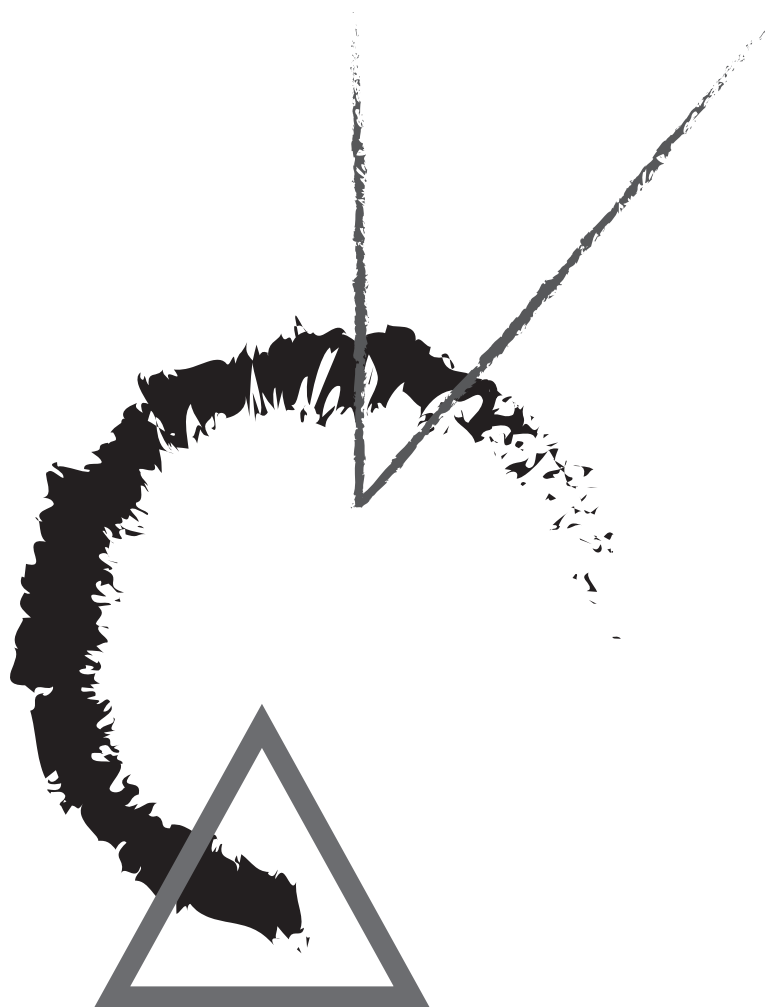




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POLICY BRIEF: A PRECIS OF A THREEFOLD ANALYSIS

The Macedonian-Bulgarian Dispute at the Heart of the
Stalled EU Enlargement

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Executive summary

We argue that in order to circumvent the endless loop of attempts at resolving historical disputes, which, as we have learned from the Visegrad countries examples (including that of the Polish-German dispute), are never truly resolved as such, the problem at hand must be transposed at the political level and tackled through the means of multi-issue policy studies approach. Remaining in the framework of a discourse on history precludes from devising political and policy means that can address the problem at hand. Furthermore, we believe that posing the problem as a “historical dispute” is misleading as it also tackles the language (the Macedonian) and on equal footing with history too. Thus, the problem we are facing is very much like that between North Macedonia and Greece and should be tackled as such: it is a conflict pertaining to history, language, heritage and, therefore amounting to cultural conflict and fear of “cultural appropriation” – to paraphrase prof. Costas Douzinas at the *Avenues of Cooperation* conference (organized by ISSHS on December 3-4, 2021) – and should be addressed as such. The model of political means to do so can be found in article 7 of the *Prespa* agreement. However, the process of implementation should be comparable to that of *Prespa* and most of the Visegrad countries (including the Polish-German, Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Russian, German-French and other examples that Visegrad processes of reconciliation were part of or built upon): a) it should be an open-ended process of cultural reconciliation, b) as advised by our Visegrad experts, history should not be part of any legally binding document, because, to quote Marta Szpala, “history is never resolved, nonetheless significant progress in reconciliation can be achieved”; thus the only time-bound document of legal nature should be a “framework of reconciliation” containing historical dispute and related curricula revisions as part of it, but not coming down to it. Youth cooperation could be a major aspect of the process of cultural rapprochement, and some good starting point is already in place, far better than the implementation of *Prespa* in its inception phase, we were informed by youth organizations that were part of the *Avenues of Cooperation* conference program. To

sum up, the Macedonian-Bulgarian cul-de-sac could be surmounted by formulating the problem in terms of cultural conflict and its political and policy means of resolution, with emphasis on educational policies as an interdisciplinary field (not merely focusing on history) in line with the up-to-date UNESCO guidelines, cultural policies and policies of enhanced economic cooperation.

Our recommendations are below, but we will restate them in this summary too to allow easier following of the fleshed out analysis

Recommendations

- The first recommendation is multilayered and presented in the form of 4 sub-recommendations. *We see the first recommendation as the prerequisite of any workable Roadmap of implementation.* The two States ought to establish a clear distinction between the cultural, historical (insofar as science or academia) and political categories of discussion and respective policy solutions when it comes to the Treaty's implementation, in the following way:
 - 1) Cultural policies should be devised in order to address the cultural conflict at hand and offer resolution in terms of cultural and educational policies across disciplines (literature, arts, history);
 - 2) In order to address both political and academic concerns nested in the curricula of both countries, such as the issue of content and wording nourishing xenophobia, as well as in the political culture of both countries, educational policies, including multiperspectivism as a method, should be put in place;
 - 3) Historiography or pedagogy are not to deliver the solution to the conflict at stake but contemporary educational policies;

- 4) Apply educational and international relations policies that could affirm the indisputable connections in history regardless of whether such history is called shared or common – affirming them as the connection of continuity between the shared past but also hopefully shared future;
- The binational multidisciplinary Commission and the policy makers should be aided in revising curricula by UNESCO aligned educational experts; moreover, the Commission should be reformed and rendered an educational policy and cultural conflict resolution panel rather than a committee on “historical truths.”
 - The Bulgarian Parliament should be made aware that article 1 line 5 of its Declaration from October 2019 is in conflict with the reality ensuing from *Prespa Agreement* signed in 2018, which is not merely a bilateral but an *erga omnes* legal act rendered such through the authority of the United Nations. Another reason for this recommendation stems from the value of good neighborliness – even if the legal *erga omnes* argument weren’t there, naming a neighbor’s language by the name it has given to it is the prerequisite of good faith instead of avoiding its use (esp. when the term “constitutional language” does not have a clear referent as explained in the analysis).
 - The Resolution of the Macedonian Parliament from July 29th 2021, should be annulled or amended by one of political wording – rather than nationalist prose – in line with the spirit of good neighborliness, a prerequisite for joining the European Union, entirely rid of the dangerous and hostile discourse of romantic nationalism.
 - Both parliaments should refrain from passing declarations, resolutions, decrees and other documents that determine the “historical truth” thus directly breaching the academic freedom of both scientific communities.

- Instead, both parliaments and state institutions should focus on cultural conflict resolution policies that do not come down to culture only but are also related to infrastructural projects that would allow an accelerated communication (travel) across the borders, while also helping the implementation of other aspects of the agreement such as improved economic collaboration.
- Strong emphasis should be put on youth cooperation as the most efficient and effective form of cultural reconciliation.

**1. Posing the problem
embedded in its context:
Another Balkan matter
of a disputed cultural
heritage and its role
in competing nation-
building narratives**

Prior to the present cul-de-sac in the implementation of the *Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation* (abbreviated as “the Treaty”) between Bulgaria and what is now North Macedonia,¹ signed in 2017, there was a calm period of its rather slow implementation in all areas except for the multidisciplinary commissions on the so-called shared or common history.² In spite of the claim of the Bulgarian authorities, and of virtually the entire political mainstream in particular in Bulgaria, that there has been no progress in the work of the so-called “Historical commission,” we cannot but argue the opposite – the dispute around history and the efforts to identify commonalities is the only area the Treaty is concerned with in which some progress has been noted. Indeed, hardly any final agreement has been reached on any of the historical periods discussed, but progress in the work of the Commission has been noted on several occasions.³ Conversely, as far as economy and infrastructure are concerned, there is hardly any progress whatsoever: energy, the “Corridor

¹ At the time of its signing: “Republic of Macedonia,” as its then constitutional name.

² The English translation of the (Macedonian term) “споделена,” which has come into use in the past two years, as a synonym to “заедничка” (the term used in the Macedonian version of the Treaty), is disputed by mainly the Bulgarian public, as if whether shared means certain overlaps instead of (as if organic) commonality. The Bulgarian term for it is „општа,” as the Preamble of the Treaty reads. According to the Macedonian side in the negotiations, both among policy makers as well as the academics in the multidisciplinary commission, parts of history are shared, the two nations and their nation building narratives both draw on those parts of history, whereas for the Bulgarian side – the claim is that it is a common history, which, it seems, needs to be interpreted as in fact one and the same history from which the Macedonian nation building bifurcates as a separate one. Whether shared or common, in other words whether “споделена” or “заедничка” – in Macedonian – should be a question of substance instead of linguistic nitpicking.

³ “Постигнат напредок во разговорите за македонско-бугарската експертска комисија”. *А1он*. 11.04.2019, available at: <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/postignat-napredok-vo-razgovorite-na-makedonsko-bugarskata-ekspertska-komisija/>; “Мал напредок во делот на средновековната историја, Делчев останува нерешено прашање за мешовитата македонско-бугарска комисија”. *А1он*. 16.10.2019, available at: <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/mal-napredok-vo-delot-na-srednovekovnata-istorija-delchev-ostanuva-neresheno-prashanje-za-meshovitata-makedonsko-bugarska-komisija/>; “Среща на български и македонски историци, какво си казаха”. *Vesti.bg*. 16.10.2019, available at: <https://www.vesti.bg/svlat/sreshta-na-bylgarski-i-makedonski-istorici-kakvo-si-kazaha-6100926>; Kostadin Atanasov, “Professor Ilchev: Sofia and Skopje need to communicate better”. *BNR*. 09.07.2019, available at: <https://bnr.bg/en/post/101142161/professor-ilchev-sofia-and-skopje-need-to-communicate-better>; “Българо-македонската комисија постигна напредък по 24 май”. *News.bg*. 16.10.2020, available at: <https://news.bg/world/balgaro-makedonskata-komisiya-postigna-napredak-po-24-may.html>; “Постигнат напредок на средбата на македонско-бугарската Комисија за историски прашања”, *Телма*. 22.01.2021, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/a74vn46z>

8" (a highway that would better connect Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania), if we exclude the modest infrastructural undertaking of a new border-crossing ("Klepalo") where the Macedonian side has completed its part of the obligations and a significant delay is to be detected on the Bulgarian side.⁴ On the other hand, the Bulgarian side has complained that the door of its investment in the Macedonian economy is closed in the form of contradictory and endless administrative procedures, keeping the investors in a sort of a Kafkaesque maze that makes it impossible to complete any undertaking in this respect.⁵ To conclude this opening paragraph, the other areas of cooperation have been marginalized by both parties, and there has been a shared fixation on history (and the related issue of language). That is why we ought to identify the core of the dispute as a matter of cultural conflict and related identity issues, such as ethnicity and national identity, in order to be able to extrapolate it and thus furnish a foundation for a political solution to the present state of affairs between the two states. Thus, the analysis will have to operate with the two distinct yet intersecting levels of discussion, that of a cultural conflict resolution and the level of political analysis. The two will lead to an interdisciplinary approach based policy discussion yielding recommendations addressed to the policy makers in both countries and to the concerned parties, i.e., to the European Commission and the European Council but also to the multidisciplinary commission on the historical dispute (henceforth referred to as the Commission).

An important part of the context is the past dispute with Greece on historical and cultural heritage, which was reflected in the name of the state "Macedonia" as presumed cultural appropriation (by then Republic of Macedonia, according to the state's Constitution), lead-

⁴ Government of North Macedonia. 27.12.2018. *Премиерот Заев во вториот дел на седницата за пратенички прашања: Верувам дека до крајот на 2019 година ќе го пуштиме преминот Клепало, праведното оданочување ги носи парите во социјалата*. [Press release], available at: <https://vlada.mk/node/16274?ln=en-gb>, accessed on 26 November 2021.

⁵ "Захариева го споредува Тито со Хитлер". *DW*. 15.12.2020, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/2sukscfv>, accessed on 29 November 2021; "Како Северна Македонија се „најде“ на крилата на некупените Ф-16?". *DW*. 20.08.2021, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mr3kfvf9>, accessed on 29 November 2021.

ing to a decades long halt in North Macedonia's accession to the European Union. It is worthwhile noting that the conflict was resolved as soon as a bilateral agreement, akin to that between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, was signed by the two countries.⁶ The multidisciplinary commission on textbooks and historiography, established to implement parts of the *Prespa Agreement*, has never been put under the pressure of deadlines set by the political elites and state institutions and has been functioning away from the spotlight of public debate in both countries. It seems that the implementation of *Prespa Agreement*, unlike that between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, is presumed to take as much time as needed as it has been the case with other commissions of a similar kind, like the one between Poland and Germany.⁷ Another important aspect of the context is that the Agreement with Greece was signed in 2018, a year after the signing of the agreement between Republic of Bulgaria and then Republic of Macedonia in August 2017.⁸ An issue, emerging from the *Prespa Agreement*, that may have retroactively affected the implementation of the bilateral Agreement from 2017 is that of the language – the Greek side, in this *erga omnes* agreement, acknowledges the existence of a Macedonian language as part of the group of South-Slavic languages. Presently, at the center of the Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute is the naming of the Macedonian language as well as its linguistic character. The latter refers to the raised issue by the Bulgarian academic and political elites as to whether the Macedonian language could be treated as a separate and essentially different language from the Bulgarian, understood beyond its stan-

⁶ Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as Described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership Between the Parties. June 17, 2018, available at: <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/02/14-February-Letter-dated-14-February-2019.pdf>, accessed on 26.11.2021

⁷ Katerina Kolozova, "On the Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute and historical revisionism". *Al Jazeera*. 07.12.2020, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/12/7/on-the-macedonian-bulgarian-issue>, accessed on 29 November 2021.

⁸ *Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation Between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia*. Skopje, 1 August 2017, available at: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/No%20Volume/55013/Part/I-55013-o8000002804f5d3c.pdf>, accessed on 29 November 2021.

dard form (spanning through dialects and usage in history).⁹ Considering the *Prespa Agreement* has the status of an *erga omnes* legal act, rendered such through the authority of the United Nations, it is only implied that the stipulation about the language contained in the *Prespa Agreement* is universally valid as is that about the name of the state. Thus Bulgaria should not be an exception in this sense, or it is in breach of said *erga omnes* agreement, as it would be too if it were not to refer to the country as North Macedonia (the short version of Republic of North Macedonia, in line with the Agreement).

⁹ Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. “*On the Official Language of the Republic of North Macedonia*”, Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Sofia, 2020, available at: <https://www.bas.bg/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Za-oficialnia-ezik-na-RSM-EN-Online-Version.pdf>, accessed on 26 November 2021; Декларация на Четиридесет и четвъртото Народно събрание на Република България във връзка с разширяването на ЕС и Процеса на стабилизиране и асоцииране на Република Северна Македония и Република Албания, *Official Gazette* 81/2019. Sofia, 10.10.2019, available at: <https://parliament.bg/bg/declaration/ID/157188>, accessed on 26 November 2021.

2. Cultural conflicts, their resolution and applicability on the problem at hand, the Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute

If we accept the premise that nation is a purely political category, any dispute about the historical narrative embedded in the nation building would be a dispute over “ownership” of a culture, i.e., a matter of “cultural appropriation,” as these narratives are laden with ethnography, cultural and civilizational values and historical moments that tie the narrative with a thread of a temporality and a certain continuum behind it. Even if history proper, or rather the contemporary historical science, acknowledges the fact that there are ruptures in ethnicity formation and nation building processes, and that nation itself is a modern invention, it lends hand in the nation building narrative by providing verified data and reliable interpretation to the state institutions.¹⁰ Thus, a selection of events, a particular wording around the chosen events and similar acts of “weaving the story of a nation,” is always already expected from the historians. Both political elites and historians – in any nation state – are aware that a “historical narrative” of a nation is more than history proper, and that it is rather a culture premised on a certain memory of the nation, backed by a presumably reliable historical science.¹¹ Or at least, it is expected for this awareness to be present in any contemporary nation-state. It is certainly expected from the multi-disciplinary commission of academics to be capable of distinguishing the one from the other. Our focus groups with members of the so-called “historical commission” from the both sides of the border, conducted this fall, by both Bulgarian and Macedonian ISSHS faculty (the Bulgarian scholars being ISSHS visiting faculty), show that the commission is equipped with scholars capable of making the distinction at stake. However, it seems that there are also historians, also in both “national teams,” who believe that the national narrative upon which the sense of identity belonging is built, can be reduced to the historical science or a purely historiographical narrative. Here we note

¹⁰ Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism and modernism: a critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism*. London: Routledge, 1998.

¹¹ Stefan Berger. “History and national identity: why they should remain divorced”. *History & Policy*. Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, University of London, 01.12.2007, available at: <https://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/history-and-national-identity-why-they-should-remain-divorced>, accessed on 26 November 2021.

a serious impediment in a competent, reliable and up-to-date with contemporary science ability of the Commission to contribute to a resolution of the issue.

One does not need to adhere to multi-perspectivism in historiography in order to be able to acknowledge the distinction between national narrative and history proper and the role of culture at the heart of the matter at hand. As for the issue of multi-perspective study of historiography, it is a matter of educational policy rather than historical science proper but it is grounded into a scientific discipline – that of educational studies.¹² Thus, it should be pointed out to the Commission that history as dry, emotionless, merely factual matter can be the methodological choice of an academic, however, contemporary educational policies, require sensitivity in presentation toward different identity groups, operating with the values of diversity, inclusiveness and decolonialism. Multi-perspectivism, at least in this policy paper, is seen primarily as the unavoidable standard in history textbooks, as well as in everything related to the cultural heritage (literature, arts, ethnography), as aligned with the up-to-date educational studies and their reflection in the UNESCO standards. Multi-perspectivism as a matter of methodological debate in the science of history itself is not object of the discussion in the analysis at hand.

Similarly to the solution reflected in Article 7 of the *Prespa Agreement*, or to the Greek-Macedonian intellectual debate that paved the floor for it, we argue we should extrapolate the key points of cultural and identity related conflict, offer a solution to it in terms of educational policy as well as multi-issue policy analysis adhering to the standards of European international relations.

Based on our desk analysis and field research (focus groups and interviews with policy makers, intellectuals involved in the public de-

¹² Falk Pingel, "UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision" 2nd Revised and Updated Edition, UNESCO and the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Paris/Braunschweig, 2010, available at: <https://www.ehu.eus/documents/3120344/3356415/Unesco+guidebook.pdf/6bdf16d1-a184-4a42-90e-033b77fddb42>.

bate on the matter, participants in the Commission), we argue there are two cultural and national identity related stakes: 1) the dispute over the Macedonian language, 2) the treatment of the shared or common history by both parties. We are not nitpicking terminological nuances as to what is meant by "shared" vs. "common" history, but looking behind the language itself, namely we examine the referent behind the terminological battles. When it comes to the issue of history, the stakes in question are the following: are we sharing a history reducible to the Bulgarian national history or are we saying that the common history allows for an organic bifurcation into a separate identity? Reducing the shared history to the Bulgarian national historiography, implies an artificiality and falsification in the creation of an identity. Granted that the Yugoslav historiography may have navigated the discourse in a way that would introduce a clear cut with the Bulgarian culture and history as well as the possible shared sense of identity between the Macedonians and Bulgarians,¹³ we argue the sense of identity cannot be falsified, fabricated or "wrong." Even if we embrace the constructivist argument about identity, the fact that it is a "discursive construct" does not make it less real, less true and a fabrication – the "construct" grows into an identity in an organic manner, it is experienced as organic as quasi-natural.

Therefore, without arguing in favor of or against the claims that the historiography of Yugoslavia thwarted and negated the links of identity nature between the Macedonians and Bulgarians, we claim that the insistence that a certain identity is unmoored from any past, instituted *ex nihilo*, imposed as a lie violates the right to self-identification or the dignity of those embodying the identity, in this case of the present day Macedonians. On the other hand, granting roots and a sense of continuity to the young Macedonian nation, even if those roots are to a considerable degree inextricable from the history of the Bulgarian nation, does not mean that the Macedonian sense of national identity is less real or reduced to the Bulgarian past but

¹³ Ulf Brunnbauer, "'Pro-Serbians' vs. 'Pro-Bulgarians': Revisionism in Post-Socialist Macedonian Historiography", *History Compass* 3 (2005) EU 130, p. 4.

rather it ought to invent a way of integrating said past into its present. Furthermore, contemporary national history narratives should not be reduced to the past, to any past even though the collective memory we take for history is perceived as the cornerstone of identity belonging. As elaborated above, the two are distinct and history proper as well as historiography are different from any present day sense of identity and the national narrative that assigns meaning to the identity as stake.

All identity narratives have a continuity or at least a sense of continuity, and, consequently, 1944, as the year of the Yugoslav intervention in what used to be a shared/common sense of identity and national myths as per the Declaration of the Bulgarian Parliament from October 2019, should not be treated as the point of division and falsification but rather as a bridge to be crossed in order to identify commonalities and more shared history rather than less. By doing so, the discourse on the “Bulgarian fascist occupying force” in the Macedonian textbooks should be changed insofar as it nourishes a prejudice preserved to present day, but also include content of building bridges of collaboration and commonality beyond the year at issue, namely 1944: for example, the role of the Bulgarian anti-fascist forces in the liberation of North Macedonia from the German occupation and their collaboration with the Yugoslav communist forces ought to be presented fairly and thoroughly or the poetry of Nikola Vaptsarov must be admitted to be part of Bulgarian literary history, whereas the fact that he participated in groups in Bulgaria identified as “Macedonian” in an identity sense (notwithstanding it may not be a national one) should be noted too – thus both themes become bridges of commonality and shared historical continuity instead of division and separation, without negating the separate right to national self-identification to any of the two parties. The Commission and the policy makers should be aided in revising curricula in the proposed way by UNESCO aligned educational experts.

As far as the language is concerned, the matter has been resolved

pre-emptively thanks to the *erga omnes* status of *Prespa Agreement*. Refusing to name the language by its name is a matter of disrespecting the other party's sense of identity as standardized language of a nation is its key element. Not treating it purely legalistically, but culturally and politically – we argue that avoiding to name a language by its name is a gesture of hostility. We would advise that the two States recognize this fact – in the Declaration of the Bulgarian Parliament from October 2019 there may not be explicit negation of the standard Macedonian language, but the stance is hostile. Moreover, calling the language simply “the official language,” as the Declaration as well as the position of Bulgaria on the EU negotiation framework suggests,¹⁴ ¹⁵ does not resolve but rather complicates the matter and there is also an implied negation: North Macedonia does not have one official language, but two, Macedonian being one of them and also one of the two languages of the bilateral Agreement. We would advise the Bulgarian Parliament to revise article 1 line 5 of its Declaration from October 2019 and adjust it to the reality ensuing from *Prespa Agreement* signed in 2018, because it seems to imply that Bulgaria does not accept the *erga omnes* legal validity of *Prespa Agreement* which has been ratified by the UN General Assembly as the document marking the conclusion and closure to the dispute between the two states.¹⁶

On July 29th 2021 the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a Resolution with hardly any political wording, but rather one that is unavoidably perceived, in its entirety, as a pamphlet of romantic nationalism.¹⁷ It speaks of the Macedonian nation as “au-

¹⁴ Council of the European Union: General Secretariat Brussels (25 March 2020) CM 1946/20: *Council conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process The Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania* [annexes included], available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/CM-1946-2020-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed on 30 November 2021.

¹⁵ Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, Рамкова позиция относно разширяване на ЕС и процеса на стабилизиране и асоцииране: Република Северна Македония и Албания (09 October 2019) [Framework Position regarding EU enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process of the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania], available at: <https://www.gov.bg/bg/prestsentar/novini/ramkova-pozitsia>, accessed on 30 November 2021.

¹⁶ “Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences”, p. 2.

¹⁷ National Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia: “Resolution on Determining the Macedonian National Positions in the Context of the European Integration Blockages,” Official Gazette of

tochthonous” (article 2 of the Resolution), mentions “universally accepted theories” in the social sciences, humanities and cultural studies which apparently coincide with those of the Macedonian science (article 3 of the Resolution), while a patriotic prose runs throughout the document rendering each article utterly vague – bereft of clear legal and political meaning. Unlike the *Declaration of the Bulgarian Parliament*, the peculiar pseudo-political prose of the Macedonian Resolution evades proper political analysis. All that can be said of it in political and legal terms is that 1) it rebuilds the national narrative and, by doing so, it introduces a notable change – it invokes the “scientific truths of the field of Slavistics” (art. 3) unlike prior to the *Prespa Agreement* when references to Antiquity and avoidance of mention of nation’s Slavic character was part of the national narrative (let us note how easily present rhetoric and narrative has replaced the one that ruled in the era of Gruevski), 2) it charges the executive branch to execute the stipulations of the Resolution. Considering the essence of the Resolution goes against one of the key premises of the *Treaty* – “shared” or “common” history – as well as some of its articles do so very explicitly,¹⁸ it violates Article 118 of the Constitution of North Macedonia, which states that ratified international treaties become part of the national legislation that cannot be contradicted or annulled by any national legal act.

Republic of North Macedonia (08 – 3602/1) [Резолуција за утврдување на македонските државни позиции во контекст на блокадите на европските интеграции, „Службен весник на Република Северна Македонија“ (08 – 3602/1)].

¹⁸ For example, Article 3, line 3 implying shared collective “memories” of Balkan and Mediterranean peoples rather than the stipulation of *the Treaty* about the Bulgarian-Macedonian commonalities more specifically, thereby diluting if not annihilating the nature of the *Treaty* at its core.

3. Transposition of the cultural conflict and its resolution onto the plain of the political: Tackling the elusive categories of identity and national narratives in political terms

The political means to tackle this problem of essentially inter-cultural relations is no different than from any other form of identity issues that have been raised to political issues and addressed through political means. A category of people, for the sake of comparison, let us say a specific cultural group or a sexual minority group, need to be dragged out of the pre-political discussions of academic scholasticism concerning culture or history or psychological and deontological discussions and thereby introduced into the realm of the political. By doing so they are recognized as political subjects and their political rights are negotiated with the authorities. Soon after or perhaps simultaneously, it becomes a discussion or rather negotiations and public debate over policy solutions.

In the case of our object of analysis, the transposition of the case of cultural conflict, embedded in competing nation-building narratives and dovetailing with the sense of national identity (identity still being essentially a cultural category), can be done in the following way:

- (A) By accepting that a standard and an official language of a country is as much a political as it is a linguistic category. Therefore, by way of adhering to the standards of contemporary international relations, at least those in place in the European Union, and the *Prespa Agreement* more specifically (taking into consideration its *erga omnes* status), the official language of North Macedonia whose name should not be avoided in any bilateral communication is the Macedonian (part of the group of South-Slavic languages). (B) The intercultural concern: Bulgaria is rightly concerned that many of the authors in their national literature are represented as Macedonian in the Macedonian curricula. A multi-perspective approach would allow for the Macedonian curricula to explain as to why these authors are perceived as Macedonian, having built themselves into the national narrative, while still being part of the Bulgarian literary canon, in particular because they wrote in that language (the circumstances explaining why should not negate the facts).

- (A) By accepting that the national narrative is also about cultural and civilizational heritage and not only history, or perhaps even more so, demonstrate respect toward the two respective narratives and ethnic identifications as distinct in spite of the intersecting national histories. Thus, the good neighborly relations can be established only if the concerned ethnicities – not only nationalities – demonstrate respect toward one another by allowing them to build their own national narratives. This should be valid fully reciprocally: the Macedonian side should respect why Gotse Delchev or Dimitar Miladinov would be part of the Bulgarian “cultural intimacy,”¹⁹ just as should the Bulgarian side. (B) The intercultural concern: Through the means of multi-perspectivism in curriculum building, the cultural value of a historical figure and an event for the institutions, the culture and the national narrative of the other state should be represented in good faith, without hostility and with no implicit or explicit dismissal but as an equally valid narrative that invites mutual respect and consideration. Once again, we shall reiterate, educational studies expert/s specialized in the UNESCO agenda of multiperspectivity should be included in the process. In spite of the insistence of the Commission that it is academically well equipped, we once again argue that they aren’t when it comes to the issue at stake – it is primarily an (educational) policy issue, not merely academic.
- Improved infrastructure that will enable to pass the distance between the two capitals in not much more than two hours by means of public transportation should be the most pressing priority as there is nothing more efficient in overcoming nationalism and bringing cultures closer together as daily interaction of the people rather than the institutions. Thus, a dramatically accelerated process of infrastructural rapprochement is to be

¹⁹ Michael Herzfeld developed the concept of cultural intimacy as “one means of defining and understanding the sore zones of cultural sensitivity and to understand why officials so often seem to connive in perpetuating that sneaky persistence in everyday life”. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural intimacy: social poetics and the real life of social institutions*, 3rd ed. Routledge, 2016, p. 2.

seen as one of the most efficient means of cultural conflict resolution.

- The Declaration of the Bulgarian Parliament should be revised in all of the parts where it breaches the academic autonomy by imposing itself as the guardian of the “undeniable historical truths” as well as in the above discussed stipulation regarding the “constitutional language” of North Macedonia – as per the *erga omnes Prespa Agreement* the language is to be called “Macedonian,” and every renaming of it (or robbing it of a name) is breach of an agreement respected by the entire European Union as it should be by all of the UN nation states.
- The Resolution of the Macedonian Parliament should be replaced by one of political wording in line with the spirit of good neighborliness, and its prerequisite - good faith, entirely circumventing the atavistic and dangerous discourse of romantic nationalism.

4. Conclusion

The bilateral dispute and the deadlock the two nations have found themselves in cannot be solved unless the elephant in the room is recognized and named – the ethno-national identity related inter-cultural conflict and the necessity of its resolution. As elaborated above, the cultural stakes that are object of concern on both sides should be extrapolated in order for them to be transposed onto the level of political discussion and addressed through such means. Ensuing policy solutions should be the following:

Recommendations

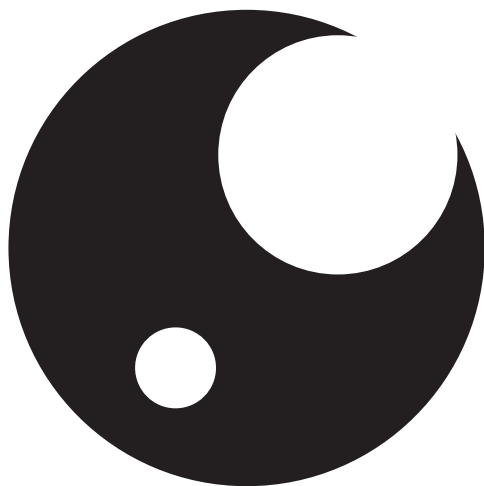
- The first recommendation is multilayered and presented in the form of 4 sub-recommendations. *We see the first recommendation as the prerequisite of any workable Roadmap of implementation.* The two States ought to establish a clear distinction between the cultural, historical (insofar as science or academia) and political categories of discussion and respective policy solutions when it comes to the Treaty's implementation, in the following way:
 - 5) Cultural policies should be devised in order to address the cultural conflict at hand and offer resolution in terms of cultural and educational policies across disciplines (literature, arts, history);
 - 6) In order to address both political and academic concerns nested in the curricula of both countries, such as the issue of content and wording nourishing xenophobia, as well as in the political culture of both countries, educational policies, including multiperspectivism as a method, should be put in place;
 - 7) Historiography or pedagogy are not to deliver the solution to the conflict at stake but contemporary educational policies;
 - 8) Apply educational and international relations policies that

could affirm the indisputable connections in history regardless of whether such history is called shared or common – affirming them as the connection of continuity between the shared past but also hopefully shared future;

- The binational multidisciplinary Commission and the policy makers should be aided in revising curricula by UNESCO aligned educational experts; moreover, the Commission should be reformed and rendered an educational policy and cultural conflict resolution panel rather than a committee on “historical truths.”
- The Bulgarian Parliament should be made aware that article 1 line 5 of its Declaration from October 2019 is in conflict with the reality ensuing from *Prespa Agreement* signed in 2018, which is not merely a bilateral but an *erga omnes* legal act rendered such through the authority of the United Nations. Another reason for this recommendation stems from the value of good neighborliness – even if the legal *erga omnes* argument weren’t there, naming a neighbor’s language by the name it has given to it is the prerequisite of good faith instead of avoiding its use (esp. when the term “constitutional language” does not have a clear referent as explained in the analysis).
- The Resolution of the Macedonian Parliament from July 29th 2021, discussed above, should be annulled or amended by one of political wording – rather than nationalist prose – in line with the spirit of good neighborliness, a prerequisite for joining the European Union, entirely rid of the dangerous and hostile discourse of romantic nationalism.
- Both parliaments should refrain from passing declarations, resolutions, decrees and other documents that determine the “historical truth” thus directly breaching the academic freedom of both scientific communities.

- Instead, both parliaments and state institutions should focus on cultural conflict resolution policies that do not come down to culture only but are also related to infrastructural projects that would allow an accelerated communication (travel) across the borders, while also helping the implementation of other aspects of the agreement such as improved economic collaboration.
- Strong emphasis should be put on youth cooperation as the most efficient and effective form of cultural reconciliation.

The Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje (ISSHS) is a nonprofit research organization in applied social and humanities studies focusing mainly on multi-issue policy studies. It holds the status of a scientific institution in the fields of social sciences and humanities accorded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia (Decision nr. 30). It is also an accredited graduate school offering MA level programs in multi-issue policy studies, cultural studies and gender studies. The Institute holds an Erasmus+ charter of Higher Education Institutions in Europe. Its core activities consist in multi-issue policy studies and policy related advocacy and training, coupled with basic research in the social sciences and humanities. Making findings visible and putting them into function that can contribute to positive changes in society is attached to that of policy research: data driven advocacy and awareness raising are part of every policy research activity we undertake. We also provide consultancy and act as multi-issue policy studies think tank.



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