in the country, especially between the wider community, ethnic Macedonian, and the main minority, the ethnic Albanian community, evidenced the existence of a latent conflict in the country.<sup>2</sup> Both communities led separate and enclosed lives, due to mistrust between them. The ethnic Macedonian community doubted Albanian loyalty to the Macedonian state and feared for its territorial integrity, and possible secession of the areas inhabited by the ethnic Albanian community and its integration into a political project in Greater Albania. In contrast, the ethnic Albanian community had reservations about the Constitution approved without

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<sup>1</sup> The European Commission allocated 470 million Euros to Macedonia between 1992 and 1999. *CARDS Assistance Programme. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006*, Brussels, European Commission, Non dated.

<sup>2</sup> According to the official census, the population of the Republic of Macedonia in 1994 was ethnic Macedonian (66.5), ethnic Albanian (22.9%), Turkish (4%), Roma (2.3%) and the rest was formed by smaller ethnic groups (up to a total of 2%). Valentina Georgieva & Sasha Konechni, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1998).

the vote of Albanian deputies and with a preamble which did not specifically consider them constituent people. In addition, they demanded a proportional representation in the government, greater participation in local government bodies, as well as public institutions, police, and armed forces. They also called for an end to their discrimination in Macedonia, since they considered that they received worse health and education services than ethnic Macedonians. Ethnic Albanians also found access to public sector employment more difficult. Alongside this, they also demanded the recognition of their identity through the use of Albanian as an official language, the possibility of using Albanian national symbols freely and following the studies in the University of Tetovo in Albanian language (ICG, 1997).

In the 1990s, there were measures to improve the situation of minority communities in Macedonia. However, the results were not enough to satisfy the most extremist ethnic Albanian elements. They even generated strong discontent among the sectors of the ethnic Macedonian community, claiming that the creation of differentiated systems in order to exercise some rights of ethnic minorities could encourage the division of the country. Macedonia's party system reflects this split by unequivocally responding to the lines separating ethnic communities. Thus, none of the political formations of the country has managed to overcome the ethnic barrier and bring together a significant part of the electorate of both communities. This is indicative of the scope of the country's division following ethnic guidelines, despite the formation of government coalitions between representative organizations of the two wider communities.

In this context, the Kosovo war in 1999 contributed to the escalation of the latent conflict between the two communities. Thus, 300,000 Albanians from Kosovo sought refuge from the war in Macedonia. This event altered the ethnic balance within the country and increased political tension. Once the war ended, the uncertainty of Kosovo's legal status and the prospect of access to independence with the support of most of the international community, was a stimulus that exacerbated the more extremist sectors of the Albanian community in Macedonia (Liotta & Jebb, 2004).

### 3. From latent conflict to armed confrontation

Kosovo was the model for groups of ethnic Albanians willing to resort to arms to achieve their political objectives. A large part of the Albanian community of Macedonia catalyzed their frustrations participating in the Kosovo conflict and many of its members joined the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) during 1998 and 1999 (ICG, 2001 a). After the political autonomy had been gained by Kosovo through armed struggle and the international support received, many of the ethnic Albanians who joined the UÇK considered the use of violence to force the Macedonian state to accept its demands necessary. This was the origin of the National Liberation Army (UÇK).<sup>3</sup>

The increase of tensions at the border between Macedonia and Yugoslavia triggered the 2001 armed confrontation. These countries tried to recover border control after the war in Kosovo but this process created resentment among the Albanian population living in the area because it was not taken into consideration during the negotiations (ICG, 2001 b). In addition, NATO transferred full control of the security buffer zone established around Kosovo to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Both events pushed Albanian rebels groups and traffic networks working in the area to adapt to the new situation.

In this context, two Macedonian police stations were attacked on 23rd of January 2001 and, the UÇK claimed responsibility for one of the attacks and justified them as resistance actions against the Macedonian oppression to end the Albanian discrimination (ICGC, 2001 c). Violence spread through the country reaching the Tanusevci area in February and affecting Tetovo, the second biggest Macedonian city, in March. At the end of that month, the Macedonian army began a counterattack against the rebel positions in Tetovo and the border with Kosovo, including the bombing of many Albanian villages generating a wave of 11.000 refugees. The escalation of

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<sup>3</sup> In Albanian language, National Liberation Army is *Ushtira Clirimtare Kombetare* (UÇK) and shares the same acronym than the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtira Clirimtare e Kosoves*).

violence forced the international community to express support for the Macedonian government. The UN Security Council Resolution 1345 condemned the use of violence by the rebel groups, fearing the progression of the conflict into a civil war on a larger scale.

The armed confrontation between the rebels and the Macedonian security forces continued over the next few months in the areas populated mostly by the Albanian community bordering Serbia and Kosovo, eventually approaching the suburbs of Skopje.<sup>4</sup> The clash led to a humanitarian crisis and forced many Albanians to take refuge in Kosovo. This refugee crisis came about for two reasons. On one hand, the Macedonian army used artillery to target rebel positions, seriously affecting the civilian population in the area. On the other hand, there were riots in some Macedonian towns between ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian extremists which resulted in increased number of internally displaced persons in both communities. This situation moved the EU, US, NATO and OSCE to pressure Macedonian political players to stop violence.

As a result of this pressure, the national unity government was formed on May 13, 2001. The main Macedonian parties were represented in this government to address state reform and, thus, find a negotiated solution to the conflict that satisfied the Albanian claims.<sup>5</sup> However, the start of the dialogue was difficult because the Macedonian government refused to negotiate with the UÇK believing it to be an illegal armed group, so that, in order to launch peace negotiations, the Albanian political parties participating in the government pledged to represent the UÇK position as long as it did not involve the ethnic division of the country. To this end, the DPA and the PDP initiated talks with the UÇK that led to the signing of the

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<sup>4</sup> Institute for War & Peace Reporting, *Ohrid and beyond. A cross-ethnic investigation into the Macedonian crisis* (IWPR: London, 2002), 35-38.

<sup>5</sup> The national unity government managed to bring together up to 8 Macedonian political parties, including both the two main ethnic Macedonian parties (Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for National Unity, VMRO - DPMNE; and the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, SDSM), as well as the two main parties of the Albanian community (Albanian Democratic Party, DPA; and the Party for Democratic Prosperity, PDP).

Prizren Agreement, a common statement with the Albanian claims for the reform of the Macedonian state (ICG, 2001 d).

Negotiations between the parties of both communities allowed the establishment of several ceasefires and the distribution of humanitarian aid among the population. Pressure from the international community ensured that the negotiations did not stall and led to a definitive agreement reached in Ohrid on 13 August, ending the violence. The result of seven months of armed confrontation was about 200 dead between combatants on both sides and civilians, the destruction of many villages, displacement of a significant part of Macedonian population and deterioration of interethnic relations in the country (Liotta & Jebb, 2004).

#### **4. The Ohrid Agreement and the state reform**

The Ohrid agreement put an end to the armed conflict between the Macedonian security forces and the UÇK by promoting a plan for state reform.<sup>6</sup> Albanian parties accepted the dissolution of armed groups in exchange for several amendments to the Constitution. The agreement also included the adoption of new laws by the Parliament, guaranteeing political rights and improving the legal status of Albanians, together with amnesty for demobilized militiamen (ICG, 2001 e) For their part, ethnic Macedonians leaders led ethnic Albanian leaders to accept a clause on the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the state. In this way, the violence was stopped despite the fact that the scenario fulfilled a number of conditions able to fuel an ethnic conflict (Hislope, 2003).

Firstly, the agreement introduced a change in the preamble of the Constitution to declare the Republic of Macedonia the state of all its citizens, preventing it from becoming a national home of any particular community. It also introduced the *de facto* recognition of the Albanian language as an official language,<sup>7</sup> and gave the ethnic

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<sup>6</sup> *Framework Agreement*, signed in Ohrid, 13 August 2001.

<sup>7</sup> The agreement established that any population comprising at least 20% of the total population of the State obtained official recognition of their language and also obliged the State to provide university education for all communities speaking an

Albanian minority the right to have equitable representation in central and local public institutions, and at all levels of public employment.

Secondly, the agreement was a challenge for the decentralization of the Macedonian state through local self-government development. This idea tried to promote respect towards local identity of different communities and boost citizen participation in the democratic life. At the same time, it refused to offer territorial solutions to ethnic problems (Flores, 2004). In addition, the Ohrid Agreement gave the Albanian community veto powers through a new parliamentary procedure. This affected matters involving culture, language use, education, personal documents, use of symbols, local finance laws, local elections and municipal borders, as well as the election of one third of the judges of the Constitutional Court, the members of the Judicial Council of the Republic, and the Ombudsman.

Thirdly, the agreement included a program for the cessation of hostilities and demobilization of Albanian armed groups with the support of NATO. It established a process for UÇK disarmament and demobilization that would be developed in parallel with the adoption of the constitutional amendments contained in the agreement.

The de-escalation of the Macedonian interethnic conflict followed the path laid down in Ohrid after the summer of 2001 with the support of the international community (Jakobsson, 2005: 38-39). NATO took responsibility to implement the military and security aspects. This included the deployment of troops to monitor the ceasefire between the warring parties and, later, to supervise the voluntary disarmament and demobilization of the UÇK. Its field presence supported the peace process and the refugee return. Then, the EU followed the NATO's work and continued military operations to contribute to the democratic stabilization. Later, it also supported the reform of Macedonian police (Ruiz, 2008). Furthermore, the EU coordinated the international aid to Macedonia and financially supported its institutional reforms in the framework of the Stabilization and

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official language other than Macedonian. Only the Albanian fulfilled this condition although it was not mentioned explicitly.

Association Agreement signed in April 2001.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it contributed with humanitarian aid and the rehabilitation of houses and infrastructure, and developed training programs for minority representatives in the State administration. Meanwhile, the UN worked in the area of development and poverty reduction through the UNDP, improving interethnic relations, and assisting refugees and internally displaced persons through the UNHCR action. For its part, the OSCE continued its monitoring mission in Macedonia and, in addition to supervising different electoral processes, supported the implementation of the peace agreement in the areas of trust building, thus improving interethnic relations. In addition, its High Commissioner on National Minorities promoted interethnic reconciliation.

The dissolution of the UÇK on the 27 of September 2001 meant its renunciation of armed struggle. It gave way to the struggle in the political arena with the formation of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and its participation in the political system and even in the Macedonian government (Brunnbauer, 2002: 7). The process of demobilization of the UÇK increased the level of trust between the parties, limited residual violence and prevented subsequent violent escalations of the conflict. This process, viewed at first with scepticism from the ranks of ethnic Macedonian political parties, developed smoothly and drove away the spectre of armed confrontation (ICG, 2001 f). The elaboration of amnesty that would ensure that UÇK members would not be prosecuted after their demobilization was an important element in this peace process and in the disarmament of guerrillas. Not without obstacles, the Macedonian parliament passed the Amnesty Law on the 7 of March 2002.<sup>9</sup>

The situation of refugees and internally displaced persons escaping violence improved rapidly. In June 2003, almost two years after the end of the conflict, Macedonia had a rate of return of 95%. Of 160,000 refugees and IDPs generated in 2001, only 6,300 had not yet

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<sup>8</sup> Stabilization and association agreement between the European Communities and their member states, of the one part, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, of the other part, Brussels, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Law on Amnesty, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia* 18/2002, 7 March 2002.

returned to their homes (ICG, 2003). Two elements contributed to this: the reconstruction of those areas affected by armed confrontation and the improvement of security conditions due, inter alia, to the constitution of multiethnic police patrols (ICG, 2006).

A little more complicated was the reform of the State envisaged in the peace agreement and the development of legislative acts complementary to the constitutional amendments. This regulatory development was slow, breached the deadlines, and reduced the Ohrid Agreement to a simple starting point in the negotiations on new laws. The constitutional amendments were adopted by the Parliament on 16 November 2001, after the renegotiation of the preamble. This finally included the people principle, referring to Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Vlach, Serbian, Roma and Bosnian (Brunnbauer, 2002: 8).

Another element of the peace agreement was the decentralization of the State. This process involved two elements: the transfer of power from central to local authorities and the redesign of administrative boundaries at the local level. Thus, with the assistance of the UNDP office in Skopje, the new Local Self-Government Act was adopted in January 2002. This law increased local authority powers in the areas such as investment, culture, education, urban planning and health. This law also established the use of the Albanian as an official language in those municipalities where the Albanian was spoken by at least 20% of the population, as well as the creation of interethnic commissions in the municipality to discuss problems related to ethnic diversity. Then, a new administrative division of Macedonia was designed and, finally, a census was completed in order to determine the representation in public sector positions and the implementation of minority rights under the peace agreement.<sup>10</sup> In 2004, legislation on local self-government was completed with the approval of a reduction in the number of municipalities in Macedonia from 123 to

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<sup>10</sup> The census data showed the following figures on the composition of the population of the Republic of Macedonia: 64.18% ethnic Macedonians; 25.17% ethnic Albanians; 3.85% Turks; 2.66% Roma; 1.78% Serbs; 0.84% Bosnian Muslims; 0.48% Vlachs; 1.04% others. *Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002*, The State Statistical Office, Republic of Macedonia.



80, and the establishment of new demarcations for them, in a way that allowed 12 municipalities to reach a majority ethnic Albanian population. This government-led legislation was criticized by the opposition parties and ethnic Macedonian nationalist groups announced that it would generate greater ethnic divisions. However, its proponents argued that the new design produced a greater number of mixed municipalities that did not exist before.

The implementation of the peace agreement was carried out under the pragmatic acceptance of the representatives of the two main Macedonian communities. However, this process was not exempt from difficulties. The first was the response of a number of ethnic Macedonian nationalist organizations to the changes in municipal boundaries made in 2004 (ICG, 2005). The second was the 2004 incidents in Kondovo, a village near Skopje, which was occupied by an ethnic Albanian armed group (Kim, 2005: 10). In spite of these problems and complicated political stability of the country in the following years, the contents of the Ohrid Agreement were fulfilled and violence disappeared from the Macedonian political scene in the years to come.

## **5. An insufficient reform**

After the end of hostilities and post-war rehabilitation, the state reform process that was agreed in Ohrid followed, which improved interethnic relations and drove the ghost of violence out of Macedonian society. However, the reform process has been insufficient and the integration of minorities has not been completed due to several reasons. This situation added to the context of weak economic growth (ICG, 2011), together with recent trends indicating a rise in ethnic Macedonian nationalism, the capture of the state by the ruling coalition, a setback in media and judicial independence, and deterioration of interethnic relations, place Macedonia in a position to face the ghosts of its recent past and the possibility of resurgence of war.

Nowadays, there are several challenges that Macedonian society has to face after the partial failure of the Ohrid. Firstly, there is a need to

address the equitable representation of minorities in state administration and public enterprises, especially with the inclusion of the Turks and the Roma, as well as the increase of the numbers of ethnic Albanians in positions of responsibility. According to the data provided by the Office of the Ombudsman of Macedonia, only 18.6% of the total public employment is occupied by ethnic Albanians, 1.9% by the Turks, and 1.4% by the Roma.<sup>11</sup> Although this data shows an improved situation in comparison with 2001 when the Albanian population accounted only for 5% of the posts in state structures, it is still far from the 25% figure which is the proportion of population belonging to this community.

Secondly, Macedonia has to advance in the decentralization of the State, a process initiated from the Ohrid but still unfinished. Cultural centres, theatres, and sports facilities remain at the same location and social services have not been fully decentralized. The financial independence of the institutions is not yet guaranteed (Grozdanovska, 2005: 420), while the government has maintained a policy of discrimination in the distribution of investments according to political parties that control the local governments, also showing a deep territorial and ethnic discrimination (Osmani, 2011: 187-188). Furthermore, some sectors of ethnic Macedonian communities criticized the decentralization policy arguing that it has not provided adequate protection to all ethnic communities. On the contrary, it has benefited ethnic Albanians hurting sometimes the rest of the communities (Lyon, 2011).

Thirdly, the use of the Albanian language is another important issue. It was already one of the most complicated issues addressed in the Ohrid negotiations and it still presents a different point of view. The ethnic Albanian community considers that the peace agreement gave Albanian the status of the second official language of the state. On the contrary, the ethnic Macedonian community argues that its official character is only valid in the local self-government units where the ethnic Albanians are at least 20% of the population.

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<sup>11</sup> Annual report on the level of respect, promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms 2014. Republic of Macedonia Ombudsman, Skopje, 2015.

Many believe that policies developed in Macedonia around languages aim to maintain linguistic, socio-economic, cultural and political imbalances of minority communities (Rustemi, 2011: 203). This is seen in the 2008 Language Act, which *de facto* defined Albanian as the second official language at the municipal level and allowed municipalities where minorities account for at least 20% of the total population adopting other official languages in the case municipal councils agreed.<sup>12</sup> Each community sees this law as an instrument for interethnic well-being with an aim to ensure social cohesion. Although it improved the situation of Albanian which *de facto* became the official language of the State, this language can not be used in most of municipalities where the ethnic Albanians do not constitute more than 20% of the population. The Albanian language has therefore an asymmetric and selective use compared to the Macedonian and is not yet used in the written form in regional or central administrations beyond the parliament (Rustemi et. al, 2011: 207-208).

Another key challenge facing Macedonia is the serious erosion of the political system and the systematic control of state institutions by the ruling party. This deterioration accelerated due to deep political crisis that polarized Macedonian society. This crisis began in December 2012 on the basis of the feeling of marginalization that grew in the main opposition party, the SDSM, after not being consulted on government decisions on sensitive issues for the country and not taking into account its parliamentary proposals (ICG, 2011: 8-9). This crisis was not resolved with the parliamentary elections in April 2014 either, which kept the SMSD in the opposition, or with international mediation. The EU pressured the coalition in power formed by VMRO and DUI parties, and on the SDSM itself, that boycotted the legislature alleging the existence of massive fraud in the elections (ICG, 2015: 3-4), albeit with poor results.

On the contrary, the political crisis was exacerbated by the scandal of recordings uncovered by the SDSM. This scandal revealed the existence of an illegal large-scale surveillance system developed by

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<sup>12</sup> Law on the use of languages spoken by at least 20% of the Citizens in Macedonia and in the units of local self-government. Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia 101/2008, 13 August 2008.

the government. It exposed the high level of corruption in the system and the apparent direct involvement of the government and party members in illegal activities. These activities included electoral fraud, corruption, the abuse of power and authority, conflict of interest, blackmail and extortion.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this, the judiciary is weak and exemplifies the discredit of institutions in the Macedonian state. It is an institution that is considered inefficient, corrupt and permeable to political influence that needs to be reformed (ICG, 2006). Although Macedonia initiated reforms in the administration of justice to form an efficient and independent system, the new legal framework has not been implemented. Meanwhile, opposition parties repeatedly criticize Macedonian justice system for making political decisions, because they doubt its impartiality and its capacity to withstand government pressure (ICG, 2011: 11).

The last of the great challenges that Macedonia still has to face is the instability arising from its lack of integration with the Euro-Atlantic axis. The country obtained the Action Plan for NATO membership in 1999 and an EU candidate status in 2005. However, the inability to resolve the country name dispute with Greece has postponed Macedonia's move towards integration into both structures, in spite of the advances and the reforms made by the State to achieve both memberships. Thus, the NATO meeting held in Bucharest in 2008 only offered the promise that an invitation to accession "will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution is reached".<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in October 2009 the European Commission recommended to the EU member states to initiate negotiations for accession with Macedonia but, due to Greek pressure, it was impossible to reach the required unanimous decision. The EU General Affairs Council explained that it a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the topic of name under the auspices of the UN<sup>15</sup> remained essential.

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<sup>13</sup> Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues relating to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015, 8 June 2015, 4-6.

<sup>14</sup> Bucharest Summit Declaration, 3 April 2008.

<sup>15</sup> General Affairs Council Conclusions on Enlargement/Stabilisation and Association Process, 7-8 December 2009, 6.

These rejections are a source of tension between the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities and between the government and the opposition for two reasons. On one hand, Euro-Atlantic integration is considered fundamental to maintain the stability of the country and in the region by Macedonian society. On the other hand, it is a goal that unites all ethnic groups.<sup>16</sup> Hence the importance of this challenge for the future of the Republic of Macedonia.

## 6. Conclusions

Macedonia is still a vulnerable state nowadays, exposed to a crisis of governmental legitimacy and under threat of a deteriorating regional security, as revealed the Kumanovo incident in 2015 (ICG, 2015: 9-12). Although there is still strong resentment in the ethnic Albanian community because they feel they are second-class citizens in a state dominated by ethnic Macedonians, the incident did not precipitate the re-emergence of armed confrontations on a larger scale. However, this situation can change following a political crisis, manipulation of interethnic tensions, and the emergence of new violent incidents.

Macedonia must continue the process already under way in Ohrid to meet these challenges. It has to deepen the equality of citizens within the State and continue with the decentralization of public administrations. Furthermore, beyond Ohrid, it has to move forward with the democratization of the political system and maintain its aspirations of European integration. This will require strong political will from all internal players, something that does not seem easy today, as well as the support of the international community.

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<sup>16</sup> According to data from opinion polls, both communities supported the Euro-Atlantic integration, scoring 80% of the total population. Rizvan Sulejmani, "Challenges of the Ohrid Framework Agreement: Ten years later", in Reka, Blerim (ed.) (2011), *Ten years from the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Is Macedonia functioning as a multi-ethnic state?*, Tetovo: South East European University, 63.

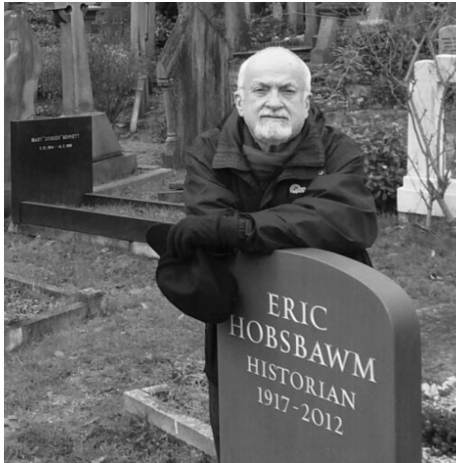
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**Jesús Nieto González** (Madrid, 1951) holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the Autonomous University of Madrid with a thesis titled "The Macedonian National Problem: World War, Occupation, Resistance and Greek Civil War (1941-1949)" (October, 2002) and a degree in Philosophy and Literature (Section of Contemporary History at the Universidad

Complutense, 1974. For many years he has been professor and teacher of Secondary Education in several places (Granollers, Talavera de la Reina, Móstoles and also in Los Angeles Unified School District and at the Vicente Cañada Blanch Spanish Institute in London (UK, from 2004 to 2010, the last two years as Head of Studies), he is a specialist in conflicts in the Balkans and Greece and has several publications on the subject. Is an honorary professor of History of International Relations in the Master of International Relations and African Studies at the Autonomous University of Madrid.



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# The Long Battle for a Name: Current State of the Issue and Future Prospects

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Jesús Nieto González

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**Abstract.** The dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) regarding the official name of the state is already twenty-five years old. Despite continued attempts at rapprochement and mediation, the conflict remains stagnant. This article tries to analyze the state of the issue from different points of view –political, economic, historical-social and linguistic– in an attempt to define what are the current difficulties that prevent reaching an agreement in the near future.

**Keywords:** Macedonia, name, Greece, FYROM, Skopje 2014

## 1. Introduction

During the European Basketball Championship held in 2015 (Eurobasket 2015), luck, chance or fate wanted the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Greece to come face to face in the first qualifying round. Greece comfortably won this match by 20 points (65-85), as reflected in both the specialized and general media. But how was it reflected? The vast majority of newspapers and sports websites echoed the result under the formula "Macedonia 65 - Greece

85".<sup>1</sup> Some, at the very least, preferred to use the term "FYR Macedonia".<sup>2</sup> The International Basketball Federation, organizer of the Eurobasket, identified each participating country by its official name in English, followed by an official three letters abbreviation in parentheses, e.g. Spain (ESP), Greece (GRE), etc. But when the Republic of Macedonia is on the list, we find this participant officially identified as MKD (MKD).

We have chosen basketball, as we could have done with another sport, or with the crisis of refugees from Syria and other areas of conflict. The situation described serves to illustrate the huge confusion surrounding a conflict which, under the label of "provisional", lasts for more than 20 years. It would not be so serious if it were only a misunderstanding about a name that two states use differently. For example, the fact that the Greeks refer to Istanbul as "Constantinople" has only a symbolic meaning. Similarly, the deplorable and yet widespread use of the term "Skopia" as a reference to the whole state by broad sectors of Greek society occurs not only on a colloquial level, but on the journalistic and even academic. This would be no more than a mere anecdote if this conflict regarding the official name of the republic did not lead to political, economic, social, and even ethnic consequences, which, to this day, prevent the normal development of this state, both internationally and within its fragile internal balance.

Not even the fact that the vast majority of UN member countries, including four of the five permanent members of the Security Council (Russia, China, the United States and the United Kingdom), 18 of the 28 EU member states, and all the states of the Balkan region (except Greece), recognize the Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name, at least in their bilateral relations, contributes once and for all to an end to this dispute.

Meanwhile, the Greek veto on the entry of the Republic of Macedonia into NATO and, above all, into the EU, endangers the country's economic development and fragile ethnic balance. At the

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others: [www.acb.com](http://www.acb.com); [www.eurosport.org](http://www.eurosport.org); [www.gazetta.it](http://www.gazetta.it); [www.lequipe.fr](http://www.lequipe.fr)

<sup>2</sup> e.g.: [www.scoresway.com](http://www.scoresway.com) and [www.live-result.com](http://www.live-result.com).

same time, ultranationalist sentiment and the rejection of the EU, and, in general, the Western countries, grow in large sections of the population.

It is not our intention here to chronicle the origin of the problem and its development over the last 25 years,<sup>3</sup> but to try to analyze the current situation and future prospects. To do this, we will approach this conflict from the political, economic, historical and social point of view, and, finally, from its linguistic aspect, which is, in the end, is what, in the current situation, is marking the limits of this dispute.

## 2. Political Approach

To go straight to the heart of the problem, Greece's veto in both NATO and the EU is a definitive weapon in the hands of the Athens government. Any other consideration in this approach is absolutely secondary. While the current or future Greek governments are willing to exercise their right to veto the access of the Republic of Macedonia to international organizations, the problem will remain *ad eternum* not solved.

Nea Demokratia, PASOK and now Syriza, have held a monolithic position in this respect. In short, for Athens it is not a problem of the government, but of the state.

It could have been hoped that this approach would have changed with the coming to power of the Syriza government, which did not have to feel tied to the approaches of the previous governments of the traditional parties. After all, Syriza was born and was able to win the elections in order to break with the way of governing in all aspects of life of Greece. However, silence, and, therefore, continuity with respect to the conflict of the name of *the fraternal neighbour of the North*,<sup>4</sup> keeps the situation open and without the prospect of a solution in the medium term.

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<sup>3</sup> For a complete account of the development of this conflict since its inception see Tziampiris, A. 2012: 153-171.

<sup>4</sup> Statement by the Greek Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kotziá, at the annual meeting of ambassadors held in Skopje on 25 August 2016. <http://www.mfa.gr>.

When asking in Syriza's political and academic circles about this issue, the answers revolve around two axes: the current serious economic crisis is not the time to remove this issue, and, secondly, dependence on the junior partner of government, the Independent Greeks (ANEL), who defend a position radically opposed to any concession (even disallowing the possibility of a compound name containing the word "Macedonia"), makes a potential change of position impossible –a red line which, if crossed, would endanger the coalition government. In addition, we can distinguish within the Greek left as a whole –Syriza, Popular Unity and even Antarsya– the existence of two distant political positions with respect to this subject. The majority, or at least the ones that impose their approach, are the *Aristeri Patriotes* (patriots of the left) who defend positions very close to those of Nea Demokratia and PASOK, that is to say, the acceptance of the term Macedonia preceded by a modifier (North, New, Upper, etc.) in the official name of the state, but on condition that it is *erga omnes*, not only for bilateral purposes. In front of this group, there is another sector called the *Ethnomidenistés*, a term that literally means "Zero Nationalism", and which advocates allowing the country to use its constitutional name of "Republic of Macedonia". This position is very strong among the youngest militants – for example, the Youth of Syriza.

Regarding the first argument of "it is not the right time", it should be noted that the silence of Syriza predates its arrival to the government. In the electoral programs of the various cycles over the last few years, the problem is dispatched with generic phrases. Thus, in SYRIZA's 40-point program of May 2012,<sup>5</sup> in section 10, *An independent foreign policy committed to the promotion of peace*, we can read: "Furthermore, on the basis of international law and the principle of peaceful conflict resolution, we will continue to work in Greek-Turkish relations, a solution to the problem of FYROM's official name, and the specification of Greece's Exclusive Economic Zone". When the first SYRIZA congress as a party was held in July 2013, the silence on the issue was even more clamorous. In the section of the final resolution adopted by the congress dedicated to international

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<sup>5</sup> For a transcript in English, see <http://links.org.au/node/2888>.

politics,<sup>6</sup> there is only a generic reference to the Balkans: "Greece's position in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean necessitates the resolution of all open issues of foreign policy on the basis of law and peace, to the benefit of the common interests of the peoples in the area". In that same section, however, the problem of Cyprus and that of the relations with Turkey were singled out. Relations with the Republic of Macedonia did not deserve even a mention for a party that reaches the Greek political stage with the main goal of doing things differently than traditional parties. Concerning the second argument regarding the fear of a possible rupture of the electoral coalition that would lead to the call for early elections, it does not seem very likely that ANEL would risk losing its privileged position within the government and face an early call for elections that could reduce this party to insignificance or even to extra-parliamentary status.

However, Syriza's government has launched an ambitious policy of approaching the Skopje government through so-called Confidence-Building Measures, following an agreement between the two foreign ministers in June 2015. Since then, almost every two months, high-level bilateral meetings have taken place on concrete issues of collaboration on a wide range of topics: energy, with the approval of the construction of an oil pipeline and a gas pipeline between Thessaloniki and Skopje; police collaboration agreements in the fight against organized crime; university degrees; tourism; opening of new border crossings; renewal of rail traffic; and, the reopening of the Florina-Bitola railway line. It is clear that, above all other considerations, the governments of both countries give priority to the fact that both states are doomed and need each other, to the extent of their capabilities, in order to develop: in the case of Greece, its regional policy as a Balkan power; and, in the case of the Republic of Macedonia, its need to rely on its neighbour to the south so as to secure itself as a state.

On the other side of the front, the government of the Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), in power for the last 11 years, has had a position very similar to that of the various Greek governments, deliberately allowing that the name dispute become

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<sup>6</sup> "Political Resolution of the First Congress of Syriza", July 2013.

entrenched, understanding, in this case with some reason, that time plays in its favour. While economic relations with Greece, as we will see in the next section, have been, and are, very fluid, the Skopje government has not hesitated to intensify its ultranationalist campaign, mainly by trying to build a national identity based on an alleged inheritance of the glorious past of Alexander the Great. This position has been useful, fundamentally, to maintain within the party the ultranationalist sectors, or simply the extreme right, that in other states of the region have their own organizations differentiated from the traditional conservative parties. Thus, VMRO, despite continued corruption and its authoritarian drift, remains a strong electoral force, as demonstrated by the recent elections held on December 11, 2016, in which it was the most voted for force. But the support of the ultranationalists has a price that seems that the VMRO, concretely, its undisputed leader Gruevski, is paying without perceptible fear. While the government maintains a fluid channel of understanding and collaboration with Athens through the aforementioned Confidence-Building Measures, it launched, at the same time, an indefinable project of "antiquation" of the capital, through the project *Skopje 2014*, which consisted of transforming the appearance of the city by building new buildings in an unspeakable neoclassical style, covering the facades of old buildings in the same style, and installing dozens of statues of all sizes and trends. These statues represent characters from all ages of the history of Macedonia, but with special emphasis on those that refer to the Hellenistic period, with an equestrian statue of Alexander Magno of 22 meters in height (an at the cost of 8 million dollars), and another, reaching 29 meters, of his father, Philip, located just on the other side of the wonderful 15th century Stone Bridge, built in the Ottoman period on the foundations of a Roman bridge, which separates the city centre from the Bazaar neighbourhood, now mostly populated by ethnic Albanians.<sup>7</sup> The planned installation of a gigantic Ferris wheel, larger than the London Eye, is expected to cost \$20 million.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This author confesses his inability to faithfully define with words what this monstrous project of the transformation of the city is about. Only images can help to understand it. See, for example: Skopje 2014, "Let them eat Alexander the great statue", Foreign Policy.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the cost of *Skopje 2014* see: "Skopje 2014 uncovered".



It is worth recalling, finally, that the city of Skopje was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake with magnitude 6.9° on 26 July 1963. The reconstruction of the city was the result of a gigantic international solidarity movement, led by the UN, the United States and the Soviet Union, and implemented by the government of Tito in a transparent and exemplary manner, through an international competition that was won by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, who had already worked in Hiroshima, and who proposed a reconstruction based on the use of bare concrete exteriors within the style of the so-called "Brutalist Architecture".<sup>9</sup> The work of the Japanese architect was acclaimed internationally for its functionality, cost and innovative character. Today, that Skopje is about to disappear crushed by a costly project (to date almost \$670 million) designed to satisfy certain political positions, despite the opposition or indifference of the majority of the population. There are also complaints about the habitability and health conditions of the new buildings, which have serious defects in ventilation, insulation, space distribution, etc.

Moreover, the *Skopje 2014* Project also has a direct bearing on the state name dispute case on the other side of the border. This process of "antiquation" is seen from the most Greek nationalist positions as the test of latent irredentism in the positions of the government of Skopje. And it must be said that, at least, this architectural breeding does not help at all to solve the problem. It is doubtful to say that a possible change in the government of the republic could contribute to changing this nationalist course. At the time of the writing of this article, the uncertainty remains for the near future of the Republic of Macedonia. The results of the legislative elections, held on December 11, 2016, after two postponements during the same year, have left the country in a situation in which the two major parties are in a technical tie. The vote of the Albanian minority, so far in the hands of the two traditional parties, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) has now been shared among four political formations, with the emergence of two new

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<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed description see: "Communist Architecture of Skopje, Macedonia – A Brutal, Modern, Cosmic, Era".

parties: BESA Movement, which has become the favourite of the urban and young Albanian sectors; and, the Albanian Alliance. The attitude of these parties will depend not only on who, but how, the country will govern in the coming years. The extent to which a government of the Socialists, who have been in the opposition for the last 11 years, can change the course of the country is something that should be analyzed in the wide spectrum ranging from hope to scepticism. It remains unknown and difficult to determine to what extent the presence of a weakened VMRO remaining in power means either the end of corruption or the implementation of democratization measures demanded by the populace. At least in the last elections, a certainly hopeful fact emerged. For the first time in the history of this country, two ethnic Albanian MPs have been elected on the lists of one of the major parties, the Socialist Party (SDSM), the long-time heirs of the League of Yugoslav Communists in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.

In short, the continuity of the Athens veto, which makes the Republic of Macedonia a victim in the eyes of the international community, and the ultranationalist drift of Skopje, which, to a certain extent, serves to justify the Greek position, become two positions that feed off of and justify each other.

### **3. Economic Approach**

Greece is one of the three largest investor countries in the Republic of Macedonia. Not even the precarious situation of the Greek economy has meant a significant reduction of its investment position in the neighbouring country (Nieto, 2014). It is true that, in absolute terms, the figures are certainly modest, but for an economy like Macedonia, Greece is, quantitatively and qualitatively, one of its main partners in the region and found throughout its financial system. At the end of 2015, more than 1,000 Greek companies were registered in the Republic of Macedonia. Of these, 360 were active and 50 were registered during that year. The jewels of this Greek presence are undoubtedly Stopanska Banka, the largest bank in the country, owned by the National Bank of Greece, and OKTA, the oil refining and distribution company, whose majority shareholder is Hellenic

Petroleum. The Greek presence in the banking sector is complemented by the subsidiary in the country of Alpha Bank. Also, Greek companies are very well positioned in sectors such as the textiles, construction, retail supermarket and wine production.

Pragmatism or double standards? Most likely both. As far as economic relations are concerned, it does not seem that the conflict over the name is an obstacle for either party. Greek executives of Macedonian companies sign hundreds of documents daily in which is written "Republic of Macedonia", since the term "FYROM" is not used at all within the country. Although it is true that "identities are not bought with money",<sup>10</sup> it looks quite paradoxical that a substantial part of the economy of the young independent republic is controlled by those who deny the possibility of access to international platforms that could potentially be vital for the development of that very same economy. In any case, regardless of the always questionable moral judgments, the economy is a very solid bridge between the two states, not only by the Greek investments, but by the already existing important role of Thessalonica, and the Greek Macedonia in general, as a point of reference of communications, entry and exit of goods and as a leisure and shopping destination for a growing number of citizens of the Republic of Macedonia.

As we have seen in the previous section, the current government of Syriza has made it very clear not to burn bridges, but rather to lay others strong enough so that Greece does not lose its predominant position in the Balkans. A simple glance at the figures of each country in the region, serves to understand the magnitude of what we are talking about. Let us take as an example the comparison between the countries of the total and *per capita* Gross Domestic Product (GDP), calculated using the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), estimated for 2016, based on the data obtained until the last quarter of that year. Thus, we find that only Romania at \$441 billion overcomes Greece with \$290 billion in total GDP (PPP); yet is the opposite when comparing GDP per capita, with Greece at \$26,809 GDP (PPP) per

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<sup>10</sup> Opinion expressed by Professor Evanthis Hatzivassiliou in a private conversation with the author during the International Scientific meeting "Balkans: historical processes and current challenges (XIX-XXI centuries)" celebrated in Granada on 5-6 November 2015.

capita and Romania with \$23,320 per capita. Slovenia, on the other hand, is the only country with a higher GDP per capita (\$32,027) than Greece. But what we are talking about here is the comparison between the GDP (PPP) figures of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia. By population and extension, it is logical that the overall Greek GDP (PPA) is much higher, compared to the \$30 billion of the little republic. But the difference is much more significant if we look at GDP (PPP) per capita figures, \$26,809 for Greece versus \$14,530 in the Republic of Macedonia, given that this figure has been calculated taking into consideration that the cost of living in the Republic of Macedonia is by far lower than the one in Greece.<sup>11</sup>

In short, even at such a serious time in the Greek economy, its economic capacity makes it the largest regional power and a privileged interlocutor for the Europeanist aspirations of the countries still waiting for joining the EU. If it is confirmed that Greece has already abandoned the economic recession, its regional power role can only become stronger in the medium term. Identities are not actually bought with money, but the economy can be a determining factor, not the only one of course, to reach a way out of the dispute over the official name of the Republic of Macedonia.

#### **4. Historical and Social Approach**

In this confusing battle, both contenders strive to claim the heritage of glorious past times. Basically, in this war of symbols, the "national" identity of the Macedonians of Philip and Alexander plays a priority role. They are an unequivocal part of Hellenism for Athens and the origin of the current Macedonian identity for Skopje. All kinds of archaeological, documentary, and geographical arguments are used to defend one or the other position. The governments of the VMRO, in power in the Republic of Macedonia during the last 11 years, have been especially active in this regard. Apart from the aforementioned *Skopje 2014* Project, the name of the airport and the A1 motorway (now both "Alexander the Great") was changed, as well as the main

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<sup>11</sup> International Monetary Fund.

square of Skopje and a multitude of other sites throughout the country. Greece counterattacks with the evidence that the main archaeological sites are in Greek Macedonia, Macedonia's participation in the ancient Olympic Games, the presence of Aristotle as responsible for the education of Alexander and a long and endless rosary of arguments and counterarguments on the part of one and the other side.

The most deplorable element of this confrontation is the participation of a good part of the academia of both countries, placed in the service of the nationalistic interests, whose objective is to support the arguments of each state. We thus have witnessed the construction of myths on both sides of the border that have a huge impact on the population as a whole, which very often feels threatened either because its identity is denied or because it is stolen. Historians and political scientists from both sides of the border (Kofos, 1993; Rossos, 2008) and the respective diasporas have put their work in the service of the justification of the respective national positions.

This type of approach seeks to and succeeds in appealing to feelings and emotions. Thus, on 14 February 1992, a demonstration took place in Thessaloniki with the support of all political parties, except the KKE, and with the enthusiastic presence of the Greek Orthodox Church, in which took one million people to the streets (Karakasidou, 2014). Not even the organizers hoped to gather such a large number of people. Any demonstration of a million people, anywhere in the world, is a great event, but if this happens in a country of less than twelve million inhabitants, where almost 10% of the population goes out, we are talking about an event of proportions out of the ordinary. The motto was simple "Macedonia is Greek" shortly thereafter, on March 28, 1992, an excited Konstantinos Karamanlis, then President of the Republic Greece, declared before the television cameras at the airport of Thessalonica that "there is only one Macedonia, and that Macedonia is Greek". This type of act is what has become what we could today call the Greek maximalist position, since it does not coincide with the approaches of the last Greek governments (Karamanlis, Simitis, Papandreu, Tsipras and even Samaras) that would accept the use of the word "Macedonia", in certain circumstances, provided that it is accompanied by a geographical modifier.

To be informed about what citizens think about this issue, we only have the surveys conducted and published in November 2007<sup>12</sup> and February 2008.<sup>13</sup> Three out of four Greek citizens believed that no concessions should be made and that the word "Macedonia" could not appear in any way in the official name of the state to which most of the street and the media denominated, and still call, "Skopia". Likewise, four out of five agreed that the government should maintain its veto to the accession of the Republic of Macedonia to NATO and the EU until the problem of the name was satisfactorily resolved. Likewise, the rejection of the acceptance of a double name, one for internal use and another for international purposes, was also supported by an overwhelmingly majority. Finally, these surveys show that the rejection of any type of concession is much higher among the residents of Macedonia and Thrace. Although we do not have more recent data, there is not much reason to believe that the opinions held today are very different.

The problem now is how and who can defuse this situation in an atmosphere of economic crisis and amid a boom of ultranationalist positions, represented (but not only) by the Golden Dawn party, which has been firmly implanted in the Greek political landscape. Nea Demokratia and Syriza do not appear to be prepared to assume this risk of incalculable electoral consequences.

Any view expressed publicly against these statements, is considered "unpatriotic", almost a betrayal. There have been cases in which individuals or groups have spoken out against the official attitude towards the Republic of Macedonia. One of the earliest nearly ended in tragedy. The only party to initially detach itself from the maximalist positions was the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). On June 3, 1994, at an election event in Thessaloniki on the occasion of the European elections, three Communist candidates were stabbed by a person who came to the podium pretending that he was going to deliver to the speakers a bouquet of flowers. The attacker was arrested, tried and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and in any case justified his action using the KKE's position towards the

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<sup>12</sup> Metron Analysis

<sup>13</sup> Alco. The pulse of society

Republic of Macedonia (Rizopastis, 1996). Another incident related to voices that dissent from the official position is that of Anastasia Karakasidou, Professor of Anthropology at Wellesley College located in the state of Massachusetts in the United States. Professor Karakasidou carried out research in the framework of her PhD dissertation in several towns in Greek Macedonia where she sought proof of the existence of a Slavic minority totally different from the majority Greek population. Her doctoral thesis was published in 1997 (Karakasidou, 1997). A leak to the press of a manuscript of her work resulted in her receiving serious death threats. An extreme right-wing publication, "Stohos" went on to publish the address of her family home in Thessaloniki, as well as the registration of the car she used to travel to the areas of her investigation. Her family, originally from Asia Minor, received all kinds of pressure and, according to some sources, several visits from the secret police. Also, organizations of the Greek Diaspora in the United States joined the attacks on this researcher (Doyle, 1994). More recently, in March 2016, Deputy Minister of Immigration Policy Mouzalas, in an interview with the Skaï television network, referred to the problem of immigrants not being allowed to enter "Macedonia". Despite apologizing publicly, both the opposition and the government partners, ANEL, insistently asked for the resignation or dismissal of the deputy minister. Some media have also dared to disagree with the official position. In this sense it is very interesting the documented work of the collective "Iós" in dismantling the myths that have contributed to form the Greek public opinion on this subject (Iospress).

On the other side of the border, the process is, basically, very similar. The inhabitants of the Republic of Macedonia have to face a process of nation building that the government identifies both with the Hellenistic past and with the struggle for the liberation of Macedonia from the Ottoman yoke in the late nineteenth and early XX centuries. The task of distancing itself from the Bulgarian component is thus set in motion. An arduous task, no doubt, since the ties between the Macedonian nationalist movements of the early twentieth century with the Bulgarian state, were very close (Danforth, 1997). In fact, the governments in Sofia, which have no problem in recognizing the Macedonian state by its constitutional name, does not recognize the existence of a "Macedonian nation" differentiated from the Bulgarian

one. In short, Macedonian and Bulgarian history, language and culture are one and the same thing. For Sofia, the differentiation between "the Bulgarian" and "the Macedonian" is a direct consequence of the historical falsification carried out by the Yugoslav Communist regime (Ivanov, 2008). However, Bulgaria accepts that a majority of the Slav Macedonian population does identify with its historical Bulgarian roots, but demands the recognition of a Bulgarian minority within in the Republic of Macedonia.

Under all of these circumstances, Greek reservations, Hellenistic delusions of the VMRO, Bulgarian positions, and the existence of an important Albanian minority, between 20% and 25% of the total population of the country, the task of building a national identity becomes extremely hard.

The existence of the Albanian minority, which is the majority in some regions, gives rise to major concerns about the stability of the country. Although the 1991 process of secession of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was fundamentally peaceful, the inter-ethnic conflict of 2001 showed that a significant part of the definition of the state was unresolved. The permeable border with Kosovo and, to a lesser extent, the historical ghost of a "Great Albania" constitute a constant threat to the very existence of the Macedonian state. It is interesting to analyze what the Albanian minority wants, which is nothing more than equal rights, official recognition of their language, access to public administration, etc. When asked in September 2013 (Enikos, 2013), for example, about the possibility of adding the geographical modifier "Alta" to the official name of the state, in the country as a whole, 53.6% was against it and 37.5% in favour. But if we disaggregate the vote between the two communities, we see that among the Slav majority the vote against the incorporation of the modifier reached 64.8%, while the favourable vote among the Albanians reached 59.1%. But where perhaps the biggest difference (and the biggest concern) lies is in the very different positions with respect to joining the European Union. While some observers fear that among the Slav majority Europeanism is losing strength to the point that the rejection would



already be close to 50%, among the Albanian minority the desire to join Europe is supported by more than 90%.<sup>14</sup>

In this scenario, the outcome of the December 2016 elections adds even more uncertainty. The VMRO campaign was very belligerent against the approaches of the Albanian parties. The peculiar distribution of seats among the six electoral regions, each with twenty MPs, has meant the victory of the Socialist opposition in the region where the majority of the capital is, the victory of the Albanian parties in the region where they are majority, the victory of the VMRO in two regions and a tie between the two major parties in the two remaining remains. In these circumstances, the country's governability rests with the largest Albanian party, the DUI, which has already ruled in coalition with VMRO in recent years. However, that same participation in the government is what explains the loss of ten MPs (from 19 to 9 seats). The message sent seems clear and it seems unlikely that this party will re-embark on a coalition with the VMRO. In any case, one more deputy would still be needed, so that the Albanian parties are compelled to understand each other, in order to try to force a government that is committed to their interests as a national minority.<sup>15</sup>

As a counterpoint to such uncertainty, the fact that, as we have explained, for the first time in the history of this young country, one party, that of the SDSM Socialists, has presented interethnic candidacies and two Albanian MPs have been chosen in the lists of this party. Likewise, the SDSM has incorporated intellectuals and social movement activists into a successful attempt to connect with what the citizens asked for.

To speak of the name dispute in these circumstances, it would seem not to have more sense. The Republic of Macedonia is in a fragile political situation where the priority is undoubtedly to achieve a stable government.

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<sup>14</sup> Author talks in Skopje with representatives of political parties, activists, university professors and journalists. Without a recent survey in this regard, virtually all agreed that Euroscepticism among the Macedonian majority is constantly increasing, while the support of the Albanian minority remained constant.

<sup>15</sup> Macedonian State Election Comision.

## 5. Linguistic Approach

The dispute over the official name of the Republic has become a stagnant conflict. When it was first raised, in the early 1990s, all measures adopted were labelled as "provisional", especially the compromise signed by the governments of Athens and Skopje in 1995.<sup>16</sup> Twenty-one years later, provisionality has given way to a *de facto* situation, in which the different actors involved have turned their respective positions into almost definitive ones, so that the possibilities of negotiation are becoming smaller and smaller.

In these circumstances, the linguistic aspect of the problem acquires a protagonism that it did not have fifteen or twenty years ago. For, in the end, a name is governed by the rules of language. Thus, although the fact that the international community accepts the name of the Republic of Macedonia is not strictly a linguistic phenomenon, it may be useful to use its conceptual apparatus to analyze the matter. According to Eugenio Cuseriu (1973), the rule that regulates speech "is not established according to criteria of correction and subjective assessment of what is expressed [...] In checking the norm to which we refer, we verify how it is said and not how it should be said [...] The concepts that are opposed to it are normal and abnormal, and not correct and incorrect". According to this, the maintenance over a prolonged period of a linguistic use legitimizes it and tends to make it permanent.

Thus, regardless of any agreement that governments can reach, it seems it would be very difficult for the Greeks to stop referring to the neighbouring country as "Skopia" and its inhabitants as "Skopianí". Similarly, it seems impossible for the nationals of the Republic of Macedonia to stop referring to their country as 'Macedonia' and to themselves as "Macedonians", knowing, moreover, that its position on this matter is reinforced by the fact of the wide international recognition as such.

In short, the linguistic aspect of this dispute has ended up becoming the main problem to reach an agreement. Greek maximalism first, the

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<sup>16</sup> Interim Accord between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

dangerous games by the Skopje governments, especially in the last ten years, of building a national identity from a more than dubious Hellenistic heritage, together with the political and economic instability of both countries, have contributed to the solution to the problem still seeming to be far away. However, it is not a risk to say that the generalization of certain linguistic uses favours the approaches of the Republic of Macedonia in the eyes of the international community.

## **6. By way of conclusion... (If possible)**

In May 2016, I had the opportunity to travel to Athens and Skopje, to try to catch up on the status of the issue on the dispute over the name. In Skopje, from the very first minute I was aware that something much more important was at stake. The democratic future of the state was, no more or less, being decided upon. The elections scheduled for April 2016 had already been postponed and very large sections of the population went out daily on to the street as part of the so-called "Colourful Revolution", which aimed to support the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, to force the President of the Republic to annul the pardon granted to more than forty politicians accused of serious crimes in the exercise of their positions and, in short, they asked for a new postponement of the elections scheduled for the month of June. In these circumstances, no one seemed to attach too much importance to the dispute over the name, since what was at stake was much more serious.<sup>17</sup>

Of the more than fifteen interviews that I conducted, all but one were with interlocutors of the Slav majority or "Ethnic Macedonians", according to the disputed and debatable term by which they call themselves. The remaining interview was the only one I held with a member of the Albanian community, a media management specialist and political activist, who, to my surprise, was the only one who, even in those circumstances in the country, considered it a priority to

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<sup>17</sup> For independent and rigorous monitoring of the internal situation in Macedonia, see the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network website, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/>.

solve the problem of the name. My Albanian counterpart went much further in stating that the unstable ethnic balance of the country required the unavoidable incorporation into the EU, for which an overwhelming majority of the Albanian-Albanian community was committed, and that for that very reason the obstacle created by the name dispute had to be removed.

However, I did not find anyone who was willing, not even my Albanian interlocutor, to give up that his national identity be defined exclusively as "Macedonian". Twenty-five years after the declaration of independence, the generation that leads, or intends to lead, the country is increasingly far from the Yugoslav period. The top leaders of the two main parties, Gruevski of the right-wing VMRO and Zaev of the Social Democrat SDSM, were respectively 20 and 17 years old at the time of independence. Bilal Kasami, leader of the new Albanian party BESA Movement, which has broken through in the last elections, was 16 at the time of independence. A large part of the activists who have led the opposition to the VMRO government on the streets are even younger. Although all of them were still born as Yugoslavs, they grew up, were formed in, and began in the labor and political worlds as Macedonians. There is nothing else they can be. They are not the Macedonians of Alexander the Great, not even the Macedonians of Goce Delchev or Dame Gruev, the heroes of the struggle against Ottoman domination, but the Macedonians of 1945, when the republic was created within the federal Yugoslav state.

With the disappearance of Yugoslavia, the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Montenegrins had no problem recognizing their own national identity. Problems arose by delimiting the geographical space corresponding to those identities. In the case of Macedonia, the territorial dispute is minimal, the state is perfectly delimited, but the national identity continues to be disputed by the Greeks, the Bulgarians, by Serbian ultranationalist sectors and by the threat of conflict with the large Albanian minority.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that a significant part of the population feels "protected" by nationalist positions, by national references to both near and distant periods of history, and even by minority but real voices, which go further and do not renounce but rather play with irredentist dreams of "reunification" of what they

consider the usurped Macedonian homeland. The inconclusive result of the parliamentary elections of 2016 may further lengthen the permanent situation of institutional crisis. The decisive role of the Albanian parties in the country's governance could lead to a radicalization of the nationalist approaches of the Macedonian majority. The possibility of new legislative elections in the spring, coinciding with the planned proposition, would help to defer any further initiative to solve the name problem.

In Greece, on the other hand, the political forces that had divided the power until recently, the right-wing Nea Demokratia and the social-democrat PASOK, approached the independence of the neighbour of the north with a maximalist approach: there is only one Macedonia, and this Macedonia Is Greek. What for politicians could be a starting point for negotiation, for the country's public opinion was, and still is, almost a dogma. Although the official position today is to accept a composite name, the condition that there are no double denominations again places the negotiations at a dead end.

However, it seems as impossible a task for the Republic of Macedonia to stop using, even if only for bilateral purposes, its constitutional name, as it would be for Greece to stop using the derogatory metonymy "Skopia". The permanent economic uncertainty in Greece, discourages the government to make decisions that, although they do not cost money, can cost popular support. The argument, however, that the governing coalition with ANEL would be in danger if more flexible positions were to be adopted in the negotiation with the Skopje government, is, as we have already pointed out, more than debatable.

Finally, the disappointing "Enlargement Report" of the European Commission of November 2016, dedicates to the issue of the name dispute only the following sentence: 'Building upon recent progress in implementing confidence-building measures with Greece, decisive steps are needed to solve the issue'. Moreover, it has been announced that the package of measures for enlargement, to be adopted in 2017, has been postponed to the autumn of 2018, so that it will not be in force well into 2019.<sup>18</sup> That represents a real pitcher of cold water for

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<sup>18</sup> European Neighbourhood Policy.

the candidate states of the Balkans, and in the case of the Republic of Macedonia, could help to defer any attempt to resolve the already unbearably long battle for the official name of the state.

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**Loreta Georgievska-Jakovleva** (Skopje, 1962)

currently works as a Full-time Professor at The Institute for Macedonian Literature (Ss. Cyril and Methodius, University in Skopje). Her specific areas of research interest include: Theory of Literature, Cultural Studies, Cultural Politics, Media and Gender Studies. Her publications include: *An Open Circle* (The Poetics of the

Novels of Tashko Georgievski, 1997), *A Mirror of the Discourse* (2000), *The Fantastic and the Macedonian Novel* (2001), *Allegory, the Grotesque and the Macedonian Novel* (2002), *Literature and Transition* (2008), *Identites* (2012) and *Culture and Media* (2015). She helms several national and international projects, currently including: COST project, IS0703, The European Research Network on Learning to Write Effectively (ERN-LWE) (2009-2012), Literacy Development in the Humanities (LIDHUM), University of Zurich (Switzerland) (2011-2013), COST project IS1007, Investigating Cultural Sustainability (2011-2014). She is a member of The Association of Comparative Literature of Macedonia and The Macedonian Writers' Association. Her social and professional functions include: Director of the Institute for Macedonian Literature (2005-2011), Member of the Rector Board of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University-Skopje (2004-2009), Member of the Council of the International Seminar of Macedonian Language, Literature and Culture (2004-2011), Editor-in-Chief of the Journal *Spectrum* (Volumes 47 and 48), Editor-in-Chief of the Journal *Culture*, President of the Council of the Institute for Macedonian Literature (2002-2004), President of the Centre for Culture and Cultural Studies (2013-present).



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## Monumentality and Identity: Macedonian Cultural Politics (2006-2016)

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Loreta Georgievska-Jakovleva

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**Abstract.** For the Republic of Macedonia, the period of transition, which foresees a move from a socialist political system to a capitalist one, accompanied by an appropriation of Western democratic values and principles, ushered in a process of international recognition for the new country. As part of the efforts placed in said realm, cultural politics stands out as the key factor in the country's attempts to create its self-image as well as the image it wishes to showcase globally. By negating elements that constitute the Macedonian identity, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, through so-called capital projects in the realm of culture, enforces a well-defined cultural politics that redefines the Macedonian identity. The implemented cultural politics aims at creating a dominant discourse that positions the "true" story about Macedonia, oppositional to the already present stereotypical representations, with the goal of "cultivating" the collective's memory, now rooted in a mythic past. The stated aim of this strategy is to instigate a personal identification with the state, thus strengthening its international position. However, the effect of said strategy has resulted in the following: internally speaking, a divided society, internationally speaking, an uncertain outcome of the processes accompanying Macedonia's international integration.

**Keywords:** cultural politics in the Republic of Macedonia, national identity, monumentality, top-down politics, resistance, the Colorful Revolution

## 1. Introduction

The cultural politics of the Republic of Macedonia has been conditioned by the specificity of its context. The breakup of the former Yugoslavia meant that the Macedonian people could, for the very first time, constitute its fully independent and sovereign state.<sup>1</sup> Though Macedonia managed to secure its international affirmation and recognition, today it remains to face the negation of key elements necessary to firmly establish its sovereign identity. Due to the ongoing issue with neighboring Greece, namely in terms of its constitutional name –Macedonia–, it continues to be recognized under the FYROM reference.<sup>2</sup> The other neighboring states have also negated certain aspects of Macedonia's identity: Bulgaria has negated the existence of the Macedonian language, whereas Serbia the autonomy of the Macedonian church. In 2001, the Republic of Macedonia was also faced with an armed conflict, instigated by the ethnic Albanian minority, framed as a human rights fight.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the name dispute, directly, as well as the other mentioned issues, indirectly speaking, have contributed to the country's EU and NATO integration processes being fully blocked.

Facts speak to a missed opportunity to constitute a state at a time when the other Balkan countries establish its statehood, followed by a failed international integration during the present day, something that has left Macedonians feeling scorned and disadvantaged. Most Macedonians feel as if Macedonia's unfavorable history is repeating, and with that, present day sensibilities reaffirm the already established past image of Macedonia as a "powder keg", as a "mixed

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<sup>1</sup> The Macedonian people had constituted its first independent and sovereign state at the end of the Second World War, during the First Presidium of ASNOM [the Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia], namely in 1944; however, this state was a federative unit within Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> It needs to be pointed out, however, that the majority of states have recognized the country under its constitutional name (the Republic of Macedonia).

<sup>3</sup> Albania has never officially or formally for that matter underscored the territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia; however, the presence of Albanian irredentism cannot be sidelined.

salad", as "Europe's Other" (Georgievska-Jakovleva, 2012; Pavlovski & Georgievska-Jakovleva, 2009).

Through its cultural politics during the last decade, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has attempted to establish a new model of (self)identification that can be analyzed through two segments, namely the so-called capital projects in the publishing industry and the *Skopje 2014* Project.<sup>4</sup> The fact that these projects were not financed through an open call, which is the standard practice, nor was their realization accompanied by a wider public debate, brings us to the following thesis, namely that capital projects in the realm of culture have afforded the political elites in power a "top-down" way to implement a well-thought of strategy that would redefine the national identity, and with that the Republic of Macedonia's international position.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Each year, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia announces an open call for the financial support of projects that have a national interest, within the cultural realm, as well as projects aimed at the development of the creative industries. So-called capital projects are not a part of this established practice. In terms of this paper, only capital projects that clearly represent the direction that the Republic of Macedonia's cultural politics follows and at the same time fall outside of the established financing parameters.

<sup>5</sup> The capital projects in the publishing industry are: *135 Volumes of Macedonian Literature* an edition aimed at showcasing the literary production having taken place on Macedonian soil since the Middle Ages; The translations of the *135 Volumes of Macedonian Literature*, and the 8 volume "Anthology of Macedonian Literature", namely a selection and translation of the most representative pieces in six world languages (French, Spanish, Russian, German, Arabic, and Chinese); The translations of selected works by Nobel Prize-winning authors; "World Literature Pearls", encompassing 560 works; "Macedonian Temptations", monographs with CD-rom editions of documentary films by the Macedonian National Television, in 66 volumes; "Best in World Philosophy, History, and Psychology with Psychoanalysis", 150 books; "Anthology of World Poetry", translated in Macedonian, 5 volumes; "Anthology of Macedonian Childrens' and Yough Adult Literature", 3 volumes; The translations of the anthological works from world architecture, painting, sculpture, internal design and ornament art into Macedonian, 22 works; The translations of the 150 most significant works from the world of sports, health and nutrition, and The translations into Macedonian of 150 biographies, autobiographies, memories, and monographs of world famous people. The *Skopje 2014* Project, on the other hand, encompassed the construction of a large number of buildings and an even larger number of statues being placed, primarily in the downtown area of the capital city of Skopje.

Despite the "top-down" politics, the key characteristic shared by the two projects is their monumentality. This term references a physical and numerical size, that is to say, it speaks to two projects of enormous size and scope. Whilst promoting the projects, the powers that be (the Government and the Ministry of Culture) emphasized the grandeur and significance of the undertakings. Hence, in terms of the capital projects in the realm of the publishing industry that serve to represent Macedonian literature domestically and internationally, through translations in several world languages, we can say that we are dealing with an "all-encompassing approach" that aims to "represent the rich and nuanced world of the highbrow and definitive literary values of the writers" from Macedonia (Katalog, 2015: 7), while the projects related to the translations of world literary masterpieces into Macedonian aim at "enriching Macedonian culture with such treasured masterpieces by authors that marked the literary canon for the last hundred years (...) thus affirming the commitment to bring Macedonian readers world renown literary works" (19). The "Macedonian Temptations" project, on the other hand, aims at "elevating the forsaken and unwritten history of the Macedonian people, by offering up scientifically verified facts, arguments, and interpretations that speak the long history of the Macedonian struggle for statehood and independence" (230).

By analyzing the aforementioned projects, the following questions can be addressed: have the implemented cultural politics undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia been effective *vis-à-vis* the stated goal, namely the introduction of a new model of (self) identification and full international recognition of the Macedonian state under its constitutional name. The answers will be provided through a description and interpretation of what message has been sent, what it signifies, and the kind of world order the said projects help usher in.

## 2. (Re)imagining the National Identity

### 2.1 *The Dominant Narrative Intervenes*

It seems that when creating its cultural politics the Government of the Republic of Macedonia takes into consideration the claims that suggest that in order for the nation-state to function, apart from the necessary components for a functional state –such as political sovereignty, statehood, the consolidation of territory (Giddens, 1987; Mann 1993)–, ideas and myths that serve to sentimentalize the collective experience are needed (Holsti, 1996). This, in turn, focuses on nurturing a sense of a shared heritage and history, as a prerequisite for national cohesion, i.e., for collective consciousness and identity. Or: it asks for "the choreographing of the power of [the] imagination by locating it in an invented history, and grounding it in an imagined geography. The orchestration of such collective remembering and, if necessary, collective amnesia, constitutes the crucial underpinning of national-state identities" (Osborne, 2001:7). Henceforth, nationalism persists as "the most compelling identity myth in the modern world" (Smith 1995:1). And this showcases the psychological and emotional bases for constructing and stabilizing the national identity (Connor, 1994), symbols and myths (Zelinsky, 1988), namely, the position that the state "must be symbolized as being loved, imagined so that it can be constituted". (Walzer, 1967 in Zelinsky, 1988:65; my own translation)

In order for the state to be "symbolized and imagined in order for it to be loved", an idea that could be summed up as the following is being constituted: the request for an independent and internationally recognized state of the Macedonian people under its constitutional name is a just cause, for it involves an ancient (Biblical) people, whose struggle for freedom has been long-lasting and heroic, and whose long historical continuity has added with its specificity to the European cultural and civilizational development. Said idea requires a balanced narrative, which first and foremost will act as counter-balance to the attempts to deny the Macedonian identity. Bearing in mind the statement by Francis that our narratives "produce the language that we use to describe ourselves as a community" and that

"if we are not telling ourselves the right narratives, then we cannot imagine ourselves acting together to resolve our problems" (1998: 475) and the position by Friedman that "identity is literally unthinkable without narrative" (1998: 8-9), the powers that be look to such a "true" narrative in the literary and historic production. The capital projects in the publishing industry are in fact serving to actualize and/or create myths, namely, literature is looked at to provide the creation of the myth about the cultural and heroic past, whilst history provides the origin myth.

The *135 Volumes of Macedonian Literature Project* serves at least two functions: on the one hand, it ought to represent the "continuity" of the Macedonian nation as a literate nation, starting with medieval times and all the way to present day, hence, it helps create an image of Macedonia as the cradle of Slavic literacy.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the re-publishing of an edition of already anthological literary works – though not ideologically monolithic –, never bring into question the existence of the Macedonian identity, aims at mapping the "key spots" for identification. This is possible since, due to the unfavorable historical events, Macedonian literature would often serve a compensating function. Namely, it would compensate for the absences in the real world by creating mythic stories of a historic past (Georgievska-Jakovleva, 2006). To illustrate: said function is present in only two novels from the aforementioned edition, namely *Pirey* by Petre M. Andreevski, where the indestructibility of the titular weed stands metonymically for the Macedonian people, and *Marko Krале* by Slobodan Mickovikj, which rests on the epic poem cycle about Marko Krале and stems from the author's interest in how a historically marginal figure such as Prince Marco rises into a hero of

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<sup>6</sup> This idea rests on the thesis that the sheer birthright of Saint Cyril and Methodius (Thessaloniki) and their sphere of influence (the territory of present-day Macedonia), and consequently, the assumption that Old Church Slavonic was most definitely their mother tongue, gives Macedonia, and with that the Macedonian people, the right to consider itself as the place whence Slavic literacy originated and spread from. This thesis rests on the shoulders of an older, already established thesis by the Macedonian literary science, that the fact itself about the so-called Macedonian edit of the Glagolitic legitimizes the conversation about Macedonian medieval literature.

unprecedented strength and a protector of his people within the lyricism of folklore.

The *Macedonian Temptations Project* is tied to aspects and segments of Macedonian history that can be marked as forgotten/forbidden by the previous political system. Namely, it speaks to a revisiting and re-addressing aspects of Macedonian history by revising the already established processes, persons, and works, and replacing them with new ones, with the goal of imagining a different dominant image about Macedonian history from the previously established one. This new image reads: due to the circumstances surrounding the Macedonian people's right to sovereignty, as part of a larger political unity (Socialist Yugoslavia), it had to relinquish a part of its history. Though the project addresses the processes and figures from the turn of the century (20th), a time when the idea of nation-states in the Balkans gains prominence, freed from Ottoman rule, it adds onto another "forgotten" history: the right of the Macedonian people to reference a shared history with the ancient Macedonia from the days of Alexander the Great.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the image of Macedonia as a "powder keg" or "Europe's Other",<sup>8</sup> said projects attempt to create a different image of Macedonia, within the cultural politics of the country, from

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<sup>7</sup> Under the influence of the current authorities' ideology, a part of the Macedonian historians postulate the thesis that Macedonia has been the victim of the interest of more powerful nations, first and foremost the Serbs, when part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. According to this thesis, due to the upper hand Serbs had they were able to practice a politics of annexation, then followed by the Bulgarians and Greeks, Macedonia was a lose during its Yugoslav days: divided, whilst the idea about independence and unification most severely punished. Henceforth, each idea about the possibility of seeing present-day Macedonia as the inheritor of Alexander the Great's history is being sanctioned, which in the eyes of said Macedonian historians the present Macedonian state has an inalienable right (claim continuity). Literature guards the "forbidden" history of the idea about Macedonia's wholeness, however the idea about Macedonia as the inheritor of ancient history has been entirely forgotten, hence the efforts to its re-actualization. In fact, the very insistence on such historic continuity is what turns the capital projects of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia into key components of a well-thought of strategy.

<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the projects tied to the translation of books from various disciplines into Macedonian aims at demonstrating the readiness to adopt Western influences (for its influences are demonstratively present), thus treating Macedonia as a part of Europe, rather than as "Europe's Other".

the already established one, both domestically and internationally. Unlike the disputed Macedonian identity and the already ascertained stereotype of Macedonia as a "powder keg", these project are to help create an image of Macedonia as the cradle of civilizations, as a Biblical and ancient land, and with that help change the dominant self-identification of the Macedonian people from the position of the proverbial loser to the stance of the heroic victor, thus help increase the country's international ratings.

For the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, said narrative is the true story of the country's identity, and as such it is a constitutive part of the strategies employed to resolve the current issues tied to the obstacles accompanying the international recognition of the country under its constitutional name and its NATO and EU integration.

## *2.2 The Visualization of the Constituted Narrative*

The *Skopje 2014* project is the visualization of this discourse, for it contains the four components represented by the capital projects in the publishing history: antiquity, continuity, heroic past, and the ancient Macedonian culture as the inalienable part of civilized Europe. The project does not only help voice the constituted discourse, but also afford its dominance by adding on a series of details. Namely, the project favors the constituted narrative about Macedonia, aimed at its self-identification, since, in the words of Massey, places become tied to people through lived stories: "[the]identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told them, *how* these stories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant" (1995: 37). For Raymond Williams, such lived narratives instigate "structures of feeling", which then bind people to their worlds by enrooting them in a given place (cited in Harvey 1996: 37). Most authors recognize the paradigmatic power of myth: "[m]ost history, when it has been digested by people, becomes myth. Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations. (...) Myths are so fraught with meaning that we live and die by them. They are the maps by which cultures navigate through time" (Wright, 1992: 5).



The *Skopje 2014* Project is a practical proof of such a claim. Situated in the state capital, referenced by the name itself, it stands in accordance with the stance that the nation's capital is the best suited place for narrativization and recollection, that is to say the focal point for the nation's imagination, thus representing a pantheon of historical figures incorporated in the public and ceremonial space.

A monumental sculpture titled "Warrior on a Horse" has been erected on the main city square, Macedonia (opened to the public on September 8, 2011, commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Republic of Macedonia's independence),<sup>9</sup> while at the Pele Square, in the vicinity of the Macedonian Square, "Porta Macedonia".<sup>10</sup> The two monuments are situated in such a way so that it gives off a visual

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<sup>9</sup> The monument is 14.5 high, cast in bronze and set on a concrete basis that is 10 meters high. Under the monument, there is a fountain surrounded by eight soldiers, also cast in bronze and 3 meters in height, as well as eight lions, 2.5 meters high. The column basis of the warrior statute consists of three rings with relief plaques that contain images of three battles. They are separated by three rings made of bronze, with decorations and relief figurines. The top ring projects a water curtain, whilst upwards a fog effect is released. The fountain plays music. The statue was cast in Florence Italy by Ferdinando Marinelli, and its author is Valentina Stefanovska. Unofficially, 7.5 million euros were spent for its construction.

<sup>10</sup> The monument is in the shape of a triumphal arch, open to the public on January 6, 2012, with a speech by the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, where he self-identified as the ideologue behind the entire project. It was officially open for use a few months after the set date (September 8, 2011, namely the 20th Anniversary of Macedonia's independence). The Porta is 21 meters high. On its exterior, it is adorned by reliefs covering a surface of 193 square meters, while its interior is a gallery space, on two levels and a souvenir shop. The rooftop contains an observation platform, with three telescopes, to be reached by two elevators. It is also known under the name "Triumphal Arch", and it is the work of the sculptor Valentina Stefanovska. The monument was built by the construction company "Granit" from Skopje, at a cost of 4.4. million euros. It also consists of 32 reliefs on top of a marble surface from Prilep, "Sivec", depicting scenes from pre-history, including images from the Bay of Bones settlement, Alexander the Great's antiquity, the Middle Ages through the all-Slavic educators Cyril and Methodius, Clement and Naum of Ohrid, Tzar Samoil, followed by some later periods, with Krale Marko and Karposh, whilst the 20th century is depicted through Ilinden, ASNOM, the Aegean Macedonian exodus, all the way to 1991 and the declaration of Macedonia's independence. Apart from the historical scenes, the side ways are adorned by artefacts from folklore material culture, accompanied by four bronze statues situated on the corners of the sill.

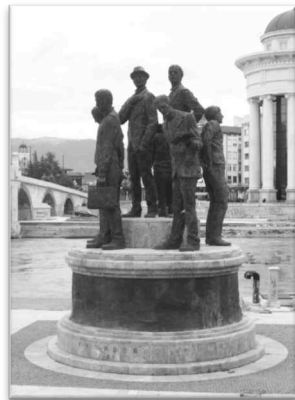
connection. When observed from a particular spot - in front of the "Porta Macedonia", they create a unity, namely, through the "Porta Macedonia", the "Warrior on a Horse" can be seen. This perspective is not random, rather it stands as the most illustrative example of the imaginary narrative whence the antiquity of the nation<sup>11</sup> should give birth to its present-day victory/triumph.



Warrior on horseback



Porta Macedonia



The Gemidzii



The first Presidium of ASNOM

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<sup>11</sup> The current Government of the Republic of Macedonia begot a process that helped solidify the thesis that Macedonians are the descendants of Alexander the Great, also known as "the antiquization of Macedonia".

This narrative is visualized by a staggering number of monuments depicting rulers, revolutionaries, freedom fighters, and political figures, striking particular poses and cast in magnanimous dimensions (for example, the monuments of Justinian I, Tzar Samoil, Saints Cyril and Methodius, the revolutionaries Goce Delchev, Dame Gruev, the Gemidzii, the Brothers Miladinov, the first president Metodija Andonov-Chento, the controversial leaders such as Todor Aleksandrov, and many others), enrooted in the downtown area so as to depict the master narrative.

In fact, we are dealing with a so-called process of conceptualizing the place that is tied to the processes that constitute identity politics (Featherstone, 1993). The whole construction of the *Skopje 2014* Project is "to communicate this government visually to the governed" (Vale, 1992: 10). This type of a concept pays particular attention to the buildings housing the Government and the Parliament, structures intended to deliver a flashy, impressive, suggestive image about the dignity, grandeur, and power of the state. Erected in the days prior to and short after the Second World War, these structures were originally in the style of the then dominant functional modernism, a style that did not follow the dominant narrative and functions for which it was conceived. Hence, the complete reconstruction of their exteriors (as well as the facades of most downtown residential and commercial buildings), in the Government chosen so-called "baroque" style.

The grandeur of the nation can be attested to through the new "baroque" structures, located on the left bank of the Vardar River, namely: the building of the Old National Theatre and the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, the Criminal Court building, State Archives building, the Archeological Museum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Agency for Electronic Communications, the Financial Police and State Prosecutor's buildings, the new concert hall of the Macedonian Philharmonic.



The old and the new Government Building

The chosen style –baroque– is not a random choice. It serves the imaginative narrative about Macedonia as "the cradle of civilizations" and a member of the European family. Henceforth, the adopted style

aims at representing Skopje as one of Europe's metropolises. In the context of this narrative, we can also trace the idea of having all Macedonian artists in a single spot, thus pointing out their numerousness, as well as the various periods they belong to. For example, "The Art Bridge", adorned on two sides by sculptures of well-known Macedonian writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, manifests said idea in said space. Thus, the style and sheer number of sculptures representing artists, not just on the Bridge, but also on the facades of the newly constructed museums, theatres, and administrative buildings, stands as a visual representation of the idea to subvert the stereotype of Macedonia as a "barbaric country" This narrative is continued with the sculptures of: Saints Cyril and Methodius (on the left bank of the River, a central city spot) and their students, Saints Clement and Naum, as well as those adorning the building of the so-called Old National Theatre, which was originally destroyed in the 1963 Skopje earthquake.



The Art Bridge



The Reconstructed Old National Theatre



The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

By enforcing these so-called capitalized project, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia aims at ascertaining a national chronicle, namely a narrative that the nation is to identify with. This, in turn, results in identity politics that re-address and re-negotiate history,

memory, and identity. Bent on reaching a consensus about the said constitutive elements of identity, while realizing that this is by far a complex process with a good deal of obstacles, the emotional bond that exists between citizen and statehood is being manipulated, thus resulting in a so-called patriotic narrative. Media play a key role in propagating said narrative, namely, populist tools such as public announcements, press releases, public service ads, etc., have transformed Skopje, quite swiftly and unexpectedly, into a "commemorative town", i.e., "a ritual site" (Hutton, 1993: 51 in Osborne, 2001: 21). An example in support of this claim are the celebrations accompanying the day of independence and the reception of the National Basketball Team following the 2011 European Championship.



The iconography of the Macedonian fans during the 2011 European Basketball Championship and the iconography of a winning team



The reception of the National Basketball Team by the political elites and the masses, Skopje, 2011

### 2.3 *Capital Projects and the Economy: Selling Place*

The Prime Minister, through public service announcements, had stated several times over that the *Skopje 2014* Project contributes to the state's economic growth by employing local construction and artisan firms and strengthening the power of tourism. Thus "unlike other countries, Macedonia experienced the lowest fall during the financial crisis" (Makfax, 2013). As many other ones before them, particularly those of former communist states, the current Government of the Republic of Macedonia manipulates places so that it can create a national narrative that would be linked to measures aimed at strengthening the country's economy, by directly assisting companies, whilst creating places and narratives aimed at a consumerist mindset. Hence, "[w]hat history has always been to national identity, so heritage is now to "social cohesion" and economic vitality" (Osborne, 2001: 21). Consequently, the *Skopje 2014* Project can be viewed also as a theme-park tied to the development of the nation. Said politics by the Macedonian Government are not isolated cases, for they are a part of a worldwide trend, or to borrow from Lowenthal: "All at once heritage is everywhere –in the news, in the movies, in the marketplace– in everything from galaxies to genes. It is the chief focus of patriotism and a prime lure of tourism. One can barely move without bumping into a heritage site. Every legacy is cherished. From ethnic roots to history theme parks, Hollywood to the Holocaust, the whole world is busy lauding - or lamenting - some past, be it fact or fiction". (1996: ix)

Said politics, particularly those focused on place-making, are not unknown to the annals of history. Towards the end of the 19th century, cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, and Washington were on the receiving end of the "construction of spaces and landscapes of sovereignty suitable for choreographing the drama of state power", i.e., they became "assemblages of inspirational monuments, imposing state architecture, and theatrical civic display" (Osborne, 2001:21), namely, they became a symbolic space that would reflect the national ambitions and the independence dream. Thus, monuments, architecture, the exterior outlook of the capital city's buildings, in



particular the downtown area, become symbolic icons that allegorically speaking attesting to the country's progress from a colony to a nation-state (Sarkanjac, 2009).

Certainly, people do not remain passive agents in said process. Society's diversity guarantees, after all, that despite the didactic performances of the nation-state's identities, they will remain "polysemic" (Jensen, 1990; Rodman, 1992). Practically speaking, this implies that said monuments and the accompanying commemorative practices and rituals always project several different meanings, despite their origins through top-down "state creating" (Breuilly, 1993) or "state reinforcing" (Mann, 1994) practices, some diametrically opposed to their original intent.

It is no longer tenuous that our memory - individual and collective - is rather elastic. Jacobs speaks about "sites in the process of becoming" that is to say "sites saturated with the cultural politics of transformation", whence the construction of a heritage is treated as a political process, whence the inherited elements are either inserted or erased by the "sanctioned view of the national legacy" (Jacobs, 1992: 101 in Osborne, 2001: 21). Jacobs concludes: "[W]hich places do or do not become part of heritage and what transformations places undergo in this process of recognition is a key arena for combative struggles of identity and power. It is not simply that heritage places symbolize certain values and beliefs, but that the very transition of these places in heritage is a process whereby identity is defined, debated and contested and where social values are challenged or reproduced" (Jacobs, 1992:35 in Osborne, 2001: 21). Hence, people are rarely passive recipients, and their reaction to the whole spectrum of mnemonic devices about national cohesion oftentimes reveals more about the present than it does the past.

#### *2.4 Emotions and National Sentiment: Manipulations*

Henceforth, there is no public consensus about the public sculpting, the national heros, and the political iconography, thus, public art in Macedonia has become a contested site, rather than a symbol of public identification and unity. The main reason behind the

Macedonian public's derision of said project is the pervasive attitude that the project fails to help build emotions and national sentiment, but rather manipulates them.

As Harvey points out, so do many Macedonians believe, namely that the conceptualization of place which is tied to identity politics is a "reactionary place-bound politics" (1990), that does not secure unity; quite the opposite, the Macedonian identity is being constituted through non-existent, fabricated, and thus dangerous elements, which do not attest to the grandeur of the nations, but rather serve to construct and demonstrate the grandeur of the cult of personality, in this case that of the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. Along those lines the critics to the cultural politics of the Macedonian Government deem the *Skopje 2014* Project inapt for a civil and liberal democratic state, whence a plural and liberal nationalism is examined through the relations of inclusivity. Instead, the *Skopje 2014* Project enforces an ethnic nationalism that privileges the emotional and exclusivist celebration of national identity (Osborne, 2001).<sup>12</sup> Hence, the iconic landscapes and mythic tales become a place of disunity rather than a site of cohesive collective memory, based on the applied style and aesthetics,<sup>13</sup> and based on ethnic belonging and economic

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<sup>12</sup> Unlike the *Skopje 2014* Project, the capital projects in the publishing industry were not the targets of criticism, at least not along the lines of the former project. What has been generally stated about them by the critical public is that the selected works are badly translated, that there is no consensus in the manner in which the selections were made, however, the value and necessity of the project is not being questioned.

<sup>13</sup> One of the most vocal and engaged critics of the Project, Nikos Chausidis, believes that through its "disregard for the existing architectural experience", the Project adds on the already seen tactics of the former conquerors of Macedonia to destroy the cultural heritage found, namely who see what was built before them as someone else's heritage (which "records" someone else's memory) and thus needs to be disintegrated (Chausidis, 2013: 19). Chausidis believes that the strategy of "building in already developed places" is being applied in this case, which could be interpreted as a sign to dismantle Macedonian identity, the analogy being that the Project's creators here act as an occupying force. His conclusion, *inter alia*, is based on an analysis of the psychological profile of the Project's creators (describing them as "cowardly aggressive", with a desire to present physical inaptitude as "spiritual power"), which, in his view, leads to *exaggeration, temporal discontinuity, and absurdity* to stand as the Project's chief qualities. This line of

reasoning.<sup>14</sup> Unlike them, many others, like Massey, claim that such and similar processes contain nothing reactionary, since places can be seen as something other than fixed or regressive, namely, outward-looking and defined by plural identities and histories (1997). According to Massey, instead of viewing identities as "singular, fixed and static" or interpreting places as "bounded enclosed spaces defined through counter position against the Other who is outside" (1997: 168), the *Skopje 2014* Project, by incorporating figures and events from Albanian history successfully incorporates the politics of inclusivity and diversity.

It seemed as if the *Skopje 2014* Project had the support of the majority of the Macedonian public up until the emergence of the so-called "Colorful Revolution", a wide-net civic activist platform led by the "I Protest!" movement, and identified by the slogan "No Justice, No Peace!". The "Colorful Revolution" was a public act demonstratively recognized by the public throwing of paint at the monuments from the *Skopje 2014* Project in protest of the current political events (wiretapping scandal, governmental coverups,

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reasoning best summarizes the negative outlook of the Project's critics' side to the debate.

<sup>14</sup> The Institute of Policy Research and Good Governance in project *Skopje 2014 (PE) Construction of Identity Through Monuments* (Institute of Policy Research and Good Governance, 2012) identifies four key points of disagreement with the Project which are, by extension, points of social disintegration: (1) Disagreement over the interethnic problems it causes, due to the feelings of Albanians in Macedonia of being unequally represented, leading to the conclusion that the Project doesn't reflect the spirit of multiethnic reality in Macedonia; (2) Disagreement over the religious problems it causes, provoked by the decision to build a church in the vicinity of the square, arguing that there was a mosque on the square until 1917; (3) Disagreements over the negative reactions of neighbouring countries, especially Greece and Bulgaria, who believe that the monuments mean usurpation of their respective national histories; (4) Disagreements over the confrontations provoked inside the Macedonian nation itself, between the two leading government and opposition parties, with the opposition objecting to high corruption and the non-aesthetic solutions. We should add here another point of disagreement: (5) Disagreements inside the Macedonian nation caused by the attempt to redefine its identity: From Slavic to an identity rooted in antiquity and from a history that records only certain "clear" personalities and figures in relation to their views on the "Macedonian question", to history that "involves" other figures that held "dubious" positions on that same question.

appropriation of public funds for private gain). The members of the "I Protest!" movement gave out the following statement: "Why do we throw paint and color? We color as a sign of revolt, protest, to point out the corruption and the public waste of funds embodied by the *Skopje 2014* Project. Our anger and our paint-filled balloons are aimed exclusively at the symbols and the people responsible for the decisions these ungodly sums of money have produced, as they have been stripped from our very pockets". (Facebook page of the civil organization "I Protest!") A series of activities that the media report on follow: paint on the Porta Macedonia, the Ministry of Culture, the Fountain of the Warrior on a Horse, the municipal barracks of the City of Skopje, tonight the Government of the Republic of Macedonia was not spared at the hands of the "Colorful Revolution"; faces painted with all sorts of colors, young and old, calls for even greater numbers, not backing down from the demands about political responsibility; Hundreds of palms colored yellow, green and red...



*Skopje 2014* Buildings  
colored by the "Colorful Revolution"



A protest against the arrest  
of a "Ja Protestiram" member



Iconography of the Colorful Revolution



The protesters of the Colorful Revolution with the slogan "No Justice, No Peace!"

"The Colorful Revolution is the best thing that has ever happened to Macedonia. It unites people and stands in opposition to the grayness of the regime and the deathly paleness of *Skopje 2014*. The Colorful Revolution is all VMRO is not; it stands for multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionality, different ideologies united for a common goal. (...) The Colorful Revolution is cool; it is love and a warning sign, desire and dissent. The Colorful Revolution is salvation and the basis for a new, healthy, colorful, prosperous Macedonia. Its colorfulness celebrates diversity. I love being colorful! I am sick and tired of the authorities' grayness!", says Nikola Pisarev for Okno (2016).

The aforementioned quotation best summarizes the differences between the two concepts battling it out. The result of this battle, still ongoing, will determine the value system of contemporary Macedonian society. The concept the Macedonian Government has been following is based in the logic of processes characteristic for all states at the onset of their respective journey, and which reemerge today as the result of migrations and globalization. The mentioned projects that address the shared public space as a site for ritualistic remembering and performance are the Macedonian Government's way of addressing its two most current and pressing issues: the unfavorable (auto)imagology about Macedonia, the reason behind the unfavorable international affirmation and the country's poor economic state. For the opponents of the Government's cultural

politics, said projects are a reflection of an authoritarian, dictatorial rule, which manipulates national sentiments for personal criminal financial gain, which in turn cancels democracy and freedom in Macedonia, and with that, prolongs the country's desired EU and NATO membership.

### 3. Conclusion

The current state in Macedonia does not allow us to draw a conclusive, objective, concrete, and clear-cut conclusion. What can be stated here, rooted in the presented findings and examinations, is a necessarily subjective fact, along the lines of personal considerations and predictions, not based on solid argumentation. Even if we take out of the equation the criticism attesting to the kitsch aesthetics of the *Skopje 2014* Project, for it is a part of the subjective domain, and take into account the facts shared through the wiretapping affair,<sup>15</sup> the claims made by the civil organizations that protested against the current authorities seem valid. On the other hand, if we take into account the unprincipled politics of the EU *vis-à-vis* Macedonia,<sup>16</sup> as the ever increasing self-centeredness of nation-states in terms of their

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<sup>15</sup> The opposition party, SDSM, towards the end of 2015, announced to the public the existence of recorded telephone conversations between the highest members of the ruling party, attesting to behind-the-scenes dealings and irregularities, connected to the voter registration, appointment of judges at the whim of governmental representatives, corrupted deals, even pointing to the possibility of the highest members of government being involved in terrorist activities and murders. A number of the recorded conversations deal directly with the *Skopje 2014* Project, which from this angle represents a money laundering venture involving public funds.

<sup>16</sup> No one is contesting the fact that the Republic of Macedonia's NATO and EU membership have been prolonged due to Greece's blocking of the country's international membership under its constitutional name as well as the FYROM reference despite the fact that several years have passed since the country's EU candidate status recognition (thus attesting to conditions having been met for negotiations to commence). The Republic of Macedonia has experienced continuous pressure at the hands of international representatives to resolve the name dispute, although set European values state that each ethnicity has the right to its name.

ethnicity, the said governmental projects are seen by many as the appropriate response and a way to maintain national pride.

What effects projects have in terms of the stated goals about a people's identification with their state could be also measured according to the public's support for them. If we take into account the mass attendance of citizens that took an active part in Colorful Revolution (although there is no statistical data available), we could say that the *Skopje 2014* Project does not have the public's support. However, on the other hand, if we judge based on the votes casted in support of the ruling VMRO party at the most recent elections, where it won by a tight margin, we could then say that the current Macedonian Government, and by extension its capital project, enjoy the majority of the public's support. Hence, at present no relevant conclusions can be drawn in terms of if and to what extent the capital projects realize the national cohesion aim.

What remains, though, is the fact that the cultural politics of the Republic of Macedonia during the last decade have divided the populace, on several grounds, including (1) the ethnic lines, basically Macedonians and Albanians; (2) along the lines of historical belonging, namely into Ancient Macedonians and Slavs; (3) along the lines of the aesthetic qualities of the project, namely into supporters and opponents; (4) along the lines of economic benefit and investment priorities, namely into those who are privileged and get wealthier at the expense of the public, and those who are marginalized, and are on the receiving end of bad public service in education, health services, infrastructure, the poor and the welfare cases.

In terms of the efficiency of the implemented cultural politics in terms of the country's international position, the fact that we are not yet EU and NATO member states, in and of itself, at least for now, speaks to their ineffectiveness.

Hence, is the implemented strategy, in the eyes of many outdated and characteristic for dictatorships, effective, alludes a final and definite answer. In lieu of one, perhaps the words of Charles Taylor could suffice for now: "We have to learn how (...) achieve some kind of common understanding. And this can only be by recognizing that our being *together* is important to us, that it enriches us, that it is

something we all cherish. (...) common identity includes a set of basic principles that recognize that we all want to work with each other to preserve these historical identities with their differences intact" (1998: 341). To add: national identity is best defined along the lines of a rational estimation of the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of the stakeholders, which in turn need to be accompanied, even in part, by the symbolic idea of what a people see themselves as.

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**Andreja Stojkovski** (Skopje, 1977) is a Senior Researcher/Analyst, and President of EUROTHINK. Andreja graduated law at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje with a major in International Law and International Relations and finished Master Studies in EU Law at the Universidad Carlos III in Madrid. In his professional career he worked as Counsellor

for EU Integration at the Sector for European Integration from November 2000 to October 2002 participating in such activities as the final round of negotiations for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, and the drafting of the first National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis. Later on he was engaged as Environment and Nature Conservation Legal Expert for the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and DG Environment. Since 2007 he has been permanently engaged with EUROTHINK – Centre for European Strategies first as Programme Coordinator, and later as Senior Researcher-Analyst. His research interests include the fields: EU Constitutional and Political System, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, Relations between the EU and Macedonia, Spain and Spanish Foreign and EU Policy, International and European Environmental Law, etc. Since October 2009 he is elected Teaching Assistant in EU Structures and Institutions at the University American College Skopje.

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# Walking Hand in Hand. How the EU<sup>1</sup> Facilitates Democratic Transition of Macedonia or the Fortification of its Illiberal and Authoritarian Regime

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Andreja Stojkovski

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**Abstract.** In the last century the Spanish liberal philosopher, writer and professor Jose Ortega y Gasset speaking on the problems of the Spanish Society uttered the famous phrase: "Si España es el problema, Europa es la solución". This has proved to be a rather correct view of the development of Spain in the last nearly 40 years, and from Europe's problem it transformed to be part of the solution creators.

The last twenty-five years, since Macedonia's independence, the country has proved to lack the capacity to independently resolve any major political problem, and has depended onto assistance from the International Community and in particular from the EU. This assistance however genuine and fruitful in the last few years has failed to produce the same results as before and has gradually turned from support for democratic transition to aiding and abiding the authoritarian regime.

On one hand, the EU needs to stay true with its promises to Macedonia and the WB Countries, while remaining consistent with its core values. On the other hand, Spain needs to share some of its success in Europeanization of Society with the same group of countries, in particular with Macedonia that has been for too long a

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<sup>1</sup> The EU is used as a term representing also the individual efforts of its Member States.

blank spot on the map, thus staying proving one more time how correct Ortega y Gasset was.

**Keywords:** EU, Macedonia, authoritarian, Spain, NATO, Pržino Accord

## 1. Introduction

This article will focus on the current state of affairs in the Republic of Macedonia, and the involvement of the EU in the resolution of the political crisis. Doing so, the article will dedicate attention to the developing relationship between the EU and the Republic of Macedonia through a chronological perspective, but also through a perspective of public support and understanding of the EU role. Finally, the article will discuss the role that the Kingdom of Spain plays or could play when it comes to Macedonia.

For twenty-five years Macedonia has maintained the strategic objective to become a member of NATO and of the European Union. The path to NATO membership was going steady, but was blocked at the Bucharest Summit<sup>2</sup> in 2008, while the EU Accession experienced a romantic period from 2004 to 2009, and has been in a decline ever since.

Since the *Black Monday* on 24 December 2012 Macedonia has been living in a state of permanent political crisis. This state was extended throughout the whole of 2013 and fortified with the early parliamentary and presidential elections in April 2014. These elections resulted in a government formed by a coalition between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, while Gjorge Ivanov was elected President of Macedonia. The opposition lead by SDSM refused to take up their mandates and boycotted the work of the parliament alleging that the elections were not legitimate due to electoral fraud, intimidation of citizens and inadequate separation of state and party

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<sup>2</sup> Bucharest summit declaration.

activities. To be completely honest, the OSCE-ODIHR Electoral Monitoring Mission did conclude that the elections "were efficiently administered, including on election day",<sup>3</sup> but failed to mention, thus credit the elections with the four key components: Free, Fair, Democratic and Credible.

Finally, Spain is an exemplary EU Member State that transformed into democracy through its EU accession process. Since the accession in 1986, Spain made a difficult U-Turn and established a democratic system, "united in its diversity". Seizing all the opportunities provided by the Structural and Cohesion Funds, and learning lessons throughout the negotiations, Spain in its peak, just prior to the last Global Economic Crisis, was the eighth, and currently the 14 economy in the World and a permanent guest of the G20. At the same time Spain is a bridge of the two stances, pro-enlargement and pro-deepening, and the biggest Member State that is openly pro-enlargement and pro-deepening.

## **2. Analysis**

From its independence, Republic of Macedonia's accession to NATO and to the EU has been presented as a top priority of all governments elected in power. Nevertheless, for a longer period the country's accession is in standstill, which was duly reflected in the manner in which political parties communicated their messages about the EU and NATO integration and the issues/matters they have defined as party priorities.

### *2.1 Striving to join the "Western World"*

The path to NATO membership was going steady from its start with the Accession to the Partnership for Peace in 1995. In 1999 the

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<sup>3</sup> International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections, 27 April 2014.

country joined the Membership Action Plans that were supposed to lead it to full-fledged membership, but at the Bucharest Summit in 2008<sup>4</sup> the alliance concluded that invitation for membership "will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached".<sup>5</sup>

The conclusion, as it reads, was due to a Greek veto and heavily impacted Macedonian society and politics. It was a boost to nationalist politics and led to early parliamentary elections and absolute majority of the conservative VMRO-DPMNE. By the end of the year, the new government decided to pursue a legal resolution to the name and filed a lawsuit with the International Court of Justice in The Hague.<sup>6</sup> Though the ruling was positive, and stated that Greece was in breach of article 11 of the Interim Accord,<sup>7</sup> it failed to identify an obligation for Greece or for any of the International Organizations to re/open the issue of Macedonia's accession and re/decide on it.

More than eight years since the Bucharest Summit, and five years since the ruling of the ICJ, Macedonia is still "trying" to resolve the name issue.

On the other hand, relations with the EU started with the Rome Summit in 1990<sup>8</sup> and through the Lisbon Summit,<sup>9</sup> which was seen as a total failure, led to the first resident envoy of Macedonia being sent to Brussels, four months later, in October 1992. However, the resident envoy did not yet mean establishment of diplomatic relations, which came later, after the signing of the Interim Accord, in December 1995. Meanwhile, most of the countries from the European Union, at that time the European Communities, established diplomatic relations with Macedonia in the period since its independence to the signing of the Interim Accord.

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<sup>4</sup> "Relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>6</sup> "The Court finds that Greece, by objecting to the admission of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to NATO, has breached its obligation under Article 11, paragraph 1, of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995".

<sup>7</sup> "Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

<sup>8</sup> The European Council. Rome 14-15 December 1990.

<sup>9</sup> The European Council. Lisbon 26-27 June 1992.



Contractual relations between Macedonia and the EU started with the negotiations, and later entry into force of the Cooperation Agreement in 1998, which was followed with the Stabilization and Association process and the negotiations and signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement<sup>10</sup> in 2000 and 2004. This romantic period of the relations between Macedonia and the EU further improved through the Application for EU Membership<sup>11</sup> being submitted in April 2004 and with the submission of the responses to the European Commission's Questionnaire in February 2005 being called the "longest love letter the EU has ever received" by Secretary General and High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana (Vesnik, 2016). Later that year the Council awarded Macedonia the Candidate Country Status, while in October 2009 the Commission recommended the opening of accession negotiations, which the Council has acknowledged but failed to act upon ever since.

## *2.2 The biggest political crisis since 2001*

In early 2015, after twenty-four years of independence and statehood, Macedonia found itself amidst the biggest political and institutional crisis to date. Answers to the question on what has led to this situation are very complex and result of long-term turbulences in the political arena, coupled with systemic regress of all institutions in the Republic of Macedonia.

## *2.3 Standing at the edge of the cliff*

In January 2015, Macedonia entered new and, by far, the most difficult stage of the deepest political crisis the state has faced. At that moment, Prime Minister Gruevski announced criminal charges against four individuals, including opposition leader Zoran Zaev, on the grounds of cooperation with foreign intelligence services and

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<sup>10</sup> Council of the European Council. Brussels 26 March 2001.

<sup>11</sup> "Accession of Macedonia to EU", Wikipedia.

providing them with illegally obtained, partially edited recordings of telephone conversations led among high state and government officials. According to Prime Minister Gruevski, Zoran Zaev used these materials to blackmail him into resigning from office, establishing technical government and organizing early parliamentary elections (Kanal 5, 2015). Consequently, Ministry of Interior motioned another criminal charge against Zoran Zaev defined as "violence against high state officials". This officially marked the start of lawsuit dubbed "Coupe". On the same day Prime Minister Gruevski announced his positions, three people were arrested, one of which was Zoran Verushevski, former chief of Ministry of Interior's Agency for Security and Counterintelligence.

On the other hand, opposition's leader had demanded technical government, Gruevski's resignation and organization of new fair and democratic elections as early as his statement on non-recognizing the results from last year's early parliamentary elections. On several occasions in the course of 2014, Zaev publicly announced that he is in possession of so-called bombs providing evidence that governing authorities, led by Gruevski, have abused their power to wage war against those of different mind, have intercepted communications of high number of citizens (22,000), have abused public funds in multitude of ways (kickbacks, favourable prices and procedures for acquiring land tenure, etc.) and have rigged elections or have engaged in inadmissible pre-election pressure and threats. From the moment criminal charges were raised against him to present, the opposition leader and his associates published 38 instalments (Plusinfo, 2015) of wiretapped conversations that support allegations of government's wrongdoings.

#### *2.4 Help is on its way*

Pržino<sup>12</sup> Accord was the outcome of three months of negotiations in search of a solution to the political crisis, the signing of which took place at an interparty meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015 at the residence

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<sup>12</sup> Pržino is the name of the Skopje neighbourhood where the residence of the EU Ambassador is located.

of EU Ambassador Aivo Orav.<sup>13</sup> This was the seventh interparty meeting with the first having been held on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015 in Brussels. Meanwhile, the remaining meetings were held in Skopje, Strasbourg and again Brussels. The first breakthrough in the negotiations was achieved on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015, when after eight hours of negotiations Commissioner Johannes Hahn announced that leaders of the four biggest political parties have agreed to hold early parliamentary elections in April 2016, preceded by a transitional period.

The final form of the Pržino Accord was reached on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015, with two meetings taking place in the meantime. In the presence of Commissioner Hahn, and with additional support from Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Euroasian Affairs Victoria Nuland who was visiting Macedonia, the Pržino Accord was finalized and regulates key issues related to bringing back democracy in the country, restoring the rule of law and organizing the early parliamentary elections:

Commitments assumed under the Pržino Accord include:

1. Parties to agree on exact organization of the government preparing the elections.
2. Revision and modification of the State Election Commission's composition.
3. Opposition's return to the Parliament.
4. Discontinued further disclosure of any materials arising from interception of communications.
5. SDSM to hand over all materials from intercepted communications to the competent public prosecutor.
6. Enhanced competences and authorizations for SEC to ensure free and fair elections, with level playing field for all political parties.
7. Appointment of new special public prosecutor with full autonomy, to lead investigations surrounding and arising from intercepted communications.

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<sup>13</sup> Aivo Orav finished his term as EU Ambassador in September 2016. The current EU Ambassador to Macedonia is Samuel Zbogar.

8. Start of work and first report of parliamentary committee (chaired by representative of SDSM) overseeing work of the Directorate for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK) and interception of communications.
9. Facilitated negotiations among stakeholders, to ensure greater media freedoms.
10. Appointment of new Minister of Interior (upon nomination by SDSM).
11. Appointment of new Minister of Labour and Social Policy (upon nomination by SDSM).
12. Appointment of new Deputy Minister of Finance with veto rights (upon nomination by SDSM).
13. Appointment of new Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy with veto rights (upon nomination by SDSM).
14. Appointment of new Deputy Minister of Information Society and Administration with veto rights (upon nomination by SDSM).
15. Submission of formal resignation by the incumbent government to the Parliament.
16. Appointment of new Prime Minister nominated by VMRO-DPMNE.
17. Holding fair and democratic parliamentary elections.

## *2.5 The turn of the tides*

Several days after the Pržino Accord was signed a report announced as special report with benchmarks for the transition period and qualified by Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Fatmir Besimi<sup>14</sup> as one in series of reports complementing the Pržino Accord, the Priebe Report proved to be actual turning point. The report was presented on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2015 by a Group of Senior Experts on Rule of Law. The report known as Priebe Report (Telma, 2015) completely shifted pressure in the negotiations. It was drafted by a group of experts, such as the former Director General for

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<sup>14</sup> "360 stepeni 107 od 04/ 06/ 2015", Youtube.

Enlargement - Reinhard Priebe, in capacity of team leader. The report was first presented to EU Commissioner Hahn and members of the European Commission, and then to Mr. Besimi, during his visit to Brussels. The underlying message of this report was: "Macedonian parties to find a lasting political compromise translated into an agreement signed in Skopje on 2nd June" (DW, 2015).

The Report offered detailed overview of state-of-affairs relating to the rule of law in Republic of Macedonia, especially interception of communications, and established "significant shortcomings"<sup>15</sup> in five main areas of concern:

1. Interception of communications;
2. Judiciary and prosecution services;
3. External oversight by independent bodies;
4. Elections; and
5. Media.

Among the many remarks, one emerged as crucial for resolution of the political crisis in Macedonia and can be subsumed in one sentence: "Considerable gap between legislation and practice has to be urgently addressed and overcome",<sup>16</sup> additionally explained later in the report: "Only a few recommendations refer to necessary changes in legislation; most of them concern actions and choices within existing constitutional and legal framework".<sup>17</sup> In other words, main problem identified by the report is not insufficient alignment of national legislation, but rather its implementation and enforcement.

## *2.6 Sentiments are rising, support drops*

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<sup>15</sup> "Report of the Senior Experts' Group on Systemic Rule of Law Issues Relating to the Interception of Communications".

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 22.

The outbreak of the wiretapping scandal in Macedonia coincided with the strengthening of the Pro-EU and Pro-Western sentiments among many of the citizen. On the one hand, many of the citizens understood better the transformative power of the EU and saw clearer the previous engagement of the Union in supporting democracy in the country. On the other hand, among the supporters of the government the Pro-Russian sentiment was growing. Macedonia does not traditionally have strong feelings about Russia; nevertheless, there are still some who sympathize with the similar language, culture and joint Slavic heritage although this is not part of official governmental policy. This whole thing started with one of the prominent pro-governmental Eurosceptic journalist, Mirka Velinovska, asking in her columns: "What have the EU and the USA ever done for us!?" and continued with the propaganda criticizing the EU's approach in all of its neighbourhood, including in Macedonia, and presenting it as yet another proof for the Union's inevitable dissolution and the birth of a new world order, and advocating the replacement of the Euro-Atlantic integration. What is the actual opinion of the citizens regarding Macedonia's EU Accession and how important is the EU to the citizens? Should the European Union be involved and stay involved in the resolution of the political crisis? To answer best, let's use the data from Eurothink's survey research #Eurometer2015 and #Eurometer2016.

When asked whether the European Union should play an important role in resolving the current political crisis in Macedonia? In #Eurometer2015 a large majority of exactly 60% of the citizens agree that the European Union must play a key role in resolving this political crisis, whilst only 24% of the citizens have a negative view. In #Eurometer2016 the position is completely different with the negative views on the involvement of the EU and the impact of the Pržino Accord taking a slight lead over the positive views. Furthermore, the positions of the citizens with regards to the credibility of the European Commission's Country Report has experienced a fall of nearly 10% when comparing years 2015 and

2016, as well as whether Macedonia should continue striving to join the EU, or look for an alternative development model.<sup>18</sup>

However, in spite of the fall expressed at the various aspects of EU involvement with Macedonia, support for Macedonia's EU Accession is still high. On the question: If on Sunday a referendum is organised where the question asked is – "Do you support the Accession of Macedonia to the EU?" a rather high number of citizens answered with "yes, I would support Macedonia's EU Accession".<sup>19</sup> Compared to the year before, when the support on this question was expressed by 67%, this year 70% answered with yes.

The reason behind those 70% can be found in a different question that refers to the public trust/support in the institutions with the trust in the three branches of government, the Parliament, the Government and the Judiciary being the lowest, while trust in the EU, NATO and NGOs stands on the higher end.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, in conclusion, despite the differences there is a great amount of support for the EU and the international community in general to play an important role in resolving the political crisis as the citizens are aware that the institutions in Macedonia don't have the capacity to resolve a crisis with such intensity.

For the sake of argument, this rise in Pro-Russian and Pan-Slavic sentiment is not unfounded and unsupported. Since the beginning of

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<sup>18</sup> #Eurometer2016 – Perception and positions about the EU and EU Accession, as presented on the conference "Urgent Reform Fails" held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>20</sup> The #EUROMETER2015 found out that only 32% of the citizens surveyed trust the government, whilst the trust in the Public Prosecution and the Judiciary is at only 17% i.e. 17.2%. On a different research project of MCET, asked how they assess the institutions, with 1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest the participants in the survey assessed the work of all three branches of government at the lowest, while the Government has actually the lowest public support with the average mark of 1.55. The Government was assessed with 1, by 55% of participants. The second lowest is the Parliament with an average mark of 1.66 and 50% of the participants assessing its work with 1, and the third lowest is for the Judiciary with an average of 1.72 and 44.4% of the participants assessing its work with 1. For the three lowest there was no one to assess their work with 4 or 5. On the higher end were the EU, NATO and Civil Society, with average marks of 2.82, 2.81, and 3.18 respectively.

the political crisis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation has issued four different statements on Macedonia blaming the West, and describing the situation as one more coloured revolution. These are also the first four statements issued on Macedonia since its independence twenty-five years ago.

Russia has no strategic interest in Macedonia, and Macedonia has never had its strategic interest to be involved or related to Russia. However, the interest of Russia is to slow-down the expansion of NATO and Western influence in what is now considered as an interest sphere, while Macedonia's, i.e. the Macedonia's Government interest is to obtain some foreign support and at any cost to its statehood, democracy and long-term stability. Therefore, the involvement of Russia should be seen as an impediment to further democratic transition and to EU Accession.

### *2.7 Ticking bomb*

The general support for EU Accession although at a historically lower end is still rather high and prevents the ruling party and the Government from completely dropping out of the process. Last time I checked all parties have as their priority EU and NATO Accession, while the Government has listed the same as Strategic Priority within its Working Programme 2014-2018.<sup>21</sup> However, crossing from party statements and Government Programmes, one can note a big difference within public perception and support of EU Accession. Discrepancies exist between the different ethnic communities and the supporters of different political parties.

Support for EU Accession is greatest with the Albanian and the Roma, whilst the support among the Macedonian stands nearly at the average, with the Serbian having the lowest support. To explain the discrepancy, we need to go back to recent history, or education, traditions, family relations and stereotypes. Having been part of a conflict, where the International Community and the EU in particular

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<sup>21</sup> Working Programme of the Government 2014-2018, Strategic Priority N. 2: *Integration of the Republic of Macedonia with NATO and the EU*,



had significant involvement, and through which Kosovo gained its independence it is only normal that support for EU Accession is highest with Albanians and lowest with Serbs. Add to this the fact that Albania is already part of NATO and is about to begin accession negotiations with the EU and the conclusion is simple. Albanians living in Macedonia strive to follow unify with their fatherland. Since changing borders is out of the question, that unification could only be achieved if borders are erased or lifted, thus joining the EU is the key, which explains the high level of public support to EU Accession amongst Albanians.

To understand the level of support amongst Macedonians one needs to correlate ethnic to political affiliation as on the two extremes of the political spectrum we note different level of support. The supporters of SDSM are above the national average, in the lower 70s, whereas amongst the supporters of VMRO-DMPNE support for EU Accession is significantly lower, and nearing the 50% mark. This has to do with government supported propaganda of the last years and the stalemate when it comes to the EU Accession Process of Macedonia. Furthermore, anti-EU and anti-Western sentiments were strengthened with the strengthening of the political crisis and the publication of the Priebe Report<sup>22</sup> and the EC Country Report (The Economist, 2013) of 2016 stating that the country is experiencing "State Capture". Finally, the EU was the sponsor and is a strong voice of support for the work of the Special Public Prosecutor, that in the eyes of the average VMRO voter is seen as targeting the VMRO elite, thus both, its sponsors and supporters. as well as the Special Public Prosecutor itself, are totally undesirable. For the Albanian Political field, the political party affiliation does not diminish the support to EU Accession and it is the highest with both, DPA and DUI.

Should the crisis continue, with the inconsistency in the EU's approach and if we have in mind the development and the propaganda so far, it can be expected that EU Accession will be postponed indefinitely leading to the Albanian feeling disenchanted by their political representatives and disenfranchised from the Government

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<sup>22</sup> Report of the Senior Experts' Group on Systemic Rule of Law Issues Relating to the Interception of Communications.

and opening up the doors to the potential of a new explosive phase for Macedonia.

### *2.8 The fuse is still burning*

The early parliamentary elections of December 2016 shed some light, but did not bring the clarity that the whole country expected or better said needed. In a situation when the election results are so tight<sup>23</sup> disarming the barrel bomb of the Balkans is not as easy as it seems. This election result neither facilitates the easy and speedy work on the reforms and liberation of the state and institutions, nor it allows for a stable government with wide majority. However, there are, to use the words of DUI, ample opportunities to form a government or operate under this circumstances.

What could be the lesson learnt from the elections is that DUI who at the previous elections was the dominant party of the Albanian block with nearly 150.000 votes has now lost 9 MPs and nearly 70.000 votes and needs to take this into account when deciding on potential coalitions. The diversification of the Albanian block aside, the Social-Democrats were the clear winner, strengthening their election result from the previous cycle, going against all major polls that showed VMRO-DPMNE winning by wide margin, and gaining on some 40-50.000 votes by ethnic Albanians and in regions where the crisis of 2001 occurred.<sup>24</sup> This is the first time that a Civic Platform has gained such support and in particular support by the ethnic Albanian. The message is clear, ethnic Albanians dislike the ethnic divides promoted by VMRO-DPMNE and justice, responsibility and rule of law, which are direct preconditions for EU and NATO Accession, thus DUI making a coalition with VMRO-DPMNE would be fatal not just for the party, but also for the country.

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<sup>23</sup> At the early Parliamentary Elections 2016 the distribution of mandates in the Parliament was the following: VMRO-DPMNE 51; SDSM 49; DUI 10; BESA 5; Alliance for the Albanians 3; and DPA 2.

<sup>24</sup> SDSM won or had a significant result in the villages of Tanushevtsi, Brest and Arachinovo where the crisis of 2001 started or saw the most severe clashes, and had significant results in the municipalities of Chair, Tetovo, Kichevo, Gostivar, etc.

### **3. Spain-Macedonia: Diplomacy without relations?**

Spain is supportive to Macedonia's EU Accession, and its officials have never failed to state the formal diplomatic phrase. However, in the years since Macedonia's EU Accession started, and in particular in the last seven years as the authoritarian regime in Macedonia started fortifying, Spain has continuously failed to put itself into the position of the Pro-European citizens, and support in a significant manner the Europeanisation of Macedonian Society.

In light of the last Spanish Presidency of the EU, Spain's Ambassador-at-large for European Integration Projects, Mr. Carlos Carnero Gonzales, stated that he does not see any objective obstacle to Macedonia's accession. At the end of November 2009 in Madrid, at the Pre-Presidency conference organized by the Royal Institute Elcano,<sup>25</sup> within the framework of TEPSA,<sup>26</sup> his statement was:

"The future of Macedonia is in the EU. There is no alternative scenario, and there is no Plan B. Macedonia will open up Accession Negotiations. Macedonia will negotiate its membership, and in the end Macedonia will become an EU Member State".

The bilateral relations between Spain and Macedonia are not burdened by an open issue. Both countries suffer from overstretched diplomatic services that are understaffed, underfunded and underequipped. Neither the Spaniards express any true interest for the Macedonians, nor are the Macedonians aware of how much they can benefit from the Spanish experience. More efforts should be put into promoting bilateral cooperation on all levels –culture, education, and civil society– which could improve the image of Macedonia in Spain and promote Spain as a role model society in Macedonia.

Spanish companies have hardly expressed interest for the Western Balkans. Although, there are no particular reasons why Spanish

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<sup>25</sup> Real Instituto Elcano.

<sup>26</sup> Tepsa.

entrepreneurs should not be interested in investing in the Macedonian market,<sup>27</sup> where there is obviously an economic opportunity, traditionally they focus mainly on Latin America, Morocco and Western Europe. If used wisely to include the Western Balkans region, this focus could expand and prove beneficial for all by linking the region with Latin America and Saharan Africa. Macedonian trade exchange with Spain in the past year had the scope of almost 70 tons of goods, and just above 172 million euros.<sup>28</sup>

*If Macedonia is the problem, Europe is the answer*<sup>29</sup>

There are not so many, similarities between Macedonia and Spain, but so many lessons learned that each country could pass to the other. In fact, if we use the famous line of Ortega y Gasset on Spain as the problem of Europe, and apply it to Macedonia we could have the first lesson learned, Macedonia can learn about the basics from the Europeanized Spanish society.<sup>30</sup>

To expand the horizons, Western Balkan enlargement and the Mediterranean partnership are two parallel processes that could prove to be complementary if steered in the right direction. Macedonia

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<sup>27</sup> МакСтат база на податоци.

<sup>28</sup> According to the data supplied by the Macedonian State Statistical Office, the most exported product from Macedonia to Spain was hot-rolled flat products from iron or non-alloy steel, 600mm or more in width and more than 15mm thick, non-plated and non-coated (*Customs Tariff* - 7208 51 20 00) with more than 10,5 tones. On the other hand, the exported product that brought the biggest value to Macedonian GDP were sets of ignition wiring and other wiring sets for vehicles, planes and sail boats (*Customs Tariff* - 8544 30 00 00) in the total value of nearly 75 MEUROs. Ceramic tiles (*Customs Tariff* - 6908 90 91 00) are the most imported product to Macedonia with import of nearly 85 tons, while the biggest contribution to Spanish GDP comes through the export of deboned pork with approximately 8,6 MEUROs.

<sup>29</sup> The famous quotation from the liberal philosopher, writer and Spanish professor "If Spain is the problem, Europe is the solution".

<sup>30</sup> In the last century Spain was governed by a dictatorship for more than 40 years, and was a witness of a *coup de état*. It has been the exemplary of an isolated country that managed to turn around its fortunes by joining the EU.

might not be on the Mediterranean, but its main route leads to the Mediterranean and is strongly influenced by the things going on in the wider region. For example, the latest research in the field of desertification indicates that the eastern part of Macedonia might be faced with the same destiny as Southern Spain.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Macedonia is a smaller country suffering from the same problem could offer Spain an opportunity to produce immediate results and to prove its leadership skills in combating climate change. The Mediterranean Union and the Southern Axis of the EU will be reinforced with Macedonia's accession, thus providing Spain with an ally for its positions inside the EU.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

This paper argues that Macedonia belongs in the European Union. Furthermore, it argues that the EU has proved as very much involved and supportive of the democratic transition of the country, although at moments due to its inconsistency it has aided and abided the illiberal and authoritarian regime in Macedonia.

The EU and its Member States must not forget the commitments they made to Macedonia, and their vital interest in upholding democracy and what is commonly known as "EU values" in the region despite of the fragmented interest of some EU Member States (Austria and the Vishegrad Countries would rather trade democracy for stability and achieve the closure of the Balkan Immigration Route). The "reluctant hegemon", after the Brexit vote, and with the up-coming elections in France and Holland's decision not to run, becomes the only remaining "true leader of the modern liberal-democracy" and is overburdened not only with saving the EURO, but also saving the European Union and democracy too. The power and Global Presence of Germany (The Economist, 2015) remains unquestionable, but the EU wants to become a Global Player and needs to show up as one in its own backyard. Consequently, the Western Balkan countries are gradually straying from their EU path, while the EU as a whole is

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<sup>31</sup> UNFCCC, "Трет национален план за климатски промени".

losing its credibility and valuable leverage. The worst case of all is Macedonia, being in the limbo for seven years, and having lost its status of an electoral democracy.

#### *4.1 For the UE*

One of the main issues is to make irresponsible partners (political actors) to honour the agreements. EU must not refrain from applying both individual pressure and wider country pressure in order to make the partners to take their obligations seriously. On the other hand, what is crucial for the EU leverage is making a set of benefits and incentives that will open for Macedonia once the crisis is resolved.

First, the Priebe Report and the Urgent Reform Priorities must transform into Urgent Rule of Law Action Plan for Macedonia with specific tasks, duties and datelines. The implementation of this Action Plan should be treated as part of the new Approach of the European Commission for early opening of the Pre-Accession Negotiations for Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) for Macedonia. This would only endorse the long-standing position of the EC to open the accession talks with Macedonia in a parallel process. The "Rule of Law" Action plan should affect the programming of the IPA II financial framework for assistance of Macedonia's EU accession and direct the assistance for the priorities set-up by the Priebe Report and the Urgent Reform Priorities.

Second, the EU ought to consider establishing a parallel of the EU Rule of Law (Article 7) mechanism for the Enlargement process and the candidate countries. Namely, that system must work to pressure the candidate countries breaching the Rule of Law principle permanently and severely having arrogant political elites refusing to make any concessions on the top of it. The New Approach encompassing democracy, anti-corruption, judiciary and fundamental rights protection will increase the leverage of the EU making it a credible player wielding instruments for implementing its principles in practice.

#### 4.2 *For Spain*

Spain, as a Member State, favours EU "voicing its opinion globally and promoting the common values of peace and security".<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it has always seen its involvement with the EU and EU Policies as an excellent opportunity to promote itself as an important player in external relations giving it a chance to be "visibly European, openly demonstrating an European societal sensibility".<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, Spain should revisit its position towards the Balkans by getting more involved in the region and by putting Western Balkans higher on its own Foreign Policy Agenda. This elevation of the involvement should be made equally in all of the WB6 rather than like up until now with Serbia mostly. Speaking on Macedonia directly, Spain should evade making a blank spot on its Foreign Policy Map between Serbia and Greece and adopt a more proactive and more open approach to the country. Additional strengthening to the diplomatic representation in Skopje, both in terms of human and financial resources will be a significant step in this direction. Such a consolidated representation should work on promoting the relations between both countries including the promotion of EU values and support to the Europeanization of Macedonian society.

#### 4.3 *For Macedonia*

Staying in the limbo for too long has proven nearly fatal for Macedonia's EU Accession, this is the moment when such state could be and should be interrupted. The Macedonian Government should explicitly express its Pro-European stance, dedicate time and efforts in transforming the Urgent Reform Priorities into what we advocated

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<sup>32</sup> Web-page of the Spanish Government for EU Affairs; Hablemos de Europea.

<sup>33</sup> Índice Elcano de Presencia Global.

previously as Rule of Law Action Plan, and show political will to undertake the crucial reforms for democratic transition.

Furthermore, Macedonia should strengthen the diplomatic representation in Madrid, both in terms of human and financial resources. Such a consolidated representation should work on promoting the relations between both countries. The Macedonian Government should allocate funds for civil society organisations and think-tanks promoting EU Integration in both Macedonia and Spain by means of applying for joint EU funded projects under the Union Programmes but also under other financial instruments and programmes.

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**Ljubomir Danailov Frčkoski** (Skopje, 1957) is professor at Skopje Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Faculty of Law, in International Law and Human Rights, Political Theory, and Dispute Resolution. Frchkoski is one of the most prominent Macedonian intellectuals and scientists and opinion-maker through his public appearances. With his scientific habitus, which

would be most closely defined as multicultural and liberal, Frchkoski drafted the new Macedonian Constitution, participated in the drafting of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and has written many fundamental texts and books in the areas of human rights and negotiation in identity conflicts.

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# Security Before Democracy?

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Ljubomir Frčkoski

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**Abstract.** Perhaps one of the clearest conclusions made by transition analysts dealing with the theory of the transition to democracy in the communist countries is that security issues are shown to be priority for control and stabilization in the transition process, particularly in its initial establishment stages. This parameter is driven further, by these sources and their claim that security issues in their internal and external aspects (inter-ethnic relations and minority issues, relations with neighboring countries, etc.) have even higher priority meanings from the basic ideological stands of transition such as: democracy and human rights. Why is it so? To what extent does our experience confirm this viewpoint? And finally, what are the risks of blindly considering only the delivery of security, in terms of building democracy and the rule of law in those countries?.

**Keywords:** democratic transition, security, Rule of Law

## 1. Introduction

My opinion is that our experience of a transition of twenty years, unequivocally supports this conclusion as such. Unfortunately, also in terms of appropriate sacrificing democracy in favor of a populist authoritarian system that has managed to build in Macedonia (since 2008) because of the blind consideration and obsessive interest of foreigners only for security arrangements that Macedonia can and should deliver. The first conclusion is supported at two important points: security is primarily important because states arising after the

dissolution of other major, complex states, in the logic of the basic principle of self-preservation and self-help, in the anarchic relations of the international community have predominant "instinct" to consolidate and address security challenges and arrangements of their own existence. Such a degree of coherence of internal resources and diplomatic means and connections suppresses into the background some of the important ideological schemes of internal political relations and the building of democracy. It certainly does not mean that this will necessarily develop into authoritarian political forms (later this is exactly what had happened), but it only means that the democratic program and institutions will suffer "pressure" from other priorities and will probably be placed under the imperative of efficient, quickly responding to possible external challenges. Second, in Macedonia the issues of self-preservation and security of the state were also stressed because of some important domestic political reasons, among which the most important were inter-ethnic relations and the general system of addressing individual human rights with individual and group rights of ethnic communities that are not majority. Especially the way to set up and protect the "right" of cultural diversity. In a word, the functioning of liberal democracy in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society such as Macedonian.

Several facts are very important in the field of external factors in depiction of pushing and inhibiting the security paradigm in the Macedonian society.<sup>1</sup> Almost a stressful feeling of inhibited fear and danger: from the Serbian megalomaniac militaristic hysteria (1989-1992); from the possible pan-Albanian (now without the control of the army of federal Yugoslavia) idea and project; from the Bulgarian national frustration with the Macedonian identity; and finally, from the Greek arrogance and its blinded policy toward us (1991-1994).

The security paradox for Macedonia was that as a new state it could not defend itself from such aggressive neighbors by closing itself and relying on its military, police and intelligence potentials, but only by

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<sup>1</sup> Macedonia's road to independence was very "procedural": First ever democratic and multiparty elections in 1990; Declaration of Independence; Independence Referendum; the 1991 new Constitution confirmed by the so-called Badinter Commission; political "mastership" in negotiating a peaceful withdrawal of the then federal Yugoslav army (JNA).

a radical opening towards the international community and the military potential of serious Western countries like the USA (NATO), whose presence in Macedonian territory and in the region neutralizes the military potential and superiority of the neighboring countries. The Macedonian political leadership of that time well perceived that fact and pursued a policy for opening of the country, a policy completely opposite from the one pursued by most of the neighbors at the time. However, the internal political effect in the short term of such openness of the country was the instant boosting of the feeling of vulnerability and being unprotected among the population. It cannot directly and easily be seen that the instinct of isolating oneself when in danger should be replaced with the opposite: a radical opening when under threat. Moreover, at that time there was no open offer for the presence of foreign troops (US, NATO) in our territory, but only verbal support and assistance from friendly countries. It only increased the security frustration of the population. What is very important and also hard to understand by foreign security experts is: why in such circumstances the reactions of the population were not a hysterical conflict on interethnic basis or political instability followed by conflict of that kind, but the opposite, a subtle coherence, being aligned around the basic political ideas for the development of democracy, system institutions, and political leadership (which was then symbolized by Kiro Gligorov and a young group of politicians around him previously engaged at the university), demonstrating referential stability and elasticity in resolving conflict situations? Such an unraveling of the security frustration and uncertainty in Macedonia was due to several factors. First is the different political history and experience of interethnic relations and the struggle for survival of the Macedonian people, respectively. In Macedonia there have never been ethnic wars of serious proportions and negative collective memory that would be perceived through "the graveyards and blood revenge" between ethnic communities. Even in times of tensions, different local communities learned to live with each other.<sup>2</sup>

The majority minority (minorities) relationship has had a capacity for tolerance. In the context of inter-ethnic relations that are significantly

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<sup>2</sup> This is shown in almost all documents or state-making projects of the historical VMRO.

influenced by mutual prejudices and stereotypes, it is important to distinguish between the following (the difference in the political experience of Macedonia is based on this): between the very existence of ethnic and religious prejudices and stereotypes on one side, and willingness to base social confliction on them. Namely, when they are the main driving force for the inter-ethnic conflicting correlations. If the inter-ethnic "stereotype" is defined as: a set of attitudes and beliefs about the personal characteristics of the person or group of people from other ethnic, racial, religious or gender affiliation that are often negative or inferior qualifications for "others" and are the result of the need for classification, simplified views, half-truths. They, incidentally, speak more about those making such stereotypes than about those for whom they are intended, then it is important to distinguish the existence of stereotypes or even demonization of the other on one hand, from a situation of "active stereotype" or behavior, political and social action that is motivated on basis on such stereotype, on the other hand. For example, the Macedonians have approximately the same stereotypes and distrust of fellow Muslims, especially of the Albanians, as the Bulgarians have distrust of the Turks as a minority in Bulgaria, the Serbs for the Albanians of Kosovo or the Greeks for the local Turks in Greece. That ethnic distance varies in all these cases with lack of confidence from 60 to 68%. However, when respondents were asked the question (involving active prejudice) whether they would become politically activated based on this prejudice, mistrust and distance, members of different nations differently answered or gave even dramatically different answers: even 48% of the Serbs said YES, and so on. The Macedonians showed a drastic decline in that possible engagement based on prejudice with only 12% of respondents saying YES. The latter shows the extent of the actual confliction in a society. In this case, even if they have similar stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims, the Macedonians still show great inertia, caution, and slowness in motivating social action towards "others" based on stereotypes about them. A cynical assessment would claim that the Macedonians are inclined to have the government solve every problem including the aforementioned rather than take own individual responsibility; but, in the context of that gap, a small but important difference, one can rest the whole different experience of



more tolerant inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia and even toward the other, neighboring countries. Second, there is considerable difference in cultural notions of the local ethnic communities in the country (the Macedonian, the Albanian, respectively) than those in the neighborhood. The Albanians in Macedonia are economically better situated and have a more developed political culture and a smoother relationship with the Macedonians than other groups of the Albanians living in Kosovo or Albania have (with the Serbs or among themselves). On the other hand, the Macedonian people, as a relatively small Slavic nation, developed properties of cohabitation and cultural survival and existence, which is specifically reflected in the position of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Although one of the oldest, it is still unrecognized by the family of Orthodox Churches, which creates a special instinct for survival by making alliances with the Vatican (closer relations than those with the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, or with the neighboring churches). Its position forces it to make complex political maneuvers and learn of political compromise and cohabitation. Because of this (and it is important for the culture of the Orthodox population) liberal values and democratic institutions that come from Western countries after the fall of communism, relatively easily become rooted in Macedonia than in other "Orthodox countries". Third, there was something I call "a balance of fear about Macedonia" in the region. The overburdened history of conflicts and wars in the Balkans is related to Macedonia and the geopolitical space of Macedonia. It was part of the history of each of the neighboring countries as well. This created restraint from easily reaching for renewed destabilization of Macedonia. Such typical Macedonian "discourse of Balkan crossroads", or of "a Balkan cross-land country" in this case was realized through non-intervention and balance in stability of Macedonia (and the region as such). The result of the conjuncture of the aforementioned cultural/political factors and geopolitical elements enabled overcoming the inhibitory fear as expressed by the population in Macedonia for their own safety and that of the new state. Finally, crossing into an entirely new phase of consolidation and stabilization of the country. Modern challenges to the stability of the state and refraction of all that in the "sense of security" among citizens, consist of the following situations: the

intervention of the international community in Kosovo and FRY and the repercussions of "the Albanian question" on Macedonia after the Kosovo crisis; the process of opening of the Macedonian economy and strategic privatizations, which has been refracted around the issue of aggressive Greek economic presence in the country (anti-Greek sentiment is much higher today than during the "Greek blockades" imposed on us?); the general rise in social insecurity and especially various crimes in the classical sense of security in life.

In my opinion, the first question is most neuralgic and mostly contributes to the "feeling of insecurity", which has general, hazy acute form but represents a constant threat. It consists of a string of conclusions, which have sometimes rather simplified form, but are very strong as widely accepted stereotypes: the international military intervention has "upset the balance" in favor of the Albanians in the region, by eliminating the "Serbian control" over Kosovo. For the local Macedonian population this creates uncertainty about the future conduct of the Albanians in the region and especially about the intensity of their "demands" to be delivered to the Macedonian state. That suppressed fear and anxiety actually gave rise to NATO skepticism in some political parties and political circles.

This feeling was further promoted by the inability of the then Macedonian government to "control" duly its relationship with the NATO partners during the refugee crisis and their legal status in Macedonia. The picture about the complete paralysis in relation to the demands of the Albanian "partner" in the then ruling government coalition –the DPA party and its freedom of action–. The entirety of such "feeling of uncertainty" was intensified among the ordinary people by their view that the Macedonian government "did not govern", but they were supposedly left to the accidental concatenation of circumstances ("fortunately, no one acutely is threatening us") while some (the Albanians in general, as prevalent stereotype) constantly "were undermining the system" and pushing their national interests and agendas before the very eyes of the blocked and corrupt government. This would be a very dangerous mood if it takes epidemic proportions because it acts (degradingly) in anomic manner upon the cohesion and motivating forces within society. It also spreads fear and uncertainty for the very future of the country and personal destinies of people which is the basis for every authoritarian

and populist manipulation. In Macedonia, as well as probably in every multicultural society, every politics must be careful as to "how it looks", how a political action and made compromise are perceived and accepted in the context of various sensitive ethnic stereotypes. Regardless if such pictures are real or not, they still are a political fact that in the worst case can push the joke and rationality too far, never to return. Cultural identities of individual ethnic segments are in a higher stage of sensitivity when they are daily confronted with the "other" cultures and practices in the same society. They feel their uniqueness in sharper way and so emphasize and defend it in a more forceful manner. There is stronger political motivation and mobilization in such situations of cultural plurality. State guarantee for the protection of cultural practices from hegemony of other local cultures is especially important in this context. It must be foreseen and then provided by the political decision-makers.

The consensus in such societies of a radical cultural segmentation is not a condition/basis (value) to be used as a point of departure in the construction of society - but a method, willingness and capacity to continuously and constantly deal with cultural clashes and competitiveness. Consensus is so transformed from (self-)value - into the procedural capacity/method to resolve conflicts. From given, it becomes assigned! We can also call it a minimum procedural consensus under constant construction.

I think the suppressed basis for the specified fear is the still unsubdued, unraised to level of awareness and acceptance, security paradox. Namely, we still do not see clearly the very reason for our relative stability: in our fragility, resilience, dynamism, and tolerance. These are values that have been "diagnosed" but not yet internalized or accepted in our political culture. Still, when mentioning the word "security", our first association implies the very state, army, police, borders, the Albanians, etc., as hegemonic cultural supremacy, that guards the tribal "fire". Regardless of our experience, we have not accepted the thesis to build our stability as a system of tolerance and openness of society. Therefore, we still have "stress" in the face of contact with the "others" without such security guarantee from the state hegemon. Such stress is emphasized in circumstances of existence of other social crises as well. We are not ready, at least not to the very end, to accept the state of constant fragility and resilience

and constantly redefining the consensus and balance (so important for multicultural societies) as our stability. We must constantly defuse the different levels of social conflict through dynamic inclusion or the involvement of social actors in the hubs that "cook" social consensus. A condition for success in this delicate project, which is new even for established democracies, is the effective functioning of a small but strong central state administration. It must ensure the neutrality of rules and procedures for the contacts among the great variety of cultural actors. It should provide "the market" and rules of peaceful interaction. Its role must be as neutral as possible, but extremely effective.

Such a function of the central administration relaxes the suppressed aggression and fear of endangering one's own cultural identity.

## **2. Macedonian biopolitics**

Contrary to the potentials for emancipation, the situation in which Macedonia embarked upon last 10 years of transition is devolution. It is a sharp turn back toward dictatorship, of the kind of authoritarian populism. This means a dictatorship which uses the election facade for hiding and an operation of the system that is basically based on autocracy of party oligarchy, with the abolition of rule law. Why and how could this happen, is the daily question we ask ourselves. How to leave that authoritarian turn and go on to win again the freedom and constitutional democracy, is a difficult question that follows. This situation in Macedonia has been outrageously tolerated by our international friends who are obsessed with "security paradigm" (security-before-democracy, rather than security –through– democracy). For them it is crucial that in Macedonia there is multi-ethnic coalition government which, regardless how it is made up and what motives it uses to function, delivers superficial peace while the rest is a matter of secondary interest. The issues of democracy, human rights and freedoms, and the rule of law are hopelessly left to us, the Macedonian citizens (whatever that means) and to our experience in fighting for them and our constitutional democracy. The international community can be expected to show reaction only if we put it in a position to have to react because of our strategy of fight. It will not

cause the changes by itself, which summarized means that in Macedonia things will get worse before possibly becoming better! Hence, in this framework, I will expose the conclusions about the nature of the regime and the foundations for fighting it, in order to restore freedom and constitutional democracy!. The Macedonian variant of authoritarian populism has been constituted by creating and strengthening a party that has pretensions to represent itself as an essential expression of the Macedonian people, who are under siege, under threat from outside and from within. The VMRO-DPMNE party has turned into a "defensive formation" of the endangered people and asks the people at elections to give the party a legitimacy to define and administer the behavior in the country beyond and above the constitutional limitations of government in a democracy under the 1991 Constitution. By means of violent elections 90, the party has succeeded in obtaining such a mandate for the fourth consecutive time. The main tool for this operation for usurpation of power is constant promotion and building ideology about political construct of the organic unity of the people, rather than political and ideological pluralism in democracy. The sovereign, in our case the Party, has abolished all other political antagonisms, all political struggles; the Party has abolished politics as antagonization to the conflict of interests and ideologies through procedures of a representative and deliberative democracy and has declared only one meta-fight with the enemies of Macedonia. It is organized into phantasm of a homogeneous organic-developed political space directed to the outside in context of the neighboring countries "that want us to disappear" and inwards in context of the domestic traitors and fifth columnists who try to weaken us by their imposed and imported liberal ideas about freedom and rights. The very usurper of democracy, the DPMNE party leader, is not a leader in the true sense of the word that Lacan and Žižek call master-signifier, one that defines things with an act, on the contrary this party leader is a servant of the essential organic 90 In context of the gross affair of mass wiretapping illegally conducted by the present populist regime that was revealed in January and February 2015 (involving more than 20000 wiretapped individuals), one can also see evident election fraud on part of the present populist government and the ruling party, by using forged identity cards for the 2011 general elections; hence,

the legitimacy of the present government since then has been seriously challenged, but it remains in Macedonian power). He serves the organic unity of the people and protects them from internal and external conspiracies. From there he draws power that abolishes democracy and pluralism, violates individual human rights, and abolishes the independent institutions of the system. In fact, he abolishes the political element, his authentic plurality of antagonistic interests, by replacing it with a superfight, a meta-contradiction, super-war by the Macedonian against the eternal and hideous enemies inside and outside. It certainly ends in farce with the Macedonian being in conflict with himself. So actually there is militarization of politics, in which every individual right may be sacrificed at any moment on the altar of the motherland, for the sake of imaginary organic unity and prosperity of the nation. Total master and total policy are possible only in this space of meta-politics with a single meta-fight. It is known from the literature as "political aesthetics" that is done by fascism: the establishment of new organic order, which abolishes modern individuality. The consequence is that our civism is abolished, prohibited, and we are merely reduced to homo-sacer (G. Agamben), capable of living bare life. We are people who are deprived of their civil rights and forced into life, which is not actually human, but only seems to be so. We are the only a fertile soil for the nation, which is a source of unlimited power of the Party that is actually reduced to the leader himself. It establishes our Schmittian sovereignty, a constant political crisis and constant emergency. The definition of emergency, determined by the sovereign, is that the law is abolished and reduced to managing the chaos, the space arising from/in its disappearance. In authoritarian populism there is no law (regulations based on the tenets and principles that are permanent and unchangeable, such as human rights, freedom, division of power, justice, etc.), but everything is administered by voluntaristic interpretation and changing laws by the administration or by the Party that has occupied it. So, paradoxically the decor of the "legal order" is maintained through the suspension of this order. In such a situation, that everyone in Macedonia witnesses, through a series of examples (in context of the current position of the Constitutional Court, the entire judicial system, the parliament and separation of power, the independence of the media etc.), everything is possible and

everything is prohibited. Nothing is predictable, except that everything will be finally decided by the sovereign, i.e., the Party. One should pay attention to a special feature in the chaos that is administered by the dictatorship, and it is the explosion of irrational violence and hatred. They become present in a form that Žižek calls "id-evil": dysfunctional cruelty, irrational violence for banal disputes, hatred of the "other" that has no reason, nor is caused by anything. It is about evil and violence, which consist of the most basic unsublimated phantasms about pleasure in the whole of the nation, which are impaired pursuant to the rhetoric of the dictatorship; a dictatorship that by stimulating such evil and violence to go into the streets and our homes, then administers them, thus establishing and maintaining hegemony in politics (Ernesto Laclau). That is the definition of condition that practically and theoretically is called dictatorship based on bio-political division in the life of the citizens and its reduction to a mere bare life, deprived from all rights that belong to it and from the dignity of the citizens. It is the Macedonian state converted into a concentration camp and the Macedonian citizen as homo sacer in it. Potentially, we are left alone with our people. We cannot change people, but we can try to destroy the instruments of usurpation and manipulation. Start of such revolutionary free-shooting change is offered, for example, by Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, with a thesis on inoperativity between law and institutions. I would add, also, by connecting the islands of autonomy into a land of the newly conquered freedom. But it implies the struggle by the Macedonians citizens in the time left to them.

Authoritarian populism in Macedonia is accelerated film and danger of complete deformation directed against young democratic institutions in the beginning of their establishment. Fifteen years of transition to liberal democracy based on the 1991 Constitution was to be a fragile liberal experiment imposed from above, by the liberal elite, before the gust of unlimited domination of populism happened in 2008 and afterwards. Several shared themes between this populism of ours and the one in Europe: immigration, minorities ("resistance to the other"), nationalism, anti-Europe sentiment and the like - are not sufficient reason not to see the big picture of the substantial difference and different strength of each of them separately, to threaten the institutions of democracy in their own countries. Well known are the

foundations on which the authoritarian populism in Macedonia stands:

–Our illiberal social tradition burdened by communism and one party culture of statism, often connected with nationalism, and bad history toward minorities and ethnoreligious diversity (the Macedonians in former Yugoslavia often played the role of "being bigger Catholics, than the Pope himself" and were especially rigid toward the Albanians and liberal tendencies in the Yugoslav Communist Party).

–The coming to power of an extremely irresponsible political elite, which takes the easy way to political mobilization in line of ethnic homogenization (syndrome of riding the tiger instead civism). This involves manipulation of fear and conspiracy, historical mythologies aimed at finding concrete imaginary enemy in the form of other ethnic groups.

–Permanent economic crisis, corruption, and collective culture of letting everything go into the hands of the government, which should decide for us.

–Economic markets deformed by the penetration of the ruling party and the state, corruption and the absence of any foreseeable legal certainty and lack of entrepreneurial culture and initiative.

–Cynicism of the ruling elites to democratic values and especially to human rights. There is bizarre practice to increase, and not to reduce this cynicism in context of EU accession process. Furthermore, there is evolving practice of creating a dual reality in Macedonia and cheating in the process of adopting EU legislation. In that context, we see its skillful exploitation in getting time and space, while in practice the government is busy building a closed system of authoritarian populism (perverted anti-European Europeanism).

–Breaking the civil sector by organized state intrusion into it and transferring the ideological debate of authoritarianism inside it, to meet the need for disclosure of internal "traitors". The new-age dictators, which includes the Macedonian one, quickly learned that civil society is important for the support of



populism and smashing the opposition and so developed a system of duplication, or counteracting. It is delivered through a system of creating quangos, quasi nongovernmental organizations covering "the original civic NGOs" by counter actions for supporting the government and competing at calls for foreign donations. This system operates even on social networks in form of duplication of government policy of ethnic hatred, spreading hate speech, an alter ego of the government's political correctness with the partner DUI in power. It's the hidden, but in fact the actual language of the government's phalanx, by which every member of the ruling DPMNE party identifies himself. It is a secret code of winking among the party supporters by saying: we have to do like that in the government, but truly we are right here on the networks.

–Obsession with the media because of conceived policies of populism. In the populist context, media become a constituent part of the organization of power, not only its instrument (Giorgio Agamben).

Macedonian authoritarian populism, like populism in wider context, does not involve the concept of coherent policies, but it is eclectic. It is more like a bag that collects imagined policies mostly from the left on the political scene because of the economic misery and political culture of the population. In this assemblage of plastered policies and views, the connecting cord and ideological dogma is the thesis that the populist leader is close to his people. That is the key and connective tissue of the different political operations to be able to put them into a program and look coherently.

The second part of this political dogma is also known: anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism or claims that elites have buried themselves in trenches and are corrupt and do not listen to the voice of the people. But in this respect, today's Macedonian authoritarian populism is shrewder than its historical predecessors. It does not offer direct resistance to the pressure to which it is necessarily exposed by the EU and NATO policies, but on the contrary it is extremely polite and submissive to the requirements of the EU, and fully procedural. Thus this populism does now allow the opposition to make easy attacks, especially the Macedonian social democracy, which is

procedural in the history of its creation. In this its new strategy of adapting and buying time and space for establishing dictatorship, the Macedonian populism develops a so-called undemocratic proceduralism, authoritarian or empty proceduralism. It is a new feature that shows to be especially obscene and powerful in ideological terms. In the new dictatorships, everything is in accordance with the law, and the law is in accordance with them. Authoritarian legalism opposes the legitimacy of the Constitution and the previous liberal political system. This objective is achieved so that procedures and laws are made by two combined techniques. The first is the enormous production of laws, muddled legislation, legal fog that is often internally contradictory, which is, in fact, the intention of the very legislator. In such a situation of general uncertainty and insecurity, the instrument of application and interpretation of laws is entirely in the hands of the administration and the very government. Thus, the presumption of innocence and honesty of citizens disappears. Everyone is potentially guilty because he probably violates some law somewhere, but is not yet processed and depends on the mercy of the administration when will be done. A classic Kafkaian situation. The second technique is ambiguity of the key legislation. What is legal and what is offense is rather ambiguous and with time changes are made in this context. Again the fundamental demiurge of implementation is the government and the administration. Their power is constantly growing and remains completely unchecked.

The ability of the leaders of this authoritarianism to draw money from European funds for legislative projects, and thereby maintain the same or even intensify their authoritarian power, makes them cynical toward European values while openly calling for the legitimacy of their political program as Eurosceptic or even anti-European. The result that we have on the ground of these authoritarian operations is creating a dual reality: the existence of a legal haze of pro-European formal legislation, which is to be shown to the foreigners, along with the existence of the entire universe of sub-rules that are actually important and serve to solve the life problems of citizens (the very biting reality). These sub-rules say who is the boss, where in the ruling party one should report to fix a problem and how to interpret the formal legislation to the foreigners. However, the basic litmus

feature of such authoritarian populism, by which one can undoubtedly recognize and distinguish it, is the very attack on the independent institutions of constitutionalism and especially the Constitution. Here it is lethally consistent and efficient. He creates mirror room or echo room, while at the same time fully destroying the independence of other government and state institutions and thus making them movable mirrors that portray the image of an authoritarian leader. The outcome is complete arbitrariness of decisions and procedures of such institutions, a completely executed reality of the dictatorship. Special devastating attack is carried out (in case of Macedonia, finalized) on the judiciary. It is completely unqualified and highly partisan. It is to be noted here that, not by chance, the Constitutional Court is a special target of such devastation. The third clear or even major difference between the historical antecedents and the current authoritarian populism is the great obsession with the media outlets. The policies are simulacrum-like, imagined. Such policies ultimately depend on their grandiose and constant display to the public through the media; they do not depend on their level of accomplishment. Hence the media are key to this policy and its power. For such authoritarian politics and policy, media outlets (according to G. Agamben) are not just an instrument of power, but a constitutive pillar through which power and authority are executed. Without them, the power of the authoritarian populism rapidly erodes. Consequently, such authoritarian systems are obsessed and aimed at making control and pressure on the freedom of all possible media outlets. No compromise whatsoever! Fourthly, such authoritarian populism does not believe in elections as such. Although it seems obsessed with them and all public political life has been transformed into perpetual election campaign (election paradox), still it treats them as an unavoidable residue of democracy and pluralism, jeopardizing the phantasm of homogeneity of the newly constituted people. The authoritarian populist believes only in verification of himself and his policies through elections; he would not believe in any other result. Especially not in the pluralism of options and alternatives. Therefore, he finds it rather easy to make abuse of the police for election purposes, abuse of electoral rolls, corruption and blackmail of the administration for elections (by blackmailing the administration employees under short-term working contract) involving also other electoral underworld. In

order to achieve success, the authoritarian populist executes the following dangerous operation: he occupies the public space and fully contaminates it with partisan and abrasive speech, creating a permanent division of the citizens (and when it is not necessary) along party lines, which become "bloodthirsty". Thus, the public space is full of "adrenaline" in constant conflict mode which the populist regime channels and controls. In this context, basic tool used by this populist regime is the classic operation of producing enemies, threats, conspiracy, and division of the citizens: those who are traitors, foreign agents, spies, infidels, fifth columnists, commies, reds, and those who are patriots and love their current government and country at the same time. In context of the aforementioned, the conceptualization of populism would include: constructing "its own people" and appealing to them; anti-institutional rhetoric and antagonism (political, not a post-political); and rhetoric of direct democracy, mediated by special "redemptive" leadership.

### **3. Conclusions**

Macedonian authoritarian populism is dangerous because of its ability for internalization of crime and repression (human security rather than democracy and freedom) as values of the zombified individual/zombified masses. Thus Macedonian populism provides its "own people" and its own reproduction. The first result of this trend is the very dissatisfaction as shown by "these people" and their abandoning European values, things that are clearly shown by opinion polls and elections. This creates absurd; actually it closes the vicious circle of the absurd: there exists the populist regime and the perversion that it has created. There is no credible democratic alternative. Autocrats of this type in the Western Balkans, especially in Macedonia, in this regard manage to sell their politics surprisingly well to the Eurocrats, working together on the enlargement policy of the EU? They seem to have discovered the famous G-spot of the EU policy in the Balkan region: security before democracy! The result is stabilocracy which they offer the Eurocrats in exchange for EU tolerance for human rights violations and the destruction of the rule of law!.

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**Nano Ružin** (Skopje, 1952) is professor of Political and Social Sciences and, since July 2016, the Rector of FON University in Skopje. He graduated at the Faculty of Political Sciences at the Belgrade University (1975), and finished his Post-Graduate studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb (1982), after having spent one year of preparations at the Sorbonne-Paris 1 University. In

1986, he received his Ph.D., and the following year he began to teach at the UKIM Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. He has authored over 15 books in the domain of International Relationships and Social-Policy Studies and around 400 published articles for various newspapers. His latest book is "NATO in the Contemporary and International Relations". Elected as a member of the Macedonian Parliament on two consecutive elections (1994, 1998) and served as Macedonian Ambassador to NATO from 2001 to 2008, he was the presidential candidate of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for the 2009 election. In March 2008, he received the "Diplomat of the Year" Award from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The Diplomatic News magazine (2007). In June 2012, he became a recipient of the French Knight of the Legion of Honour. Nano is married to Danica Ružin, a professional diplomat, and is the father of two sons, Alexander and Marko.



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## Populist Authoritarianism and Corruption: The Case of the Republic of Macedonia

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Nano Ružin

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**Abstract.** After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990s, the countries of the Western Balkans embarked upon the path of democratization, political pluralism, the free market, and the expansion of civil society, putting an end to Communist apparatchiks, dictatorship of the proletariat, worship of Communist Party leaders, unlimited state power, socialist populism, anathematizing internal and external enemies, censorship of the media and the red bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, corruption - a term normally reserved for capitalist countries, despite the widespread practice of bribery in socialist states - has also made its appearance in these new democracies. The scant episodes of corruption "discovered" in the communist era focused criticism on the small apparatchiks of the Party or on the business world, seen as the "enemy" of the working class and socialism. At the beginning of the transition it was naively thought that all the "demons" of the communist system would disappear, but it has been seen that this would not be so.

Today, in the Balkans, the spirit of populism and the manipulation of crowds reigns, and the demagogy of politicians is enriched by authoritarianism and sophisticated systems of corruption. The case of Macedonia is very significant in this regard. VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski, who won the parliamentary elections in 2006 and still maintains power, began his mandate by promoting a war against corruption, for which he even hired former Romanian prosecutor Monika Macovei to serve as an anti-corruption advisor of his government. But the discovery by the opposition of a large network

of wiretaps organized by the Ministry of the Interior have revealed the extent of corruption of the current Gruevski government.

The leaders of communist Yugoslavia were barely apprentices in comparison to the magnitude of the corruption of the current power elite. Some projects such as *Skopje 2014*, the roads built by Chinese companies, or the Actor case have revealed the existence of significant influence trafficking for the benefit of politicians and the companies that finance the party in the power. Faced with challenges of this magnitude, the Macedonian justice system has not been able to undertake a single legal procedure for corruption against the members of the Government. For that reason, the international community has encouraged the creation of a Special Prosecutor's Office with the mandate to initiate a judicial proceeding on the corruption of the political elite, as it was evidenced by wiretapping records.

The pathologies of political power, such as authoritarian populism, go hand in hand with corruption. How to fight against it? First, through institutional and non-institutional control over power, that is, through the application of a system of checks and balances. On a second level, by the meticulous and expert analysis of the sources of corruption. And, at a third level, for regional and international cooperation to change the point of view of the fight against corruption and the creation of a methodology to fight against it.

**Keywords:** corruption, authoritarian populism, Macedonia

## 1. Introduction

If one were to diagnose the systemic deficiencies of the Republic of Macedonia in three words, these would be "unemployment", "poverty" and "corruption". But this Macedonian cocktail would become even more bitter if to it were added populist authoritarianism, demagoguery, identity crisis, and mixed in with it, the bankruptcy of the *checks and balances* system and the absence of the rule of law.

With regard to unemployment and poverty, we are faced with weaknesses inherited from the Tito's system. In this period of history, Macedonia was –along with Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina– one of the poorest Republics of the Yugoslav Federation. After the emergence of the Fund for the Less Developed Republics of Yugoslavia, Macedonia became one of the biggest users of state financial aid. Unemployment was around 18% in the context of a state economy. Corruption and bribery existed within the Balkan and Communist patterns, within certain minimum limits. There were no tycoons or millionaires. Even though some highly objectionable examples were verified, the communist parties reacted with the application of their ideological principles and the judicial and repressive means. The glamor was reserved for the jet set and the *red bourgeoisie* of Yugoslavia.

After independence, in 1991, Macedonia had to survive a very difficult transition. The dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation and the disappearance of the Yugoslav single market, as well as the tragedy of the ethnic war and a bad privatization destroyed the Macedonian economy. As of 1995, unemployment reached 30% of the country's workforce. Despite the efforts of the various parties that succeeded to resolve this problem, unemployment has become - after the controversy over the name of the country - the main theme of each election campaign. Today unemployment is still very high, and officially reaches 28%, but the opposition refuses to recognize this supposed "success" of the government. The current ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE, in government since 2006, has employed two mechanisms to control the unemployment rate: on the one hand, it has doubled the number of public employees, especially through the incorporation of its faithful to the administration; and on the other hand, it has introduced the distinction between "active unemployed" and "passive unemployed" through the Employment Agency, bringing down the number of unemployed to a significant extent - statistically.

However, in the multiethnic society of Macedonia the welfare state does not work, being supplemented by family solidarity to get out of poverty. Meanwhile, the crisis of identity has become widespread, creating very favorable ground for nationalist and populist demagoguery.

Since 2008, the date of the second consecutive victory in a parliamentary election of the rightist VMRO-DPMNE, its young leader Nikola Gruevski inaugurated an authoritarian system in the fight against the corruption that put a special focus on the magnates and the wealthy close to the previous left-wing government. From 2007, Gruevski had enrolled in this effort the former Romanian prosecutor Monika Macovei, known as the greatest fighter against corruption in the Balkans. The wide range of legal means made available to Macovei provoked a strong reaction from the opposition and the experts. New investigative means were introduced, including wiretaps (Law of Continuous Communications) and asset forfeiture measures in cases where the owner of the assets could not provide evidence as to their origin (Criminal Procedure Act). According to prof. Gordan Kalajdjiev from the Faculty of Law, "fighting corruption rather than helping to build the rule of law can lead us to a police state" (Duvnjak, 2008). In response to the criticism, Macovei's response was concise and clear: "I hope to maintain good relations with the Prime Minister and with the citizens, since my advice will be mainly for the benefit of the people" (Rusi, 2007).

Meanwhile, the police multiplied their actions by arresting numerous individuals suspected of corruption, but operated in a selective manner, prioritizing the investigation of people close to the previous government, and with great media impact, in the presence of television cameras (Rusi, 2007). This would be Gruevski's most popular moment when his levels of popular support were five times greater than those of the opposition leader. But it would also be the moment in which he would begin with the authoritarian, demagogic and corrupting drift of his government, which would end in 2015 with his resignation to the position of Prime Minister, the creation of a Special Prosecutor, and the call for early elections, all as a result of the signing of the Pržino Agreement. Indeed, this was an absurd outcome for a story that began when the country's new strongman, Gruevski, brought Monika Macovei to fight together against corruption, and ended with his conversion into the number one target of the new anti-corruption crusade of the Special Prosecutor's Office. How to explain this degradation of the most popular politician in the Republic of Macedonia? Why did the checks and balances system fail? Was it the result of his populist authoritarianism mixed with the

organized crime activities of his closest collaborators? Or was it his ambitious and megalomaniac personality, his desire to mark the history of his people and to remain in power as long as possible? In an effort to conduct an analysis of corruption and organized crime, at least the three above-mentioned factors may be discovered; each of which are mutually interdependent in the case of the degeneration of *Grudevism* (Vankovska, 2015).

In spite of the obvious arguments against him - known mainly through wiretaps in the possession of the opposition, and thanks to the creation of a Special Prosecutor's Office –Gruevski and those surrounding him remain untouchable for justice–. In Macedonia, the judiciary –including the Constitutional Court– is completely controlled by the government and the ruling party, while the Special Prosecutor's Office is defenseless as a result of the absence of a Special Court under its authority, since the First Instance Court refuses to accept and recognize the decisions of the Special Prosecutor's Office.

## **2. Demagogy and populist authoritarianism in Macedonia**

"It may seem imprudent," said Machiavelli, "that, born in a dark condition, I dare to give rules of conduct to those who govern." (Machiavelli, 1976: 8). These princes whom Francis Bacon considered "the idols of the tribe," these "fathers of the people," sometimes great or small dictators, these strong politicians still exist in our minds and in the political realities of Europe and elsewhere in the world. In the Balkans, from Slovenia and Croatia, through Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia, to Albania and even Greece, populism and demagogy are in full expansion. Nationalism, statism, a rule of law deficit, organized crime, and corruption are the permanent attributes of demagogy.

In the Balkan region, which is split between EU Member States and those aspiring to EU integration, and inhabited by people frustrated by poverty, unemployment and the crisis of identity, all sorts of demagoguery and populism have opened up. In this context, the Macedonians wonder: who are we? Are we just former Yugoslavs?

New Macedonians? Ancient Macedonians? Macedonians like those of the times of Alexander the Great? Slavs? Slavobulgarian? Slavserbs? Atheists or Orthodox Christians? And if all these doubts aren't enough, now come those generated by the neoclassicism promoted by the *Skopje 2014* Project, which we do not know whether it is authentically reflective of past architecture or giving birth to a new style.

Rhetoric and propaganda, mass movements, manifestations of strength or faith are among the mechanisms used by Premier Gruevski's megalomania to transform and dominate the psychology of the crowd. His speech is, in fact, a rupture with the past, with the political, ideological, cultural and even architectural identity of the country, and consequently make him to be the demagogue par excellence.

These strong men understand power as a drug that creates addiction from the first dose. Intoxicated by power, they enter into authoritarianism, blindness, populism, and intolerance towards those who do not think like them. The populist is a maker who builds idols and myths, and who exercises their authority as a leader of the masses without concessions towards those who differ in their political, religious, or racial vocation.

As in the case of Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Janez Janša in Slovenia, Tomislav Karamarko in Croatia, Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia, or Milorad Dodik in Republika Srpska; as with Greek or Albanian populism, Macedonian gruevism has contributed to turning the Balkans into the theater of identity and cultural populism, of national-populism, of neopopulism in the twenty-first century.

The spirit of the Orbán method thus hovers over the Balkans: close control of institutions and media has moved from Budapest to Skopje. And when this type of control comes from a member country of the EU, all criticism of our local populists is diminished in every way. Logically, EU authority against the Balkan demagogues is also weakened, since the enforceability of the Copenhagen criteria is weakened.

Is it populism's fault? Populism places the nation, the crowd, the populace at the center of the political debate, which the populist considers as a homogeneous entity. Populism is nourished by a whole

series of moral stereotypes: the modest Macedonians, patients and hardworking workers, always plundered; the Albanians, always exploited and deceived; the Serbs, naive and capable, but manipulated and impoverished by the new rich or by the old Communists. In Macedonia, our peasants are the best of the Balkans. And their greatest enemy is that opposition, incapable and corrupt, whose main interest is not the farmer but power. The ideology of populism is based on the dichotomous and horizontal division between the people and the elite, between "us down here" and "you up there". And, in parallel, in the vertical plane, the demarcation is also carried out with respect to the others within the same people (who have a different ethnic group or race, or belong to another political party) or with respect to foreigners. This creates a space conducive to both xenophobia and nationalism.

### **3. Manipulation of the multitudes**

As Serge Moscovici (1985) has written, "crowds are ready to fall under the pressure of their emotions, to express their rapture or their panic. When it comes to arguments, the best way is to repeat the same phrases, the same attitudes again and again." In this same logic, Gruevski and his *spin doctors* have been manipulating the emotions of the Macedonians. In this case, the process of generalized persuasion and propaganda through the media has shown to play a predominant role.

Already in his *Psychology of the Masses* (1895), Gustave Le Bon wrote that "in conditions of crisis it is very easy to persuade men to believe in miracles. Man is hungry to be manipulated and deceived in order to remain hopeful." In Gruevski's Macedonia, it has been very easy to convince the poor masses, the unemployed, the farmers, the citizens in general, to believe that they can return to the times of Alexander the Great or Philip, Cyril and Methodius, or of Czar Samuel. In times of economic crisis, social crisis and identity crisis, populism understands that the individual hardly accepts a reality that does not go beyond poverty and loneliness.

The man on the street dreams of a different reality with new hope, even if it is unreal. When this man finds himself in the crowd, he loses even more of his sense of realism; you need a leader, a messiah, a boss who decides on your behalf. It is enough that your leader verbally satisfies his dreams, all the while you feel humiliated listening to him. The problem is even greater if the populist is a megalomaniac, who not only uses the spoken word but also symbols and their collective imaginary. Perhaps St. Thomas Aquinas was right when he said that man can not understand anything without images. That is why the populist creates monuments, images to better persuade the crowd. That is why the *Skopje 2014* Project, promoted in 2011 as a megalomaniac initiative of 800 million euros, marked by the largest statue of Alexander the Great (35 meters) in the world, and marked by a triumphal arch, a hundred sculptures and monuments to the different historical times, and an endless display of neoclassical facades, became the main symbol of this manipulation of the public space –as well as the greatest consumer of the public funds of the country–. The main idea of Gruevski was the rupture with the immediate past –with the communist architecture–, for the sake of a new beginning, of the creation of a new space for a new and genuine Macedonia. Ljubiša Georgievski said that being a member of VMRO-DPMNE meant to have the blood and the gene of Macedonia. The new and true Macedonian is lucid, ambitious and heroic, in direct opposition to the old stereotyped image of a peaceful, obedient, submissive, and frightened Macedonia.

Gruevski authoritarianism is coupled with its populism. The crowds should listen more and not think so much, because their leader does instead. But if by chance they think, they have to be coherent and consistent in their ideas and thoughts. The Gruevski authoritarianism is an identity and demagogic populism that threatens democracy: that imprisons journalists and opposition; that orders the expulsion from Parliament of opposition members by the police (12.24.2012); that closes television stations whose editorial policies are beyond their control; that organizes protests outside opposition headquarters; that is suspected of being behind deadly accidents; that listens in on 20,000 opponents; that falsifies elections; that corrupts the electorate; that practices nepotism, corruption, blackmail, and the politics of fear; that threatens the destruction and punishment of former coalition



partners; and that completely *party-fies* the executive functions. It is the populism of he who is considered to be called by history to change the destiny of his people. Unity and homogenization are an absolute imperative for any populist. Thanks to its dogmatism, it transforms the psychological state of the crowd toward the intolerance of those who think differently. It opposes pluralism in society. Those who take different positions risk being attacked, imprisoned, expelled or punished. The populist has nothing to negotiate with those who oppose his attitude. He does not argue with his opponents. For him, negotiation is not possible with the enemy. People can not afford that luxury. The people decide everything. The people advance; the others stop! But behind these sentences many sins are hidden: for example, the enormous corruption, organized crime, or the control of the society through the illegal eavesdropping.

#### 4. Corruption

Corruption is a perversion or deviance in a process, or interaction within the framework of it with respect to one or more persons, for the purpose of obtaining special benefits or prerogatives or, from the perspective of the corrupt, to obtain remuneration in exchange for favor given. It usually leads to the personal enrichment of the corrupted, or to the enrichment of the organization of the corruptor, be it a mafia group, a company or a group of interest. There are several definitions of corruption, but the common point to all of them is that it is an abuse of power for the purpose of personal enrichment.

Corruption in the Republic of Macedonia is a major problem. According to the report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2011), the incidence of corruption in Macedonia is more urban (6.4%) than rural (5.8%), and more male (7.3%) than female (5.3%). Cash payment is the most common way to practice corruption (45%), although almost 32% have offered to pay for food or drink for that reason. 50% of bribes are paid at the request of the public official. The weaknesses that cause corruption in public administration have to do with bureaucratic procedures: more than 50% of citizens who participated in corruption, gave money to shorten a procedure, 12% did so to finalize it, 11% to aspire to a better

treatment, and 12% gave the bribe without any specific purpose (UNODC, 2011: 4). The frequency with which bribery is used to reduce waiting time in an administrative procedure probably has to do with the fact that in Macedonia the most corrupt are doctors: more than half of the citizens surveyed (58%) have paid a bribe to doctors, over 35% to the police, 17% to different officials, and a smaller percentage to teachers. Most of those who offered food or drink (63%) said they had done it for the first time, and prefer to remain anonymous for this act.

In a country like Macedonia where unemployment is so high (30%), almost 20% of the population dreams of finding a job in the administration. Between 2006 and 2016 –the Gruevski-controlled government period– the number of public employees increased from 60,000 to 180,000. Political affinity, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, and bribes became the major recruiting factors on the part of the administration. According to surveys, only 7% believe that recruitment is done based on merit. On the eve of the 2008 parliamentary elections and the 2009 local elections, only 5% of the administration's respondents acknowledged that they had been asked to vote for a specific candidate. But that does not mean that the question of blackmail and harassment does not play an important role in the influence of political parties on the electoral behavior of the administration.

## **5. Corruption of the high order**

As a result of the worsening political crisis following the opposition's decision to publish wiretaps and leave the Macedonian Parliament, the international community decided to tackle the crisis. In April 2015, the European Commission established a group of independent experts headed by the former Director of the European Commission Reinhard Priebe. The group led by Priebe concluded that the National Security Agency held a great concentration of power than was allowed by law, and proposed a number of recommendations on improving democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Each recommendation was aimed at ensuring the separation between the political class and the public interest of the State, the transparency

and freedom of information in the media, the independence of the judiciary, and oversight over intelligence activities that had subjected 20,000 people to espionage, including ministers and the Prime Minister. The recommendations mostly included measures for the prevention of corruption and the punishment of corrupt businesses (Priebe, et al., 2015).

But even before the discovery of the big corruption scandals through wiretaps, some cases of corruption had been detected by senior leaders of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party, such as the sale of Makedonska Banka or the "Actor" case. The Actor case involved signs of corruption that were detected between the government and a Greek company that won a tender for the construction of a short stretch of motorway. The government illegally withdrew 3.5 million euros in EU funds thanks to bribes paid to the company. But these cases were not sufficiently disseminated as a result of the corruption and control over the private and public media (Petkovski, 2014). In fact, since the triumph of the VMRO-DPMNE in the early elections of 2008, the number of sectors of Macedonian social life immersed in cases of corruption has multiplied: from the massive corruption of the voters themselves, through media communication, to the rampant corruption of local communities - of which 90% are under the control of the Prime Minister's party - and ending in Gruevski's nepotism and other party charges. All of this would be noted, among others, by Ambassador Alexander A. Arvizu, Assistant Secretary for Europe and Asia in the US Department of State (SELDI, 2016). The same finding would be confirmed by the *rapporteur* for Macedonia of the European Parliament, Ivo Vajgl (SELDI, 2016), who in his reports to the European Parliament and the European Commission confirmed corruption was a serious problem in the Republic of Macedonia.

In just two years (2014-2015), the pressure of corruption on the citizens of Macedonia increased by 5%. Public opinion polls found that 30.5% of citizens surveyed acknowledged that they had practiced corruption, while 20.2% reported being victimized (Freedom House, 2017). For Transparency International, the corruption index in the country had reached considerable dimensions, placing Macedonia in a tie for the 66th position with Sao Tome and Principe.

However, there have been many more real cases of corruption discovered through the illegal wiretapping conducted by the intelligence services. Most of these were carried out through the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Civil Engineering, in collaboration with the mayors, the police and the judiciary. Offshore companies in Belize and the British Virgin Islands have become the biggest investors in the country as the new rich from Macedonia begins to buy or build different building complexes in the country as a way to better hide the money laundering system.

## **6. Three scandals of corruption still warm**

### *6.1 The "Skopje 2014" Project*

The project *Skopje 2014* is a childish dream of Nikola Gruevski: a kitsch idea, dominated by the baroque and neoclassical style, to which it is not possible to assign another function than the purely political one of serving the populist homogenization of the people, left at the feet of its supposed crisis of identity and contributing to the search for its national identity. At the level of foreign policy, its function is to take the revenge on Greece by starting a process of antiquization and changing, at the same time, the negative stereotype of a timid and withdrawn Macedonia. The main purpose of this project has been the reconstruction of the center of Skopje. Its cost was initially estimated at about 80 million euros, of which has been spent about 642 million. By June 2016, the project had already been completed 136 objects, including 27 buildings, 6 exterior garages and 2 underground ones, a dozen new facades, 34 monuments, 5 plazas, a panoramic wheel (19 million euros), 4 bridges, 39 sculptures, an arc of triumph, two fountains and many other miscellaneous objects.

After his victory in local elections in 2013, the opposition candidate in the city center of Skopje –and new mayor– Andrej Zernovski commissioned two reports by independent experts and told the special prosecutor that it was clear that the project *Skopje 2014* had made a number of violations of the law that constituted criminal acts (Spasovski, 2016). Acts of corruption were once again evident

through telephone tapping. By the same logic, when Al Jazeera journalist Milka Smilevska interviewed the owner of Arte Bronzo in Verona, which specializes in the production of bronze monuments, she stated how "the man was surprised when he learned that his rival Ferdinando Marinelli had won 8.5 million euros instead of 2.7 million, for the construction of two lions and some bronze sculptures".

The monument "Warrior on Horseback", which symbolizes Alexander the Great on the back of Bucephalus, has been the most expensive of the whole project, with an estimated cost of 8.2 million euros, awarded to the Marinelli house. From the beginning, irregularities were observed in the procedure followed for their adjudication; irregularities that were corroborated by the enormous final price of the monument. The other monument that caused doubts is Zar Samuel, which cost 1.4 million euros and was built by the art gallery Pietro Bazanti. In the first place, this gallery was not authorized or registered to carry out this type of activities, a reason for why its participation in the solicitation for its construction should have been rejected. Then, to move the monument about 30 meters and carry out some repairs in the center of the Plaza of Macedonia, the company *Transmet* –property of Sead Kochan, close to the party in power– signed a contract of 2.5 million euros with the Government. Another monument, the statue of Philip, which is much smaller (7 meters) than that of his son, cost €4.4 million with the sculptor's fees rising to €1.5 million. The auditors have mentioned that the irregularities arose as a result of Gruevski's decision to change the initial draft, which had been approved by a jury. In spite of this, the Prime Minister decided to transform and raise the cost of the project, agreeing *tete-a-tete* with the sculptor and the producer. Finally, this monument was paid for by the municipal budget of the Skopje-Center municipality, which had no competence for it. In this same manner, many other buildings, monuments, sculptures and garages of the *Skopje 2014* Project were built, always with extra costs and in the midst of suspicion of corruption.

## 6.2 The "Treasury" and "Citadel" Cases

The name of the "Finzi" company jumped into the news for the first time in 2014 in connection with an investigation into the ownership structure of various media outlets in Macedonia, the benefits of which came largely from government subsidies, and around their relations with tycoons close to the party in power and owners of several offshore companies. The "Finzi" company was founded in 2009, although it was never clear what its commercial activity was. Its owner was another company with the same name, based in the United States, which, in turn, was owned by a third company whose head office was in Cyprus. Finzi-Macedonia controlled several portals close to the Government, all dedicated to the darkest propaganda against the opposition. Finzi's CEO was Kosta Krpač, who died strangely in a suicide involving two shots of a gun at the beginning of 2016. Before him, the position of CEO was in the hands of Vladislav Stajkovic, founder of the NVSP company. Its role was key in the diffusion of wiretaps by the opposition, as it was through its NVSP company that the equipment necessary to carry out the eavesdropping was acquired in Israel on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior of Macedonia. In the above-mentioned recordings, Stajkovic and a judge close to Gruevski, talked about how to transfer certain sums of money to private bank accounts. The company NVSP has its own radio station, Radio Slobodna Makedonija, which totally support the party in power and the Government.

Thanks to this sophisticated listening equipment acquired in Israel on behalf of the government and the subsequent leak of the recordings, the opposition was able to detect various corruption issues involving the Macedonian political elite. By controlling and listening to his interlocutors, as well as to another 20,000 citizens of the opposition, Gruevski made a big mistake that allowed Macedonian public opinion to discover its true face. In a moment of panic, he and his collaborators decided to destroy this sophisticated mechanism valued at ten million euros. However, the new Special Prosecutor began an investigation called "Citadel". One of the crucial testimonies in "Citadel" was that of Kosta Krpač, who, as we have already pointed out, was the former director general of Finzi and died in early 2016.

The Special Prosecutor also opened an investigation into the purchase of hearing aids and other indications of corruption –a case called "Treasury"– although the State Prosecutor's Office, under the control of the party in power, did not dare open the judicial process. The investigation, opened under pressure from the international community and public opinion, has not yet resulted in the adoption of specific measures against the free movement of the person in charge of this matter.

### *6.3 Chinese Capital, the Highway and Corruption*

The wiretaps of early 2013, in which the voice of Nikola Gruevski and his ministers could be recognized, brought the government's talks with the Chinese company Sinohydro on the construction of two 110 km long roads into the public eye. Alarm was raised when the Macedonian Minister of Transport and Public Works was heard explaining to Gruevski the €30 million commission to be paid by the Chinese company to his Macedonian partner. On the other hand, according to the laws of the Republic of Macedonia, each project that exceeds the value of €200,000 must go through a public tender process, which did not take place in this case. Instead of using the public tendering procedure, Prime Minister Gruevski's government used its parliamentary majority to adopt a special law that allowed the Chinese company to get the right to build these two highways. The price of the roads –one for €206 million and the other for €374 million– caused a great debate and generated a reaction from the opposition in Parliament. The opposition estimated that the price per kilometer was very high and that the Chinese company would have excessive profits. Added to this was the fact that all the processing of the case had been secret and irregular, which denoted the possibility of corruption. What further increased the suspicion was that the government published figures were drastically different from those appearing on Sinohydro's website, differences of €30.9 and €36.1 million. The day after the release of this "truth bomb", the Chinese company erased the prices of these projects from its website. In summary, the government's official price was 3.5 times higher than that published by the successful bidder.

## 7. Conclusions

Corruption jeopardizes some of the most basic human rights. In the absence of effective countervailing powers, neutralized by the discretion of an authoritarian, populist and demagogic government, citizens become even more vulnerable to corruption. So a corrupt government that rejects the principles of transparency and accountability is usually one that does not respect human rights.

Corruption also erodes the principles that govern the rule of law, undermining the legitimacy of government and the effectiveness and credibility of public institutions, rendering justice ineffective and creating a climate of insecurity that may jeopardize political stability.

Corruption also undermines the ethical and cultural values of a society and introduces it into a vicious circle: society is defenseless against corruption and does not even have the possibility to react and defend itself. Thanks to galloping clientelism, which is a direct product of corruption, populist authoritarian demagogues can easily win one election after another.

Interestingly, many people still believe that corruption can help to grease the wheels of a slow and under-regulated economy. But the facts deny this theory. Corruption has a cost: it is proven to promote unproductive investments, increases the cost of goods and services, and leads to a decrease in the quality of any service or production under public control.

Corruption breeds bad decisions, encourages competition that ends up multiplying corrupt practices rather than fostering healthy competition in quality and cost. And when it becomes endemic, it increases the costs of businesses and especially hurts smaller ones.

Corruption slows economic and social development and causes significant damage in the poorest countries; diverts a country's resources to the benefit of a few, erodes a country's resources and contributes to keeping it in the vicious circle of poverty.

Corruption encourages discriminatory practices, threatens the most basic social, economic and cultural rights, serves as a breeding



ground for arbitrariness and often comes from repressive methods by the State.

Those who have the courage to take up the challenge and openly fight corruption are at considerable risk and face real danger. The physical integrity of the people is threatened when they are likely to affect the interests of the beneficiaries of corruption. Only this way can explain the tragic events of Kumanovo in May 2015 or that of several suspicious fatal "accidents".

It is clear that in the current context of the Republic of Macedonia, the links between organized crime, the circuits of corruption and authoritarian populism are contracted to become compatible and inseparable phenomena.

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**Zhidas Daskalovski** (Bitola, 1974) holds a PhD in Political Science (2003) as well as M.A. in Southeast European Studies (1998) from the Central European University in Budapest, after having graduated in History and Political Science at the American University in Bulgaria (1997). He has published numerous scholarly articles on politics in the

Southeast European region, as well as co-edited books including: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (Frank Cass: London, 2003) and *Ten Years after the Ohrid Framework Agreement: Lessons (to be) Learned from the Macedonian Experience*, (CRPM and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Skopje 2012). He has also written Macedonia country reports for Freedom House/Nations in Transit, Open Budget Index, Global Integrity Report, Bertelsmann Transformation Index, UNDP People Centered Analysis, and UN Human Development Report. A professor of political science at the St. Kliment Ohridski University in Bitola, he is the Director of the Council of Europe supported School of Public Policy "Mother Theresa". In 2008 he was nominated "Young Scientist of the Year" by the Macedonian Academy of Science; he is one of the Distinguished Persons of Bitola of the University of Kliment Ohridski and a recipient of the Lord Dahrendorf Fellowship at St. Antony's College (Oxford University), the School of Slavonic and East European Studies Macedonian Studies Fellowship, and the Social Science Research Council/Ethnobarometer Fellowship at the University of North Carolina. His expertise is prominent in the fields of policy analysis in general and decentralization, democratization, ethnic and multicultural issues in particular. He has also been working for the Center for Research and Policy Making, War Torn Societies Project (WSP), Local Government Initiative, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the European Stability Initiative.

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# How to Save Macedonian Democratic Consolidation and EU Enlargement?

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Zhidas Daskalovski

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**Abstract.** European Union (EU) enlargement is under threat. There is little enthusiasm among European member states for further enlarging the Union. The slowing down of the EU integration process in the Western Balkans has been accompanied by a slowdown in investment in the region by EU member states. The slow process of enlargement has negatively affected citizens' perceptions in the region. In the Western Balkans populist and authoritarian tendencies have grown. Macedonia is the exemplary of these processes. New regional powers, such as Turkey, Russia, and China threaten to use the impasse in the EU enlargement process. It is necessary to improve democratic consolidation in the Western Balkans and the EU to aid the process. Consolidation of democracy in the region depends on elite consensus and cooperation as well as remodelling key public institutions to be powerful and independent from party influences. The case of Macedonia is important to consider as this country has been for long time candidate for EU accession without being able to start negotiations. Tough reforms and European assistance are necessary to invigorate the democratization process in Macedonia and move on the enlargement agenda.

**Keywords:** EU enlargement, democratic consolidation, Western Balkans, Macedonia, crisis

## **1. Introduction**

Europe and the enlargement face difficult times. There is little enthusiasm among European member states for further enlarging the Union. The slowing down of the EU integration process in the Western Balkans has been accompanied by a slowdown in investment in the region by EU member states. The slow process of enlargement has negatively affected citizens' perceptions in the region. In the Western Balkans populist and authoritarian tendencies have grown. Macedonia is the exemplary of these processes. It was granted an EU candidate status in 2005, and since 2009 the Commission has consistently recommended that negotiations be opened. The European Parliament has also incessantly supported opening accession negotiations. Nothing has happened, mainly due to the objections by Greece to the country's use of the name "Macedonia". Meanwhile the state of democratic consolidation has considerably worsened. Tough reforms and European assistance are necessary to invigorate the democratization process in Macedonia and move on the enlargement agenda.

## **2. State of play in the enlargement process**

The Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) –as a tailor-made, country-by-country, progressive approach and intermediate step on the path towards accession– has, since May 1999, been the centrepiece of EU strategy towards the Western Balkans. On 19 and 20 June 2000, at the Santa Maria de Feira European Council, all Western Balkan countries were considered as potential candidates for EU membership. A few months later, on 24 November 2000, the prospect of possible accession to the EU was confirmed at the Zagreb Summit. At the Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003, all EU member states declared their 'unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries' and that 'the future of the Balkans is within the European Union.' Croatia became the newest member of the EU in 2013, but European Commission

President Jean-Claude Juncker epitomised, in July 2014, the current mood on enlargement inside the EU in the presentation of his political guidelines to the European Parliament: 'The EU needs to take a break from enlargement so that we can consolidate what has been achieved among the 28 [member states]. This is why, under my Presidency of the Commission, ongoing negotiations will continue, and notably the Western Balkans will need to keep a European perspective, but no further enlargement will take place over the next five years. Despite the pessimistic outlook for the next five years, there was some progress in the Western Balkan countries as far as enlargement is concerned during the period of the previous European Commission from 2009-2014.

The European Commission's approach has been to address fundamentals first, thus prioritising reforms related to:

- The rule of law and fundamental rights;
- Economic governance and improving economic competitiveness;
- Strengthening democratic institutions (European Commission, 2014)

These three pillars are interlinked, and progress in these areas is key to determining when countries will be fully ready to join the EU. In all the above fields, the Commission aims to make the maximum use of existing mechanisms and forums to drive reforms forward, for instance through SAA structures, accession negotiations, or Commission-led country-specific initiatives such as high-level dialogues or structured dialogues on the rule of law.

As regards the first pillar, the rule of law and fundamental rights, the Commission emphasizes that tackling rule of law early in the accession process maximises the time countries have to develop solid track records of reform implementation. Progress under chapters 23: judiciary and fundamental rights and 24: justice freedom and security will need to be made in parallel with progress in negotiations overall. The Commission recalls the existence of the "overall balance" clause of the negotiating frameworks and the possibility of stopping negotiations on other chapters if progress on rule of law issues lags behind. (European Commission, 2014:19)

The second pillar, strengthening economic governance and competitiveness in the enlargement countries, is crucial for meeting the economic criteria for EU membership. Reforms should be intensified to achieve sustainable growth, improve the business environment, and boost investment. The reform process must be intensified as the West Balkans lag behind European Union countries including the so-called new member states. Growth in the Western Balkans has slowed down since the Europe wide financial crisis, while employment creation is sluggish. Convergence of living standards towards the levels of EU economies is also trailing behind. The region suffers from low investment, while emigration from the region has again become a policy issue for both the EU and the Western Balkans. Overall, reforms are slowing down and the region faces the risk of permanent marginalisation on the periphery of Europe. On 12 May 2015, the Finance Ministers of the EU, and the Western Balkans adopted recommendations to ensure sound public finances and to increase competitiveness and long-term growth in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The recommendations are based on economic reform programmes, that "focus on the macroeconomic and fiscal policy framework and –for the first time– also on sectoral structural reforms, for instance regarding infrastructure, education and employment, industrial structures, business environment and trade integration". (Hahn 2015)

In connection with the third pillar, strengthening democratic institutions, the Commission wants to better integrate public administration reform into the enlargement process, establishing "special reform groups" with the enlargement countries "as a forum for addressing horizontal public administration reform issues from the relevant negotiating chapters, monitoring progress and ensuring consistency". (European Commission, 2014:20)

The implementation of various reforms in the candidate and potential candidate countries is receiving EU support under the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II). Through IPA II, the EU will provide EUR 11.7 billion for the period 2014-2020 to support the enlargement countries in their preparation for accession and to support regional and cross-border cooperation. It is envisioned that this will further strengthen the region's stability, its economy and its investment potential. IPA II is expected to facilitate stronger



ownership by the beneficiaries through integrating their own reform and development agendas. This mechanism is also expected to further anchor the civil society in the democratization and Europeanization process of the Western Balkans. The European Commission and the European Parliament are continuously working on enhancing the enlargement process in the Western Balkans.

Overall, the EU is a major reform-driving factor for the countries of the Western Balkans: Enlargement hinges on the idea of "the transformative power of the EU" (Grabbe, 2006). This extends further than democratisation and the rule of law. As a single market, the EU is the world's largest trade bloc, and it is scarcely imaginable that the small countries of the Western Balkans could achieve substantial growth and prosperity outside the EU. Nevertheless, past enlargement experience has demonstrated that "the EU's ability to trigger liberal democratic reforms in candidate countries should not be overestimated, especially when it faces illiberal and authoritarian governments". (Sedelmeier, 2014)

Indeed, both inside the EU and in the Western Balkan region, the enlargement project faces serious obstacles. European states face different problems of their own making. Citizens across the continent feel less connected with the European supranational institutions and globalization processes. Economic progress has been stagnating and populist leaders have exploited anti-elitist feelings. While enlargement is not on the agenda in Europe new actors such as Turkey and Russia have emerged in the region. Radical Islam has an influence among dissatisfied Muslim youth. While the modernisation process in the region has been stagnating, "a tarnished, divided EU is often powerless to make real changes to Balkan political dynamics of polarisation, zero-sum games, and toxic nationalism...progress on core European standards such as the rule of law, media freedom, and the fight against corruption is often superficial or simply non-existent, while independent monitors warn against rollbacks of the progress that has been made". (Lasheras, 2014)

Candidate countries have become increasingly aware that the negotiations will take a long time. For example for the 2004 enlargement negotiations lasted six years. Sofia and Bucarest joined the EU in 2007, negotiating for seven years. Croatia negotiated from

2005 to 2013. It is highly unlikely that any of the Western Balkan countries will be able to join the EU in such periods of time. Indeed, at the hearing in the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) of Johannes Hahn, the new Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, some MEPs feared that if too extended in time, the preparatory process could force some of the candidates to give up (Marini, 2014). Moreover, the Greek debt crisis dealt "a serious blow to the enlargement narrative as one of sustained convergence, EU-driven modernisation, and increasing prosperity" (O'Brennan, 2013: 40). The duration of the accession process and the declining level of foreign direct investment in the region heighten the feeling of indifference to the EU and the whole enlargement project among the regional elites, influencing a political culture of outright hostility between government and opposition parties and authoritarian tendencies in domestic politics.

As governments usurp democratic consolidation and the EU enlargement perspective of the Western Balkans slowly progress while economic recovery stalls, public confidence in further EU enlargement has begun to wane. Since 2011, according to the survey of Eurobarometer, it has dropped from 85 % to 79 % in Macedonia, and it has fallen from 72 % to 61% in Montenegro. In Serbia the support has remained around 58%. It has gone down from the initial 58% to 49% in 2012, to high 63% in the spring of 2014, to drop back to 58% in the autumn of 2014. The most recent public opinion survey by the Serbian European Integration Office conducted in December 2014 reveals a support of 44% to the question "If there was a referendum tomorrow on the following question "Do you support our country's integration in the European Union", how would you vote?" The support in this survey has been steadily decreasing since the peak 63% in April 2011.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON FURTHER ENLARGEMENT OF  
THE EU TO INCLUDE OTHER COUNTRIES IN FUTURE  
YEARS? (%)

	FYROM	MONTE NEGRO	SERBIA
Autumn 2014	79	61	58
Spring 2014	77	69	63
Autumn 2013	79	64	50
Spring 2013	85	68	57
Autumn 2012	83	62	49
Spring 2012	88	62	58
Autumn 2011	85	72	
Spring 2011	84	72	
Autumn 2010	85		
Spring 2010	88		

Source: Eurobarometer,  
[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

### 3. Macedonia and EU enlargement

Macedonia was granted EU candidate status in 2005, and since 2009 the Commission has consistently recommended that negotiations be opened. The European Parliament has also incessantly supported opening accession negotiations. Nothing has happened, mainly due to the objections by Greece to the country's use of the name "Macedonia". Greece objects to the use of the name "Macedonia",

arguing that Macedon was an ancient Greek kingdom and Macedonia is the name of a region of Greece adjacent to the former Yugoslav republic that bears the same name. A solution to the name issue remains elusive for all sides, including EU officials and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini (Retman, 2014).

As far as starting negotiations for membership are concerned, beyond the Greek blockade over their objections to the use of the name Macedonia, the country faces a serious internal problem regarding democratic consolidation. Opposition parties have been boycotting parliament, accusing the governing coalition of fraud in the April 2014 election. In February 2015, Macedonia became immersed in a political imbroglio as the Social Democrat opposition leader Zoran Zaev began releasing recordings of illegally wire-tapped phone conversations. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and the Head of Intelligence Service Sasho Mijalkov faced accusations that during the past few years they had secretly and illegally wire-tapped some 20,000 people, including journalists, opposition leaders, businessmen, NGO activists, academics, religious leaders, members of the judiciary, and prominent intellectuals. The content of the wire-tapping conversations was disputed, and criminal charges were filed against Zaev, including incitement to "overthrow the constitutional order", and "espionage and violence against top state officials". For some time, all aspects of public life –from the bureaucracy to public enterprises to civil society– have been politicised. The recordings augmented the fear that the system of government has been designed with the objective of maximising wealth, power, and impunity for the benefit of particular groups and networks, rather than serving the public interest. Meanwhile Mijalkov, and the Ministers of Interior and Transport and Communications resigned, while Macedonia witnessed a bloody conflict with a terrorist group in Kumanovo in May 2015, and more opposition protests, some of which violent, and a massive support rally by the ruling VMRO-DPMNE.

An agreement, brokered by the European Union and the United States, was worked on in June and July 2015. Early general elections in April 2016 were announced. From 20 October 2015, a transitional government was installed including the two main parties, VMRO-

DPMNE and the Social Democratic Union (SDSM). A new special prosecutor was appointed to investigate alleged crimes implicated by the wiretapping scandal. As part of the agreement, Gruevski resigned in January 2016. The investigation into Gruevski and other politicians from VMRO-DPMNE was stopped in April 2016 by a pardon of the President Gjorge Ivanov, which resulted in several protests. VMRO-DPMNE allegedly did not agree with his action. Zaev supported the protests to overturn Ivanov's pardon referred to by some as the "Colorful Revolution". The protesters demanded that the government resigns, that a technical government is formed, and that the parliamentary elections planned for 5 June 2016 are cancelled, on the grounds that the conditions for free and transparent elections are not in place. The government and its supporters, who have organized pro-government rallies, maintained that the elections on June 5 are the only solution to the political crisis. Finally, early parliamentary elections were agreed upon and were held on 11 December 2016. The elections produced inconclusive results as the ruling party won 51 of the 120 seats in parliament and the SDSM 49 both proclaiming victory and insisting they would form the new government.

Generally the state of democracy in Macedonia is gravely endangered. For some time now all aspects of public life, from the bureaucracy to public enterprises to civil society have been politicized. Complaints of political dominance of the media system; the structural inefficiency of the public administration, the rising costs of entry to politics of new subjects, weak execution of the regulations concerning the public financing of parties, the de-facto arbitrariness of many decision-making processes excluding wide and efficient public consultations, the lack of confidence of citizens in the institutions of the state, and the political class; the lack of a sense of state building attitudes in the public service are not new phenomena. The feeling among citizens is that the system is designed with the objective of maximizing wealth, power, and impunity for the benefit of particular groups and networks, rather than serving the public interest.

Among many in Macedonia a widespread "sense of impunity" of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI officials exists amplified by a long-standing absence of alternation in government. The feeling is that Prime Minister Gruevski and his associates have learnt to maximize

wealth and power for their own benefits while extracting large-scale resources from the society and employing part of those resources through clientelism and other means. All of these actions are seen as being taken in order to ensure their continuing positions, financial gain, and impunity. At the moment the legitimacy of public policy making is questioned, while social norms, and the trust in the public institutions shaken. The trust in the functioning system of checks and balances is broken. A belief that a systemic failure has occurred in the country is omnipresent.

Literature on state capture underscores that it presents unique difficulties for policy-makers, practitioners, and concerned citizens who wish to address it. One major challenge is simply gaining detailed documented information about actual structures and processes that accompany this phenomenon (Hellman et al.). EU Progress Reports, analyses by various think tanks and the content of the wire-taped conversations provide Macedonians with ample evidence, even if on a somewhat superficial level. Citizens need to focus on the second challenge, "creating sustained public pressure under which even captured institutions go against the interest of their captors and come back to serve their citizens under public scrutiny". The third challenge is keeping reformed institutions out of the orbit of state capture (Hellman et al). The following section presents a set of ideas how to make reforms so that there is a critical mass of agencies that are not under state capture, assuring that those institutions that have been reformed remain free of internal as well as external pressures.

#### **4. Reforms and processes needed for European Macedonia**

The first and immediate issue to be tackled with is to return politics to a sense of normality and decency. Being politician must not confer special privileges. Politicians must not abuse the system and have humility and accountability as virtues. Macedonian politicians should not enjoy extraordinary incomes; neither should they enjoy various hidden privileges as they do at present (for e.g. extra income from membership in various supervisory and governing boards, extravagant travel expenses and per diems, unlimited or unaccounted

usage of publically paid for mobile phones, automobiles or meals in restaurants). Politics in Macedonia must be open and transparent activity where public goods are not used for private or party benefits during electoral campaigns and beyond. Integrity means playing by the established rules, not subverting them, even for the sake of ideological or party gain. Politicians are elected by the citizens to make decisions on the basis of evidence based policy research conducted by public servants in cooperation with analysis of experts from think tanks, universities, trade unions, employers association, business associations and civil society activists, and in communication with the citizens. Politicians are not elected to seclude themselves and base their decisions on their own or party interests.

Furthermore, given that there are typical problems related to corruption and political/party influence on the independence of public institutions, the media, and the electoral processes, Macedonia should focus on strengthening the independence and the competencies of several public institutions that can influence the mentioned problematic areas. These include: the State Audit Office, the Media Regulatory Body, the Public Broadcasting Service, (MRT), the Ombudsperson Office, the Public Prosecutor, the Anti-corruption Commission, the State Electoral Commission, Commission on freedom of information, Anti-monopoly Commission, and the Commission for Protection from Discrimination. One could envision a system of election/appointment of officials in these bodies through a consensual vote in the parliament where for example the nominations would be confirmed by a strong majority and the candidates would have very strong qualifications. Among other things, the strengthening of the efficacy and the role of the mentioned institutions will in the short run influence the fairness of elections. Conducting free and fair elections, whereby voting will not be disputed by any party, should be a priority for the near future.

A key aspect of this engagement is to improve monitoring and evaluation of public policymaking in general. Macedonia should move from traditional monitoring which focuses on implementation monitoring, i.e. tracking inputs (money, resources, strategies), activities (what actually took place) and outputs (the products or services produced). This approach focuses on monitoring how well a

project, programme or policy is being implemented, and is often used to assess compliance with work plans and budget. The government should begin using results-based monitoring, which involves the regular collection of information on the public policy performance. Results-based monitoring demonstrates whether a given law, programme or policy is achieving its stated goals. However this should not be used as an incentive for further enlargement of the public administration but should be performed through reforming its present capacities and efficiency to fit the new results-based monitoring approach. This approach is in line with the EU accession strategy as the union repeatedly calls in all progress reports for the country output legitimacy to be strengthened rather than just focusing on the input legitimacy of decisions. It will inevitably need establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework that is currently lacking, as well as acquiring certain sets of skills of civil servants as well as level of knowledge and awareness of public managers for results –based monitoring framework to be enforced–.

Performance-based budgeting is the practice of developing budgets based on the relationship between program funding levels and expected results from that program. The performance-based budgeting process is a tool that program administrators can use to manage more cost-efficient and effective budgeting outlays. It is a way to allocate resources to achieve specific objectives based on program goals and measured results. The key to understanding performance-based budgeting lies beneath the word "result". In this method, the entire planning and budgeting framework is result oriented. Program budgeting is not simply about changing the way a budget is presented, but about changing the way policy officials, the public and government staff think of the government, how they plan, manage and budget. Each line ministry and agency needs to engage in the process of developing a program structure for their budget. Line ministry management and staff –not consultants– must undertake the work. This also implies that a country should not simply import a program classification from another country and try to adopt it. In the same time the performance – based program budgeting is in line with the EU accession requirements for Macedonia and a commitment the Government fails to implement since 2009.



Macedonian government should in the long run establish results-based models of monitoring and evaluation, looking at outcomes and impacts, as opposed to the traditional monitoring and implementation orientation, which only looks at the inputs and milestones for project's implementation rather than program implementation. Performance-based monitoring, evaluation and budgeting must include systematic and continuous data collection on public policy implementation for performance measurement, and it must include indicator values against which progression towards meeting targets can be measured in line with objectives set. Furthermore it should facilitate adjustments and adaptation, thus making for more effective public policy management. This facilitation of full-fledged monitoring and evaluation through consensus and capacity development –with a view to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies– should be a priority. Regulatory impact assessments and other steps and commitments to performance-based budgeting already presuppose strategic planning for targets and indicators measurement. Pertinent to the success of the results based models of policy-making is time, for deliberation, for implementation, for adjustment and measurement of impact and results. The style of governance promoted in the last decade was rather contrary, marked by not inclusive policy making due to the lack of time, express procedures for adoption of new legislation successfully hidden behind the need to meet pressures for accelerating EU accession. Therefore, a new government should take it slowly, define several results per sectors and devote time for implementation that will allow time for measurement of results and deliberation of new policy solutions. Such improvements due to the currently low capacities of the government in monitoring and evaluation and performance budgeting can be bridged by the inclusion of independent experts and civil society actors.

Consequently, Macedonia must immediately thoroughly improve fiscal transparency the comprehensiveness, clarity, reliability, timeliness, and relevance of public reporting on the past, present, and future state of public finances is critical for effective fiscal management and accountability. It helps ensure that governments and the public have an accurate picture of public finances when making economic decisions, including of the costs and benefits of policy

changes and potential risks to public finances. The current crises revealed problems that originate from the lack of pre-budget statement and thereof lack of debate for the central budget in Parliament; lack of citizens budget and thereof user-friendly budget information sharing with ordinary citizens; absence of reporting the public debt in the budget document; absence of reporting the transfers of socially owned enterprises (such as ELEM, T-home, AEK and etc.) to other public enterprises such as JSP, MTV and others. The separate reporting of the external public debt is not sufficient, it needs to be included in the budget as it is financed and administered through the budget, as well as it needs to include debt not just towards external financial institutions but also commercial borrowers. Fiscal transparency should provide legislatures, markets, and citizens with the information they need to hold governments accountable.

By joining the Open Government Partnership, the government of Macedonia has pledged to continuously improve itself on the foundations of open, transparent, reliable and efficient government institutions that communicate and cooperate with the citizens. The obligations for transparent implementation of the government activities as well as inclusion of NGOs are proclaimed priorities that should be put in real use. It is an imperative that the civil sector is more actively used in the policy-making processes. Macedonia needs to develop a culture of inclusion and respect of rights for all citizens in the policy making and decision-making processes, including the adoption of laws and access to information. Better enforcement of the Law on Free Access to Public Character Information should also be a priority especially providing data to citizens first hand so that there is no actual need that one should use this Law to ask for certain information.

The reform of the judiciary should be a continuous process, important now as in the long run. Enforcement of anti-corruption legislation requires an efficient, predictable, and accountable judiciary, able to hold the executive accountable under the law, and to interpret and enforce the terms of the constitution. The independence of the judiciary from direct undue interference with adjudication by the government and the power to enforce its rulings are crucial in the anti-corruption efforts. Hereby, enforcement of rulings is the key issue and Macedonian government must consent to provide the

resources needed for enforcement. Given its stature, the Constitutional Court could contribute more to the development of public policies.

In the mid to long run, Macedonians of all credos must demand further democratization of our political parties. Ethnic parties should adopt more nuanced party platforms based on political ideologies rather than solely on advancing particular kin interests. The electoral system must not only equally take into consideration the role of women, going beyond the current 30% quota, but also present citizens with choices to elect candidates on the basis of individual virtues perhaps through using the open party lists model or a combination of a majoritarian and PR system as used in Germany. To reduce interethnic tensions electoral system to induce ethnic accommodation, for example, vote pooling could be used in local or presidential elections. Through vote pooling politicians in a heterogeneous society seek support outside their own group in order to win elections and voters exchange votes across group boundaries. Transparency of the elections must be raised both in terms of party financing and media coverage.

In the mid to long run Macedonians must also insist on deepening the decentralization processes. Deepening the principles of equitable and just representation defined with the Ohrid Framework Agreement to the municipal level in combination with moderated electoral campaigns as envisioned above should have a reconciliatory effect on interethnic relations in the country. Macedonia should focus on the implementation of the Strategy on Integrated Education and have a more proactive approach in order to ensure the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities of all communities lowering the threshold of 20% for official use of minority languages. This threshold is one of the contentions point hovering over the census taking process.

Given the problems witnessed with the wire-tapping affair various forms of participatory democracy, such as the community forum program supported by the Swiss, should be taken into consideration in the mid to long run. Electronic participation at the problem defining level if not at the strategic planning and budgeting processes should be an aim for citizens to be able to effectively engage at on a local level. Overall, participatory budgeting which allows the

participation of citizens in the conception and/or allocation of public finances' should be a target. Doing so will encourage Macedonians to become part of the "public sphere" rather than to remain mired in the civic disengagement and apolitical cynicism that seems to have plagued our political systems in recent years. Such citizen engagement will increase social justice by involving the poor and excluded, and helps individuals become better citizens through oversight of public spending, thereby helping to reduce corruption and cronyism, empowering a more diverse range of political activists, reducing elitism and clientelism and, in the end, providing citizens with greater access to basic services and improved living conditions (Moynihan, 2007).

## **5. The need for an elite pact and a political settlement**

The current state of affairs and elite conflict distinctively resembles the circumstances described by political scientists in literature on democratic transitions. Key authors in this field noted that the critical step for a successful democratization included transformation of disunified elites into consensually unified ones, through an elite settlement of basic disputes among elites (Higley and Burton, Burton and Higley, O'Donnell, G., and Schmitter, Higley and Gunther).<sup>1</sup> An elite pact, settlement or political settlement is a relatively rare event in which warring national elite factions suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements. Such pacts are the processes in which previously disunified and warring elites suddenly and deliberately reorganized their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements, thereby achieving consensual unity and laying the basis for a stable democratic regime. Alternatively put, political pacts are a set of formal and informal agreements between contending political actors to diffuse potentially disruptive contestation; they establish a basis for restrained and peaceful political competition between major elite camps. An elite pact can also be defined as an explicit, but not always publicly explicated or justified, agreement

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<sup>1</sup> All definitions are from the mentioned references.

among a select set of actors which seek to define (or better, to redefine) rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the "vital interests" of those entering into it. The effect of these settlements is to fundamentally transform relations among existing elite factions, creating a consensually unified elite structure that provides a foundation for lasting political stability. After settlements, elites continue to be affiliated with conflicting parties, movements and beliefs, but they share a consensus about government institutions and the codes and rules of political competitions. The essence of an elite settlement is a bargain among elites that their respective supporters will accept.

In political science elite pacts are related to political settlements. Both are related to the current Macedonian crisis. Political settlements are the common understanding between elites about how power should be organised and exercised and include formal institutions and informal agreements. (DFID) Every state is based on a political settlement that represents the outcome of contention and bargaining between elites, and between social groups and those who occupy authority within the state and society more widely. The political settlements approach focuses on the formal and informal negotiations, bargains, pacts and agreements between elite actors, as crucial drivers of the locally effective institutions and policies that promote or frustrate the achievement of sustainable growth, political stability and socially inclusive development. OECD characterised the term as referring to how the balance of power between elite groups is settled through agreement around the rules of political engagement. (2011) Political settlement may be (re)shaped by the outcome of a single event (such as a peace agreement), or it may reflect an ongoing process of exchange and (re)negotiation that extends over time where what matters is the conduct of key actors.

Political scientists have argued that elite settlements are triggered by a sharp and profoundly dangerous crisis which drives elites to abandon competition and cooperate to effect a change of regime. Elite settlements occur through relatively quick negotiations among leaders of major elite factions. The negotiations are conducted by experienced political leaders. They are often face-to-face, partially secret, negotiations among paramount leaders of the major elite factions/parties. Through a combination of skill, desperation, and

accident, impasses are broken and crucial compromises are struck that result in formal written agreements. Written agreements commit elite factions publicly to the concessions and guarantees they have made. But formal agreements and constitutions by themselves hardly suffice to produce the common elite acceptance of a new code of political conduct, which is the most fundamental and lasting consequence of an elite settlement. Behind such agreements there must be a great deal of forbearance and conciliatory behaviour among the most central elite actors

Elite settlement as a new and transformed political order born of crisis and achieved through elite cooperation is crucial for our country. Elite settlement "tames" politics: leads to compromises among political leaders, generates shared practices among competing political elites and defines sanctions for violating that. After settlements, elites continue to be affiliated with conflicting parties, movements and beliefs, but they share a consensus about government institutions and the codes and rules of political competitions. Politics no longer kills, "is no longer a warlike affair, (...) affirms itself as the standard *modus operandi* of a polity"; only a settlement leads to a stable democracy (Sartori, 1995). We need such a settlement as soon as possible in Macedonia.

Macedonian politicians have for a long time disagreed about government institutions, engaged in fights for dominance, and had "the winner takes all" attitude. It is imperative for the political and social actors to understand that the consolidation of democracy comes through cooperation not based on self-interests but on society-oriented interests. In order for democracy to consolidate it is imperative for political parties and politicians to show political will in negotiations and institution building past petty and temporary interests. VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM must immediately open communication channels. There needs to be a quick agreement on the necessary steps forward. Action plans for reform of key institutions (such as the State Audit Office, the Media Regulatory Body, the Public Broadcasting Service, (MRT), the Ombudsperson Office, the Public Prosecutor, the Anti-corruption Commission, the State Electoral Commission, Commission on freedom of information, Anti-monopoly Commission, and the Commission for Protection from Discrimination) should be agreed upon. A census should be prepared

and organized as soon as possible, even if the question of ethnic belonging is not to be posed (language identification could be used in the census as this is actually key for policy making in education for example, not collecting data on ethnic identity will avoid unnecessary tensions over the Ohrid Agreement provisions of bestowing rights in local municipalities to populations over twenty percent, and would reduce unnecessary tensions over the ethnic balance in the country). A consensus should be sought for having a unified position on the Greek objections to the name. Within, constructive ideas should be discussed that can reach to the other side's position. Given that the reforms envisioned here are implemented and politics is returned to normal, they could bring a new dawn to democratic Macedonia and enhancement of the EU enlargement for this country.

## **6. EU to engage Macedonia and the region**

From a strategic and geopolitical point of view, the EU should re-energise the enlargement process in the region. Nevertheless, an enhanced impetus for reform from the side of the governments in the Western Balkans is a prerequisite for the success of any continuation of the enlargement process. However strategic and geopolitically important the region may be, EU membership will not be realised unless the countries concerned undertake the necessary reforms. Transparency and accountability are needed in the reforms, hence more accent should be placed on improving institutions and agencies that monitor and evaluate public policymaking. Elites in the Western Balkans must be induced to drop the prevalent confrontational mentality and move from disunity to unity in working together to further the enlargement process and democratic rule in general. Regional cooperation should be enhanced, and the EU should assist this through the various forms of multilateral institutions currently in place. There is no point in working on EU accession if the region does not improve and does not coordinate better its own activities and projects aiming to help the life of ordinary citizens. Brussels should accept that some of the regional problems, especially those involving bilateral issues and concerning "good neighbourly" relations, will remain unresolved without the EU's direct involvement. Overall,

devoid of EU accession prospects, the Western Balkan countries face the risk of a social-economic implosion and authoritarian consolidation. The Western Balkan countries need more assistance and attention from the EU than the Central European candidates that acceded to the EU in and since 2004.

Politicians in the region must comprehend that the consolidation of democracy depends on elite consensus and cooperation. This is needed in the Western Balkans as soon as possible. Indeed, the EU should apply pressure on political parties in the Western Balkans to defuse the "winner takes all" mentality of political elites. Party dialogue and a culture of consensus-building over policy issues and institutions should be further promoted. To safeguard against the appropriation of the EU enlargement progress for the furtherance of individual party political interests, the EU should formally insist that candidates for key positions leading the respective country's accession process –Chief Negotiator, Minister and Deputy Minister of European Integration, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for EU Enlargement and similar positions– are elected or appointed by a consensus among the political parties in the respective national parliaments–. The more the ruling and opposition parties are formally engaged in the enlargement process, the less they will be inclined to take a confrontational stand against the necessary reforms. Consensual policymaking will decrease inter-party bickering and defuse the tensions that contribute to the "winner takes all" mentality. Although it might look as if the EU were trying to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries in the region, this move would signal to the elites and to citizens in the region that political settlement and consensus over EU enlargement is a crucial issue for the democratisation and socio-economic development of the Western Balkans.

Problems related to corruption and party political influence on the independence of public institutions, the media, and electoral processes are prevalent throughout the Western Balkans, a point repeatedly made in the European Commission progress reports. To address these barriers to the EU integration of the region, the EU should use IPA II to further support reforms in the "enlargement countries". The EU should through IPA II continue to insist on reform of the judiciary in the region. The enforcement of anti-corruption



legislation requires an efficient, predictable, and accountable judiciary, able to hold the executive accountable under the law, and to interpret and enforce the terms of the constitution. The independence of the judiciary from direct undue interference –and the power to enforce its rulings– is crucial to anti-corruption efforts. The enforcement of rulings is the key issue, and governments in the Western Balkans must give their consent to provide the necessary resources. Given their stature, the constitutional courts in the region could contribute more to the development of public policies, and the EU could enhance this process through IPA II funds for think-tank analysis on the role and effectiveness of these courts or through twinning programmes to strengthen their capacity.

Overall these reforms and processes if put in place will greatly contribute to the strengthening of democratic consolidation in the countries of Western Balkans and improving of their readiness in the EU enlargement process. The reforms in the Balkans countries will not suffice if current populist anti-EU tendencies prevail among member states in upcoming elections around the continent. However, it is better for Western Balkan countries to be fully democratic for their own sake, and if the EU process becomes invigorated the better for them too

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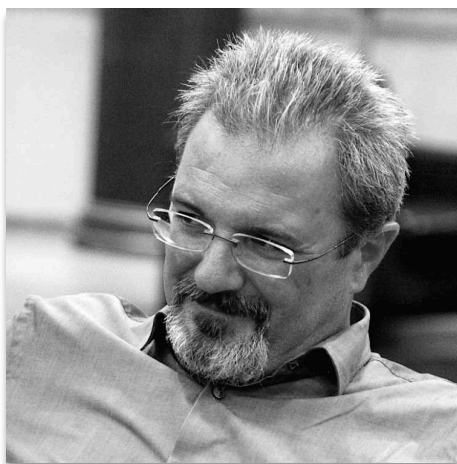
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**Irina Chudoska Blazhevskaja** (Skopje, 1983) is an associate professor in the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy at FON University in Skopje. She holds a PhD in Economics from the UN University for Peace (Belgrade) and a PhD in Economics from the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius (Skopje), as well as a BA degree in International Relations from the University

State Institute of International Relations (Moscow). Her area of research is international relations with emphasis on the Balkans and Russia in general, and international migrations in particular. She speaks fluently Macedonian, English, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Spanish.



**Carlos Flores Juberías** (Valencia, 1964) has a BA and a Doctorate in Law by the University of Valencia, as well as a BA in Political Science by the UNED. Since 1989 he is professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Valencia Law School. Among his many publications count *Las nuevas instituciones políticas de la Europa Oriental* (Madrid, 1997), *La transformación de las*

*políticas sociales en la Europa del Este* (Madrid, 2001), and *Europa, veinte años después del Muro* (Madrid, 2009). He holds *honoris causa* doctorates by the Universities of San Francisco Xavier in Sucre (Bolivia) and Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje (Macedonia), is a member of the Electoral Board and the Transparency Council of the Valencian Community, and the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Macedonia in Valencia.

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# Macedonia in the 2015 Refugee Crisis

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Irina Chudoska Blazhevskaja

Carlos Flores Juberías

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**Abstract.** The refugee flows, which in the recent years have acquired considerable dimension and complexity due to a number of conflicts –particularly, but not exclusively, active and vicious in the Middle East and in some African countries– affected the Western Balkans with unexpected intensity during 2015. The Republic of Macedonia, itself a host country of refugees in a not so recent past, became one of the key transit countries for refugees fleeing from the war in Syria who chose as their point of destination countries in the European Union which had declared themselves ready to accept them. This paper will provide: some reliable figures to allow a rigorous assessment of the magnitude of the challenges faced by Macedonia during the so-called "refugee crisis", and will use these figures as the departure point for an enumeration of the national and international actors who intervened in this process, helping to deal with the humanitarian crisis generated by the flow of refugees; a definition of the policy priorities and the legal framework on the basis of which the Macedonian Government conducted itself during this crisis; and an evaluation of Macedonia's success rate in this situation and the consequences this crisis has generated for the country, in terms of its internal stability and its international image.

**Keywords:** European Union, Refugees, Immigration, Macedonia, Middle East

## **1. Introduction and background**

The refugee flows, which in the recent years have acquired an unexpected dimension due to a number of conflicts –particularly, but not exclusively, active and vicious in the Middle East and in some African countries–, now affect virtually all countries of the world. A few of them (like Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, or Somalia) are affected in their capacity as generators of emigration and refugees; many others (like Germany, Austria, and the Nordic countries, but also most other European Union member states) in their capacity as host countries of the refugee and migration flows; and some (like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia, or Macedonia) primarily in their capacity as transit countries.

Despite its very short existence, the Republic of Macedonia was already once forced to become a host country of refugees: it was during the 1999 conflict in Kosovo, when this former Yugoslav Republic had to provide humanitarian aid and safe refuge to more than 400,000 ethnic Albanians fleeing the violence in the then Serbian province. NATO air strikes against the Milošević regime, starting on 24 March 1999, were aimed at putting an end to the violence in Kosovo and to making Serbian authorities accept the terms of the Rambouillet Peace Plan. But the strikes provoked escalating violence on the ground, which in turn generated a large refugee outflow that included organized expulsions of Kosovars to Albania and Macedonia. As a result, nearly a quarter of the entire population of the territory fled or were expelled, many of them to Macedonia, in the very short period of eleven weeks. The refugee inflow not only generated a major humanitarian crisis, in great part solved by the solidarity of ethnic Albanian families in Macedonia, but also raised fundamental issues of national security seriously affecting the delicate ethnic balance of the country (Drezov, 2001). The overall estimation is that the government of Macedonia generally accepted the flow of refugees and that despite the challenge they posed, their basic needs were met: there were no serious epidemics, no deaths on a large scale, and the mortality rate among refugees was much below the generally accepted threshold for emergencies (UNHCR EPAU, 2000). However, it is also assumed that some of the tensions

generated by this episode were replicated two years later, in the well-known outburst of violence of the spring of 2001, which put Macedonia on the verge of an extended armed conflict and could only be resolved by the peace deal brokered by the international community and concluded between the Slavo-macedonian and the Albano-macedonian parties known as the Ohrid Framework Agreement (Flores Juberías, 2002/2003).

However, Macedonia's position in the current refugee crisis in the Balkans is entirely different. Starting in October 2014, throughout 2015, and until the first quarter of 2016, Macedonia turned into a transit country, especially for refugees fleeing from the war in Syria and Iraq, who chose as their point of destination countries in the European Union. This came as a direct consequence of the geographical position of Macedonia, as a part of the "Western Balkan route" (See Figures 1 and 2) that linked the above mentioned scenarios of conflict with the safe havens in Western and Northern Europe through Turkey and Greece in the first place, and Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia or Hungary in their last steps (Mandić, 2017). This confronted Macedonia with the numerous and complex challenges deriving from the need to provide state protection, appropriate treatment and care, and swift passage to their points of destination to an unprecedented flow of refugees transiting through its territory, which by the end of the year were already numbering several hundred thousand.

This complex scenario caught the Republic of Macedonia in an already complex internal situation, which the refugee crisis certainly aggravated. For a long time, Macedonia had been considered a relative success story in the Western Balkan region: no major political confrontations nor inter-institutional disputes, peaceful interethnic relations –only abruptly interrupted, and rapidly reconciled, in 2001–, fairly successful state-building process, slow but steady economic progress, and a promising route towards EU and NATO integration rapidly became the trademarks of this small Balkan country, which in December 2005 received EU candidacy status and by 2008 was already fulfilling the criteria for entering NATO (Flores Juberías & Atanaskova, 2012). However, following the highly controversial 2014 elections, Macedonia entered a severe political crisis, in which no major ingredient was missing: disputed

electoral results, illegal wiretapping of high government officials, massive street demonstrations, repeated accusations of corruption and cronyism, the permanent meddling of EU, US and Russian diplomats on the spot and –on top of it all– even a new outburst of violence (Vankovska, 2015). The events of May and June 2015 were a reminder that Macedonia had the potential to become a fertile ground for politically instigated violence and ethno-centric mobilization, while the country's high unemployment rate –around a quarter of its labor force remains unemployed– offers additional reasons for social unrest

Within this context, this paper will start by providing some reliable figures to allow a rigorous assessment of the magnitude of the challenges faced by the Macedonian Government during the so-called "refugee crisis"; secondly, it will describe the national and international actors which became engaged in the process of dealing with the humanitarian crisis generated by the flow of refugees; thirdly, it will define the policy priorities on the basis of which the Macedonian Government conducted itself during this crisis and the legal framework under which these policies operated; and finally, will evaluate Macedonia's success rate in this situation and the consequences this crisis has generated for the country, in terms of its internal stability and its international image.

## **2. The dimensión of the refugee crisis: some relevant figures**

The refugee crisis of 2015 initiated in the summer and became increasingly serious in the last four months of that year, gradually losing intensity throughout the first months of 2016.

Prior to 2015, irregular immigration was a relatively minor problem for Macedonia: the number of detected persons had been 682 people in 2012 (European Commission, 2014); a figure which increased by 66% in 2013 with a total number of 1,132; and reached 1,750 in 2014, but which, in any case, featured rather manageable figures (European Commission, 2015).



FIGURE 1: MAIN ROUTES TOWARDS EU COUNTRIES IN THE 2015 REFUGEE CRISIS



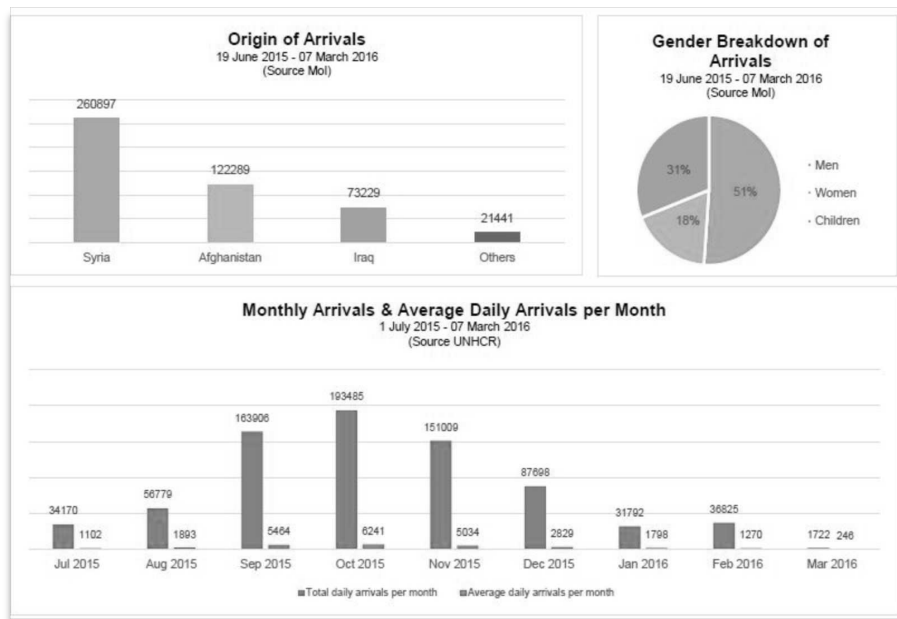
(Source: Tash y Nudelman, 2016)

FIGURE 2: THE BALKAN ROUTE, PRE-MARCH 2016



(Source: Mandić, 2016)

FIGURE 3: REFUGEE ARRIVALS TO MACEDONIA (JUNE 2015 - MARCH 2016)



(Source: UNHCR, 2016 b)

However, everything changed in 2015 (See Figure 3). The largest flow of refugees in Macedonia took place during the months of September, October and November 2015: during this period, the number of new arrivals reached figures above 150,000 refugees per month, more than 5,000 new arrivals per day (European Commission, 2015). Starting in 2016, however, those figures dropped dramatically to around 1,500 new refugees per day, and even to lower figures in the following months of 2016. At the end of March 2016, just 1,223 refugees and migrants were registered to remain in the country: 1,033 in the Tabanovce Reception Center, 135 in Vinojug, 43 in the Vizbegovo Reception Center for Asylum Seekers, and 12 in the JRS-run Safe House. By January 2017 –the latest available data–, there were approximately 200 refugees in Macedonia, mostly citizens from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria (Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, 2017), of which 84 were settled in Tabanovce and 69 in Vinojug (UNHCR, 2017 a, 2017 b).

According to the Macedonian Ministry of Interior and the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), between June 2015 and March 2016, the number of refugees entering Macedonian territory and declaring their intention to apply for asylum in EU member States reached the figure of 477,856. Of these, 260,897 (55%) declared themselves to be Syrians, 122,289 (26%) Afghans, 73,329 (15%) Iraqis, and the remaining 21,441 (4%) represented other nationalities such as Iranians, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Congolese and Bangladeshi. Women and children –of which no less than 18,349 (4%) were registered as unaccompanied– made up 49% of the refugee flow. As of 1 January 2016, only 80,176 of them were in need of international protection, mostly nationals of Syria (38,752), Afghanistan (25,222) and Iraq (16,199). Only 80 have applied for actual asylum within Macedonia, while most of them choose to apply for asylum in Austria, Germany, or Sweden. By 31 March 2016 only 2 persons had been accepted as refugees in Macedonia, both unaccompanied children, one from Iraq and one from Syria (UNHCR, 2017 a, 2017 b).

It should be noted that the overall number of migrants transiting through Macedonia –estimated at 800.000 between June 2015 and March 2016–, represents about one third of the overall population of the country; a figure which it itself may well describe the unprecedented burden this crisis posed for the Macedonian administrative structures.

### **3. The management of the refugee crisis: Macedonian institutions, NGOs and international organizations**

The massive flow of migrants and refugees towards Macedonia's southern border and into Macedonian territory generated security and humanitarian problems which in the first place fell within the scope of competence of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior's special Unit for Border Affairs and Migration, responsible for the security aspects and management of Macedonian borders. A specialized unit within the Department for Serious and Organized Crime dealt with the fight against human trafficking and people smuggling; and a Crisis Management Center was established already

in 2015 in order to manage the flow of refugees and to coordinate infrastructural needs of the transit centers. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy became responsible for migrants' and refugees' access to services and for their socioeconomic integration while in Macedonian territory. It also managed children without parents or legal guardians, asylum seekers and humanitarian food and non-food items. The Ministry of Interior –and especially its Section for Asylum– managed security, identification and documentation processes, while the Ministry of Health was charged with providing suitable health care to individuals. For that purpose, a National Coordinator for the Immigrant Crisis was created within the Macedonian Government, while the Ombudsman Office also took part in the protection coordination.

Humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees was also facilitated by a number of non-governmental and international organizations, most of them working on the spot. Specifically, shelter was provided by the UNHCR and Habitat for Humanity; food and water by the UNHCR, UNICEF, the Red Cross, La Strada, and Caritas; primary medical interventions by the Red Cross, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UNHCR and the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund); protection by UNHCR, La Strada, Terre des Hommes, and the German GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), among others. UNICEF and La Strada cared specifically about displaced children, and the IOM (International Organization for Migrations) had a limited role in monitoring and collection of overall data, including pushbacks. Local NGOs (like Legis, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association or the Macedonian Helsinki Committee), volunteers, and activists also flocked to the refugee camps providing humanitarian food and other kinds of assistance, and legal aid for documentation, registration and asylum procedures. They were also active in preventing human rights violations, and in guaranteeing good living conditions in the camps (UNHCR, 2015).

Finally, following its meeting in Belgrade, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) decided to deploy around 400 representatives of the mission of the European Frontex border forces on the Macedonian-Greek border in December 2015. Assisting in the securing Macedonia's borders were also representatives of

border control units from several EU countries –namely Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia– plus Serbia, who deployed their police officers in support of Macedonian police (Vecer, 2015; Lokalno, 2015).

#### **4. The existing (and the new) legal framework**

In order to provide the necessary legal framework for the provision of humanitarian aid to refugees in Macedonian territory, on 16 January 2015 the National Assembly adopted the Resolution on Migration Policy Strategy and Action Plan for 2015-2020, based on the previous one of 2009-2014 (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2009, 2015 a). Later on, an emergency response plan in the event of continued flow was developed; and in November 2015 a Standard Operating Procedure was adopted, establishing a comprehensive approach towards unaccompanied foreign minors. In July 2016, additional standard operating procedures on vulnerable categories of migrants were also adopted.

Also, in order to deal with the increased number of requests for asylum in the Republic of Macedonia, in June 2015, the National Assembly passed the Law of Amending and Addition of the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection. This legal reform enabled refugees to communicate their intention to seek asylum to a police officer within 72 hours from their arrival to the country, and granted temporarily free movement and use of the public transportation system. These legal changes were intended to significantly reduce the chances for organized criminal groups specialized in migrant smuggling to obtain benefit from the situation, as well as to reduce the risk of accidents (European Commission, 2015). Macedonia is party to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The amendments also established that an application made by a person from a safe third country would be considered as manifestly unfounded, which appears to be incompatible with the Asylum Procedures Directive (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, 2017). On one hand, these changes brought improvements in the area of access to the state territory and asylum procedures as well as in the

conditions for detention of people seeking international protection (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2016 a). On the other hand, the Law created restrictions on family reunification by requiring that the principle of family reunification only be exercised three years after obtaining refugee status, which is incompatible with the Family Reunification Directive.

The Law on Foreigners was amended in December 2015 to address the complexity and duration of procedures for obtaining work permits and resident's permits for employment or self-employment (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2015 b). A single procedure was introduced to apply for residence permit for work (European Commission, 2016 a). This amendment also was intended to align Macedonian legislation with the *aquis* on the right to family reunification, the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents, conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange and return of illegally staying third-country nationals (European Commission, 2016 a). In 2014, there had been 4,219 temporary residence permits issued.

As of today, the country still needs to conclude readmission agreements with a number of countries of origin of irregular migration while upholding the non-*refoulement* policy towards asylum seekers. However, in 2014, 1,213 people were returned to the country because of a readmission agreement with the EU, and from January 2015 to January 2016, 15,496 migrants were returned to the territory of Greece due to falsified certificates, documents or because of the nationality-based restrictions imposed along the Western Balkan route. In 2015, 1,832 people were returned to the country, mainly from EU Member States and assisted voluntary return procedures have been carried out for 23 migrants.

Despite the legislation progress, and although the country has the necessary institutions and procedures in place to handle asylum claims, the problem of the lack of or inadequate implementation of legal provisions still exists. Therefore, a number of national and international actors, including the European Commission and UNHCR, believe that "the state still does not meet international standards for the protection of refugees and can not be considered a safe third country" (European Council, 2013) and have even advised

neighboring states to refrain from returning or sending asylum seekers in Macedonia until the improvements in legislation and practice do not meet the international standards.

## **5. The position and the policies of the Macedonian government**

Macedonia's position in relation to the refugee crisis, stated in an endless series of official statements and interviews with Western media like CNN, BBC, Bild, and the Wall Street Journal, mostly carried out by MFA Nikola Poposki (2016), can be synthesized primarily in the following five points:

- 1.– That the numbers of migrants entering Macedonia should be "determined by the numbers of those that can be accepted in Western European nations".
- 2.– That the "open borders" concept that was present during the last years, has its limits: "It is clear that the absorption capacities of migrants in mainly receiving EU member states such as Germany, Austria, Sweden and others has reached a certain threshold where it cannot continue in the next year with the same pace".
- 3.– That "there has to be a distinction between those fleeing a conflict, to whom we have to provide a safe haven, and those that are simply going to Europe in order to find a better job. This is a legitimate reason too, but it has been clear over the years that none of the European countries is capable of absorbing millions of migrants that might simply come for economic reasons",
- 4.– That "there is a decision to stop illegal migration and to make sure that there is a registration at the exit from Greece on those that can be eligible asylum seekers", with the purpose of making sure that "there is 100% registration of legitimate asylum seekers that are allowed to continue their route and transit through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and eventually arrive in Germany".

5.– And, finally, that though Macedonia's interest is not to close the border with Greece – "The last thing we like to see is a big mass happening across the border in Greece"–, this may become the only possible solution if countries up north like Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria decided not to open their own borders.

As a consequence of such a set of priorities, measures taken by the Macedonian Government in relation to the refugee crisis could basically be classified in the following five categories:

1.– Measures adopted in order to guarantee the protection of national borders and for the prevention of illegal entries. In order to discourage illegal entries, control the flow of migrants and channel them towards legal entry and registration checkpoints, a security fence was erected and/or reinforced on sections of the Greek-Macedonian border suspected of being vulnerable to illegal crossing, which increased the number of people intercepted while attempting at an illegal border crossing. Furthermore, on March 9, 2016 Macedonia closed its border with Greece completely, in response to Austria, Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia announcing further restrictions on who would be allowed to cross their borders. 240 cases of damage to the border security fence were documented.

2.– Measures adopted in order to promote cooperation with other European countries, especially in order to receive bilateral assistance from EU member states regarding border surveillance equipment and secondment of border guards to assist Macedonian border police with patrols, registration and identification. In response to these requests, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria decided to second border guards and equipment, having them deployed on a rotational basis together with Macedonian security forces at the border region. Coordination and cooperation with the Greek police authorities was also established at different levels. The Government of Macedonia welcomed the decision of early December 2015 to deploy Frontex border guards at Greek–Macedonian border.



3.– Measures adopted in order to provide humanitarian aid to migrants and refugees in Macedonian soil. With this purpose, two Transit Relief Centers were created: one in Vinojug (on the southern border with Greece, not far from the main border crossing of Gevgelija), with an official capacity of 1,500 people, and another one in Tabanovce (close to the northern border with Serbia, near Kumanovo) with capacity of 500 people. Besides these two locations, some refugees were also hosted in the Asylum Center in Vizbegovo, the Safe House, and the Center for Foreigners in Gazi Baba, all locations in or around Skopje (European Commission, 2015). These centers were adapted to provide temporary transit relief capacity for short-term stay for 2,000 people (as compared with Romania who at that point had the capacity to host just 1.200 refugees, Bulgaria, 5.100, and Albania, just 300). According to the European Commission report at the beginning of the migration crisis, the situation in the transit centers was poor, but improved over time (European Commission, 2016 a). However, these facilities were not suited for extended stay. In close cooperation with UNHCR, the Red Cross, and other relevant international organizations, the Macedonian Ministry of Health managed to provide services to prevent diseases, as well as health treatment to refugees hosted at the transit centers. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy also undertook concrete measures including the provision and distribution of food and water, clothing, blankets and other necessities to refugees. The Center for Social Work designated guardians (adult refugees) to unaccompanied minors.

4.– Measures adopted in order to help refugees cross through Macedonian territory towards their destination of choice. The Macedonian Government provided migrants with a document granting them a 72-hour stay in the country before either formally seeking asylum or leaving the country, and also provided access to public transport and medical help within that 72-hour time frame.

5.– Measures adopted in order to fight against organized crime, specifically mafias active in human trafficking and documents counterfeiting. The Macedonian Government acted here in

response to a documented increase in the circulation of counterfeit documents, mostly false Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan passports and identity cards, but also counterfeit Frontex and Greek registration certificates. As a result of Macedonian authorities strengthening these screening procedures, only in January 2016, 2,979 cases of counterfeit documents were detected by the Macedonian police.

## **6. The phases of the refugee crisis**

From the Macedonian perspective, the 2015 refugee crisis could somehow be divided into three different periods or phases. The first period was dominated by the unexpected, uncontrolled, and illegal border and territory crossing of the country by refugees and migrants arriving to Macedonia's southern borders from the Middle East and through the territories of Turkey and Greece; the second period was that of systematically organized transiting of the refugees and migrants through Macedonian territory across a South-North corridor, under the supervision of Macedonian authorities and international organizations; and the last period was that of closing Macedonian and European borders and the retention of refugees for extended periods in designated points of concentration. Hence, the context in which the events were developing was significantly changing from one period to another and was marked by the following developments.

### *6.1 The phase of illegal crossing*

The registration of migrants by Macedonian authorities began only in June 2015. Since then and until the end of 2015, 388,233 refugees who passed through Macedonian territory were registered (International Organization for Migration, 2015), while from the beginning of 2016 until March that year (when, as a result of the agreement between EU and Turkey of 18 March 2016, the borders of the Balkan route were officially closed) 89,623 additional refugees were registered (Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Interior, 2016).

Considering the time that passed from the beginning of the crisis until the start of the registration process, it can be assumed that a large numbers of refugees crossed Macedonia unregistered and, consequently, that the real number of refugees and migrants arriving in the EU between 2014 and 2016 was much higher than the official data shows, probably exceeding the number of 1 million people.

During 2014 and 2015, 5,267 migrants and 5,740 refugees were missing or found dead. International Organization of Migration reported that year 2016 keeps the record number of 7,189 migrants and refugees dead or missing in the world during the crisis (Telegraf.mk, 2016). According to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 40 migrants lost their lives in 2014. For the 2015 and 2016 there is no official data, but, according to the European Commission report, the number of deaths was 24 people, who were killed by trains in 2015 (European Commission, 2015; Aljazeera America, 2015).

## *6.2 The phase of organized crossing*

On 19 August 2015, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia for the first time adopted a decision declaring a state of crisis on the southern and northern borders of the state as a result of the massive flow of refugees in the country. This first declaration was intended to last for 30 days (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2015 c), but on 18 September 2015, the state of crisis was extended until 15 June 2016 (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2015 d). By successive decisions of the National Assembly, the state of crisis was extended twice again: on 28 March 2016 until 30 December 2016 (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2016 b), and on 13 October 2016 until 30 June 2017 (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2016 c). The objective of the declaration of the state of crisis and its extensions was to secure "continuity of the execution of tasks by the army and security forces of the Ministry of Interior in an attempt to guard and protect the state border" (MIA, 2016).

In November 2015, a first wire fence was constructed on the border with Greece after police officers were injured in a violent attempt of the migrants to enter Macedonia (Vest, 2015). The second line of the

fence was constructed in February 2016 on the same border, while in March of the same year a three-meter high wire fence was constructed on the border between Macedonia and Serbia as a response to the increased number of illegal border crossings from Serbia into Macedonian territory after closing the borders of the Balkan route (Tasev, 2017).

In September 2015, the transit of refugees was organized in the Vinojug and Tabanovce transit camps. The camps were set up away from populated areas, along the train tracks, and close to the borders with Greece and with Serbia. Camps expanded daily, and transit was conducted in an organized manner, with the registration of refugees in Gevgelija and direct transport with an emergency line of trains of Macedonian Railways. After closing the borders on 9 March 2016, around 1,400 refugees remained in the country (UNHCR, 2016), most of them in these two camps with an established closed regime, which means that the refugees were not allowed to leave the camp. This retention in Vinojug lasted almost nine months when as a result of significant pressure from NGOs and the Ombudsman, the refugees were allowed to visit the towns, always accompanied by representatives of the Red Cross.

### *6.3 The phase of border closure*

The boundary between Greece and Macedonia soon became one very conflictive area. In order to close the so-called "Western Balkan route", Macedonia followed the decision of its northern neighbors, closing its own border. Greece was then forced to accept a deployment of EU border guards to keep people from arriving to its own refugee camp in Eidomeni.

This closure, however, was gradual. In December 2015, the Government of Macedonia adopted a decision that only nationals of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan may cross the state border, and in February 2016 extended this limitation banning refugees from Afghanistan too. In early March 2016, the government decided to close the borders completely to any person without legal residence in the country, automatically categorizing them as "migrants" because of

the decisions undertaken by other countries on the Balkan route and according to the agreement between the EU and Turkey (Collett, 2016; European Commission, 2016 b)

These actions decreased the numbers of new arrivals, at the cost of exposing migrants to security and humanitarian threats such as smugglers, criminal local gangs and additional police violence due to clashes or attempts for irregular entries. Macedonian police, in cooperation with police forces of Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, uncovered the smuggling of thousands of refugees and migrants. In 2016, progressively restrictive policies culminated with the end of the wave through approach via designated crossing points and a drastic reduction in the number of new arrivals. At the same time, it resulted in some 1,400 refugees and migrants remaining in the country as of 9 March 2016. In September 2016, their number decreased to less than 200 as a result of continuing their way to Serbia.

Many refugees entered and still enter illegally in the country, falling victim to smugglers and acts of hatred. The smuggling attempts started to increase from 2014 by around 44% comparing with the previous year (European Commission, 2014). From January to August 2016, 84 cases of attempts to smuggle a total number of 1,480 migrants were detected. Criminal charges were submitted against 72 people, including 12 foreign nationals for smuggling of migrants. Law enforcement bodies tried to be more proactive in preventing and arresting people smugglers. Approximately 100 victims were citizens of Syria, Afghanistan and Morocco. Many migrants were found to be victims of physical attacks resulting in injuries, and also robbed, or tricked by people offering them bogus transport (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, 2017).

## **7. The financial cost of the refugee crisis**

According to the Macedonian Vice Premier for EU Integration (Besimi, 2016), Macedonia received about € 20 million in support for the refugee crisis in 2015, of which € 10.5 million came from the EU, while € 5.3 were received from different international organizations

for humanitarian assistance and € 5.2 million for equipment and other equipment directly in the field. In 2016, around € 40 million in assistance was expected, of which € 10 million would be received as a special support from the EU for hosting refugees. An additional € 50 million from IPA 1 and 2 EU funds for the period 2007-2020 will be dedicated to integrated border management, border control, and asylum policy. This will be very useful in this current crisis but they are also systematic solutions for Macedonia becoming a part of the Schengen, with an integrated control system and full implementation of asylum policy as in the EU countries.

In 2016, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe covering the period from January to December 2016 was adopted. From the reports of UNHCR of the snapshots of November and August 2016 it can be seen that Macedonia in November received funding totaling \$ 20,575,461, which covered 79% of its total requirement of \$ 26,014,080, while the snapshots of August showed that the funding level was \$ 18,605,788, which was 72% of the total requested amount of \$ 26,014,080. Governments of different countries and private donors contributed this financing (UNHCR, 2016 c, d).

According to the International Organization of Migration, the donations from the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Governments would be applied towards achieving better management of the public health impact of population mobility in the receiving countries including Macedonia, as well as providing information on the medical conditions of migrants. The Governments of Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and The Netherlands financed an assisted voluntary return program. These were aimed at providing an orderly and humane return of refugees to their own homes in circumstances in which such return does not threaten their lives, including airport reception, transportation to final destination, counseling and referral to assistance services, installation of reintegration grants, housing support, educational reinsertion, vocational trainings, employment facilitation and micro-business set up. The caseload consists of failed asylum seekers, vulnerable returnees (those with medical condition, unaccompanied minors, victims of human trafficking, etc.), both individuals and families.

## 8. The EU assesment of the role of Macedonia in the refugee crisis

An overall evaluation of Macedonia's response to the refugee crisis was provided by the European Commission's 2015 and 2016 Progress Reports. The Commission's opinion in these two Reports concludes that Macedonian authorities took positive, but perhaps insufficient, measures to deal with humanitarian consequences of the refugee crisis. With the difference that in 2015 authorities were largely overwhelmed by the escalating numbers of refugees, while in 2016, when humanitarian tension decreased, Macedonian authorities could better manage the humanitarian consequences of the crisis and at the same time increase the pressure on illegal smuggling activities on its northern and southern borders.

The recommendations of the Commission are summarized in three points, two of which remain unchanged in both Reports. The first one is the need to ensure effective border management and step up action against people smuggling and human trafficking as a high priority. The second is that the country should strengthen and continue capacity building regarding the management of mixed migration flows, while in the report of 2015 the emphasis is made on early identification on the vulnerable groups, in difference to the 2016 report where the asylum system stood out. And the third recommendation differs in the terms that in the 2015 Report, it is focused on the adoption and implementation of the new anti-terrorism strategy and action plan, with special attention being paid to measures preventing radicalization, while in the 2016 Report the emphasis is made on adequate accommodation and special consideration to vulnerable categories, like unaccompanied minors, women with children (European Commission, 2015, 2016).

More specifically, the 2016 EC Report on Macedonia acknowledged that the humanitarian situation is now stabilized, and that sufficient inter-agency bodies have been established to deal with future emergencies, and that reception centers for irregular migrants now meet basic standards. But it also underlined a number of negative aspects, among them that (1) a lack of clarity persists over the division of powers, coordination and responsibilities among them; (2) reliable data on the scope and structure of migration flows is largely

missing; (3) screening, identification and registration of migrants, does not meet EU standards yet; (4) there is still insufficient institutional capacity and human resources in the Crisis Management Centre; (5) reception centers for irregular migrants are not suitable yet for the accommodation of vulnerable categories or persons, nor for long term stays, and lack of security remains a problem due to the persistence of organized criminal groups; (6) the need to conclude readmission agreements with a number of countries of origin of irregular migration –especially with Turkey– while upholding the non-*refoulement* policy towards asylum seekers still has to be addressed; and (7) effective border management and stepped up action against people smuggling and human trafficking should remain a high priority.

Additionally, the EC Report largely criticized the existing Macedonian regulation of asylum on the grounds that important shortcomings existed within it. Application made by a person from a safe third country is considered as manifestly unfounded, which is incompatible with the Asylum Procedures Directive; the principle of family reunification may only be exercised three years after obtaining refugee status, which amounts to an excessively long period of time; the asylum procedure in the quality of decision-making remains inadequate; the capacity to evaluate the applications on merit is weak, since the Section for Asylum is not fully staffed and cannot cope with asylum applications in a timely manner; sufficient translation capacities are lacking; the decision making process in asylum procedures is often considered to not be transparent; court decisions are often not taken on the basis of a thorough examination of the merits and rarely contain a clear motivation; calling on state security is used as the most common grounds for refusal of applications for international protection; there have been reported cases of *refoulement* at the borders targeting an unidentified number of migrants; and there are limited protection-sensitive screening mechanisms to identify and refer appropriately those who may be in need of protection. All in all, a sufficient budget is needed to facilitate the effective integration of refugees (Chudoska Blazhevskaja, 2016).



## 9. Conclusions

In general terms, the position of transit countries is by and large less complex than that of the countries of destination, and obviously less dramatic than that of the countries of origin of refugees. Unlike the latter, transit countries are not plagued by violent armed conflicts, and unlike the former they are not bound to provide long-term assistance, and to guarantee social integration for large number of refugees. But this does not mean their position is devoid of a certain complexity.

To begin with, transit countries are bound to deal with a problem which is essentially alien to them, since –by definition– they are not the ones provoking the flow of refugees, nor are they the final point of destination where refugees plan to stay. Despite this, transit countries are still expected to build up temporary but costly infrastructure to deal with refugee flows, when many of them simply lack that infrastructure, nor have the economic ability to pay for it, and to keep it active for periods of time which they cannot foresee, much less determine. Transit countries are compelled either to coordinate their policies with those of the countries of destination, or to become dependent on the decisions taken by them, which severely limits their capacity to decide on their own policies, and places them in a clearly subordinate position. To make matters worse, transit countries are usually put under the spotlight of international media for being a point of entry or passage of refugee flows, not to mention because of the responsibilities they have to face as the first safe point of destination of such refugees. Finally, transit countries often run the risk of suffering an unfair undervaluation by international public opinion of the challenges faced, as a consequence of the perception that their responsibilities in assisting refugees is somehow less demanding than that of countries of destination.

The position of Macedonia in the 2015 refugee crisis featured all the characteristics of a transit country, and therefore the country suffered all the above mentioned consequences. The country was forced –largely as a result of its geographical position– to handle a complex and entirely unprecedented situation which it had certainly not provoked, nor helped create; was required to build up costly infrastructure and forced to mobilize its own police and military

forces to their full capacity; had no choice but to act in accordance with the decisions of countries farther up the migration route, upon which it had very little influence, if any; and was required to conduct itself in full compliance of EU values and standards. Moreover, Macedonia was forced to face extended criticisms of how its Government handled the situation by the international media and by several European governments –especially Greece– which repeatedly held the country responsible for the dramatic situation of refugees –even of those still in EU territory. This portrayal of Macedonia as a hostile country for refugees, selfishly denying entry to a host of people at serious risk, resulted in significant damage to its international image.

However, the truth is that on occasion of the 2015 refugee crisis the Republic of Macedonia made a logistical effort of enormous magnitude –both in absolute terms and, especially, in relative terms– in order to adequately channel the flow of refugees who sought to cross its territory towards the host countries of their choice, providing them with humanitarian aid, transportation, security and documentation. Additionally, it introduced relevant changes to the existing legal framework for treatment of refugees, asylum seekers and people in need of international protection. Also notable were the efforts of the Government of Macedonia to increase the available capacities and to improve the existing infrastructure for the treatment of these individuals. And, on top of that, having been trusted with the task of keeping the buffer zone toward EU countries, the Republic of Macedonia became one of the key elements in geo-politics and according to the words of the country's President Gjorge Ivanov (2016), ended up "defending EU from itself".

This notwithstanding, and against a background where most of the legislation has become harmonized with international standards, it must still be noted the existence of contradictions between Macedonian domestic legislation and international standards on issues like grounds for refusal, family reunion, safe third country, etc.; as well as some deficiencies in the facilities designed for the accommodation of refugees. Deficiencies and shortcomings which one may expect may well be resolved in a less demanding national and international scenario as the one experienced in the Balkan peninsula during 2015.

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