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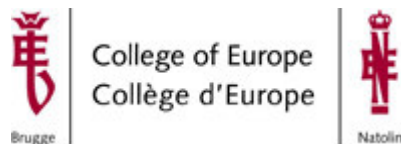
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The Macedonian Question – changes in content over time

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Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to give the chronology and phases of the evolution of the “the Macedonian Question”. The main idea is to present the chain of events and disputes that generated the complexity in defining the Macedonian national identity within the frames of the nation building processes on the Balkan Peninsula.

The Balkans is characterized by diversity of ethnic, religious and national identities. One must wonder: Why so many disputes? What is so specific about this region that makes it so difficult to be understood? What will be the future to come and is there ever end to the cycle of “self reproduction “of this particular question over time?

The study will deal with five main parts, each framed in a historical perspective. The first one is the Macedonian Question as a part of the “Eastern Question”, which gives the main background for what is to happen later. In the second part, that is a consequence of the first, the spotlight will be given to the Macedonian Question and the Balkan Wars. Afterwards, a discussion will be raised on the major identity ‘break-through’ and the Macedonian ‘Quasi-state’ in the Yugoslav Federation. The last two parts are closely connected and deal with the ‘reinvention’ of the Macedonian Question: unfolding the internal aspect of the problem (the interference with the “Albanian question“in Kosovo), as well as, the external dimension (the problem of the official name of the Republic of Macedonia).

The Macedonian Question as a part of the “Eastern Question”

The new economic and social changes that took place in the 19th century had immense impact on the historical flows elsewhere and unavoidably on the Balkans. There were new emerging empires (the “Great Powers” – Germany, Austria-Hungary, France, Russia and England) powerful to change and lay down their conditions and “points of view” in the so-called “Rumenli” region (territory between the Balkan Mountains, the Rhodope Mountains and Strandzha Mountain, called later on in time - “the Balkans”).¹ Furthermore, as the strength and the control of that region by the Ottomans started to deteriorate, the Great Powers saw an opportunity to put an end to their old, distinguish opponent. Therefore, their influence rose

¹ **Michigan State University Libraries**

Available at : <http://www.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/lect10.htm>

slowly among the local entities in the region, enhancing their incentives to commence an armed struggle against the Ottomans. That gradually augmented the political, economic and diplomatic problems that the Ottomans were facing with over longer period, creating the “Eastern Question”.²

The question was: “What will the future of the Balkans be if and when the Ottoman Empire will cease to exist on European Lands?”³ Hence, after the war for independence of Greece (1821–30), which significantly weakened the Ottoman Empire, the need for controlled desolation appeared urgent. Even more, the uprising in Bosnia & Herzegovina lead to the last Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), which finished with the Treaty of San Stefano crating new Bulgarian state that included all Macedonian territories and even more reduced the Ottoman’s Empire control on the European soil. But, on the other hand, this meant enormous influence of Russia through newly formed Bulgarian state endangering the vital interests of the other Great Powers, particularly Austria-Hungary. As a result, at the Berlin Conference (1878) Macedonia was returned to the Ottoman Empire (with the Treaty of Sun Stefano it was included as a main part of the Bulgarian state), creating problem for the future that is identified in the literature as the beginning of the “Macedonian Question”.⁴As part of the Ottoman Empire (after the Berlin Conference), Macedonia became foremost principal domain of political interference of the Great Powers onto the affaires of the Ottoman Empire: they wanted to protect and further deepen their economic interests within the scope of the wider region, and in addition, they saw “victims” in the Christian population under the Ottomans. In contrast, the Sultan wanted to keep Macedonia under his power.⁵

It is interesting to see that the population living in the Macedonia region become aware of the possibility to end the long Ottoman period of rule and started organizing for an armed uprising. An organization was formed in Salonika on October 23rd 1893, by six members, which is known as the *Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO)*.⁶ The attentiveness about IMRO started quickly spreading. A wide network was built in the village communities and

² Mark MAZOWER, "The Balkans", Weidenson&Nicolson, London, 2000 , p.3

³ Michigan State University Libraries

Available at : <http://www.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/lect10.htm>

⁴ The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001-05.

Available at: <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ea/EasternQ.html>

⁵ Nadine Lange-Akhund - “The Macedonian Question, 1893 – 1908”, Columbia University Press, 1998, p.66-67

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 36-38

the funds were raised for buying weaponry. Consequently, the grounds for revolutionary liberation were slowly prepared, and the violence spread across the region. This mobilized the public opinion within the idea of complete liberation of Macedonia. Therefore, even though not well prepared, on August the 2nd 1903, an uprising was proclaimed and the “Krishevo Republic” was proclaimed (often referred as “the first republic on the Balkans”, with institutional form derived from the ideals of the French Revolution). However, the uprising did not succeed. Indeed, there were political gains from this, marking the Macedonian question a priority of the European diplomacy.⁷ In addition, on September the 30th 1903, an Austro-Hungarian - Russian initiative took place -Murzsteg Reforms Program - taking into account the interests of the Great powers while solving the Macedonian Question, which represents a declaration clarifying the future increased interference in the “home “affairs of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ This meant that the diplomatic pressures will rapidly increase, as well as, the calls for the Ottoman Empire to introduce reforms. The Great Powers pressed for financial, as well as, juridical reforms, which created the grounds for the final removal of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II from power.

In a conclusion, such a development of the Macedonian Question fueled the Young Turk Revolution (1908) lead by young university students that were educated in the western universities and carried out by young officers garrisoned at Salonika. After consolidating in power the Young Turks ruled the Turkish state until the First World War.⁹ However, in spite of the efforts of the Young Turks to reform the state the situation further deteriorated, a situation widely used by the new Balkan states for their expansionist intentions initiating wars between themselves and shape the next dimension of the analyzed question.

The “Macedonian Question “and the Balkan Wars

The second phase of the evolution of the Macedonian Question, in my opinion the crucial one, begins after the Young Turk revolution, when the Balkan states started to form alliances. The Serbian state saw threat in the increasing influence of Austria-Hungary, and the Bulgarians began preparing for ‘repatriation’ of Macedonia. The Balkans states wanted to act before the

⁷ **Nadine Lange-Akhund** - “The Macedonian Question, 1893 – 1908”, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 118-135

⁸ *ibid*, p. 142

⁹ *ibid*, p. 310- 325

Young Turks reorganize the state. The exchange of the information between the two states increased rapidly in 1909 and the central issue was Macedonia. On the other side, the wars lost by the Turkish State intensified the determination of the Balkan states to finally end the Turkish rule in Europe. After months of negotiations an agreement was reached between Serbia and Bulgaria for military cooperation on one hand against the Habsburg's aspirations and on the other hand, versus the Turks. This agreement confirmed that "if autonomy could not be implemented for Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria would partition that area."¹⁰ The Bulgarians took under consideration that an autonomous Macedonia will unavoidably lead to annexation of all its territory.

Even before any agreement was finalized between Bulgaria and Serbia, there were talks in progress between Sofia and Athens. The Greeks were very much interested in a Greek-Bulgarian alliance against Turkey, but in contrast the Bulgarians did not have much confidence in the Greek combat capabilities. Additionally, "gentlemen's agreements" were concluded between Greece and Serbia and Montenegro. Whereas, the Turks had very low morality between their combat structures as a consequence of the continuous loss of territories (the wars in Yemen and north of Africa).¹¹ By the end of 1912 the Ottoman control in Macedonia deteriorated even more. Indeed, when the agreements for the alliance were reached, military preparations for war started rapidly. The strategic move was made by the Bulgarians, who insisted on implementation of the promised (by the Ottomans) autonomy for Macedonia, but when the Ottomans refused to implement the autonomy, the war started. The Great Powers could do little to prevent the conflict.¹²

The First Balkan War was on the way. As the conflict spread it was clear that the Balkan league (Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro and Greece) will be the winner. In May, 1913 was signed an agreement in London stating that the Ottoman Empire has to withdraw from most of its European territory. *Macedonia was divided between the Balkan allies* and Albania gained independence.

The agreement made after the First Balkan War was not quite satisfactory for Bulgaria. Therefore, in 1913 Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece bringing them together in alliance,

¹⁰ **Richard C. HALL**, "The Balkan Wars 1912-1913; Prelude to the First World War", London, New York, 2000, p. 11

¹¹ *Ibid* p. 14

¹² *Ibid* p. 15

commencing the Second Balkan War. The end of the war and the peace settlement was very unfavorable for the Bulgarians, because they only got a small region of eastern Macedonia. On the other hand Serbia and Greece *divided* the most of the Macedonian territory between themselves.¹³

These wars seemed to be just an introduction to the first Great War, the First World War. Indeed, it started on the Balkans. On the 28th of June, 1914, with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand (the heir of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy) in Sarajevo by a nationalist Bosnian Serb student, the First World War was underway.¹⁴ The Great Powers were divided in blocks. On one hand, there were the *Entente Powers* (Great Britain, France and Russia) and on the other the *Central Powers*, alliance between Austria-Hungary and Germany.¹⁵ Right from the beginning the Balkan states entered in the war on the side of each of the blocks driven by their own interests. An example is the Bulgarian attack on Serbia in order to regain Macedonia, lost in the previous Balkan wars.¹⁶ The Greeks were very much concerned about the strategic value of Salonika and what is more, keeping what was already won until then. The Macedonian Front was formed as a narrower part of the Southern Front. The war ended with the Versailles Peace Conference¹⁷ with a *verification* of the division of Macedonia between the Balkan states.

Concluding, the main point of this part is that the Macedonia region after it was 'liberated' from the Ottoman rule become the main 'dish to be consumed', for the newly formed Balkan states within the peak of their nationalist driven policies and politics. What is more, soon after the end of the war, pressures by the new rulers increased rapidly upon the local population in the divided parts : "All the Macedonians had to Serbianise their names ... [and] in Greece they (the names) ended on 'os' or 'is' ".¹⁸ Moreover, the "exchange of population" between Turkey and Greece and the brutal doctrine of Venizelos against local Macedonian population, created homogenously ethnic state changing the ethnic content of the province of Macedonia (Greek

¹³ **Richard C. HALL**, "The Balkan Wars 1912-1913; Prelude to the First World War", London, New York, 2000, p. 1- 21

On that matter see also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkan_Wars ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Balkan_War ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Balkan_War

¹⁴ Available at: <http://www.firstworldwar.com/origins/causes.htm> ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I#Causes

¹⁵ Available at : <http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/alliances.htm>

¹⁶ **Misha GLENNY** - "The Balkans; Nationalism, War and the Great Powers", New York, Penguin, 2000 , p.333

¹⁷ Available at : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWI#End_of_the_war

¹⁸ **Mark MAZOWER** - "The Balkans", Weidenson & Nicolson, London 2000 , p.109

population by 1923 was 89 percent)¹⁹. The Macedonian autonomists in Bulgaria continued making problems in the western parts, which was out of the government's control.²⁰ This continued to make the Macedonian Question even more complex to be understood, in a time when the humanity was approaching to the beginning of the Second World War.

Quasi-state in the Yugoslav Federation

- major break-through in terms of forming the Macedonian identity

With the end of the Second World War a more peaceful phase begins for the entire Balkans region and in that scope the Macedonian Question is considered in 'past tense' and put on the history shelves. A Yugoslav Federation was formed on the foundations of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, the inter-relations between the constitutive peoples of that federation were quite different compared with the situation before the Second World War. Hence, the new construction was comprised of six republics, in which, what is called 'Vardar Macedonia' [the region Macedonia is consisted of three parts: Aegean Macedonia (Greece), Pirin Macedonia (Bulgaria) and Vardar Macedonia (today's Republic of Macedonia)] became one of the six republics under the name of "Socialist Republic of Macedonia". That was a consequence of the events that took place during the Second World War when the Macedonian communist fighters fought on the side of Tito's communist partisans against the Nazi Germans and their Balkan allies, the Bulgarians. So, the Macedonians managed to form a "republic" in surrounding context rather difficult for them, taken under consideration the constant attacks and questioning the existence of Macedonian identity. This was considered to be a serious generator of instability in diplomatic and political relations of the Yugoslav Federation with the neighboring Greece, Bulgaria.²¹

In addition to the attempts of defining and further reinforcing the Macedonian identity, must be stated that "the point here is not that Tito created the Macedonian nationalism, but that

¹⁹ **Mark MAZOWER** - "The Balkans", Weidenson & Nicolson, London 2000 , p. 107

²⁰ *Ibid* p. 109

²¹ **Zlatko Isakovic** – "Identity and Security in Former Yugoslavia", Institute of European and Russian Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, 2000, p.200

he gave it *formal legal and institutional expression*” (Rosses (1994) p.369, taken from Zlatko Isakovic (2000) p.200)²². Indeed, the Macedonians were not able until then to come closer to any kind of lasting legal identity that could mean future state, if ever that was to come. On the other hand, the official Yugoslav politics with that decision has as aim to renounce the Bulgarian aspirations and possibly to make it easier to satisfy the needs for “their own state” of the serious influx of Macedonian refugees undergoing further extermination of Macedonian population from Aegean Macedonia, during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) . Only later came the recognition of the Macedonian republic (in the Yugoslav Federation) by Bulgaria, but it must be stressed that it was refused to be recognized the existence of the Macedonian nation. Subsequently, the situation beyond the borders of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, the creation of legal bases of the Macedonian identity began the process of an establishment of the Macedonian minorities in Bulgaria and Greece, which now had a state to identify with.²³

However, the Macedonians were not numerous or even consolidated enough within the Yugoslav Federation, which created the position of being less “equal” among the equal peoples of the Federation. This resulted with limiting the capability to interfere in the federation’s mainstreams and thus forcing them always to balance between the major groups of ethnic power (Serbs, Croats) in the decision-making process in the Federation. It critically can be said in a way that they had lack of ‘serious independence’.

In spite of that, the economic, political and cultural development was growing within the growth of the Federation. The Yugoslav economy was booming in the period of reconstruction in the postwar period and with that came rapid development of the southern poor provinces, as was considered Macedonia to be. The Macedonian Question somehow seized to exist or it was put aside as already solved. It can be claimed that the Macedonians during this period further defined the national identity and international recognition.²⁴ However, it is clear that “the Macedonian Question lay dormant in the international immigration”²⁵, which means that main debates for the Macedonian identity, were transferred in the communities in Australia, USA.

It can be concluded that the term “quasi-state” was aiming to describe the undefined relations between the Yugoslav states in general, and in particular the “set-aside atmosphere” in

²² **Zlatko Isakovic** – “Identity and Security in Former Yugoslavia”, Institute of European and Russian Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, 2000,p.200

²³ *Lbid.*, p.201

²⁴ Available at: <http://www.historyofmacedonia.org/IndependentMacedonia/RepublicofMacedonia.html>

²⁵ **Jane K. Cowan** - “ Macedonia: The Policies of Identity and Difference” , University of Sussex , p.1

which the smaller entities in that federation existed, unable do reach to the core of the decisions, and always trying to balance between sides. As far as the second point is concerned, it was a major “break – through “of giving legitimacy to the Macedonian identity, which will prove to be one step less than full independence that came later.

The internal dimension of the rebirth of the Macedonian Question:

- Interference with the “Albanian question “in Kosovo

It is, yet, another chapter of the Macedonian’s Question, *the final identity definition*, which could be divided in two major issued: a) Macedonia’s Albanian Question and b) Macedonian- Greek Conflict. Both proved to be curtail tests of the legitimacy of the existence of independent Macedonian state.

At the end of 1980s the things started to get wrong in the welfare system that the communist party wanted to establish and the economy started lagging behind, compared with the countries that it wished to “overreach”. As a matter of fact, Tito knew how handle the republics’ leadership and how to resolve nationalist crisis in the federal state, but after his death nationalistic currents appeared in Serbia and Croatia. The federal system weakened and the system broke down at the same time with the fall of the communism elsewhere.²⁶

Furthermore, Kosovo as a problem started slowly to appear renewing the “Albanian Question” (claims for better human and minority rights as well as possible independence of the autonomous province of Kosovo). The nationalist Serb leadership opposed strongly on the Albanian claims for better rights in a territory where the Albanians were the minority (85% of the population of Kosovo consisted of Albanians and roughly 20% of the population in Macedonia)²⁷. But, it seems that the conflict erupted after the speech of the Serb President Milosevic on 28th June 1989. It was the world press who classified that speech as highly nationalistic, as well as, the “first open threat of violent conflict “²⁸ which later took place. “In a fervent speech before a million Serbs, he galvanized the nationalist passions that two years later

²⁶ Mark MAZOWER - "The Balkans", Weidenson & Nicolson, London 2000 , p.124 -125

²⁷ *ibid.* , p. 125

²⁸ BALKANS Briefing, Belgrade/Brussels, 6 July 2001; **International Crisis Group**;
http://www.intl-crisis-group.org/projects/balkans/serbia/reports/A400345_06072001.pdf
Also available at: http://emperors-clothes.com/milo/gw.htm#_ftn14

fueled the Balkan conflict.”²⁹The Yugoslav federation started dissolving with the declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia, at the beginning of the 1990s and the beginnings of the war in Bosnia, Macedonia gained its independence peacefully in September 1991.

Indeed, the NATO intervention against SR Yugoslavia or most notably the ‘Milosevic regime’ in 1999 which was carried out to resolve the Albanian Question in Kosovo, proved to be a catalyst for bringing the Macedonia’s Albanian Question in a stage of unavoidable conflict to come. The “spill over” occurred in spite of the claims of the international community that it will not happen and that they control the situation on the ground. “As in Kosovo previously, rebel forces in this former Yugoslav republic claim to be fighting for the rights of ethnic Albanians. But, unlike Kosovo, Macedonia is ruled by a unity government, albeit a fragile one, that includes ethnic Albanian participation”³⁰. The torches were flamed in 2001 and in a short internal conflict of couple of months. The crisis was solved on a negotiating table producing the *Ohrid Framework Agreement* and changes in the constitution.

It can be said, as a conclusion, that this conflict posed the question of existence for the Macedonian state. What is more, the ever disputed identity proved to be present and reinforcing. The Macedonian state needed to change part of its constitutional order, but nevertheless it remained whole when (hypothetically) even bigger and more homogenous states would have gone into peaces. This confirms the ‘exception of the rule’ for the turbulent Balkan near past and present.

The international dimension of the rebirth of the Macedonian Question:

- “The Macedonian Question” - the problem of the official name.

The last open controversy?

The official re-birth of the “Macedonian Question” (in international context) appeared in 1993. The first tracks of the escalation to come can be seen in the letter of the Foreign Minister of Greece to UN Secretary General Butros Butros-Ghali : “ Peace in the region is threatened not

²⁹ **The New York Times**, July 28, 1996, Sunday, Late Edition - Final, Section 1; Page 10; Column 1; Foreign Desk, 1384 words, Serbs in Pragmatic Pullout from Albanian Region, By JANE PERLEZ, PRISTINA, Serbia, July 22

Also available at: http://emperors-clothes.com/milo/gw.htm#_ftn14

³⁰ MACEDONIA'S ALBANIAN QUESTION - Joanne Mariner, *Human Rights Watch*
Available at : <http://writ.news.findlaw.com/mariner/20010531.html>

only by the name of this new state, but also by a series of actions, resulting from usurpation of the name Macedonia, with an aim of creating a new, historically non-existing country, with *territorial pretensions as its fundamental policy*,..., Mr.Gligorov's Government ..., accepted a national flag with symbols from the history of Greece...³¹

As the tensions rose, the Greek official institutions blocked frequently petrol supply to Macedonia on the port of Thessaloniki (Salonika) and other trade related flows. However, the official beginning of the Embargo was announced on the 16th of February, 1994 by the Greek Prime Minister Andrea Papandreou cutting the diplomatic relations. A Macedonian response to such actions was a diplomatic one, addressing a letter to the Greek Government as an open call for dialogue stating to “sign an agreement ... which would guarantee the permanency of the borders”³² Later the President of Macedonia Mr. Kiro Gligorov explained the Macedonian positions: “ ... As to Greek historical heritage, we do not wish to steel it. We settled this region in the 6th and 7th century A.D. ... we took the name of the territory we settled, Macedonia, it does not mean that we have any pretensions to the history of ancient Macedonia. We have our own history...”³³

The European Union called for an immediate end of the blockade. The president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, threatened Greece to take the dispute to the European Court in Luxembourg. As a response, Greece threatened to step out of the EU if Greek national interests were to be endangered. In relation with the previously said, confirming the danger and the escalation of the situation, there was a speech made by one of the supporters of the new state during the Embargo, George Soros, before the United States Congress' Subcommittee stating that “... Macedonia could easily disintegrate, and if this happens, we will have a Third Balkan War ...”³⁴

The Embargo ended in 1995 when the US assistant secretary of state, Richard Holbrooke, announced that an agreement has been reached. The agreement called **Interim Accord** signed by representatives of Macedonia and Greece confirmed the recognition of Greece of the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” which is a reference for Macedonia until final name of the republic is found in the frames of the United Nations. Additionally, the negotiation had to

³¹ **John SHEA** – “MACEDONIA AND GREECE: The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation” , McFarland & Company, North Carolina, 1997, p.278

³² *Ibid.* p.285

³³ *Ibid.* p.286

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.364, George Soros – founder of Open Society Institute and Soros Foundation Network)

continue under patronage of the secretary general of the UN and as a special mediator of the dispute was named Matthew Nimitz. Furthermore Macedonia obliged to stop using as a national flag the “Star of Vergina”. After that the relations between the both countries increasingly improved, but the dispute over the name is still to be solved.³⁵

Until then there was an upturn of the neighboring relations between the two states apart from the constant low profile obstructions by the Greek diplomacy. However, the dispute got new direction after the recognition of the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia by the United States of America on November 4th 2004.³⁶ It is the main and the most important recognition of the full Macedonian identity and state.

Finally, in nowadays perspective the “Macedonian Question” is seen as European’s Union matter (burden), knowing that Macedonia is a Candidate Country for entry into the Union. On the other hand, there is the reactive, emotional Greek politics and sensitive public opinion, to be taken under consideration while solving the dispute and finally closing the “Macedonian Question”.

³⁵ Ibid.. p.304 -310

³⁶ **Richard Boucher, Spokesman, US Department of State** , November 4, 2004
Available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2004/37819.htm>

Conclusion

There is surely a lot to say about this particular phenomenon. The evolution of the question and its amalgamation with the events give the specific fruition. Being part of the overall developments during the Eastern question formed this subject. Continuously, the Balkan Wars made sure that the question will be present in the future. In contrast, it was the time when Macedonian identity defined its main features opposing the new 'landlords' - the neighboring nations.

The period of the Yugoslav Federation gave the legal bases of the already defined Macedonian national identity. It was important to set the frames of the state formation even though in the large Federation there was a situation of paradox, which can be classified as 'quasi-state'.

The independence of the state enhanced the Macedonian national feelings among the population, but it created complexity in the understanding of the specificity of the identity by the neighboring countries' politicians, which were to some extent *unprepared* to recognize the new nationality and state. Two tests gravely tested the Macedonian identity, while was confirmed that the Macedonian identity is a reality. The next challenge is to set the further evolution towards the civilized standards of the sustainability of the national identity.

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