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KATERINA TODOROSKA

Institute of National History Skopje

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7276-4659>

Macedonian Domestic and International Problems (1990–2019)

Abstract

The breakdown of SFR Yugoslavia and the independence of Macedonia brought the state and the Macedonian people to a period of transitional changes. Namely, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, for the needs of the new time, declared independence at the referendum of September 8, 1991. The Macedonian citizens were asked to answer the question: “Are you for a sovereign and independent state of Macedonia, with a right to enter into any future alliance with the sovereign states of Yugoslavia?”. 75.75% of the citizens with the right to vote went to the polls, and 95.1% of the voters voted “for”. Thus, an independent sovereign Republic of Macedonia was created. From the moment of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia faced numerous temptations, both internally (within the existing until then federal state) and internationally, on the way to achieving its international establishment. For Macedonians, the transition meant the moving from a peaceful and calm everyday life, accompanied by secure jobs and wages, to a temperamental life marked by a daily struggle for survival and earnings. What was and remains the biggest flaw of the transition in Macedonia is that all the processes that started have remained somewhere in the middle. The author of the article analyzed almost three decades of the political existence of the Macedonian state, making a synthetic assessment of international regional policy and its impact on the shaping of Macedonia’s state entity in the international arena.

Keywords: political transformation, Macedonia, ethnic minorities in Macedonia, regional policy, the Balkans

The breakdown of SFR Yugoslavia and the independence of Macedonia brought the state and the Macedonian people to a period of transitional changes. Namely, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, for the needs of the new time, declared independence at the referendum of September 8, 1991. The Macedonian citizens were asked to answer the question: „Are you for a sovereign and independent state of Macedonia, with a right to enter into any future alliance with the sovereign states of Yugoslavia?”. 75.75% of the citizens



with the right to vote went to the polls, and 95.1% of the voters voted “for”. Thus, an independent sovereign Republic of Macedonia was created¹.

With that, the Republic of Macedonia has emerged as a new entity in international relations. Its appearance and existence changed the geopolitical relations in the Balkans until then and became a new element in the distribution of forces in the region.

From the moment of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia faced numerous temptations, both internally (within the existing until then federal state) and internationally, on the way to achieving its international establishment.

Wanting to annul the neighbors’ efforts to portray the new state as a factor of instability in the Balkans and an aspirant to parts inhabited with the Macedonian minority in the neighboring countries², on January 6, 1992, “The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia has adopted a decision declaring two amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which are related to Article 3 and Article 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, emphasizing that the Republic of Macedonia has no territorial pretensions to neighboring countries, that the border of the Republic of Macedonia can be changed only in accordance with the Constitution and that the Republic will not interfere in the sovereign rights of other states...³”.

For Macedonians, the transition meant the moving from a peaceful and calm everyday life, accompanied by secure jobs and wages, to a temperamental life marked by a daily struggle for survival and earnings. What was and remains the biggest flaw of the transition in Macedonia is that all the processes that started have remained somewhere in the middle. The process of denationalization of the properties of the Macedonian citizens started, but it was neither implemented according to the adopted Law on Denationalization, nor completed; then the process of privatization of the social enterprises began with a lot of noise, and resulted in an army of fired workers who did not know how to cope with the new conditions created. And so, everything began with the healing of some wounds, which were then left untreated completely, while new ones – deeper and more painful – were being opened.

Internationally, the Macedonian state had been facing numerous obstacles, due to which on April 9, 1993, it was admitted as the 181st member to the United Nations as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and not under its constitutional name⁴.

Bulgaria was the first country to recognize the independence of the Republic of Macedonia on January 15, 1992. However, it did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian people and the Macedonian language. This way, Bulgaria continued its long-standing policy of denying Macedonian history and culture.

¹ The Republic of Macedonia is located in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, with a total area of 25,713 km², which constitutes 38.6% of Macedonia, a geographical region in the Balkans.

² After the end of the Balkan Wars (1912–13), the division of Macedonia was formalized with the Bucharest Agreement of August 10, 1913. World War I did not bring anything new to the status of the Macedonian territory, because only with minor territorial adjustments, at the expense of Bulgaria in favor of Serbia, did the Paris Peace Conference (1919) sanction the provisions of the Bucharest Agreement. Thus, officially, the largest part of Macedonia, 35,169 km², fell to Greece, 25,713 km² to the Kingdom of SHS, and 6,798 km² to Bulgaria.

³ Spase Mircheski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia (chronology 1990–1997)*, Skopje 1998, p. 37.

⁴ Zeqirija Rexhepi, *Socio-political Events of Albanians in Macedonia 1991–2001*, Tetovo 2007, p. 7.

On April 8, 1996, the Republic of Macedonia was also recognized by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, when diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. Macedonia's northern neighbor has not officially recognized the Macedonian Orthodox Church's autocephaly. With that, the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which considered that the Macedonian Orthodox Church should be only a part of it, was renewed.

On April 26, 1993, the Republic of Albania recognized Macedonia's independence, but under the reference to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In the next period, the Macedonian state signed numerous bilateral agreements with the neighboring countries in the field of economic, cultural, and educational cooperation.

In those sensitive years, the Macedonian state underwent major internal turbulences, which were primarily caused by some radicals who appeared on the political scene.

In Macedonia, the Albanian population had the right to receive complete education at all levels in their native Albanian language. As for the political engagement of the Albanian population in R. Macedonia, the People's Democratic Party led by President Iljaz Halimi was registered in January 1990⁵. Then, numerous parties of Albanians in Macedonia were being registered with a purely ethnic character⁶, while several of them were with a openly focus on the destruction of the Macedonian state. The Albanian population in R. Macedonia could be culturally elevated by attending theatrical and other cultural events in the premises of the Albanian Drama in the Theater of Nationalities in Skopje. Despite such facts, on January 10 and 11, 1992, the Albanians in R. Macedonia held a "referendum" on political and territorial autonomy⁷, while in Struga, on April 3, 1992, the branch of the Party for Democratic Prosperity organized a protest rally at which, among other things, the formation of the so-called autonomous republic "Ilirida"⁸, was announced.

In early 2001, the Macedonian state faced another domestic problem in relation to the Albanian population, when an armed conflict began between the National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian army and police. The reason for the armed conflict was that the Albanians in Macedonia claimed not to have enjoyed basic human rights, which was far from the truth. However, the military action aroused great interest among the international community and thus gained an international character. The armed conflict, like all other wars, was resolved on August 13, 2001 by signing the so-called "Framework Agreement" in Skopje, in the presence of "European facilitators. Then, to establish „European peace" in Macedonia, this agreement was extended in the desired direction and to the required length. The years to follow were devoted to the implementation of the Framework Agreement in Macedonia to improve and calm coexistence between the Macedonian and Albanian populations. Bilateral relations between Macedonia and Albania were formalized on a number of questions related to the bilateral issues.

⁵ Spase Mircheski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 11.

⁶ On April 15, 1990, the Party for Democratic Prosperity was founded in Tetovo, and Nevzat Halili was elected the first president. On August 1, 1991. The Party for Democratic Action – Islamic Road in Tetovo was registered, and Kenan Mazlimi was appointed the first president. Spase Mircheski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia...*, pp. 13–29.

⁷ Spase Mircheski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 37.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

Unlike the Albanian population in Macedonia, who enjoyed the aforementioned rights, Macedonians in Albania have been treated as Albanians. They did not have the right to express their ethnicity even during the 2000 census, when Albania had already entered the period of transition and democratization of the society. Such a behavior of an official state towards a minority was unclear, because the Macedonians concentrated in Mala Prespa had the right to study primary education in the Macedonian language. In Mala Prespa, Macedonian children also learnt the Macedonian language as a native language two hours per week in the first two years of secondary education⁹. With the formation of the only Macedonian party, the need of the Macedonian population for independent participation in the legal parliamentary elections in the Republic of Albania was supposed to have been met. It is illusory to speak about cultural institutions that would nurture and practice the culture of the Macedonian language. Unfortunately, only from time to time is there a public gathering held in support of the Macedonians in neighboring countries¹⁰. The dissatisfaction with the treatment of Macedonians is rarely publicly expressed before the international institutions¹¹, and only occasionally do some institutions or labor organizations or NGOs from the Republic of Macedonia dare to visit Macedonians in Albania or donate textbooks and other literature in the Macedonian language.

In the Bulgarian state, there is a traditional opinion about the Bulgarian character of the Macedonian people and language, and today, opinions on this issue are divided among the Bulgarian population. Among the younger generations, there are currents when it comes to Macedonian national sovereignty. In a word, there are differences. They range from accepting the reality, that is, the existence of the Macedonian national sovereignty, language, history, and culture in the Republic of Macedonia, to the complete denial of that reality. Therefore, the Bulgarian academic “elite” stand firm on the Bulgarian roots of the Macedonian people and state. The same applies to the highest representatives of the Bulgarian state and political life. Starting from the time of Todor Zhivkov onwards, regardless of the ideological and political differences, when it comes to the relationship with the Macedonian national sovereignty, there is complete unity¹².

When searching for modern reasons for such a firm attitude to Bulgarian politics and journalism, a very pragmatic answer arises. That is the fear for the future of the Pirin part of Macedonia; fear of the survival, development, and consolidation of the national consciousness in that part of Macedonia.

Despite the brutality that the Macedonians faced in Bulgaria, in the years following the 1948 IB Resolution until the late 1980s, due to its “excesses” to seek national rights, the Macedonian national minority in Pirin Macedonia felt a stronger need of its own promotion and, finally, the acquisition of basic human rights in the country in which they lived. Such an urge was the reason for establishing the Independent Association – Macedonian

⁹ In Albania, Macedonians were engaged in four associations, while the political party was registered in 2005, after fifteen years of democracy in Albania.

¹⁰ Spase Mircheski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 12.

¹¹ On June 22, 1990, in Copenhagen, at the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, the Yugoslav delegation submitted a Memorandum on the position of the Macedonian national minority in Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. Spase Mirceski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia (chronology 1990–1997)*, Skopje 1998, p. 14.

¹² Ivan Katardjiev, *Macedonia and its Neighbors: Past, Present, Future*, Skopje 2001, pp. 31–40.

organization “Ilinden (VMRO – Independent)” in Sofia on November 14, 1989. Immediately afterwards, the anti-Macedonian sentiments in Bulgaria flared up. As a result, on November 27, 1989, a rally was held demanding the unification of the whole of Macedonia to Bulgaria and uniting the Bulgarian brothers from Macedonia and Serbia with Mother Bulgaria. The Great Bulgarian positions were especially emphasized on November 27, 1989, by the establishment of the Association of Macedonian Cultural and Educational Societies in Bulgaria, whose president was Dimitar Gocev. This Association, on February 22, 1990, divulged the renewal of the newspaper “Macedonia”, which according to the announcements should have dealt with the problems of Bulgarians in the diaspora and in Macedonia, in order for them to learn the truth about their historical and cultural roots¹³. In response to the aggressive anti-Macedonian policy in Bulgaria, numerous associations of the Macedonian population began to be established. On April 14, 1990, in Sandanski, a unifying meeting was held of representatives of “Ilinden VMRO-independent” from Blagoevgrad, KPD “Jane Sandanski” from the village Mikrevo, the Committee of Repressed Macedonians from Bulgaria, the Committee for Protection of Macedonian Rights in Bulgaria, and the “Independent Democratic Union” from Blagoevgrad, Simitli, Krupnik, Bansko, and others. The epilogue of the meeting was the creation of the United Organization OMO “Ilinden”¹⁴. It was also joined by the independent association “VMRO Ilinden” from Sofia. After preparing the necessary documentation, on May 14, 1990, the request for registration of OMO “Ilinden” was submitted to the District Court in Blagoevgrad. Attached to the request were the Statute and the Program of the Organization, in which the organizers referred to the applicable regulations in Bulgaria and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although OMO Ilinden activists believed in the seriousness of Bulgaria’s signature on the UN Declaration, they still took a cold shower the same day the National Constitution Protection Service accused the organization of opposing Bulgaria’s territorial integrity and the unity of the nation. Based on the submitted documentation, the National Service came to the conclusion that “OMO’s activity is unconstitutional, separatist and anti-Bulgarian, in order to ‘establish a new independent Macedonian state within the ethnic borders of Pirin, Aegean and Vardar Macedonia’, which means secession of Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria”¹⁵. Attacks on OMO Ilinden members and activists have been intensified. Due to the tension created, on June 6, 1990, the district court in Blagoevgrad, at a session held behind closed doors, rejected the OMO “Ilinden”’s request for registration according to Bulgarian legal norms¹⁶. Irritated by this decision, the activists of the Organization declared the so-called “relay strike” with hunger. However, their action was severely punished by the police, and the strikers were even asked to cooperate with the Bulgarian state security services. This attitude of the state authorities towards the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria provoked the members and supporters of OMO “Ilinden” to declare a boycott of the first multi-party elections held in Bulgaria on June 10, 1990, voting

¹³ Ahil Tuntev, *Republic of Macedonia, First Decade (1990–1999)*, Skopje 2005, pp. 424–425.

¹⁴ One of the founders of OMO “Ilinden” was Sokrat Markilov (born April 12, 1921, village of Butkovo, Aegean Macedonia – died August 4, 1993, Banja Bansko, Strumica), who spent many years of his life in camps and prisons because of his activities for the rights of Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia.

¹⁵ Ahil Tuntev, *Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 426.

¹⁶ An appeal was lodged against this decision to the Supreme Court in Sofia, but on November 14, 1990, this court upheld the decision of the Blagoevgrad Court.

with “white ballots”. On the other hand, the Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia became more and more engaged in the Organization, and in the middle of June 1990, they numbered about 40,000, with the largest numbers in Blagoevgrad, Simitli, Sandanski, and Petrich. It all contributed to the holding of the First Congress of OMO “Ilinden” on August 2, 1990, in the village Oshtava, near Kresna, with the participation of 103 delegates and heads of local and city organizations, as well as representatives of “Ilinden-VMRO” from Sofia. Although informed in a timely manner, Bulgarian police violently disrupted the congress, confiscated work materials, and detained the organizers. In response to the brutal Bulgarian policy, after the ban of OMO “Ilinden” in Blagoevgrad, in November and December 1990, an independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights was established.

At the same time, numerous organizations with the name of VMRO began to appear in Bulgaria¹⁷.

The activities of the Macedonians from Pirin Macedonia did not subside. On the contrary, on April 3, 1991, the Secretary of the Coordinating Board of OMO “Ilinden” Jordan Berbatov visited the President of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, Stojan Andov, and asked for the Macedonian politics to work to acquaint the world public with the problems of the Organization and the position of the Macedonians in Bulgaria.

On April 19, 1991, Budimir Loncar, Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the SFRY, accompanied by the Macedonian Minister Denko Maleski, paid an official visit to Bulgaria. A visit with representatives of the Macedonian national minority also took place. After the meeting, Loncar said that “the current unsatisfactory position of Macedonians in Bulgaria has a prospect of improvement. On the contrary, Bulgarian Minister Viktor Volkov reiterated the official views that there is no Macedonian national minority in Pirin Macedonia”¹⁸. This statement came at a time when a second attempt was being made to mark the anniversary of the death of Jane Sandanski. Then, the Bulgarian authorities used large police forces to prevent the Macedonians from holding the scheduled gathering at the Rozhen Monastery on Jane’s grave. Due to that, the Macedonians headed to Melnik to lay fresh flowers at the monument of Sandanski. On that occasion, the members of OMO “Ilinden” disclosed the Declaration and Appeal to the UN, EC, and KEBS for protection of the rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria. Having no effect, the constant engagement of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria for the realization of the basic human rights in the country in which they live, the activists of OMO “Ilinden” in the second half of 1991, gained momentum internationally.

When Macedonia got independence, Bulgaria recognized the independence of the Macedonian state. A statement was divulged, about which the first Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov wrote: “The Bulgarian government very wisely made its statement, saying that it recognizes the realities and avoids to say whose is this state of Macedonia, that it is a state of the Macedonian people, and not of a population living here”¹⁹. However, the

¹⁷ On December 14–15, 1990, the First Congress of VMRO SMD was held in Sofia. Namely, the former Union of Macedonian Cultural and Educational Associations has been renamed the “socio-political organization” called VMRO SMD. Prof. Dimitar Gocev was elected President of the Organization.

Then, in late December 1990 and early 1991, another VMRO organization led by President Hristofor Tzavela appeared in Sofia.

¹⁸ Ahil Tuntev, *Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 430.

¹⁹ Kiro Gligorov, *Macedonia is everything we have*, Skopje 2000, p. 408.

“Great Bulgarian” unfulfilled dream was the reason for the Bulgarian recognition of the state, followed by the remark that the Macedonian people and language are not recognized, because they were “Bulgarian”. Nevertheless, numerous agreements on bilateral co-operation between the Bulgarian and Macedonian states were signed, which was not easy at all. Namely, on April 13, 1994, talks were held on bilateral cooperation in education and science. The Bulgarian Minister of Education, Marko Todorov, refused to sign the Agreement on Cooperation in Science, Education and Culture because, according to him, the clause that the document would be signed in both Macedonian and Bulgarian was inadmissible. Two days later, he said in Sofia that the document could not be signed because “the Macedonian language does not exist”²⁰. In fact, by this, the beginning of the so-called language dispute was publicly divulged. This dispute also caused obstruction during the visit of President Kiro Gligorov to the Republic of Bulgaria on April 25, 1994, when the previously agreed agreements were not signed. In the working part of the visit, Gligorov had the opportunity to speak in front of the Bulgarian Parliament, where he pledged “to accept history as a lesson, to make the most of our own and other people’s experience for the good of the free man, his own people, with awareness and responsibility that the world today is more deeply connected than ever”²¹.

In the meantime, the Macedonians from Bulgaria also worked in favor of recognizing the independence of the Macedonian state. Namely, at the beginning of April 1992, OMO “Ilinden” from Blagoevgrad appealed to the EC and other organizations for the immediate recognition of the Republic of Macedonia as an independent and sovereign state, in order to ensure democratic development in the Balkans. At a meeting of foreign ministers of the European Union (EU) member states in Luxembourg on April 6, 1992, it was assessed that the chances of recognizing Macedonia were higher than before, but the recognition did not happen.

Not succumbing to injustice and pressure, the Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia continued their activities. Thus, after a long period of preparation and collection of documentation, on September 23, 1992, the organization “Traditional Macedonian organization VMRO, independent, Ilinden” was registered in Sofia under the leadership of Gjorgji Solunski. In addition to the activities for preservation and popularization of the Macedonian core, tradition, and culture, it was also planned to publish a newspaper entitled “Independent Macedonia” and the magazine “Ilinden”²².

A special challenge for the work of the Macedonians in Bulgaria was the scheduled census from 4 to 14 December 1992. Wanting to react in a timely manner to the injustices against the Macedonians by the Bulgarian government, on December 1, 1992, OMO “Ilinden” sent a protest to the CSCE stating that it was an opportunity for the people of Bulgaria to declare themselves as Bulgarians, Turks, Gypsies, Tatars, Jews, Armenians, Casabals, Circassians, Gagauzis, and others, but did not mention Macedonians and mother tongue – Macedonian. Regardless of everything, the Bulgarian government used pressure and intimidation during the census for Macedonians to declare themselves as Bulgarians.

²⁰ Ahil Tuntev, *Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 133.

²¹ Kiro Gligorov, *Macedonia is everything we have...*, p. 413.

²² However, in April 1993, the registration of this Organization by the Supreme Court of Bulgaria was suspended due to the participation of Solunski and its supporters in the celebration of the Rozhen manifestations.

Unprecedented propaganda was used to impose on them the thought that Bulgaria was a one-nation state. Quite shyly, on Bulgarian television, it was announced that 30% of the population in the Sandanski and Petrich areas had declared themselves Macedonians.

At the same time, Macedonian diplomacy was trying to find the most painless way for its international affirmation, due to which on November 25, 1992, the Consulate General of the Republic of Macedonia was opened in Sofia. It was the first step towards establishing full diplomatic relations between the two countries and opening an embassy of the Republic of Macedonia in Sofia, which took place on December 20, 1992. The exchange of notes on the establishment of diplomatic relations took place two days later²³.

Unfortunately, all the efforts of the Macedonians in Bulgaria (undertaken independently or through the representatives of the Macedonian diplomacy in Bulgaria) to get support or protection from the important international organizations for the protection of human rights have remained completely ineffective. Due to the “deafness of the democrats from Europe”, the leader of OMO “Ilinden”, Jordan Konstantinov, on March 10, 1994, held a press conference in Sofia and demanded the status of an autonomous region for Pirin Macedonia. “He condemned the Bulgarian authorities for genocide against Macedonians, who are being assimilated by the fact that the Macedonian language is not recognized and by physical and moral violence. He demanded the introduction of the mother tongue in schools and Macedonian nationality in the passports.”²⁴ The Bulgarian government reacted strongly to the statements and activities of the members and supporters of OMO “Ilinden”, and the police, well-informed by the long-eared and petty, intervened at every gathering of the Macedonians.

Since the independence of R. Macedonia to this day, the negative attitude of the Bulgarian policy towards the Macedonian sovereignty is constantly present. In other words, a negative attitude towards the Macedonian national identity, language, and culture has been present in Bulgarian political doctrine for more than 130 years. It reflects a recognition that accepting the existence of the Macedonian language, different from the Bulgarian, will automatically mean recognition of the existence of the Macedonian nation in Macedonia, separate from the Bulgarians. The theory is especially synthetically explained by Ivan Mihajlov’s VMRO between the two wars, consistently implemented after the Second World War.

For more than thirty years, during Zhivkov’s his tenure, representatives of the Bulgarian state in contacts with Macedonian and Yugoslav representatives will demand for Macedonia not to stand up for the Macedonian minority in the Pirin part of Macedonia and its national rights²⁵. Such a policy, according to Bulgarian politicians, should have continued until today in R. Macedonia.

Almost simultaneously with the tantalean struggle of the Macedonian patriots in Bulgaria, after long diplomatic negotiations, on February 10, 1999, an agreement was reached in Sofia to overcome the language dispute between R. Macedonia and R. Bulgaria. The Declaration of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria was signed on February 22, 1999 by the Macedonian Prime Minister,

²³ Spase Mircheski, *Almanac of the Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 72.

²⁴ Ahil Tuntev, *Republic of Macedonia...*, p. 435.

²⁵ Ivan Katardjiev, *Macedonia and its neighbors*, pp. 31–40.

Ljupco Georgievski, and the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Ivan Kostov. The declaration was signed in Bulgarian, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, and in Macedonian, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. However, the Declaration provoked a torrent of reactions and interpretations about Art. 11²⁶ of its content. The members of the organizations of the Macedonian minority in Pirin Macedonia reacted most strongly, considering that the indicated article meant resignation by the home country of its minority in neighboring Bulgaria. One of the biggest fighters for the basic rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria, Jordan Kostadinov-Ivanov, said after the announcement of the draft declaration, but before it was signed: “We do not believe that any Macedonian government, or at least the current one, with the mentioned Declaration, or any other document, will be able to renounce the Macedonians in the neighboring countries and betray the Macedonian national interests...”²⁷.

The activity of the Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia has continued in the following years.

However, the activities of the Bulgarian political elite, along with the denial of the Macedonian state in terms of the Macedonian language and history did not stop. On the contrary, they gained even more momentum after Bulgaria became a member of the European Union in 2007. From then until today, Bulgarian politicians have not missed the opportunity to “divulge the Bulgarian character” of the Macedonian language and Macedonian history. Despite the existence of a bilateral document on good neighborliness since 1999, for reasons unknown to the Macedonian people, on August 1, 2017, an agreement on good neighborliness, friendship, and cooperation²⁸ was signed, which provoked numerous negative reactions from the Macedonian public. The agreement envisages the establishment of a joint Commission for educational and historical issues, which should “find” the so-called joint historical events and personalities, and thus ensure “joint celebration of common history”. In that way, vampirization of the centuries-old spirit of San Stefano Bulgaria began in the conditions of the so-called European democracy in the 21st century.

As for the relations of Macedonia with its northern neighbor, apart from the problems with the Macedonian Orthodox Church, in the period from independence until today, only occasionally have political disagreements appeared.

The Macedonian population in Serbia is an officially recognized minority. According to the 2002 census, 25,847 Macedonians lived in Serbia, 14,062 of them in Central Serbia and 11,785 in Vojvodina. The highest concentrations of Macedonians were in Plandishte,

²⁶ Declaration of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria: “11. Both parties will not take, encourage and support one against the other actions that have hostile character.

Neither party will allow its territory to be used against the other by organizations and groups aimed at carrying out subversive and separatist actions or actions aimed at endangering the peace and security of the other country....

.... Both parties will take effective measures to prevent ill-intentioned propaganda by institutions and agencies and will not allow the activities of private individuals aimed at inciting violence, hatred and other similar actions that would harm the relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic. Bulgaria.”

²⁷ “Nova Makedonija” February 19, 1999.

²⁸ <https://akademik.mk/potpisan-dogovorot-za-dobrososedstvo-prijatelstvo-i-sorabotka-megju-makedonija-i-bugarija/> (access 12. 06. 2024)

Jabuka, Glogonj, and Kacharevo, where they represented 10–32% of the total population. If we consider that the Gorani are also part of the Macedonian people, then according to the 2002 census, 4,581 Gorani lived in Serbia (excluding Kosovo and Metohija). It is estimated that there are over 60,000 Gorani. Formed in Serbia, the Democratic Party of Macedonians included Mile Spirovski, who in 2012 became the first Macedonian a member of the Serbian Parliament. He is also a member of the Association of Macedonian Fine Arts Artists in Serbia. On January 19, 2016, a founding assembly was held in Belgrade to form the new Party of Macedonians in Serbia. Goran Ilijevski was elected president of the party, while Ana Sinicki, Daniela Cvetanovikj, and Slave Gruevski were appointed vice presidents. Biljana Miloshevski was elected secretary of the party²⁹. Activities of the Macedonians in the Republic of Serbia are numerous and aimed at preserving the Macedonian tradition, history, and culture.

Since its independence, the Macedonian state has had the biggest obstructions with its southern neighbor, Greece. For many years, from 1913 onwards, a part of the Macedonian territory inhabited by the Macedonian population has been part of the Greek territory. The Greek state, wanting to assimilate and denationalize that population and portray Greece as an ethnically pure state inhabited only by Greeks, took draconian measures against the Macedonians. When the break-up of the Yugoslav federation and the independence of Macedonia as a state was in sight, a Ministry of Northern Greece and Thrace was set up as a “preventive” measure in Greece, because Macedonia was not allowed to be mentioned. For decades, the first man of the Ministry, Papatemelis, has been conscientiously pushing the agenda of punishing anyone who speaks Macedonian or sings Macedonian songs. At that time, the first red lights in Greek politics were lit, and it started to mark the renaming of the mentioned Ministry of Northern Greece and Thrace to the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace (later Thrace was removed from the name). Then, for the first time in Greek modern history, the desire of the Hellenes (Ellines) or Greeks to become Macedonians arose.

The independence of the Macedonian state was received with great disapproval in the Greek society, and Macedonian self-will was also supported by the international community. Just because of this, Macedonia had to change its new flag with the 16-pointed sun from Kutlesh, accept the humiliation of renaming itself the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in order to join the United Nations, and change the Constitution to specify that it will not take care of the Macedonians in the neighborhood. In fact, Greece was disturbed by the historical truth that the Macedonians on its territory are a native Macedonian population. Just because of that, during the “Greekization” of Aegean Macedonia, many Macedonians, living now around the world, were expelled, and according to all international documents, they were entitled to their property in “democratic” Greece. However, the Greek “democrats” did not stop there. In every way and on every occasion, they tried to stop the Macedonian state in its efforts to become a member of international organizations³⁰. After using all the other trump cards, Greece used the name of the state of the Republic of Macedonia for its extremely undemocratic methods of regression of the Euro-

²⁹ <https://meta.mk/nova-partija-na-makedontsite-vo-srbija/>

³⁰ For the role of Greece in stopping the Macedonian state in its international establishment, see more in Kiro Gligorov, *Macedonia is everything we have....*, p. 432.

pean path and for humiliation of the Macedonian state and the Macedonian people. In this regard, the Greek state stopped Macedonia's entry into the NATO alliance in 2008 by putting a veto on its accession proposal.

In order to exercise its internationally guaranteed rights, and based on the Interim Accord between Macedonia and Greece, the Macedonian party has filed a lawsuit against Greece before the International Court of Justice in The Hague. On November 22, 2011, the International Court ruled that Greece had violated the Interim Accord. The judges at the tribunal ruled that Macedonia's lawsuit against its southern neighbor was justified. However, that has changed nothing in the attitude of Greek politicians towards either the Macedonian state or the Macedonian minority on its territory. On the contrary.

Under the threats and blackmails of the Greek "democracy", the Macedonian party gave in and on June 17, 2018 signed the "Final Agreement on Resolving the Differences Described in Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993) of the United Nations Security Council to cease the validity of the 1995 Interim Accord and for establishing a strategic partnership between the parties." It is an agreement known to the public as the "Prespa Agreement", under which Greece exercised its "democratic" rights to rename the Macedonian state. Thus, Macedonia again received a pejorative name and became the only country in the world with a geographical designation in the official name. The Macedonian people, in a referendum held on September 30, 2018, for (non) acceptance of the so-called "Prespa Agreement" rejected the agreement. However, this was not an obstacle for the Parliament and the Government of Macedonia to declare the referendum, declared by the Macedonian people "consultative" and without any significance for their opinion.

As for the Macedonians in Greece, who considered themselves living in a democratic state and should have basic human rights according to international documents, in 1994, they formed the Rainbow Party, a political party of Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia. The Rainbow does not consider itself a separatist party, an allegation made by the Greek government. The party's headquarters are in the town of Florina. The Rainbow is a member of the European Free Alliance. The party and its activists have been convicted, and their party offices have been set on fire and robbed. They are under constant attack and pressure from the Greek media.

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the Greek government is guilty of violating the European Convention on Human Rights over a political party. The court ordered the Greek government to pay the party compensation in the amount of €35,000, which the Rainbow used to reissue the Elementary Education Textbook (Alphabet), in Macedonian language, created and published by the Greek government in 1925, under pressure from the League of Nations, which was successfully presented in Thessaloniki and Athens at the end of 2006, with the great support of the Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia and a large number of Greek intellectuals³¹.

In such a "good neighborly" environment, the Macedonian state continues to exist, prove itself before international institutions, and fight for a dignified entry into the European family.

³¹ [https://mk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BE_\(%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B0_%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0\)](https://mk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BE_(%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B0_%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0))

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