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**THE CONFLICTS OF IDENTITY:  
NATIONALISM IN POST-YUGOSLAVIAN MACEDONIA**

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## **Abstract**

This article looks at the challenges faced by Macedonia in creating a national identity since independence. After briefly reviewing the region's history since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the revolt for independence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the interwar period when it was part of Serbia, and the Yugoslav era when Macedonia first attained a separate political existence, the article addresses the challenges the Slav Macedonians faced in creating an identity for the new state. Some of those challenges came from Serbia and Bulgaria, which claimed that the Macedonian Slavs were actually part of their respective nations, and from Greece, which objected to the symbols and the name they had adopted. The greatest resistance inside Macedonia to an exclusively Slavic national identity, however, came from the Albanian community, located mainly in the eastern reaches of the country and in Skopje. An unwillingness to share power or to make concessions by the Slav nationalists eventually resulted in armed insurrection by the Albanians in 2001. Though the Ohrid Accords signed the same year ended the fighting, tension between the two communities has continued on and off until the present, despite some examples of peaceful coexistence.

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# *Central and Eastern European Review*

## **The Conflicts of Identity: Nationalism in Post-Yugoslavian Macedonia**

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In 1991 the two great communist empires that had dominated Eastern Europe suddenly and unexpectedly disintegrated; the Soviet Union into fifteen independent states and Yugoslavia into six states which had formerly been its constituent republics.<sup>1</sup> Long suppressed, and sometimes new, nationalist sentiments rose to the fore in each state to varying degrees as it was suddenly and unexpectedly faced with new existential realities. The new states perforce began trying to establish, or re-establish, identities and histories for themselves. Among the many tasks they set about were the creation of national identities, national histories, and the creation of national symbols.<sup>2</sup> Greatly complicating those attempts to create new national identities within borders was the distribution of various ethnic and religious communities throughout the peninsula and within the borders of each new state.<sup>3</sup> One of those new nations was the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the break-up of the Soviet Union see David Remnik's *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Vintage, 1994). On that of Yugoslavia see Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had existed as large entities before that. The Soviet Union was the embodiment of the Czarist Russian Empire and the Yugoslav Republic was that of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia that had existed between WWI and WWII. Both of them had consisted of numerous administrative divisions, usually constructed along ethnic lines. The communist authorities in the conservative and traditional Moslem Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirgizstan were strongly opposed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. See Hedrick Smith, *The New Russians* (New York: Random House, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Those break-ups coincided with a surge in nationalist sentiments, feelings that had been suppressed for the most part since WWII. Yet, the new nations were oftentimes plagued by tensions within their borders because of their different ethnic communities.

<sup>4</sup> For a general history of Macedonia written during the Yugoslav period see, Stoyar Pribichevich, *Macedonia: Its People and History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1982).

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The challenges that faced Macedonia in creating a national identity were somewhat different from those confronting the other Yugoslav republics. They came from both within and without. Inside the country the challenge came from the diverse ethnic and religious components of the country's population. From without, there were the claims that the surrounding countries had on Macedonia's people and heritage.<sup>5</sup> Macedonia had certain qualities that distinguished it from the other Balkan states. Henry Wilkinson observed that when he said:

Macedonia defies definition for a number of reasons.... History no more sets its seal upon the boundaries of Macedonia than does physical geography.... This region is distinctive not on account of any physical unity or common political experiences but rather on account of the complexity of the ethnic structure of its population<sup>6</sup>

The dominant Slav community hoped to create a national state based on its culture. But that was strongly challenged by the neighboring states of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, as well as the ethnic minorities within Macedonia's borders, and particularly the largest of those, the Albanians.<sup>7</sup>

The history of modern Macedonia, as opposed to the ancient period, began in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD with the migration of Slavic tribes into the region and their assimilation of the native peoples. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century Cyril and Methodius preached Christianity to the Slavs, thus initiating their conversion. They also created an alphabet based on the Greek that became the

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<sup>5</sup> Soviet Central Asia was another region where former republics—predominantly Moslem, but oftentimes with sizeable Russian populations—became independent and had to create new histories and identities for themselves. Though no open conflict occurred—as it did between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus—tensions did arise, and continue to exist today. For example, the former republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan continue to have a variety of conflicts over the members of their respective ethnic groups that live in the territory of the other state (the boundaries were drawn up in the 1920s and left large minorities of each inside the other's territories). During the Czarist period Russian Central Asia was called Turkestan and those ethnic conflicts did not exist, at least in the same, nationalist, way; on the issue of ethnicity in the Middle East, see A.H. Hourani, "Race, Religion and the Nation State in the Near East," in *A Vision of History* (Beirut: Khayats, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> Henry R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: University Press, 1951), pp. 56–7.

<sup>7</sup> On the Albanians and the Macedonian Slavs see, Duncan Perry, "Conflicting Ambitions and Shared Fates: The Past, Present, and Future of Albanians and Macedonians," in Victor Roudometof, ed., *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2000), pp. 259–299.

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basis for the Slavic languages. That same era also marked the initiation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.<sup>8</sup> The first Macedonian archbishopric was founded at Ohrid and became the center of “Slavic culture in the Balkans.”<sup>9</sup>

The Balkans had been a major crossroads since ancient times, and its ethnic complexity reflected that. “Claims on Macedonian blood and soil are legion,” as Robert Kaplan observed.<sup>10</sup> The various groups that inhabited the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century included Slavic-speaking Christians, Greek-speaking Christians, Turkish-speaking Moslems, Albanian-speaking Moslems, Vlachs, Jews, and Gypsies, but there was disagreement on the specifics of each group.<sup>11</sup> At the turn of the century the ethnicity of the majority of the population in the “core territories” of Macedonia were still uncertain and had become “the main bone of contention” in the “Question.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, it was the diversity of Macedonia’s population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that brought about the coining of the word *Macédoine* in French, which means “a salad of mixed fruits and vegetables.”<sup>13</sup> There were other neighbors that made claims upon Macedonia and its

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<sup>8</sup> The Macedonian Orthodox Church was one of several nationalist churches to arise in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Others were the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Rumanian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>9</sup> Loring. M. Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 49; “In the Balkans,” Kaplan cogently remarked, “history is not viewed as tracing a chronological progression, as it is in the West. Instead, history jumps around and moves in circles; and where history is perceived in such a way, myths take root.” Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Kaplan, p. 57; Kaplan also draws a parallel between the clash of cultures, ethnicities, and religions in the Balkans and the region’s geography when he states, “and “The tectonic plates of Africa, Asia, and Europe collide and overlap here, synthesizing the earth’s most diverse landscape....” *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Wilkinson, p. 57; In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman territories of Thessaloniki, Bitola (Monastir), and Kosovo had Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Serb, Turk, Vlach, Gypsy, and Jewish ethnic groups. Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 297.

<sup>12</sup> Hupchick, p. 297.

<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson, p. 57; Kaplan, p. 57; Many of the authors use this analogy of a salad to describe the ethnic make-up of Macedonia. Hupchick does so rather differently. He says that the literary Macedonian language that was developed after WWII to distinguish it from Bulgarian was “a veritable linguistic hodgepodge approaching the French meaning of *macedoine* when referring to a mixed salad.” He goes on to say that “...the highly artificial Macedonian literary language provided the Communist-mandated ethnic validity for an independent Macedonian nationality.” Hupchick, pp. 430, 431.

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people besides the Serbs. Until the 1880s, the struggle over Macedonia was basically one between “Bulgarism” and “Hellenism.”<sup>14</sup>

That was the beginning of the so-called problem of the Balkans and that of Macedonia, of which it was a part. The dilemma that faced the states of Europe with the “Macedonian Question” was how to divide the territory among the three neighboring states of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece.<sup>15</sup> That challenge, or “question” as it was normally phrased, had its origins in the Congress of Berlin in 1878. As Kaplan points out “the ‘Eastern Question’ that finally boiled over in 1914 was largely an early packaging of the ‘Macedonian Question,’ ...”<sup>16</sup> It had wide-ranging consequences that went far beyond the region itself. Kaplan goes on to state that, “Macedonia was to become the original seedground not only of modern warfare and political conflict, but of modern terrorism and clerical fanaticism as well.”<sup>17</sup>

Like many other places in Europe, those myths became attached to the new ideology of nationalism, which began to stir in the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “After four centuries of silent stagnation,” Hugh Seton-Watson states, “the Macedonians began to awaken....”<sup>18</sup> The Macedonian nationalist movement began with the founding of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) in Resna in 1893 by a “small band of anti-Ottoman Macedonian Slav revolutionaries” who wanted to create “an autonomous Macedonian state” that was “completely independent.” Furthermore, they considered Macedonia indivisible and all of its inhabitants Macedonians regardless of their religion or ethnicity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> George C. Papavizas, *Claiming Macedonia: The Struggle for the Heritage, Territory and Name of the Historic Hellenic Land* (London: McFarland, 2006), p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> On the “Macedonian Question,” see Hupchick, pp. 296–302.

<sup>16</sup> Kaplan, 55; “The Congress of Berlin (1878) imposed the Western European concept of the nation-state on the small states of Serbia, Greece, Romania, Montenegro, and Bulgaria...and sowed the seeds of future nationalist conflicts among them all.” Hupchick, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> Kaplan, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918-1941*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 311; Danforth states that Macedonian culture had been dormant for centuries until the national revival in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pp. 49–51; Until the 1870s, “Macedonia’s inhabitants held millet religious identities” and “[t]heir loyalties lay in their local villages and Orthodox faith....” Hupchick, p. 297.

<sup>19</sup> Hupchick, p. 299; On IMRO and other organizations see, Duncan M. Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893–1903* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), and Nadine Lange-Akhund, *The Macedonian Question, 1893–1908* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998); Revolutionary

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By 1900, Macedonia had become “a power vacuum of sectarian violence. The absence of a visible central government or defining concept of nationhood permitted various outside powers—all soon to disappear as a result of what Macedonia would unleash—to play out their rivalries against the backdrop of a magnificent, mountainous landscape.”<sup>20</sup> Chaos reigned in a paroxysm of conflict. According to Ellen Stone as many as 245 armed groups—Serb, Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian, and Vlach—roamed the mountains around the turn of the century with the Christian militias fighting Muslim ones as well as each other.<sup>21</sup>

The Macedonian question, which so terrorized southern Europe in the first fourteen years of this century, comprises two elements which paradoxically run parallel and concurrently. The first element comprises the various perceptions of Macedonia’s neighbors. Except for the most extreme nationalists, Serbs have, by and large, come to accept the Titoist solution which afforded recognition of the Macedonian nation, with the boundaries of Vardar Macedonia, roughly corresponding to the republic’s present borders. Some political currents in Serbia still maintain Vardar Macedonia is southern Serbia, as the territory was officially known in the inter-war years. To the east, Bulgaria has recognized the Republic of Macedonia as an independent state but still refuses to acknowledge the existence of a Macedonian nation. Greeks show the least willingness to compromise of all—neither the Macedonian nation, nor a Republic of Macedonia can exist because Greece has exclusive historical and territorial rights over Macedonia. These attitudes, which range from grudging tolerance to a hostile campaign directed against the Macedonian state, are leading to the suffocation of this small but vital square of territory which provides a land crossing east and west and north and south, across the Balkan mountains.<sup>22</sup>

The claims made on Macedonia by Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece led to the Balkans wars of 1912.<sup>23</sup> At the end of those in 1913 Macedonia was finally divided between Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, a situation that endured until the Second World War. After the First World War, it

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groups proliferated in the area during this period. Aside from IMRO there was also the Bulgarian-Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (BMARO) and the Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (SMARO).

<sup>20</sup> Kaplan, p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> Kaplan, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (1994), pp. 71–2.

<sup>23</sup> Danforth, p. 28.

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became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. During that period, the Slavs in Macedonia were considered “South Slavs” by Serbians and the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav state, Macedonia was designated “South Serbia,” and the language spoken by the Slavs there was considered a dialect of Serbian.<sup>24</sup> The rise in Serbian nationalism that occurred in the late 1980s in Yugoslavia was to revive those “fears of Serbian claims on Macedonia.”<sup>25</sup>

Change came again at the end of the Second World War. In August 1944, “Macedonian partisans proclaimed a Macedonian People’s Republic that would take an equal place among the other republics in Tito’s planned federated Communist Yugoslavia.”<sup>26</sup> Macedonia came into existence once again with the creation of the Republic of Yugoslavia and aspects of a new identity began to appear. One of those was the restoration of the archbishopric of Ohrid in 1958. In 1967, the Macedonian Orthodox Church gained full independence after two hundred years with the restoration of the archbishopric of Ohrid.<sup>27</sup>

The 1980s saw the questioning of the *status quo* in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. As the hold of Communist ideology began to weaken in the course of one decade long-controlled nationalist sentiments began to come to the surface and rage at the end of the 1980s in Yugoslavia. Following the pattern that occurred in other parts of the country, the Macedonian Slavs began to mobilize as the political situation began to change. In February 1989 first the Movement for All-Macedonian Action (MAAK) was formed and then, in June of the same year,

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<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson, p. 65; On Macedonia during the interwar years and WWII, see Hupchick, pp. 340–1, 348–9, 353, 355, and 358.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict* (London: Minority Rights, 1993), pp. 53–4; For the events of 1989–90 in Macedonia, see Poulton, 52–4; On the history of the Macedonian Slavs during the 1980s to 1990, see Poulton, pp. 46–56; Commenting on the “bullying” Macedonia’s neighbors had employed for years against the region, Matthew Brunwasser summarized their actions by saying that, “Bulgarians see [Macedonia’s] people as Bulgarians with accents. Serbia used to consider the land Southern Serbia and refuses to recognize its church. Greece accuses the country of nothing less than stealing its name, history and national symbols.” Matthew Brunwasser, “Macedonia Plays Up Past Glory,” *New York Times*, 23 June 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Hupchick p. 429; “Macedonia’s potential for keeping nationalist antagonisms alive in the Communist Balkans highlighted the fact that Communist Yugoslavia (in which most of Macedonia lay) was the most volatile focus of latent nationalist strife.” Hupchick, p. 429; Each of Yugoslavia’s “six federated, supposedly autonomous and equal, republics was considered territorially representative of a major ethnonational group.” Hupchick, p. 429; “Macedonia appeared as an official national entity for the first time in its tortured history.” Hupchick, p. 430.

<sup>27</sup> Danforth, p. 53; The Macedonian Church in Ohrid had fallen under Greek control for almost seven centuries from 1014 until 1767 when it was abolished.

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the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party of Macedonia (VMRO-DPMNE), which was a “more radical nationalist party than MAAK.”<sup>28</sup> Both played important roles in promoting the vision of a Slavic Macedonia.

The issue was not just one of members from surrounding communities living inside Macedonia; it was one of Macedonians living across the borders and inside those neighboring countries as well. “The depth of suspicion felt by Macedonia’s neighbors,” Misha Glenny says, “has in part been reached because of the existence of Macedonian minorities, notably in Bulgaria and Greece.” The largest of those lived in Bulgaria, but, “[n]o government in Sofia” was “prepared to concede that they are anything other than Bulgarians.” A primary reason for that stance was linguistic. The Macedonians speak a language that is very close to Bulgarian. That resulted in ambiguity in terms of identity. “You may find many areas,” Glenny says, “both in Macedonia and Bulgaria, where the peasants do not really know whether they are Macedonians or Bulgarians (and in some places they think they may be by Serb).”<sup>29</sup> Seton-Watson alluded to that same ethnic uncertainty and ambiguity within Macedonia when he wrote that:

No reliable statistics exist for the ethnical composition of Macedonia... Macedonian peasants describe themselves as Turks, Greeks, Bulgarians or Serbs according to political circumstances, and no one knows what the truth is, not even the peasants themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Alluding to the irony of that situation Glenny says that, “The Slav Macedonians, poor and small in number, have been branded as ruthless expansionists by three of their four neighbors, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece.” Meanwhile, he adds, “Relations with the fourth neighbor, Albania, are

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<sup>28</sup> Poulton, p. 52; The Bulgarians in Macedonia did the same, and through their organization of the Society for Bulgarians in Vardar Macedonia they appealed for Bulgarian intervention. Poulton, p. 52; On the Macedonian issue as it concerned Bulgaria see, Victor Roudometof, *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian Question* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), pp. 39–46.

<sup>29</sup> Glenny, *Fall of Yugoslavia*, p. 72; On the Macedonian Slavic dialect see, Victor A. Friedman, “The Modern Macedonian Standard Language and Its Relation to Modern Macedonian Identity,” in Roudometof, ed., *The Macedonian Question*, pp. 173–206.

<sup>30</sup> Seton-Watson, p. 311; Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the American correspondent John Reed believed that “the vast majority of the population of Macedonia are Bulgars....” Kaplan, p. 53.



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comparatively good although the fate of the western Macedonian Albanians is a thorn in the side of their development.”<sup>31</sup>

Macedonia became independent in 1991 along with the other constituent republics of Yugoslavia and those of the Soviet Union, and it very soon again became “one of the dominant issues in Balkan politics.”<sup>32</sup> Of the six republics that composed Yugoslavia, Macedonia was one of the few to avoid conflict in the early years after independence.<sup>33</sup> In 1995, however, anxiety began to mount that the conflicts that had been occurring to the north, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, could spread southwards. One of the reasons for that fear was the ethnic conflicts and worsening economic conditions that were taking place within Macedonia. The major threat, though, was Slobodan Milosevic, the president of Serbia, who “refused to recognize the independence of Macedonia and considered it to be southern Serbia.” It was believed that war would erupt if Milosevic “increased the repression of ethnic Albanians” in Kosovo, which would then draw in Albania, the Albanians of western Macedonia, and the governments of the neighboring countries. Raymond Bonner believed that, “If peace is to be preserved, the Macedonian Government must also treat its Macedonian population more fairly.” He said that the Albanians had been “[l]ong discriminated against. In fact, the government had made concessions such as including programming in Albanian on state television, allowing some elementary and high schools to teach in Albanian, and reserving spots for them at the national university.”<sup>34</sup>

Another one of those external impediments to the creation of a Macedonian nationalism and the establishment of an independent identity for the new state came from the country’s neighbor to the south. Greece’s objection, however, differed from the claims put forward by Serbs and Bulgarians, who maintained that Macedonians Slavs were in fact members of their

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<sup>31</sup> Glenny, *Fall of Yugoslavia*, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> Danforth, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Slovenia had only a brief conflict with the Serb-dominated central Yugoslav government before being allowed to depart the federation.

<sup>34</sup> But Albanians only constituted 3% at the national university, and the government forbade the creation of an Albanian university in Tetovo saying it could not do so for every minority. It also feared that such an institution would become a “political training ground for separatists.” Raymond Bonner, “In Macedonia, New Fears of a Wider Balkan War,” 9 April 1995.

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respective branches of the Slavic tree. The Greeks' contention was not related to people as much as to symbols. They claimed that the very name "Macedonia" was one of its cultural possessions and they did not recognize the Macedonians' right to use it as the name for their new country. Aside from that, they argued that there was already a Greek province by the name of Macedonia just across the border. George Papavizas, like many other Greeks, maintained that it was the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia that had "created" Macedonia and the concept of the Macedonian Slavs.<sup>35</sup>

Greece's objections had still other repercussions for the Macedonians. They prevented Macedonia from breaking out of its isolation and becoming a member of European and international organizations. Writing in 1991 Glenny explained that:

Although Macedonia has disengaged itself from the Yugoslav federation without blood being shed, it has...yet to win recognition from the European Community or the United States because of Greece's hysterical objection to Macedonian statehood. The creation of such a state, the Greeks say, is an affront to the tradition of Hellenic Macedonia and it implies a plan of territorial expansion.<sup>36</sup>

Greece vetoed Macedonia's application for membership to NATO in 2008 and rejected the use of the name Macedonia because "the use of the term implies a claim to Greek territory with the same name."<sup>37</sup> The Greek view was that "indigenous Hellenic Macedonians (IHMs)" living in Greece were "the only people who can be called Macedonians."<sup>38</sup>

As a consequence of that on-going dispute, Greece closed its port of Salonika to Macedonian trade in February 1994. The embargo lasted for nineteen months until Athens finally lifted it in October 1995. The embargo proved to be a double-edged sword and "dealt a heavy blow to the Greek economy as well as the already weak economy of Macedonia." In exchange

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<sup>35</sup> Papavizas, p. 174; On the controversy since Macedonia became independent, see Papavizas, pp. 218–42; On the Greek position on Macedonia, see Danforth, pp. 30–42; For the Macedonian Slav, or "nationalist," view, see Danforth, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Glenny, *Fall of Yugoslavia*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Brunwasser, "Killings Heighten Ethnic Tensions in Macedonia," 16 April 2012, *New York Times*.

<sup>38</sup> Papavizas, p. 174.

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for the lifting of the embargo Macedonia relinquished “its new national symbol—the 16-pointed Star of Vergina that is a symbol of the dynasty of Alexander the Great...”<sup>39</sup>

But the conflict with Greece did not go away. In the summer of 2011 the dispute with Greece reignited when the Macedonian government erected a forty-seven foot high bronze statue of Alexander the Great upon a pedestal in Skopje’s central square. The Greek anthropologist Vasili Neofotistos remarked that that was a way “for Macedonia to affirm its national existence,” and that by doing so Macedonia wanted “to advance the thesis that it is a cornerstone of Western civilization.”<sup>40</sup> The Greek foreign minister told deputies in the Parliament that “the statue was a major point of foreign policy.” He called it “a provocation” that fueled “irredentism, the greatest threat to the Balkans.”<sup>41</sup> Though it had an unemployment rate of 31 percent and the cost of \$13 million to erect the statue of Alexander was considerable, the Macedonians considered it worthwhile. The statue was not the only structure to be given the name of that famous historical figure. The airport in Skopje, a highway, and a stadium were bestowed with Alexander’s name as well.<sup>42</sup>

Matthew Brunwasser said of the conflict with Greece that “Macedonia has been stuck in one of the most intractable disputes of the post-communist world: Greece has held international relations hostage for 20 years because it considers the name Macedonia an appropriation of its own Hellenic identity and its northern province of the same name.” He said that, “If it can’t have riches, Macedonia...wants recognition.” Thus, “[p]laying up ties to an ancient global celebrity resonates with people who believe that they have been marginalized for centuries.”<sup>43</sup>

Greece protested the name and flag of Macedonia as soon as the latter became independent in 1991. The Greeks accused Macedonia “of staking claims to Greek territory and of trying to separate Macedonian civilization from Hellenic culture.”<sup>44</sup> They then refused recognition to Macedonia and began an embargo against it. They signed an interim accord in

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<sup>39</sup> *New York Times*, October 16, 1995.

<sup>40</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

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1995 whereby Macedonia would be called the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” In exchange, Greece agreed to lift its embargo, recognize that provisional name, and agreed not to block Macedonia’s application for membership to international institutions.<sup>45</sup>

In 2011, the two countries were “still negotiating a new name” and they had given indications that “they might consider a geographical modifier of Macedonia,” such as “Northern Macedonia,” which Greece favored, or “Macedonia (Skopje),” which the Macedonians favored. Nonetheless, Macedonia filed suit in the International Court of Justice because of Greece’s action and accused it of violating the 1995 agreement.<sup>46</sup>

The United States’ decision to support Greece’s “harsh demands” invited “claims on Macedonia from outside and a disintegration from within.” The Greeks considered the use of the name “Macedonia” as “part of a plot to grab the glory that was Greece, and some of its territory as well.” Athens wanted it to use the name “Republic of Skopje.” The Greeks argued that Albania or Bulgaria would “move into Macedonia and endanger Greece.” They also had “bitter memories of a civil war when Tito’s Communists used Belgrade’s control of Macedonia to menace Greece.” Also, in 1992, “by withholding recognition and blocking trade from Macedonia,” the Greeks were blatantly siding on this issue with Serbia, “the main source of instability in the Balkans.”<sup>47</sup> The country’s minorities were not unaffected by that dispute over the name. It worried Albanians because, as the Albanian deputy speaker of the Macedonian Parliament said, “there will be no prospects for the future, no security and foreign investment.”<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the claims made by Serbia and Bulgaria that the Macedonian Slavs were in fact wayward members of their respective nationalities and those of Greece that the new Macedonian government was pilfering its cultural symbols and harboring territorial ambitions, there were domestic factors that called into question a Macedonia defined as Slavic in nature.

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<sup>45</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

<sup>47</sup> “The Name Game in Macedonia,” *New York Times* (15 May 1992); Three hundred American troops were sent to Macedonia in the summer of 1993 for that same reason. The United States finally decided to recognize Macedonia in 1994. That was done after some European nations had done so in December 1993 and because Washington hoped it would help prevent the spread to the north of the fighting then occurring. David Binder, “U.S. to Recognize Macedonia,” *New York Times* (9 February 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Brunwasser, 23 June 2011.

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The minority community that presented the greatest challenge to the vision of a Macedonia that had a Slavic identity and was defined by Slavic culture and language was that of the Albanians. The Albanians comprise approximately twenty-five per cent of the country's population.<sup>49</sup> They are concentrated for the most part in the western portions of the country. They were a majority of the population in many areas including the cities of Tetovo, Gostivar, Kiçevo, and Debar, and in the capital Skopje they constituted 14% of the population.<sup>50</sup> The Albanians also differed from the Macedonian Slavs with respect to religion. Although there was a minority of Albanians who were Christians, the vast majority are Moslems. At the same time, the population of the region of Kosovo to the north is ninety-percent Albanian.

Not only was there a large Albanian population within Macedonia and all along its borders in the west, but the size of the community had been increasing rapidly for decades. According to the census taken in 1981 there were 377,726 Albanians living in Macedonia. That was 19.8% of the population at the time and represented an increase of 36% since the 1971 census when the population was 279,871 or 17% of the total population.<sup>51</sup> That increase was due to the significantly higher birthrate among Albanians. In 1988, the birthrate in Tetovo was three times the average in the nation as a whole.<sup>52</sup> That large discrepancy in birthrates led to a discussion at the end of the 1980s about policies whose aim was the restraint of the growth in the rate of births among Albanians.<sup>53</sup> Yet, the trend continued after independence. The 1994 census gave Slavs 66.7% of the population, Albanians 22.7%, and Serbs, Turks, Vlachs, and Gypsies

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<sup>49</sup> Albanians frequently claim that that figure is far too low and that the real percentage is nearer forty. Some even say their number equals that of the Macedonian Slavs.

<sup>50</sup> Poulton, p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> Poulton, pp. 76–7; Censuses are sensitive issues in many countries because the results may favor one group over another. That is especially true if the balance has changed, or if one community fears that its position has been eroded. One clear example of that is Lebanon. The last census was taken in 1938, and the government was organized based partly on the results of that census. No other census has been taken since then, mainly because all know that it would reveal a quite different demographic reality. Censuses continued to be sensitive issues in the Balkans as well. For example, see the article “Bosnia delays first postwar census as regions fail to cooperate,” *Reuters*, 23 January 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Poulton, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> Poulton, p. 80.

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the remainder. That same year, 36% of births—or 2.7 per 100—were to Albanians while 50%—or 1.3 per 100—were to Slavs.<sup>54</sup>

The higher birthrate that Albanians had compared with Slavs continued to undercut the latter's hopes of having their own state in 2001. Though statistics were scarce, they indicated that "if current trends continue, the Slavic majority could become a minority" in Macedonia sometime in the future. Both sides admitted that birthrates were "perhaps the fundamental fact of politics" in Macedonia. That was especially emotional for Slavs because of the implication that Slavs would "have to share more of the power and the largess of the state" with the Albanians. It also indicated "an intangible but undeniable shift in this new nation's character." By 2001, it was estimated that Albanians constituted one-third of the population, and that of every twenty children being born, ten were Slavs and seven Albanians. That trend worried "the Macedonian majority, who fought for more than a century for a state along their own ethnic and cultural lines."<sup>55</sup>

The issue of education was another area of contention between the two ethnic groups. In 1951 the number of Albanian schools in Macedonia was more than 200, with 600 teachers and some 26,000 pupils. By 1981 the number of schools had increased to 248, that of teachers to 2,150, and pupils to 60,000.<sup>56</sup>

Glenny referred to the Albanians in Kosovo and western Macedonia as "pained" when he visited those regions in the summer of 1991. "It is axiomatic," he said, "not just in the Balkans, but among most European minorities that each national group believes its experiences of repression to be more intense than any other." Yet, he said that the Albanians of Macedonia were "without question the most prosperous of the three compact territories on which Albanians

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<sup>54</sup> Ian Fisher, "Albanians' Many Children Unnerve Macedonia's Slavs," *New York Times* (11 August 2001); the insurrection that occurred in 2001 delayed plans for another census. Even so, "[t]he issue of a census is contentious. Albanians contend that they now make up at least a third and possibly more of the population, saying they have long had trouble getting citizenship documents and rights from the government because of suspicions that they are actually from neighboring Kosovo." *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Fisher, "Albanians' Many Children Unnerve Macedonia's Slavs," 11 August 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Poulton, p. 77; For nationalism among the Albanians in Macedonia and the Macedonian authorities' reaction thereto, see Poulton, pp. 77–82

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live.”<sup>57</sup> Although Macedonian Albanians did “not have full access to the organs of power, the harsh repression of the pro-Serb communist leadership in Macedonia [had] rapidly eroded since the elections of 1990.”<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, the Albanians there seemed “almost unwilling to shake off the past” and insisted “that their fate remains more terrible than that of the Kosovar Albanians....”<sup>59</sup>

The relation between Macedonian Slavs and Albanians in Macedonia was not unlike that of Bulgarians and Turks in neighboring Bulgaria. There, the Turks constituted a “sizeable minority with a far higher growth rate, speaking a different language, living in concentrated areas especially in the countryside, Islamic as opposed to the Orthodox majority, and whose geographical position gives rise to possible irredenta.”<sup>60</sup>

As early as the 1960s there were calls for the Albanians in Macedonia to join their brethren in Kosovo to form a seventh republic in Yugoslavia. Unsurprisingly, that was seen by many to be the prelude to a union with neighboring Albania. An increase in the exhibition of nationalism by Albanians after 1981 caused the authorities in Macedonia to respond with harsher penalties. Poulton speculated at the time that, “Should such a proposed seventh republic comprising Albanian-dominated areas of western Macedonia occur, this would severely truncate the Macedonian republic and almost certainly revive Bulgarian (and even Serbian and Greek) claims to the remaining rump.”<sup>61</sup>

By the middle of the 1980s, the Macedonian authorities—similar to a Bulgarian campaign that occurred earlier with respect to the Turks—initiated a policy of changing names and replacing Albanian names with Macedonian Slavic ones. That “banning of Albanian names and Albanian folksongs prompted protests from Albanian writers.”<sup>62</sup> To complicate the issue of who was an Albanian and who belonged to the other minority communities in Macedonia,

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<sup>57</sup> Glenny, *Fall of Yugoslavia*, p. 70; That is also what I was told by the Albanian family with which I lived in 1994.

<sup>58</sup> Glenny, p. 70.

<sup>59</sup> Glenny, pp. 70–1.

<sup>60</sup> Poulton, p. 77.

<sup>61</sup> Poulton, p. 78.

<sup>62</sup> Poulton, pp. 79–80.

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especially those of the Turks and the Gypsies, there was the perceived “Albanianization” of those two groups.<sup>63</sup>

In 1989, the government in Skopje changed the republic’s definition from “a state of the Macedonian people and the Albanian and Turkish minorities,” to a “nation-state of Macedonian people” because of the unease caused by Albanian nationalism.<sup>64</sup>

Despite attempts to resolve the many problems that existed between the two communities, they remained as far apart as ever. As Poulton commented of the relationship between Macedonia’s two major communities, “The reality of the situation in Macedonia is that there is very little mixing between ethnic groups.”<sup>65</sup> That had been the case earlier in Yugoslavia as well. A 1974 study found that, “Mixed marriages between Macedonians on one hand and Albanians and Turks on the other were found not to exist...”<sup>66</sup> Hence, although the communist authorities advocated a philosophy of “Brotherhood and Unity” among the ethnic groups living in the republic, “the picture was one of mistrust and increasing alienation between the Macedonians and the rapidly expanding Albanian population of Macedonia as mirrored in everyday relations by chauvinist attitudes from both sides.”<sup>67</sup>

Late in the 1990s Albanians in Kosovo rebelled against the domination of Serbia, which they were nominally still part of. Their resistance and the support they received from abroad in time gained them a measure of autonomy. The successful resistance of the Kosovar Albanians gave inspiration to their brethren across the border in Macedonia. The Macedonian Albanians objected to what they claimed was the “indifference of the state.”<sup>68</sup>

The government in Skopje, which was controlled by Slavs, even though it incorporated Albanians into the government, “also sought to bolster its legitimacy by mythologizing Macedonian culture.” It claimed, “despite dubious historical evidence,” that Alexander the Great

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<sup>63</sup> Poulton, pp. 90, 93; the campaign against Albanian nationalism in Macedonia was termed “differentiation,” and it gained momentum in the late 1980s. Poulton, p. 80; on the issue of religion in Macedonia during the 1980s, see Poulton, pp. 82–3.

<sup>64</sup> Poulton, p. 84.

<sup>65</sup> Poulton, p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> Poulton, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Poulton, p. 84.

<sup>68</sup> Chris Hedges, “Macedonia’s Albanians Are Restive,” *New York Times* (11 May 1998).



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was the “forefather” of modern Macedonians, that the Macedonian Slavic dialect was “the sole official language,” and that the Macedonian Orthodox Church was the “official creed.”<sup>69</sup>

The Albanians, meanwhile, felt they were not full citizens, they had little representation in the police force or the army, and they comprised the majority of the third of the workers who were unemployed. The country’s capital, Skopje, reflected the growing separation between the two communities as Albanians concentrated on one side of the Vardar River while Slavs tended to congregate on the other. A growing militant separatist movement among the Albanians exploded bombs in January of 1998, and the Macedonian government was worried by the appeal the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) was having for young Albanians.<sup>70</sup>

The armed conflict between Slavs and Albanians that many had feared might erupt in the middle and late 1990s in Macedonia finally occurred in 2001 when Albanian rebels launched an insurgency to gain greater autonomy for Albanians. In May 2001, three months after the uprising had begun, there was fear that the fighting might expand out of the mountains and cause “ethnic violence” in cities and towns. Two policemen were shot and shops were attacked in Skopje and fears of further “ethnic attacks” spread throughout the city. Both sides were frustrated at the new unity government’s slowness in addressing the tense situation.<sup>71</sup>

Following eight months of fighting, a cease-fire was finally reached, but it did “little to overcome the chasm of anger and distrust” between the Slavs in Macedonia and the Albanian insurgents. The Albanians were fighting “for greater political rights” and brought the country perilously close to civil war. The outside world, meanwhile, was “desperate to stop another ethnic war in the Balkans.” At the root of the conflict was the “story of two people who lived side by side for centuries...and who now view the same facts through different eyes.” In Macedonia, the Macedonian Slavs “were suddenly in charge” following independence in 1991 and there was agreement that “the new Macedonian state and its Constitution denied the largest

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<sup>69</sup> Hedges, “Macedonia’s Albanians Are Restive.”

<sup>70</sup> Hedges, “Macedonia’s Albanians Are Restive.” The two communities seemed to mirror one another’s actions at times. Hedges says that an “underground ethnic Albanian university” in Tetovo sought “to counter Macedonian chauvinism by teaching ethnic Albanians a chauvinism of their own.” *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Carlotta Gali, “Fear of Ethnic Attacks Grips Macedonia’s Cities,” *New York Times* (21 May 2001).

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minority group, the Albanians, full rights—to education, to recognition of their language, [and] to jobs in the civil service.” For ten years Albanians had “pushed for greater rights...with little success.” The Slavs were “willing to share—but not to the point of giving up what they believed makes them Macedonians, that is, their own language and culture.” The Slavs also maintained that the Albanians’ demands were “a veneer for another agenda” which was “to carve from Macedonia a new, separate state for Albanians.” The Albanians denied that, but the proximity of Kosovo and Albania to western Macedonia nevertheless made it a sensitive issue.<sup>72</sup>

After eight months of fighting and the death of perhaps two hundred persons, the conflict eventually came to an end when international envoys brokered a peace agreement termed the Ohrid Accords, which took its name from the picturesque city in the southwest of the country. According to its terms the Albanian insurrectionists agreed to give up their arms in exchange for amnesty and the government’s promise to improve rights for minorities. Although “the agreement encouraged Albanians to integrate politically,” it left “a societal chasm” between the two communities.<sup>73</sup>

There was an expectation that elections that were to be held in the fall of 2002 would be marred by violence.<sup>74</sup> That did not occur, however. Moreover, the election’s results were decisive. The two Slav and Albanian parties that composed the ruling coalition were defeated at the polls and replaced by the Social Democrats, a moderate left Slavic party, and the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI), the Albanian party led by Ali Ahmeti, the former leader of the rebellion that had occurred in the west of the country. But the country’s “ethnic divide” Samson noted was “as entrenched as ever.” The Social Democrats then had to decide “whether to share power” with the BDI, “the new dominant force in Albanian politics.”<sup>75</sup> One cause for optimism,

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<sup>72</sup> Ian Fisher, “Cease-fire in Macedonia Stops the Guns but Not the Distrust,” *New York Times* (7 July 2001); Fisher says that, despite the complaints of abuse at the hands of the Slavs, the Albanians admitted that they lived much better than their brethren in Kosovo. *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Brunwasser, “Killings”; The Macedonian government asked NATO to keep its troops in the country following the Accord. “Macedonia to Ask NATO Force to Stay,” *Radio Free Europe* (30 November 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Simpson, “New Instability Feared After Macedonia Election Sunday,” *New York Times* (14 September 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Daniel Samson, “A New Political Era in Macedonia Faces an Old Ethnic Divide,” *New York Times* (17 September 2002).

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however, occurred when a group of Slavs joined Ahmeti's BDI believing that it offered a better alternative for solving the country's ethnic problems.<sup>76</sup>

The peace agreement in 2001 and the absence of violence during the elections of 2002 may have given hope to many that the country had gone beyond conflict between the two communities and that a "new era" had begun, but that was not the case. Accusations were still leveled by Albanians that discrimination by the Slav-dominated government persisted. For example, the following year the Association of Albanian Publishers objected to the "disproportional development of culture" on the part of the Ministry of Culture by "failing to devote adequate attention and resources to support the literary needs" of Albanians.<sup>77</sup> In one sign of an attempt at conciliation, however, the Macedonian parliament voted to recognize the Albanian university in Tetovo and to provide it with state support.<sup>78</sup>

Trouble arose again in 2004, this time in the southwest of the country. That came in response to proposed changes in municipal boundaries that were part of the Ohrid Accords. Those changes caused the Slavic community in the southwestern city of Struga to contemplate independence within Macedonia. The Slavs in Struga "objected to the changes...because the city's new boundaries would take in nearby [Albanian] villages and make ethnic Albanians the new majority in the district."<sup>79</sup>

Struga's subsequent "crusade" to become "a city-state" elicited reactions elsewhere in the country. The "outrage" of Struga's Slavs garnered support from other Slavs in Macedonia who began to petition for a national referendum to prevent the boundary changes. Those new laws fulfilled the peace agreement's promise and gave municipalities "an increased say over public services, planning, economic development, education and health care." Under those changes,

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<sup>76</sup> "Ethnic Macedonians Join Ethnic Albanian Party," *Radio Free Europe* (22 November 2002).

<sup>77</sup> "Ethnic Albanian Publishers Complain Of Lack Of Attention," *Radio Free Europe* (7 July 2003).

<sup>78</sup> "Macedonia: Parliament Recognizes Ethnic Albanian University," *Radio Free Europe* (17 July 2003); The Albanian National Army (AKSH), however, was still carrying out attacks. Its members fired rockets at a Macedonian guard post on the border with Kosovo "in order to weaken Macedonia's military and force it to withdraw from territories inhabited by ethnic Albanians there." "Macedonia: Ethnic Albanian Group Claims Responsibility for Attack," *Radio Free Europe* (26 August 2003).

<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Wood, "Boundary Changes Put Ethnic Peace to the Test in Macedonia," *New York Times* (30 August 2004).

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minorities, which made up more than twenty-percent of the local population, also had “the right to address their local council in their own languages,” a policy that would “benefit Albanians, as well as other minorities such as Turks.”<sup>80</sup>

Many Macedonian Slavs, however, considered those changes “ethnic gerrymandering.” They particularly objected to “the attachment of outlying Albanian villages to the capital, Skopje, and Struga.” That would increase the number of Albanians in both cities and make them a majority in Struga. The officials of the city, most of whom were Slavs, also complained that the government had not consulted them beforehand. One official stated that the city would be unable to “function properly” if that occurred and that the change would involve “people with different cultures and mentalities.” Finally, the city’s mayor considered the changes a “threat to its peaceful existence.”<sup>81</sup>

The Slavic nationalist organization The World Macedonian Congress, which was in favor of the referendum, maintained that the changes would “force members of the ethnic majority out of Albanian-controlled municipalities.” The Congress’ campaign “increased fears of renewed ethnic violence” in the country. At the same time, Albanian leaders maintained that “if the referendum succeeded it would undermine the guiding principle of the Ohrid Accords, namely that Macedonia’s ethnic majority should not be allowed to impose laws on minorities without their consent.”<sup>82</sup> A few days prior to the vote on the referendum the United States agreed to

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<sup>80</sup> Wood, “Boundary Changes.”

<sup>81</sup> Wood, “Boundary Changes”; the redrawing of boundaries would also make Albanians the majority in 16 of 80 new municipalities, adding to the 28 of 124 that they already dominated. *ibid.*; The Slavs in Struga had rioted in July a week after the laws for redrawing municipal boundaries and giving more power to city councils were passed by the parliament. Nicholas Wood said, “It was the first major outbreak of civil unrest since the end of an internecine conflict in the country three years ago.” Nicholas Wood, “Ethnic Macedonians Riot Over New Laws That Aid Albanians,” *New York Times* (24 July 2004).

<sup>82</sup> Wood, “Boundary Changes”; only one percent more would live in municipalities where they were a minority. Wood called the belief that the changes constituted “ethnic cleansing” a “colossal exaggeration.” *ibid.*; The European program director of the International Crisis Group said fears that the new law would “lead to larger numbers of Macedonians being dominated by Albanian councils...unfounded.” Wood, “Boundary Changes”; In response to the World Macedonian Congress’ action, the Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD) called for a boycott of the referendum and its spokesman predicted that if it were passed, it would bring about the country’s demise. Without elaborating, he also said that his party “would consider supporting a possible referendum on the Albanian minority’s political autonomy.” “Macedonian Albanian Party Predicts ‘End of Macedonia,’” *Radio Free Europe* (25 August 2004).

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recognize the country as the “Republic of Macedonia,” apparently to relieve tensions.<sup>83</sup> The referendum against the new boundary laws was held in early November 2004 and failed because of low turnout. That result, Nicholas Wood remarked, represented “a victory for Macedonia’s multiethnic coalition government.”<sup>84</sup>

There were examples, however, of Christian and Muslim peaceful coexistence in the midst of such conflicts that had been occurring ever since independence. The inhabitants of the small Christian village of Vevcani, which is located in the same southwestern portion of the country as Struga, actually did declare their independence from Macedonia in 1991, created the “Republic of Vevcani,” and developed their own coat of arms, passports, and currency. Though surrounded by Muslim villages and located just across the border from Albania, its inhabitants maintained good relations with their Muslim neighbors throughout the 1990s and even during the insurgency of 2001. The mayor of the village believed that the village represented “an example for the rest of the country.”<sup>85</sup>

There was frustration with failure to implement the new agreement as well as suspicions that the government really did not intend to do so. For many ethnic Albanian citizens of Macedonia, much of the autonomy and integration promised under the Ohrid accord had yet to be realized. Many said that the ethnic Macedonian-dominated government never recognized the need for increased language rights and autonomy for minority communities and complained that it formally respected the Ohrid process without showing the political will to implement it effectively.<sup>86</sup> An international human rights law professor at the South East European University in Tetovo claimed that the government was only “pretending” that it had been “trying to integrate minority groups” over the previous decade.<sup>87</sup>

By 2006 Macedonia had “made substantial progress toward recovery” since the 2001 insurgency. However, there had also been a “revival of violence” due to “reports of fraud and

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<sup>83</sup> Anthee Carassava, “U.S. to Recognize Ex-Yugoslav Republic as Macedonia,” *New York Times* (5 November 2004); The proposed recognition by the United States was particularly aimed at allaying discontent among the Slavs.

<sup>84</sup> Nicholas Wood, “Anti-Albanian Macedonia Vote Appears to Fail,” *New York Times* (8 November 2004).

<sup>85</sup> “Macedonia Tolerates A ‘Republic’ In Its Midst,” *Radio Free Europe* (6 January 2002).

<sup>86</sup> Brunwasser, “Killings.”

<sup>87</sup> Brunwasser, “Killings.”

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intimidation” in elections because of divisions within the Albanian community. Some Albanians who were “disgruntled” with the nature of the peace deal supported more radical politicians such as Agim Krasniqi. By June of that year more than twenty incidents of violence had taken place, and all of the major parties had been involved. Most of those conflicts took place in Albanian areas, with the struggle being between “nationalists,” who had lost power over the last four years, and the “new generation of politicians.”<sup>88</sup>

Violence erupted again between rival Albanian political parties during elections in 2008 when one person was killed and nine wounded in Albanian regions of the country. Accusations of election fraud, intimidation, ballot rigging, and the arrest of thirteen persons led to the suspension of voting. The election was seen as “a test of Macedonia’s democratic credentials” as the country sought to join the European Union as well as “overcome a recent rebuff in its attempt to join NATO.” The violence reinforced “the country’s reputation as a problem child of the Balkans.” It also “undermined the vote’s credibility” and diminished hopes of meeting the European Union’s “standards on the rule of law and to modernize its economy.”<sup>89</sup>

A month later, Macedonia was seen as coming ever closer to the edge of chaos. Nenad Pejic summarized the situation by saying that the country was “embroiled in a border dispute with Serbia and tensions over that country’s refusal to recognize the Macedonian Orthodox Church,” Albania and Kosovo were giving “sometimes-unwelcome support to Macedonia’s” Albanians, Greece continued to reject the country’s name, and “many in Bulgaria question the country’s separate identity.” That resulted in the country orienting its focus inward, turning to the past, and developing an interest in Alexander the Great, “its favorite son.” Furthermore, there were “little changes” such as the alteration of the names of streets and schools “to reflect Macedonia’s historical glory,” schools “rechristened with names from ancient times,” and the

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<sup>88</sup> Nicholas Wood, “Nationalism Still a Threat in Macedonia,” *New York Times* (4 July 2006).

<sup>89</sup> Dan Bilefsky, “Violence Erupts in Macedonian Election,” *New York Times* (2 June 2008); Greece blocked the application to NATO in April 2008. *Ibid.*, and Nenad Pejic, “Macedonia Moves Closer to the Abyss,” *Radio Free Europe* (25 July 2008).

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erection of an “ancient Macedonian statue” in Skopje. In stores, receipts showed “how much money was spent on goods produced in Macedonia and how much on imported products.”<sup>90</sup>

The following year, the publication of a new encyclopedia started another heated dispute between the government and the Albanians. The work published by the Academy of Sciences and Arts caused protests not just among Albanians in Macedonia, but in Albania and Kosovo as well. That was because of its statement that Albanians did not began to settle in the region until the 16<sup>th</sup> century and its reference to Ali Ahmeti, the leader of the 2001 Albanian insurgency and now the head of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), as a “war crimes suspect.”<sup>91</sup>

In April 2012 five Macedonian Slav fishermen were found murdered. The speculation that the killers were Albanians aroused “fears of a new bout of intercommunal violence” and the killings sparked “angry protests”. (That followed another incident that had occurred a month earlier when an off-duty Slav policeman killed two Albanians in an argument over a parking space in Gostivar. The resulting riots went on for several days.) As a political scientist at Skopje University remarked at the time, “The ethnic communities live more separated than ever.”<sup>92</sup> Two days later hundreds of Slavic youths protested the killings in Skopje and “chanted nationalist slogans and blamed Albanians.” Later, police prevented protesters from crossing over the bridge to the Albanian quarters of Skopje.<sup>93</sup>

Like the inhabitants of other new nations that came into existence after 1991 in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, Macedonians are still engaged in a dialogue over how to define their nation’s identity. For the people of Macedonia that discussion concerns whether

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<sup>90</sup> Pejic, “Macedonia Moves Closer To The Abyss.”

<sup>91</sup> “Macedonia Encyclopedia Sparks Balkan Ethnic Row,” *Radio Free Europe* (24 September 2009); In 1994 I was presented with a copy of a new two-volume history of Macedonia in English by the Sts. Cyrill and Methodius University. It begins with the migration of the Slavic tribes into the Balkans in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. See, Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, ed. *Documents on the Struggle of the Macedonian People for Independence and a Nation-State*, 2 vols. (Skopje: Kultura Makedonska Kniga Mednarodna Politika Mislra, 1985). The first volume is entitled “From the Settlement of the Slavs in Macedonia up to the End of the First World War,” and the second, “From the End of World War One to the Creation of a Nation-State.”

<sup>92</sup> “Slayings Have Macedonia on Edge,” *Radio Free Europe* (14 April 2012).

<sup>93</sup> “Macedonian Police Clash with Youths after Killings,” *Radio Free Europe* (16 April 2012); “Macedonia On The Brink As Leaders Try To Calm Ethnic Tensions,” *Radio Free Europe* (17 April 2012); According to the report, “Ethnic animosity” had been “simmering between Macedonia’s two largest ethnic communities” since the 2001 Albanian insurrection.

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the country's identity will be dominated by the majority Slavic community or whether it will be a multi-ethnic one that incorporates all of the communities, including the Albanians, Turks, Gypsies, and Vlachs. Still to be determined is how that will end. In the meantime, demographics, especially in the Albanian and Slavic communities, continue to change, thereby altering the balance between them. The challenge of reaching some kind of accord between them remains immense.



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