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Toward an Exit Point from the Enlargement Cul-de-Sac Posed by the Macedonian-Bulgarian Dispute

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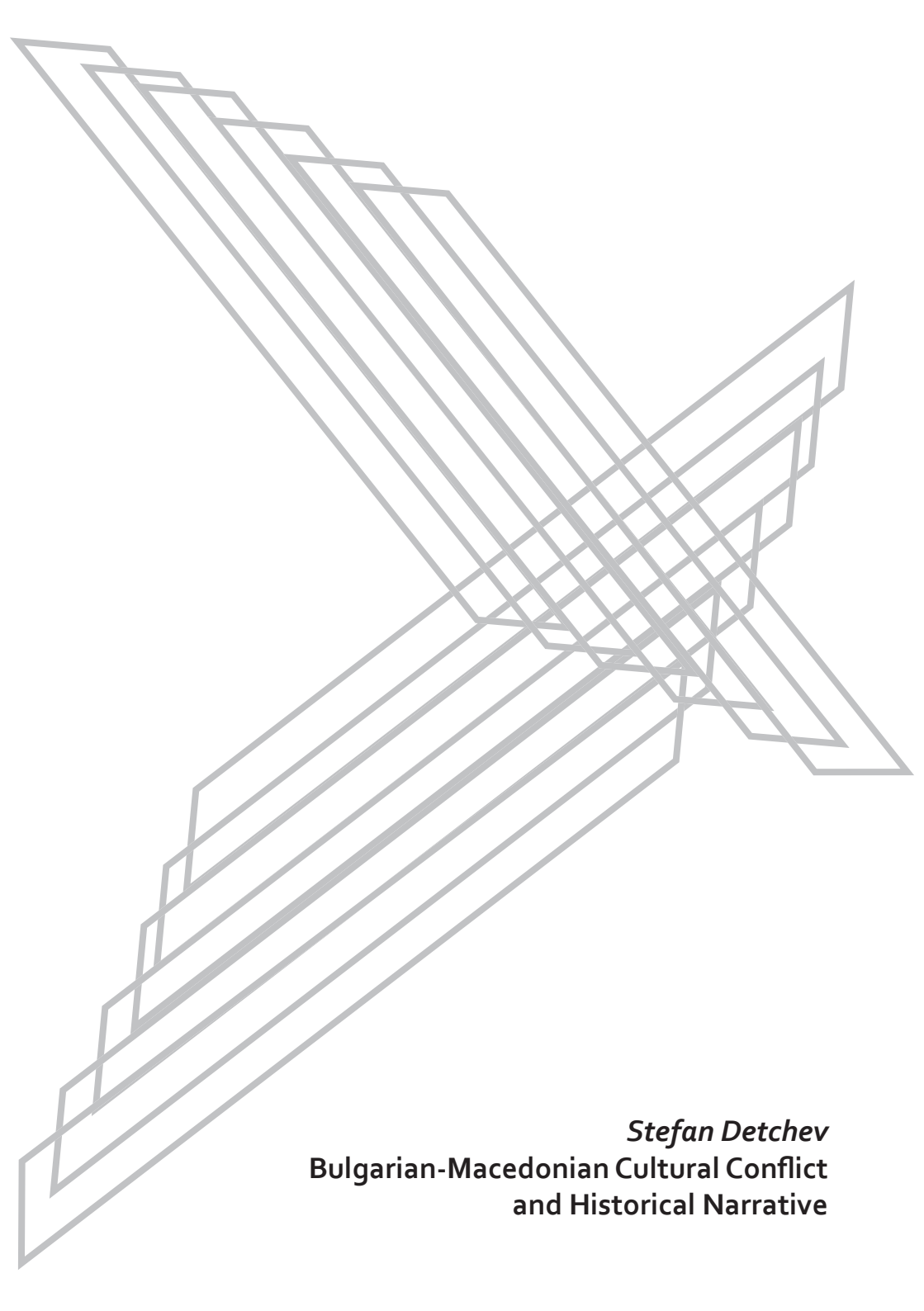
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Modern and contemporary processes of disintegration of empires and the formation of nations and nation-states in the Balkans led to the establishment of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia as two independent and sovereign states. According to Bulgaria, that recognized the former Yugoslav republic under its constitutional name in 1992 (Republic of Macedonia), the recognition of Macedonian statehood does not automatically lead to the recognition of the Macedonian language and the Macedonian nation, as it was defined in Yugoslav times - a nation derived from the South Slavs with centuries of separate history, different from the Bulgarian one. This non-recognition by the Bulgarian side of the nation and the language provoked reservations in the position of Skopje. As a result, for more than two decades and a half their bilateral relations remained problematic. This Bulgarian intransigence towards the nation and the language, combined with the lack of a modern historiographical approach, make the Macedonian side defend its conventional historical narrative inherited mainly from its Yugoslav past.¹ Moreover, the criteria for membership in the European Union do not include an inventory of storytelling in a candidate state. Nevertheless, it was mainly the historical narrative and historical dispute that provoked the Bulgarian veto on the approval of the negotiation framework of the Republic of North Macedonia for the start of the process for future accession in the European Union from the end of 2020.

¹ „Опсервер“ (PCM): Без напредък завърши поредното заседание на българско-македонската историческа комисия <http://m.focus-news.net/?action=news&id=2922122>

Bulgarian-Macedonian identities "on the field"

In general, the processes of final nation-building of the contemporary Bulgarian and Macedonian nations, with the delineation of the borders between them, was relatively successful after the end of World War II, not least because of the already created pre-conditions. Among them were the cultural particularism of the Revivalists from Macedonia, the political separatism of the Macedonian revolutionaries, the maturing of the Macedonian ethnic sentiment after the end of the First World War, which multiplied the rare and isolated early cases from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.² Later, as a result of the work of the institutions in the early totalitarian period of communist Yugoslavia, only the Yugoslav form of Macedonian identity was legitimized and prevailed publicly. To a large extent, it is still considered as the "correct" one. As we have said, the same process was going well in Bulgaria. That part of the population that has its roots in Macedonia was fully integrated into the Bulgarian nation. Moreover, usually people coming from this community insist on a tougher position of Sofia towards Skopje. While, by the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the process of forming a separate Macedonian nation in today's Republic of North Macedonia was coming to an end, the consequences of the cultural autonomy of 1946-1948 (which had never had much ground

² Маринов, Чавдар. Прочута Македонийо, земьо на Александър – Р. Даскалов, Ч. Маринов (ред.) Преплетените истории на Балканите. Том 1, София: Нов български университет, 2013, с. 279-335.

in the Bulgarian Pirin Macedonia), were very successfully erased by Sofia. The same was true about the policy of recognizing a separate Macedonian identity in order to attack the Yugoslav version, which lasted for about a decade. As a result, today, the vast majority of the population in the Republic of North Macedonia feel themselves to be ethnic Macedonians and believe in their centuries-long separation and uniqueness from the Bulgarians. On the contrary, throughout Bulgaria the vast majority of the population with roots in Macedonia considered themselves Bulgarians, as it is the case with those living in Bulgarian Pirin Macedonia. These groups, on both sides of the border, illustrate the successful nation-building efforts of the authorities in Skopje and Sofia in recent decades.

Along with this, there are other groups that demonstrate some gaps in the nation-building processes. There is a hard-to-determine group of Macedonians from the Republic of North Macedonia who are aware of the “common history” with Bulgarians, the late emergence of a Macedonian ethnic sentiment, and the traces of Bulgarian identities of Macedonian Revivalists and revolutionaries, but who have felt like ethnic Macedonians since they were born, and who hold on to this and consider the process of forging the Macedonian nation as completed and irreversible. Another, second group of citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia - and here we are talking about tens of thousands or about 100,000 - do not feel Bulgarian, but have signed some papers with incorrect content to obtain a Bulgarian passport due to the opportunities for realization within the European Union. Together with the bulk of the largest group of Macedonians, the latter two groups oppose Sofia’s veto from the end of 2020 and they take a negative view about the Bulgarian position on the Macedonian nation and language as being artificial. However, they can serve as a public basis for building respect in Macedonia for the common history of the two peoples in the past. Another group of citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia have a truly dual identity and are perceived both as Bulgarians and Macedonians, or as Macedonian

Bulgarians, but consider Macedonia as their homeland. Among them there are Bulgarians because of the transmitted family memory, as well as those who have dug a lot into historical literature, read memoirs of revolutionaries in the original language and realized the deep problematic nature of the written history inherited from Macedonia's past in Yugoslavia. They are against the veto imposed by Sofia, believing that it only helps to increase the gap between the two societies created in the last hundred years. At the same time, the latter group does not accept Sofia's official position on the language, and advocates greater flexibility on it. Finally, there is a group of a few citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia who claim to be Macedonian Bulgarians. They feel themselves offended by the Macedonian state and they are quite hostile to it. These people are the only ardent supporters in the country of the veto imposed by Sofia. Many of them have been living in Bulgaria for years. Recently, they have been pushing for the inclusion of Macedonian Bulgarians in the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, among other nation-building ethnic groups. This could be the reason why they are, lately, very much tolerated by the official Bulgarian authorities, as almost the only expressions of the moods and desires of all of the Macedonian Bulgarians - something that clearly does not correspond to the reality. There are also some who directly advocate Greater Bulgarian claims and are not worried about Sofia's insight on the Macedonian language.³

In the Republic of Bulgaria, as it was already mentioned, the vast majority of the population of Pirin Macedonia, as well as the descendants of refugee families from Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, identify themselves as Bulgarians, Macedonian Bulgarians, or Bulgarians nationally and Macedonians regionally. Their ancestors never accepted as their own the new Macedonian alphabet and the standard Macedonian literary norm created in 1945. Often, some of them are much more sensitive and advocate a tough policy towards

³ Илиев, Людмил. Радев проведе безпрецедентна среща с българи от Северна Македония – Cera, 27 окт. 2021 <https://www.segabg.com/node/196566>

Skopje, compared to Bulgarians from other parts of the country. There is another minority in Bulgaria, which seems comparable in weight to those Macedonian Bulgarians who want to be included in the constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. They claim to be ethnic Macedonians, different from the Bulgarians. Some of them, to the annoyance and excitement of the rest of the population in Pirin Macedonia, even argue that the area was occupied by Bulgaria in 1912, and the Bulgarians and the Macedonians have never had a "common history," as it was written in the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation on August 1, 2017.⁴ These are circles around the former UMO "Ilinden" and now around UMO Ilinden-Pirin, which have never supported the policy of Macedonian Prime-Minister Zoran Zaev and the signed treaty with Bulgaria. They are not only against the veto imposed by Sofia, but believe, like the opposition VMRO-DPMNE in the Republic of North Macedonia, that the treaty with Bulgaria should be annulled. Currently, whilst the Bulgarian authorities are betting on a small group hostile to the authorities in Skopje, the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE in the Republic of North Macedonia - which won the recent local elections and expects to take power after early parliamentary elections - is betting on the last small group of Macedonians in Bulgaria. In this situation, it is difficult to reach a compromise between the two countries, and the future of their relations in the face of expected political changes in Skopje is increasingly unclear.

⁴Treaty 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>

Why history cannot be totally ignored

As much as one circumvents the past, these different interpretations and states of Bulgarian and Macedonian identities are historical products that need a plausible explanation. This will be difficult without a direct confrontation with historical facts and a reliance on contemporary historiography, the achievements of the social sciences and humanities, the knowledge about the dynamics and multiplicity of identities and their negotiation, occurrence and variants. Currently, the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute starts from the premise that national identity is an eternal value that has existed since time immemorial and is given once and forever. The modern Bulgarian and the modern Macedonian identities are perceived by the predominant part of the two societies as given by nature and have existed over the centuries as unchanging entities. These national identities are based on the existence of national historical narratives about the past that are considered sacred in both societies.⁵ In the framework of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues established by the Treaty of Friendship on August 1, 2017, the members of both countries are trying to defend the established national historical narratives. This inevitably affects their work, insofar as it simply loops and becomes in practice the main reason for Bulgaria's disapproval at the end of 2020 of the negotiating framework for the start of the Republic of North Macedonia's negotiations with the European Union.

⁵ Дечев, Стефан. Да се остави историята на историците. Но на кои? – Дечев, Стефан. Скрытая история. Полемики. София: Парадокс, 2019, с. 147-171.

Careful monitoring of the information provided during the period from 2018 (the start of the meetings of the Joint Historical Commission) until the end of 2021 saliently demonstrates the different attitudes of both parties to the Joint Commission concerning its mandate, nature of activities, frequency of sessions, and expectation of results. This situation also stems from the different goals and motives for which the two countries signed the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation on August 1, 2017. At that time, the then Republic of Macedonia signed the agreement with the desire to open the door to NATO membership and the idea that negotiations for the country's accession to the European Union would begin soon. For its part, Bulgaria was moving to sign the agreement with a desire to restore the "historical truth" that had been hidden from the Macedonian public for decades. Ultimately, the Bulgarian side of the commission wanted to impose on the Macedonian one, a comprehensive historical narrative, according to which the "Bulgarian nation" (Balgarska narodnost), forged in the 9th-10th centuries from the Middle Ages, existed as such until the "Bulgarian Revival" of the 19th century, when it converted to the modern Bulgarian nation. This process came to an end in 1944, when the work on systematic de-Bulgarianization and Macedonianization began, which ended in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the formation of an artificial Macedonian nation combined with the production of a falsified historical narrative. That was why, for the Bulgarian side, the forthcoming negotiations had to put an end to this historiographic forgery and be a kind of "normalization" by returning to the time before 1944. Moreover, they should be a kind of imagined return before the lost wars of 1913, 1918 and 1941-44.

The Macedonian side seems to be aware that the process of building the Macedonian nation was delayed compared to that of the Bulgarian one. The professionals are also aware that in the Macedonian narrative, at least until the late 1920s and early 1930s, the empirical density that the Bulgarian one enjoys is weaker.

That was why the Macedonian historians decided to rely more on modernist and postmodern theories of nations and nationalisms, of ethnic and national identities, of constructing historical narratives and the multiperspectivity of historical personalities, events and processes. They were even used in an effort to defend the old Macedonian Romantic historical narrative about Samuel's state as a "medieval Macedonian Kingdom."⁶

However, the common formulas, reached in February 2019, for the two countries to commemorate common historical figures such as Cyril and Methodius, St. Clement of Ohrid, St. Naum of Ohrid, Tsar Samuel and Grigor Parlichev, show that reaching a consensus, even if it was difficult, was not completely impossible.⁷ Although the concrete final texts were never made public by both governments in Sofia and Skopje, the consensus was reached on the Slavic character of the work of Cyril and Methodius, the Christianizing and Slavic character of Clement and Naum, patronized and directed by the Bulgarian monarch Boris I, the existence of the Bulgarian royal tradition in the Middle Ages, as well as the intertwined biography of the men of letters from Macedonia.

At the same time, the proposal of the Macedonian side from June 2019 for a joint celebration by the two countries of the transfer in October 1946 of the bones of Gotse Delchev from the Communist government in Sofia to the Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia was the first serious "explosion" in the work of the Joint Commission.⁸ After the adoption of the Framework Position of the Bulgarian Government⁹ and the Declaration of the Bulgarian Parliament¹⁰ in October 2019,

⁶ Вангелов, Огнен, Ристески, Љупчо. **Обединување околу „историски вистини“ или околу различности? (II)** – Respublica, 28 maj 2021 <https://respublica.edu.mk/mk/blog/blogger/ovangelovljristeski>

⁷ Екатерина Захаријева прие учените от смесената комисија с Република Северна Македонија – NOVINI.bg, 21 февр. 2019 г. <https://novini.bg/bylgariya/politika/525650>

⁸ Каракачанов скочи: Комисијата за общата ни историја с Македонија не работи! – Dnes.bg, 9 јуни 2019. <https://www.dnes.bg/obshtestvo/2019/06/09/karakachanov-skochi-komisiyata-za-obshtata-ni-istoriia-s-makedoniia-ne-raboti.412866,4>

⁹ <https://www.gov.bg/bg/prestsentar/novini/ramkova-pozitsia>

¹⁰ Парламентът прие Декларация за Северна Македонија и Албанија след бурни дебати – actualno.com, 10.10. 2019 - <https://www.actualno.com/politics/parlamentyt-prie-deklaracija-za-severna->

things got even worse, and practically all subsequent meetings of the historical commission were fruitless. There has been some retreat by the Macedonian side even in adopting common formulas to the two governments for conscientiously celebrating common historical figures, as well as moving forward on history textbooks, where the Joint Commission has long stood in the 10th century. The Macedonian side complained that the Bulgarian one strives to impose, on the Macedonian Ministry of Education, the entire Bulgarian historical narrative, according to which, as early as in the 9th and 10th centuries, there was a Bulgarian ethnic homogenization, including on the territory of later Macedonia. The Macedonian side also used elements of discontinuity between the state of rulers: Boris, Simeon and Peter, on the one hand, and Samuel's state, on the other, in order to defend the decades-old narrative of Samuel's state as "Macedonian" in the Middle Ages. For this purpose, the Macedonian side referred to some achievements, which had been the result of the historiographical consensus and the situation in Tito's Yugoslavia. This behavior of Macedonian historians was finally attacked by the Bulgarian side as a mere reluctance to recognize the achievements of world-wide Medieval and Byzantine studies in relation to Samuel's state. Nevertheless, the delineation of the state as a continuation of the Bulgarian royal tradition, as well as the exaggeration of the Bulgarian narrative of "ethnic homogenization" at that time became clear. Here it is also interesting to emphasize the fact that for the medieval period Bulgarian and Macedonian historiographies totally diverge in all directions and on all topics. This makes the greater reliance on academic science in the case of possible revisions of the curriculum difficult to recommend, insofar as the Bulgarian and the Macedonian historical sciences are visibly problematic in regards to fulfilling the task of presenting to their societies real expert knowledge on the subject.

Although Sofia's veto at the end of 2020 was imposed due to the historical dispute, in the following months the emphasis in Bulgarian

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politics changed. The governmental circles moved from historical issues to human rights and the Copenhagen criteria for membership in the European Union of the candidate states. The very historical issues, in a peculiar way, have already begun to be “read” and re-interpreted in a new way through the membership criteria. The problem of “hate speech” was associated with the representation of Bulgarians in the Macedonian textbooks, in the form of origin and way of life, as well as the period of World War II. The request for the rehabilitation of the victims of Communism also passed through the insistence of new readings of the period after 1944. The issue of non-interference in the internal affairs of Bulgaria, and the inclusion of the Bulgarians in the constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, was also related to a new perspective.

Nevertheless, the work of the Joint Historical Commission and the need for its real results is visible, in order to create an atmosphere and environment that would allow for a way out of the impasse. In this regard, despite the possible success that the other commissions planned by the new Bulgarian Prime-Minister Kiril Petkov (business, transport, culture, education, etc.) could achieve, it would be still unlikely that without any steps on matters concerning history that the overall negotiation process for accession to the European Union could be unblocked and begin to start. In this regard, despite the lack of a direct link to the Copenhagen membership criteria, and although Bulgaria was not admitted to the European Union in 2007 after reviewing its history textbooks and the way it presents controversial historical topics with its neighbors, the current negotiations could be used for the simultaneous Europeanization of the teaching of history in both countries - the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia. Moreover, the Bulgarian claims against Macedonian textbooks would lead inevitably to the problematization of pre-modern identities, the nature of medieval state formations, the Bulgarian narrative of nation-building, the interpretation of Bulgarian Revival and language disputes, the wars of “national unification,”

the failure of the Bulgarian national project from the 19th century and the emergence of a separate Macedonian identity in the 20th century.

Other bilateral disputes and the uniqueness of the Bulgarian-Macedonian one

A comprehensive look clearly shows that the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute has a very specific character, which - although seen as a cultural conflict - makes the mechanical transfer of the whole practice from other similar historical disputes (French-German, German-Polish, Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Russian, Hungarian-Slovak, Greek-Macedonian, etc.) not always appropriate to give reasonable feedback for solutions. The specificity comes from the fact that at the end of the 19th, and the beginning of the 20th, century the Macedonian ethnic identity has only isolated and sporadic manifestations. Its maturation took place during the interwar period, and its final formation and nation-building, as well as its negotiation of identity, occurred after the end of World War II. It took place in a Yugoslav context, when Macedonian Republican institutions existed for the first time, with all of the ensuing consequences. One of them was a special sense of immediate life experience and a kind of Macedonian cultural intimacy, which completely diverged from the Bulgarian ones of the Communist period. However, before the beginning of the 20th century, most of the Macedonian Revivalists had a Bulgarian ethnic consciousness, despite their Macedonian cultural particularism, expressed in the use of local dialects. The same

applies to the Bulgarian identity of the Macedonian revolutionaries, despite their political separatism, in which they claimed Macedonia as their priority homeland. For this reason, there is no other case when practically the entire elite of the Macedonian intelligentsia participated in the First World War (1915-1918) as part of the Bulgarian army and administration. All of this does not negate the fact that after a process of maturation and bifurcation with Bulgaria and the Bulgarians after the First World War, the above-mentioned cultural intimacy marked by the Yugoslav context has actually created two nations, with all of the prerequisites for specific sensations, including at the level of bodies. In practice, Tito's Yugoslavia was, in any case, the first manifestation of Macedonian political autonomy, albeit with partial sovereignty. At the same time, the Macedonians found themselves in a country where, after the initial severe repression, they gained a sense of superiority over the rest of Eastern Europe, not to mention a country such as Bulgaria, with which they had a common and intertwined history in the past.

It has already been mentioned that the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute is a specific cultural conflict in which two different historical narratives collide, which ultimately form two different identities - Bulgarian and Macedonian. For the vast majority, in Bulgaria, they are the same and identical, and for the vast majority in the former Socialist Republic of Macedonia, in former Yugoslavia, they are different, coming from centuries ago. The two related peoples connect their identities, in the first case, with the medieval polynomial "Bulgaria," and, in the second case, with the resurrected and, as if turned into magic, after about the middle of the 19th century, the toponym "Macedonia." Both peoples were, in their vernacular, part of a South Slavic dialectical continuum, from which the Bulgarian literary language was formed in the 19th century and the Macedonian one in the 20th century. As a result of the historical experiences of the last two centuries, the two names - "Bulgarians" and "Macedonians" - have already become sacred and important in themselves, rather

than the real proximity or difference between the peoples denoted by them. The illusory continuity created by history textbooks and popular historical narratives over the centuries further reinforces these identity sensations. As far as in today's Republic of North Macedonia, Bulgaria was traditionally ideologically stigmatized as bearing the name of a non-Slavic tribe, a "fascist country," in the course of the process after 2017 it was a shock for the vast majority of Macedonians to realize the existence of some common or entangled history with Bulgaria, having in mind that they bear at the same time something with ancient Macedonians. During these same years, it was a surprise for the majority of Bulgarians to learn that Macedonian identity is not just a matter of stubbornness, but has been sufficiently shaped, and that the process is visibly irreversible. For many Macedonians, the very assumption that they are Bulgarians is already self-deprecating. In order to be a true Macedonian, there must be clear boundaries between you and the stigmatized Bulgarian, which is Turkish, Mongolian, Tatar and much later Christianized and civilized from the Macedonian language and Macedonian culture. The Macedonian Slavs, unlike the Bulgarians, have captured the prestige of the ancient Macedonians, which makes the Macedonian superior to the Bulgarian.

Against such a view, is the popular Bulgarian understanding that Bulgarian and Macedonian are simply synonymous, with the latter being only a regional, geographical feature. It was only after the First World War, under Serbian pressure and with the help of terror, that the regional, Macedonian identity, in order to forget the connection with Bulgaria, quite unnaturally became a national Macedonian one. The regional identity has replaced the real, unadulterated national one, which is Bulgarian. According to theater director Yavor Gardev, in this "game of names" between Bulgarian and Macedonian, there is invested hope for the future on both sides of the border. On the Macedonian side, this will mean that one day the Bulgarians will give up their (proto) Bulgarian name and return to the Slavic one,

which is equal to the “Macedonian bosom.” On the Bulgarian side, however, this is the desire of the Macedonians to give up the artificially transformed true Bulgarian identity into a Macedonian one. Therefore, according to Gardev, here we encounter a mutual expectation of a return to the “Bulgarian root” or the “Macedonian root.”¹¹

Another expression of this cultural conflict is the mutual perception of the two languages. The Macedonian seems to the vast majority of Bulgarians to be a mere dialect and a non-prestigious language. The Bulgarian, which visibly resembles the Eastern Macedonian dialects, which are not prestigious in relation to the Macedonian literary norm, sounds rural too. That was why when Zoran Zaev, in his attempts to speak Bulgarian, switched to the Strumica regional dialect, he made the Skopje elite look at him as a provincialist, and his behavior in the November 2020 interview with BGNES to be received as self-deprecating for the Macedonian nation he represented.¹²

The cultural conflict is also a clash of two myths. According to the Bulgarian version, in the 9th and 10th centuries in Macedonia, together with Moesia and Thrace, the Bulgarian medieval community (narodnost) was built, which in the 19th century grew into a Bulgarian nation. After 1944, a new artificial Macedonian nation with an artificial language was created in Yugoslav Macedonia through a falsified history. On the contrary, according to the Macedonian national myth, during the Bulgarian fascist occupation, there was strong resistance by Macedonian guerrillas who had national liberation goals and proclaimed Macedonian statehood at ASNOM on August 2nd, 1944. In this regard, the victory of the Soviet Army, which in the Bulgarian case means the occupation of Bulgaria and

¹¹ Гърдев, Явор. Българи и македонци. За името ли спорим. Интервю на Димитър Вацов п Портал Култура, 26.03., 2021 <https://kultura.bg/web/%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BB%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BC/>

¹² Зоран Заев: България не е фашистки окупатор и Гоце Делчев е и на двете страни – news.bg, 25.11.2020. <https://news.bg/politics/zoran-zaev-balgariya-ne-e-fashistki-okupator-i-gotse-delchev-e-i-na-dvete-strani.html>

decades of totalitarian rule within the Soviet bloc, for the people of the Republic of North Macedonia means a celebration of Macedonian independence, albeit within the frameworks of Tito's Yugoslavia. And, if for the majority of Bulgarians, Communism is a totalitarian regime, the isolation from Europe, inability to travel, subordination to the USSR, shortage of goods, lack of luxurious commodities, then Macedonian communism is national liberation, living under "better socialism," and traveling throughout the world with a Yugoslav passport. And while Bulgaria has lately stubbornly kept silent about its alliance with the Third Reich, the Republic of North Macedonia is deluded into some of its original anti-fascist righteousness, and leaves the blame for fascism to Bulgaria. Of course, it should not be forgotten that the relatives of the partisans killed by the Bulgarian occupation authorities carry this as a real traumatic memory until present day.

At the moment, both countries and societies are obsessed with the narrative of victims of foreign aggression. The Bulgarians are convinced that the Macedonians have been "stealing history," starting from the Middle Ages, and that this history was completely stolen until the beginning of the 20th century, the First World War and even until 1944. For its part, the Macedonian side experiences itself as no less as a victim because its neighbour steals what was Macedonian. They portioned Macedonia during the Balkan wars and the idea that the Macedonians were separated, participating in different Balkan armies during the First World War, is especially strong.

Simultaneously, the high narrative of the victim combined with cultural intimacy and popular historical knowledge, circulated in the mass literature and media. They have built, in both societies, a kind of narrative of superiority. That is why, for the Bulgarians, the Macedonians are Bulgarians who have been cheated by the Serbs into thinking that they are Macedonians. Forgetting their Bulgarian origin, they speak and write in a dialect that is "spoiled Bulgarian." And since they were Bulgarians until 1944, this is the reason why

today they have no history and therefore steal the Bulgarian one. All this is garnished with an over-emotion, which the Macedonians even perceive as Macedonophobia. This narrative corresponds to its Macedonian counterpart, which connects the Macedonians with Alexander the Great and antiquity, as well as with the subsequent Slavic population. In this sense, the Bulgarians are "Tatars," and hence all modern Bulgarians who are not are actually Macedonians.

It seems that the most sensitive part of the cultural conflict is for the Macedonians the identity of the Revivalists and the revolutionaries from the past. As far as the Bulgarians are concerned, it is the inevitability of the split and bifurcation after 1918 that continued in the successful nation-building after 1944. These are the main idiosyncrasies where there is a risk involved to give the dispute long-lasting life forward in time. On this occasion, the Bulgarian director Yavor Gardev says:

"Relationships have a limit in the zone of trust, which currently cannot be removed. He is there and will stay there for a long time. But come to think of it, for some Macedonians this is probably even more unpleasant. Although they feel close, they have long considered us strangers. But they are not so much annoyed by our foreignness as they are frightened by the non-recognition of their presence. And in this there is something that undermines all relationships - cultural, economic, political, and probably personal. Even when - I don't know if you notice - the Bulgarian state has stated through its main representatives that it recognizes this identity, as it has often done lately, this is still not enough. Because we declare that we recognize their identity, but through our questions to history we undermine its continuity and the problem is revived. So it seems to them that we recognize it and take it away at the same time. With one gesture."

This is the main reason why Macedonian politicians, public figures and historians are proposing to leave history aside indefinitely; to be left only to historians; refer to the work that lasted for decades of other similar commissions; or the possibility of the existence of parallel narratives.

The emphasized uniqueness of the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute in comparison with the other historical disputes in Europe¹³ does not mean that individual examples cannot be extracted from them, which could be used to find a solution in our case as well. The first is related to a certain disinterest in how exactly history is presented in the textbooks of the other country, unless we come across cases where there is open hate speech, insults to the other, or territorial claims. From the German case, the Bulgarian side can also use the cases of taking responsibility for the past in relation to the Holocaust. It could be also important for the Macedonian side to follow from the French or the Polish cases, the recognition of collaboration with the occupier. The Polish experience can also be shared with the Bulgarian side with its gradual abandonment of Poland's territorial claims to historical Polish lands to the East. Last but not least, certain performative gestures could also be important, which have a deep symbolic meaning and could set the stage for a decisive future turn in the relationships. In this case, it could be a pilgrimage of a Bulgarian delegation or Bulgarian leaders to the Holocaust Memorial in Skopje, in front of the Vataša Infantry Monument, or a joint celebration of Gotse Delchev as a Bulgarian and a Macedonian revolutionary.

¹³ Вж. другите доклади в този сборник.

Dynamic identities in history and their cultural intimacies

The Macedonian historian Manol Pandevski writes in one of his books that revolutionaries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries talk a lot about “Macedonians” and the “Macedonian people,” explicitly stating that he has no intention to discuss in detail what the internal content they invested in the terms was. This is understandable, since we are talking about a whole crucial stage of “common history” with Bulgaria, in which the intelligentsia, as well as parts of the people, subscribed to Bulgarian identity, despite the presence of a local Macedonian feeling and the perception of Macedonia as a “fatherland.” During the interwar period, one can already talk about different Macedonian identities, and there is both interaction and competition between them. There are also generational differences, especially typical of the younger generation that grew up in royal Yugoslavia and was educated in Belgrade and Zagreb. These people were increasingly looking at the “Macedonian people” as “one of the Yugoslav peoples.” This generation was crucial for the formation of the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Macedonian identity. And while the Bulgarian historical narrative was constructed as if the “Bulgarian people” had always existed as a self-conscious community, the historical narrative in Skopje after the Second World War was constructed as if there had always been a “Macedonian people” as a self-conscious community. There was a kind of illusion that from now on there would be Yugoslavia forever, and the Bulgarian past is completely deleted.

The existence of the so-called double identity among many figures from the past cannot be denied too. In some cases it is more pronounced, in others it is less. There are quite a few movements in both directions. These crossings must be viewed normally on both sides and no one must be declared by any side as a traitor. Here the double identity of Krste Misirkov, Dimitar Vlahov, Panko Brashnarov, Pavel Shatev, Venko Markovski, Nikola Vapcarov etc., must be accepted as part of the richness and diversity of life that unites and connects us, and not as an occasion for cursing and mutual hatred.

In fact, the formation of the Macedonian identity within Yugoslavia is more important for cultural intimacy than any other historical narrative. Initially, the suspension of the Exarchate institutions and the operation of the Serbian educational system and the Macedonian language in everyday communication stimulated the Macedonian identity at the expense of the remaining Bulgarian one. A number of achievements of modern and contemporary civilization, the population of today's Republic of North Macedonia received in the past in the Yugoslav cultural context - radio, television, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, cars, etc. To this we can add the role of catering, popular music and popular culture in general. If we add to this the prestige of Yugoslavia in the Eastern European context, combined with the low international prestige of Zhivkov's Bulgaria, with the exception of Olympic sports, the situation becomes clearer.

The fluctuation of the "Macedonian" can also be observed in Bulgaria. In general, in the correct historical official narrative, the Macedonians are part of the Bulgarian people. At the everyday level, it is possible for them to be perceived as foreigners, especially in view of the country's political assassinations in the past, in which they were actively involved, without having a different ethnic identity but a different political agenda. Too often it is possible for the same individuals who think of them as foreigners or non-Bulgarians in different situational and contextual conditions to perceive even Macedonians outside Bulgaria as Bulgarians. But while the correct

identity west of Osogovo is that the Macedonians are “one of the Yugoslav peoples,” in Bulgaria they are a centuries-old part of “the Bulgarian people.”

Narratives and identities in history textbooks

What is the current situation with history textbooks in both countries? They are written on the basis of a national and cultural background, which is hidden, but sets a philosophy that is valuable and ideologically charged. The content is based on scientific achievements mainly by national historiographies and in particular on their mainstreams. The local Bulgarian and Macedonian academic hierarchies are in fact mutually valued within their national institutional structures and encourage old nationalist narratives, as well as an outdated historiographical paradigm. The textbooks in both countries suggest, with their narratives, Bulgarian and Macedonian continuity through time and space, thanks to a selection of facts and their careful organization. Ultimately, students remain uninformed about the nature of the national narrative as an ideology or philosophy behind the curriculum. In this way, the nation of today's modern nation-state is presented as existing in the past as a socio-political or ethnic group by presenting students with primordial characteristics of the collective. At the same time, the national myths embedded in the textbook stories legitimize certain territorial claims and interests of today. Particularly frightening, is the complete discrepancy between the two narratives about the period of the Middle Ages. One can definitely talk about the presence of hate speech in Macedonian textbooks and disregard for the Macedonian community in the Bulgarian. In both places there is a tendentious presentation of the other culture and prejudices towards the other nation. There are

also many factual errors and obvious prejudices in the curriculum. Cases of conflict or murder from the past are purposefully presented in Macedonian textbooks in a way that incites hatred. On the other hand, the Bulgarian textbooks, with the persistent suggestion of “unliberated lands,” as well as shifting the main line of interpretation to the governments of Bogdan Filov (1940-1943), and ignoring the Bulgarian anti-Nazi and anti-fascist spectrum, creates preconditions for Great Bulgarian and anti-Macedonian suggestions. By and large, the multiethnic perspective seems more visible in Macedonian textbooks, not least because of the culture of the former multinational Yugoslavia, but also as a specific Macedonian consequence of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001, which governs relations and balances with the Albanian population in the country. However, the Macedonian Bulgarians, who fought in the past for an independent Macedonia, are completely absent from the story and it is suggested that all Macedonian Bulgarians were representatives of the Great Bulgarian idea and “collaborators” with the “fascist occupier.” And while in the Macedonian case the textbooks emphasize the differences with the Bulgarians and their separateness over the centuries, in the Bulgarian case, salient efforts were made to ignore any differences and specificities. In this sense, the forced centuries-old peculiarity on the one hand, opposes the long-standing unity under the name “Bulgarian people” since the 9th century, on the other.

How can one come out of the narrative of cultural conflict, of sacrifice, of superiority, as well as of the contradictions and hate-inspiring historical narratives, especially through textbooks? What can both parties of the dispute do that could recognize each other? Before that, it would have to be accepted as legitimate and normal for the history curriculum to start from the perspective of today’s realities, which are present on both sides of the border of the overwhelming majorities that form a Bulgarian nation that speaks the Bulgarian language and a Macedonian nation that speaks Macedonian. The

Bulgarian side, for example, could renounce the suggestion of the Macedonian nation as an artificial work of the Comintern and recognize the natural process of its formation. In this regard, its foundations can be traced in the Macedonian dialects used by the revivalists of the 19th century (and it should not be hidden that they were called “Bulgarian” at the time). Other foundations can also be found in the political separatism or the autonomist tradition of the revolutionaries (again, it is no secret that they had a Bulgarian or some dual identity, in which the Macedonian has a more political character). As difficult as this may be, the Macedonian side must come to terms with the reality of the Bulgarian identity of the revivalists and revolutionaries, despite their cultural particularism underlying today’s Macedonian language and political separatism or an autonomist tradition that inspires the foundation of Macedonian statehood. Thus, the first step towards a solution is to allow each side to let the other build its story in the history textbooks, according to today’s realities of state, nation and language, but without falsifying or hiding facts. Both sides must take this into account.

The second step towards a possible solution is related to the acceptance of national identity as a modern category, which came to the Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries and then the process of formation of modern nations took place. In this sense, all national identities are in some sense constructed and invented, as they bring to the minds of the citizens of the state, through its institutions, a degree of historicity that did not exist before the modern era and in traditional pre-modern and illiterate societies. In this sense, national histories, however, remain certain intellectual constructions that demonstrate only one possible way of telling history or describing the past. Last but not least, this identity has its own internal dynamics, which are situational and contextual.

The third step is related to a correct understanding of the concept of multiperspectivity in history textbooks and storytelling. As Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it: “Education means being able to look at things from the other’s point of view.” In the work of the Joint

Multidisciplinary Commission on Historical and Educational Issues so far, the Macedonian side gives the impression that through the principle of multiperspectivity it seeks to legitimize some problematic and mythological descriptions of the past by Macedonian historians from the previous decades. At the same time, it is evident that the Bulgarian side demonstrates such a conviction in the rightness of the Bulgarian narrative that it completely rejects the principle of multiperspectivity. Last but not least, the reason for this is the fact that on the basis of the concrete work of the commission it sees in the multiperspectivity an attempt to completely erase the Bulgarian heritage in Macedonia. In this case, however, the Bulgarian side fails to see that the principle of multiperspectivity goes hand in hand with requirements to follow the last word of science on a given problem or topic, as well as to avoid arbitrary interpretation of facts that irritate.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that history textbooks ought to conform to certain principles and values. Democracy, human rights, international and intercultural awareness, and the education of students in critical thinking should be leading principles. The textbooks have to promote a culture of peace and the ability to live together. Therefore, the curriculum must be accurate, balanced, without prejudice and to follow the latest advances in science, promoting mutual knowledge and understanding. The textbooks themselves should present different perspectives, whilst the national and cultural background from which they are written have to be made transparent. Factual errors, obvious prejudices and hate speech must be eliminated immediately. Emphasis needs to be placed on commonalities, not on differences that still exist. Topics on which there is disagreement may be omitted or given to the best experts who could present a parallel reading. For this purpose, it is necessary to have alternative interpretations and stories. As it has already been pointed out that it is normal for the textbooks to be written from the perspective of each of both contemporary societies, in this way a new historiographical paradigm can be reached in both places. It will

lead to the eradication of obvious hate speech and the elimination of stereotypes about the neighbor.

For this purpose, it is necessary to attract specialists who have not been involved in the writing of textbooks so far, and for whom it will not be a problem to revise their own curriculum. The discoveries of the best academic research in the world need to be included in the curriculum. That is why the achievements of experts should be presented to the general public and not left in closed academic circles. This includes changing the nature of the national narrative as an ideology or philosophy behind the overall curriculum. To this, we can add a suggestion of the dynamic, contextual and multi-layered nature of the identities themselves. Because the textbook should not hide, despite the perspective from which it is written, that the nation of today's modern nation-state did not exist in the past as a socio-political or ethnic group. The textbook should also show that the fundamental myths can legitimize certain dangerous territorial claims today. What should also be shown to the students is the illusory nature of continuity through time and space in the historical narrative, and how the past reality is filled with discontinuities and empty spots. The students have to feel that the author of the textbook is the one who creates a sense of continuity through the selection of facts and their organization. Therefore, the biased presentation of the other culture and the neighboring countries should be avoided, as well as prejudices against the other nation should be suggested and deepened.

However, based on these universal values, the curriculum must be locally relevant and meet the needs of Bulgarian and Macedonian students themselves. That is why some very specific requirements should be set for future textbooks. The students have to be able to understand why nations, that are so close to each other and have certain periods of a common and hardly distinguishable past, are already two nations with two histories, languages and cultures. I would recommend the introduction of family and family histories

that show the regularity, legitimacy and persuasiveness of both identities - Bulgarian and Macedonian - based on the same pre-modern population.

A consensus could be achieved if one took into account the accomplishments of contemporary historiography, as well as those of the contemporary social sciences and humanities. Then, the Bulgarian and Macedonian historians could agree on the following points: the dynamic nature of identities; the modern nature of nations; the artificial process of standardization of each language; the different medieval realities; the "common history" related to the fluid identities of Revival period elites and revolutionaries from Macedonia, who transitioned from a Bulgarian ethnic national identity into a separate, Macedonian one (which was formed later); the interaction of the right and the left of the IMRO with the Bulgarian army during the First World War; the gradual maturation of Macedonian identity during the interwar period; the complex and dynamic picture in Macedonia during the Second World War; the predominance of Macedonian identity during the war years; the forced homogenization of the Macedonian identity in Tito's Yugoslavia at the expense of the marginalization, suppression and "cleansing" of what was Bulgarian from the past; the movement of Bulgarian historiography towards Great Bulgarianism from the end of the 1960s onwards, which hid the cultural particularism of the Revivalists, the political separatism of the revolutionaries and the early forms of ethnic Macedonianism.

The Bulgarian historical narrative already needs a revision of the post-communist one imposed over the last three decades, which practically ignores the anti-Nazi and anti-fascist tradition of the whole Bulgarian political spectrum - from the conservative right to the left- and identifies with the government of Bogdan Filov, his actions and the government majority, excusing somehow the alliance with the Third Reich. As for the controversial topic of World War II, correctness requires the Macedonian society to present the whole complex and diverse picture - the popularity of Adolf Hitler

himself near Vardar in April 1941 as executioner of royal Yugoslavia, ending the Serbian occupation regime; for the Action committees (in which there are also quite a few Macedonian communists), which greeted the Bulgarian army in April 1941 in a friendly and flowery way, not least because of the well-known Italian appetites for Macedonia; for the inclusion of many local activists in the administration during the Bulgarian occupation, including members coming from old Ilinden families close to Nikola Karev, Pitu Guli, Gotse Delchev, etc. When you are aware of all of this, you will look at the inscriptions "Bulgarian occupation" or "Bulgarian fascist occupation" in a different way. To this must be added the murders and repression by the Yugoslav communist authorities after 1944 of a number of individuals with Macedonian-Bulgarian self-consciousness, all the more so as Bulgarian police documents show that they were suspicious of the Bulgarian authorities throughout the war because of their autonomous preferences and desires for an independent Macedonia.

The whole picture for the period 1941-1944 has to be presented to the Bulgarian public as well - how the idea of an independent Macedonia already dominates, unlike during the First World War; the fears of the Bulgarian government of the traditions of Macedonian autonomy; the gradual disappointments of the local population from the Bulgarian rule; the complete failure of the Bulgarian government to win the young Macedonian generation that grew up in royal Yugoslavia; the practical inevitability of Macedonian secession after the summer of 1944. In fact, today's Macedonian historical narrative is mostly the narrative of the generation that grew up in royal Yugoslavia, which represents the Revivalists and revolutionaries in some way from the perspective of 1950-1980- those years of the XX century.

Powerful symbolic gestures are also needed in the curriculum. For example, to simultaneously recognize Bulgaria's responsibility for and complicity in the Holocaust and the Vatasha killings, along with Tito's communist repression in Yugoslavia after the end of 1944. It

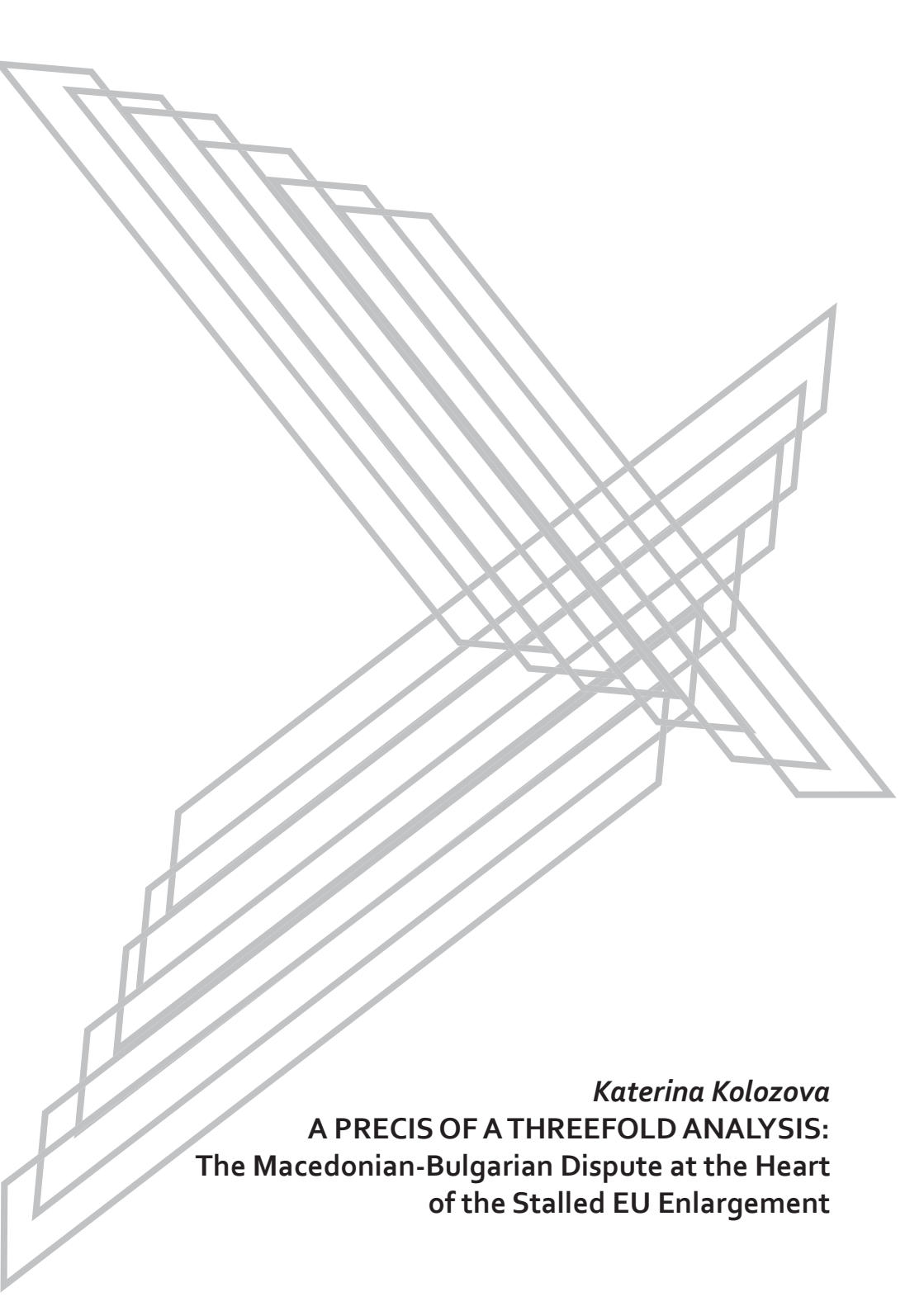
is unfair to teach the Vatasha shooting without saying that Lyuben Apostolov was captured by the Bulgarian authorities, handed over to the People's Republic of Macedonia, taken to trial and sentenced. We finally need a gesture from the Macedonian side towards the Macedonian Bulgarians who fought for an independent Macedonia and were repressed for their Bulgarophilia and Bulgarian identity, or double identity. At the same time, it is clear that not only the Macedonian Bulgarians have contributed no less than anyone else to an independent Macedonia, but among them this idea was born. Moreover, even the autonomist tradition of historical IMARO gave rise to this political thinking. And as far as the perspective of this historical story will be the idea of an independent Macedonia, it cannot but be emphasized that the Great Bulgarian project was in various cases against it - in 1912, 1915 and 1941, and only in the latter case, this differs completely from the Macedonian political project, as in the beginning there is an unstable construction and swinging between the two agendas.

Additional initiatives

The Bulgarian and Macedonian academic mainstream possesses strong commitments to conventional narratives of a unified Bulgarian history up to 1944 and a centuries long Macedonian uniqueness without any common history with Bulgarians. These kinds of notions predominate among people working in the Bulgarian and Macedonian media as well. That is why many additional initiatives will be needed in order to promote the latest scientific achievements. It will also be difficult to establish a high academic standard in textbook consulting, as local Bulgarian and Macedonian academic hierarchies in their mainstream encourage old nationalist narratives. That is why it is necessary to involve politicians and specialists in the field of education to support the process. It will be impossible to avoid the organization of special seminars aimed at people who work in the media, because in addition to the history textbooks, the mass media creates a common political culture with the historical information contained in it. It would also be good to organize teacher seminars on one side and then on both sides.

Bulgarian politics has obviously relied on the smallest number of Macedonian citizens, not covering even all Macedonian Bulgarians, justifying the importance of the problem based on the belief that holders of Bulgarian passports proving Bulgarian origin are indeed Bulgarians. It is obvious that Sofia needs to reorient itself to those with a dual identity who consider Macedonia as their homeland as well as to those who consider themselves only Macedonians but who acknowledge the facts of the common past. Moreover, in both

countries the politicians could think of possible political, legal and psychological solutions that could recognize all versions of Bulgarian, Macedonian, Bulgarian-Macedonian, and Macedonian-Bulgarian identities as legitimate and having equal status and to leave to historians, specialists in linguistics or other people from social sciences and humanities to study them in the future.



Katerina Kolozova

**A PRECIS OF A THREEFOLD ANALYSIS:
The Macedonian-Bulgarian Dispute at the Heart
of the Stalled EU Enlargement**

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 a 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 phrase, 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 the *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 word-

ing – 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

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.

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 “Coridor 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

³ “Постигнат напредок во разговорите за македонско-бугарската експертска комисија”. A10n. 11.04.2019, available at: <https://a10n.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”. A10n. 16.10.2019, available at: <https://a10n.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/sviat/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 напредок 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>

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/2suksclf>, 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/mr3kjavf9>, accessed on 29 November 2021.

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), leading 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 the *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

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.

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 standard 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).

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-55013-08000002804f5d3c.pdf>, accessed on 29 November 2021.

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-език-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 a 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

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*.

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 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 her-

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.

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>.

itage (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 the 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 debate 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

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

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 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 at 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 is-

sue, 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 the *Prespa Agreement*. Refusing to name the language by its name is a matter of disrespecting the other party’s sense of identity as the 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

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.

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 the *Prespa Agreement* signed in 2018, because it seems to imply that Bulgaria does not accept the *erga omnes* legal validity of the *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 “autochthonous” (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

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 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)].

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.

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 plane 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, it demonstrates 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 institu-

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.

tions, 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 are not 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 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 a 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 the 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:
 - 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 the *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.

