

## THE ROLE OF THE ALBANIANS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA (1991–2001)

Mariyana STAMOVA

*Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*

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### Abstract

For more than two centuries the Albanian factor in Republic of Macedonia has been an objective and dynamically changing reality. It has manifested itself in different dimensions, forms and conditions: as an ethnic, demographic, socio-economic factor during the Ottoman rule and in unitarian Yugoslavia; as an ethnic minority, political and constitutional-structural crisis – at the time of federal Yugoslavia, in which the People's (from 1963 - Socialist) Republic of Macedonia was included as a constituent part; ten years after the establishment of independent and sovereign Republic of Macedonia, since the beginning of 2001, along with its traditional dimensions the Albanian factor received a number of new ones: it has turned into a major problem for the existence, constitutional order, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia; it has emerged as an important criterion for the adherence to the European norms and standards, for inter-ethnic relations and resolving the problems of minority communities, as well as for the successful and accelerated implementation of the European integration priorities in the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia; in 2001 it received also a military dimension - with the organization, arming and activation of Albanian paramilitary formations in Macedonia ready to establish control over certain areas in the Republic of Macedonia; it has developed into a regional and international problem - after the active interference of the leading international players and forums, which have an impressive presence in the Republic of Macedonia and are able to influence the strengthening the stabilizing trends and processes in the republic. The last decade of the 20th century is associated predominantly with the international consolidation of the Republic of Macedonia, whereas during the first decade of the 21st century the country faced grave international problems and confrontations between the Macedonian and the Albanian communities, as well as the dilemma of its further steps towards membership in the European and North Atlantic structures.

*Keywords:* Republic of Macedonia; Republic of North Macedonia; Macedonians; Albanians; Ohrid Agreement; Prizino Agreement; NATO; EU.

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### Introduction

From 1945 till the break-up of the multi-national Yugoslav federation at the beginning of the 1990s the Albanian problem in Yugoslavia led to great changes in the Yugoslav-Albanian relationship: from declarations for sincere friendship, and ideas for creation of a huge Balkan state; to disruption of the relationship and its usage in a mutually hostile propaganda campaigns; quiet “Albanisation” of Kosovo, its transformation in a subject of the federation and establishment of direct connections and contacts between Pristina and Tirana.

The unsolved Albanian problem in Yugoslavia in 1945–1991 put its imprint on the developments both in Albania and Yugoslavia. When the Yugoslav federal system collapsed at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s and in Albania, like in all other East European countries, the Communist regime collapsed, the Albanian issue was activated in completely new circumstances. They were marked by the fact that there was no more a bi-polar system, Yugoslavia, or the socialist community and totalitarian regimes. Albania came out of isolation. The Yugo-crisis was on daily agenda. There were new developments and new solutions of the minority problems on the Balkans. The Albanian issue not only came out of the Yugoslav

boundaries and its Balkan parameters but also became a problem of the international community.

Along with the situation of the Albanians in Kosovo, a region which became a political, economic, social, educational and cultural centre of the Albanians in the Yugoslav federation, specific place took the problems caused by the position of the Albanians in Macedonia (Stamova 2012a, Stamova 2014d, Stamova 2017c, Stamova 2018f). On the one hand, Albanian party leaders and intellectuals in Macedonia were constantly in connection with the party and regional leadership in Kosovo and the Albanian intellectuals in Prishtina. On the other hand, the illegal Albanian organizations, acting on the territory of the autonomous region Kosovo had their structures in the neighboring Macedonia. In contrast to Kosovo, Macedonian leaders even after the decisions of the Brioni plenum did not allow the penetration of Albanians in all spheres of the socio-political life of the republic. But after the changes in Kosovo and the broadening of the rights of the local Albanians, the Macedonian leadership was forced to take into account the new realities in the Yugoslav federation on the national issue. Unlike Kosovo, Macedonians succeeded initially to keep Albanian pretensions in the framework of the rights of minorities in the republic and to prevent activities towards autonomy and unification with Kosovo. To accomplish its goals Macedonian leadership applied a policy of economic pressure towards the local Albanians. It also underlined their rights as “Yugoslav nation” and introduced elements of cultural-educational autonomy. But direct contacts with Tirana were not allowed and everything was centralized through the particular Macedonian institutions (Milosavlevski & Tomovski 1997).

In the process of the collapse of the federative Yugoslavia, only Macedonia from the former Yugoslav republics succeeded in achieving its independence in a peaceful way. In parallel with the process of proclaiming independence in the beginning of the 90, the Republic of Macedonia faced serious problems in its own country. In the internal plan – the final independence of the State and the liberation from the UNA, and in the external – its international recognition.

### **Decade of creation and and affirmation of the Republic of Macedonia and multinational relations (1991-2001)**

In the SFRY at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, there was a transition from the one-party authority of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) towards the establishment of a pluralist multi-party system. After the possibility to establish new political parties was legalized, about 20 parties and coalitions were founded in the Federal Republic of Macedonia. Which brought great diversity to the political life of the Republic and provided the foundation of party pluralism. The parties divided based on their attitude toward the future development of Yugoslavia, so there were “pro-Yugoslav” and there were “national” parties. At the same time that Macedonian national parties were established in Macedonia, political parties and coalitions based on national and ethno-religious foundations were created. The Party of Democratic Prosperity (SDP) and National Democratic Party (NDS), which have their base of support among the Albanians in Macedonia, were particularly prominent among the parties (Milosavlevski & Tomovski 1997). One of their major program requirements was to “redefine” Macedonia as the state not only of Macedonians, but also of Albanians and Turks, so that the Albanian community would be created along with the gain of political and territorial autonomy. Not a small role in the policy and conduct of these parties was played by the establishment of a close relationship and mutual activities with the representatives of the so-called Kosovo Alternative – the leaders of the Democratic Alliance of Kosovo with political parties and government institutions of Albania. “The Albanian Syndrome” or the problem of “Kosovization” of West Macedonia realistically endangers the integrity of the Macedonian state. This problem is gradually becoming an international problem and there is a unanimous assessment that it is a considerably serious source of ethnic, political, socio-economic and military tensions for not only the Republic of Macedonia, but also for the whole region (Parvanov 1992a, 158–178). There are entire territories, such as the towns of Tetovo, Struga and Gostivar where the Albanian population is in the majority – they make up 80 % of population and as for the percentage they exceed the situation in

Kosovo. Essentially, this expansion is the re-run of the trend that occurred in Kosovo in order to create “ethnically clean” Albanian towns and entire territories, which would be a foundation for a future “Albanian republic in Yugoslavia.” It turned out that these were not only intentions or theoretical constructions but a long-term implemented policy.

After the referendum of September 8, 1991, when out of 1,494.624 voters 95.32 % voted for the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia (Parvanov 1992e, 222–244), the further development of public and political life of the independent state was marked by increasingly deeper secessionist activities of the Albanian population and their political organizations.

After the intentional political activities in the campaign preceding and during the elections, the leaders of the Albanian parties SDP and NDS turned to the tactics of abstention - boycott and non-participation in the efforts to create a pluralist civil society and strengthen the just born Macedonian statehood. The first step towards the full abstention from public and political life was directly linked to the establishing of the first democratic Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia on November 17, 1991 (Ustav, 1991). According to the Constitution, the R Macedonia was declared an independent, sovereign and civil state. The rights of nationalities in Macedonia and regulated by Articles 7 and 48. They provide for the use of one’s native tongue as official in municipalities where a group comprises a majority or a considerable part of the population. They determine the rights of declaration, development and determination of national identity and characteristics, native tongue and literacy. They can use their flag and other symbols, which however must not be identical to those in their mother countries. Considerable concessions were made in this way, but the Albanian parties remained dissatisfied.

The Albanian population refused to participate in a census in the Republic of Macedonia at the beginning of 1992. The Albanian members of parliament boycotted the sessions of the Sobranje (Macedonian Parliament) many times, including at times when important laws was adopted. There were even attempts to create parallel state institutions. In 1993, the intention was announced to create an autonomous Albanian area in Macedonia, so-called Republic of Ilirida. In 1994, attempts were made to create Albanian paramilitary organizations by establishing so called National Defense Axis of Albanian Armed Forces under the leadership of H. Haskaj – who was the Depute Minister of Defense of the Republic of Macedonia at the time and H. Arushi, a former Yugoslav Army officer from Kosovo (Parvanov 2011d, 218).

The situation in Macedonia had elements of escalating tension on the eve of the Kosovo conflict of 1998/1999, whereas even back in 1996/1997 the territory of the Republic was turned into a starting logistics base and support and the main channel for transfer of weapons, people and ammunition used by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). On the eve of 2001, the territory of Macedonia was used by the units of the Army for Liberation of Medvedja, Presevo and Bujanovac, which established their bases, supports and military warehouses there. The same processes unwinding in Kosovo one way or the other happened in Macedonia as well, with varying rate and intensity of course. After the first wave of Albanian refugees from Kosovo into Macedonia during 1990s, there was a second wave, which followed mass refugee movement during the military activities in Kosovo in 1998/1999. In this way over 300.000 Albanians from Kosovo were directed by the Serbian Army toward Macedonia. This caused considerable changes in the ethnic balance of the population, since the majority of them continued to live with their relatives in Macedonia.

At the same time, on the eve of a new millennium in 2000, Albanian scientists from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia worked out the last variant of the Albanian national doctrine for the 21st century – “The Platform for the Solution of the Albanian National Interest.” It declares the attitude toward Greater Albania the most topical and offers the new programmatic goals: The rise and determination of national identity, self-consciousness and pride of the Albanians; The change of the status of the Albanian ethnic communities in neighboring countries, where they would no longer be treated as minorities but should enjoy a certain degree

of independence; Free communication within the Albanian cultural and ethnic areas; “Collective” integration of all Albanians in the Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures, organizations and values – regardless of state borders within which they live (Stamova 2001b, 105–112).

### **Foreign Policy Issues to affirmation of Republic of Macedonia**

With the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia on 17 November 1991 and the Declaration on the international recognition of its sovereignty, a little later the main prerequisites for its international validation were created.

On 17 December 1991, the foreign ministers of the EU countries approved certain criteria for the recognition of the new countries in southeastern Europe and the USSR. Two days later, the meeting of the Republic of Macedonia sends to the EU a special declaration stating that the demands of the Union are maintained and that the rights of minorities will be guaranteed under the UN Charter.

The first state to formally recognise Macedonia under its constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia" on the same day, on 15 January 1992, when the Badenter's Commission concluded that the Republic of Macedonia fulfilled all the conditions for international Recognition is Bulgaria (Tafrov 2012). The president Dr. Zhelyo Zhelev also influences Moscow on the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia. Officially Bulgaria recognizes the state Republika Macedonia, but not Macedonian nation and language, which reinforces the blgarofobiâta among certain circles in Skopje.

Immediately after the Bulgarian state, the Republic of Macedonia was recognized by Turkey, which first established diplomatic relations with Skopje. Until its accession to the UN in 1993, it was recognised by its constitutional name from Russia, Slovenia, Croatia and some other countries.

On 8 April 1993, after UN Security Council resolution 817 and acclamation at the UN General Assembly, the Republic of Macedonia was admitted as a full member of the World organisation. But due to Greece's opposition and pressure to change the constitutional name, considering that it shows territorial claims to it, the country's membership in the United Nations is under the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). The Act of Accession of the Republic of Macedonia to the UN unleashes its recognition from other countries. By the end of 1993, it was also recognised by six EU member States – Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Great Britain, with whom it established diplomatic relations. Finally, on 29 December 1995, the Republic of Macedonia managed to achieve full diplomatic relations with the EU (Chomovski 2011). Thus, one of the key factors for the country's promotion in the region during the 90 years of the twentieth century proved to be solving the controversial problems with the neighbours. The fact that the Republic of Macedonia is not admitted to the United Nations with its constitutional name also creates problems for the country.

From all neighbouring countries only Bulgaria has a clear opinion, which first recognizes the Republic of Macedonia. But on the other hand, the historical problems remain, as the Bulgarian side does not confirm the recognition of the Macedonian nation and Macedonian language. Bulgaria firmly asserts its position that a large part of the Bulgarian population lives in the Republic of Macedonia, which because of the historical circumstances has not had the opportunity to declare itself as it feels.

Albania's recognition of the territorial sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia proves to be one of the main problems in bilateral relations. Albania exerts pressure on the Macedonian state to provide greater rights for the Albanian minority, insisting it be a constitutional element of statehood. Albania, in this connection, recognised the Republic of Macedonia with a delay on 24 December 1993.

Wed Yugoslavia, or the then power of Serbia, is unhappy with the secession and independence of the Republic of Macedonia. The government in Belgrade is also not happy that the Serbian minority is not included in the preamble of the Macedonian Constitution unlike Albanians and others. Other serious problems, such as the

boundaries, are also to be solved. All this slows down for some time the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Serbia, which still happens on April 8, 1996 (Veljanovski 2006, 17–18).

Relations with the southern neighbour Greece, apart from the problem related to the name of the Republic of Macedonia, are an expression of deeper historical and political problems. The interim agreement of the autumn of 1995 led to a normalization of the relations between Athens and Skopje. On 16 February 1994, an end to the 20-months blockade was put on the movement of goods through the port of Thessaloniki to the Republic of Macedonia. However, the questions of recognition of the name and visa regime remain open. On the other hand, in the end of the 90 years Greece became one of the biggest investors in the Macedonian economy (Veljanovski 2006, 18).

### **Interethnic Relations in the Republic of Macedonia in the Beginning of the 21st Century. Interethnic conflict and Ohrid (Framework) treaty of 2001**

The situation in the Republic of Macedonia changes swiftly and almost suddenly from the state of relatively stable inter-ethnic relations and domestic political situation, it turns into armed conflicts between the Macedonian armed forces and paramilitary terrorist groups of Macedonian Albanians with the support of units and staff of the Kosovo Liberation Army from Kosovo and South Serbia.

The escalation of tensions in Macedonia began after the signing of the Agreement of demilitarization of the border between Serbia and Macedonia and acknowledgment of it as an interstate border. This agreement was signed by President Vojislav Kostunica and President Boris Trajkovski in Februar 2001. The agreement was proclaimed illegitimate by the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Army for Liberation of Medvedja, Presevo and Bujanovac in Kosovo, and by the Albanian parties in Macedonia because according to them it isolates the Albanians in Kosovo as a negotiating party and the border which goes between Kosovo and Macedonia and closes natural links between relatives (Stamova 2012e, 151).

Immediately after that there followed an armed action to take Tanusevci, when a new factor of Macedonian Albanians entered the scene – a terrorist organization called National Liberation Army (NLO).

During the following months the activity and behavior of the Albanian political forces in Macedonia were redirected from the politics of ethnic coexistence, integration and cooperation towards the tactics from the beginning of 1990s – abstention, boycott, and active irredentist activities “flavored” with the armed terrorist actions of NLO.

There is a striking resemblance between the tactics and activities of the Albanian radical footholds and forces in Kosovo in 1998/1999 and the occurrences in Macedonia in 2001. By declaring the NLO as a bearer of extremist attitudes and first military actions in Tanusevci and Tetovo, there followed mass meetings and demonstrations of the Albanian population – in Skopje and Tetovo in support of the demands to change the Macedonian Constitution and make the NLO legitimate.

The typical characteristic of the situation during the active military actions in Macedonia was increasingly closer cooperation and mutual operations of the leaderships of political parties DPA and NDS with the leaders of the NLO. The evidence for this was the signing of so-called Prizren Declaration on May 23, 2001, by and between the leaders of DPA, NDS and the NLO. The document provides for the common political platform and action plan: The change of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which would be transformed from unitary into dual state; Proportionate participation of the Albanians in all government institutions; The Albanian language will become the second official language; The creation of separate educational system for the Albanians, which would include opening of an Albanian University; Establishing of “free communication with the Albanian cultural and ethnic areas” in Albania, Kosovo, South Serbia; Rehabilitation of the NLO and their free “reintegration” into society; Remuneration of all losses and destruction suffered by the Albanian side

due to punitive actions by the Macedonian government and army (Prizrenska deklaratsiya 2001).

The analysis of the events shows that a double standard was applied in the behavior of the Albanian political factor – on the one hand, they spoke in favor of preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia, and on the other hand – more and more they took an attitude of support for terrorist actions, to make the NLO legitimate, to include it in the negotiating process and to cement their escalating demands on the Macedonian government. Ultimately, they were in favor of internationalization of the problem.

The threat of expansion of the conflict in 2001 and its transformation into a civil war is being thwarted by the international community, which gives way from its initial position, defining as “terrorists” the representatives of the ANO. It has already set itself as the main goal to bring to the table the negotiations both warring countries. With the help of representatives of the international community in the Republic of Macedonia and the betting of President Boris Traykovski for a peaceful solution to the conflict, on 13 August 2001, after long and painful negotiations, in Ohrid the agreement, known as “Ohrid (framework) Agreement” (Ramkoven dogovor 2001). The agreement was signed by President Boris Traykovski, Prime Minister Ljupcho Georgievski, the president of DPA Arben Dzhafari as a representative of a party, included in the authority, the president of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) Branko Crvenkovski and the president of the Party for Democratic Prosperity Imer Imeri, as representatives of the opposition. On behalf of the international community, the agreement signed James Pardew as a representative of the United States and Alain Leroa as an EU representative. In addition to the end of the conflict and the refusal of the use of force the agreement also foresees the imposition of constitutional changes in favour of the Albanian ethnicity in the Republic of Macedonia.

Until the tragic death in a plane crash near Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 26 February 2004, President Traykovski remained the guarantor of the Ohrid Agreement, preventing the idea of internal ethnic borders between the Macedonians and Albanians in the state.

After assisting and actively supporting the process of negotiating the ceasefire agreement, which in turn leads to a peace agreement, NATO's leadership sends a task force on the request of the Government to collect weapons from The rebels, also known as “Essential harvest” and in support of the implementation of the agreement. The NATO-led international surveillance mission is operational by 31 March 2003, when the EU takes on the leading role by sending its military mission – Concordia. Her work continues until the end of 2003, after her term of office receives the EU Police mission, known as PROXIMA. Its aim is to carry out consolidation and reform in the police lines, to support the fight against organised crime and to achieve European police standards. Its term of office lasts until 2005 (Evropskata uniya 2004, 18).

One of the first and important points in the Ohrid agreement is the organization of extraordinary parliamentary elections in order to achieve new legitimacy for its realization. They are held on September 15, 2002 with the insistence by the international community in the electoral process to actively include representatives of the ANO. The Macedonian political bloc formed two larger coalitions, covering several smaller parties. One is led by SDSM and comes out with the motto "For Macedonia" and the second-from VMRO-DPMNE, with motto “Head Up”. A convincing victory won the first Coalition – 60 seats, using skillfully the situation created by the military conflict. In the Albanian block, the new thing that happens is that it defeated the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), led by Ali Ahmeti, who, during the conflict in 2001, was the commander of the ANO. This party, as well as its executives, originated mainly from the military structures of the ANO. In the election campaign SDSM openly stated that it would not form a government with the participants in the conflict, defined as “terrorists”. It turns out, however, that this is impossible and that the will of voters should be respected when numerous concessions have already been made. So SDSM with Branko Crvenkovski as prime minister is forced to form a government in which agents of DUI enter. This step is not well accepted by the Macedonian population, which visibly affects the rating of the party.

In the end it should be noted that in 2001 the political and ethno-national situation in Macedonia entered a

qualitatively new stage. After an almost 10-year-long period, when there was a gradual creation of the framework of “the Macedonian model of ethnic coexistence” within which the Macedonians as a majority nation in the republic and the Albanians, organized ethno-politically into two powerful political parties, made attempts to find a common language of communication and to implement the European standards in the minority-related policy, there was a sudden turn (Parvanov 2002b, 233–244).

After the Ohrid Agreement of August 2001, after voting in favor of 15 Constitutional amendments, after passing the law of local self-government, education and use of language, introduction of quotas according to the principle of ethnicity in some government structures and institutions, including the army and security agencies, but with still intolerance in the attitudes and behavior of the two sides, due to the double standards and the passivity of the so-called international community, unpredictability of “irresponsible” factors among the Macedonians and the Albanians, increasingly bigger arrogance and the lack of willingness for understanding and cooperation by the extremist elements tied with the criminal world of the Albanian political power – the situation in Macedonia remains open.

In one of the debates about the Republic of Macedonia, a decade after 2001, the President Georgi Ivanov underlined the following: “The Macedonian model means integration without assimilation. The Constitution and the framework contract are the guarantors of this model”. A leader of DUI Ali Ahmeti, who enters the governments of SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE in the role of partner and guarantor of the future of the country, in an interview with the first private TV in the two official languages, Macedonian and Albanian, AIsAT, notes: “We can not afford Macedonia to be an oasis, surrounded by EU and NATO members, and isolated itself”.

After the Ohrid agreement of 2001, the future of the country largely depends on the extent to which the Macedonian ethnic community complies with the ever growing demands of the Albanians. Macedonian authorities are obliged to respond adequately to Albanian pressures for greater participation in State institutions. In this regard, as application of the provisions in the agreement is the Law for new Territorial division and local government, which comes into force at the end of 2004 and as a result of which the number of municipalities under Albanian local authority is practically increasing (Chavdarova 2008, 50). Cities such as Struga and Kichevo are transformed into cities by a majority of the Albanian population, joining the surrounding predominantly Albanian villages. The discussion on drafting the law caused a lot of tension, and in order to quiet the ethnic passions, the architect of the Ohrid agreement is essential to the United States with its decision in August 2004 to recognize the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

In the field of education and teaching in the Albanian language in the Republic of Macedonia, it is very important that the opening of the university for South-East Europe in Tetovo in the turbulent for the country 2001 the university is known by the name “Schul University” in Honor of the former OSCE Commissioner for National Minorities, Max van der Schul and his big contribution to its establishment (Toevski 2011). One of the goals of the university is its openness to all ethnic communities to improve interethnic relations and promote interethnic harmony.

## **Conclusion**

On the verge of the new 21st century, Republic of Macedonia clashed with numerous domestic political problems and escalation of the inter-ethnic conflicts. The danger of the escalation and spreading of the ethnic conflict and its transformation into civil war was successfully averted with the help of the international community. From a foreign policy perspective, during the first decade of the 21st century the country had candidate status for EU membership and the doors of NATO were open for it. However, the main problem before its successful integration consisted in finding a solution to the issue of the country’s name in its dispute with Greece.

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