

## **THE UNIVERSITY OF TETOVA AS A PEACEMAKER IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA**

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### **Abstract**

The word 'university' is derived from the word 'universe' and in this prism the university is the arena where all corpuses of values such as education, science, culture, art, emancipation and civilization are interwoven. The emergence of universities has given rise to other historical developmental trends of humanity, accelerating social processes and contributing to the assumption of universal value and the building of democracy. Universities have been those who have sketched every social step, not to prevail "everlasting serenity, for "everlasting serenity" is death itself. And a people without a university, is a dead people. Thus, it can be freely stated that with the opening of the University of Tetova, Albanians of Macedonia challenged death, undoing and assimilation, and today they enjoy, like never before throughout history, the benefits brought by higher education in their native language. However, the road to establishment of an Albanian language university in the Republic of North Macedonia was difficult and full of vicissitudes. Although in disadvantageous circumstances, which will be elaborated below in this paper, still the will and the inevitable need for education in native language in the end triumphed, and in turn led to the creation of conditions for stability in the inter-ethnic plane, but also in the creation of permanent peace in the Republic of North Macedonia.

**Keywords:** *University of Tetova, Republic of North Macedonia, peace, peacemaker, emancipation, education, bridges of communication*

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### **1.1 The long roots of marginalization in the Republic of North Macedonia**

Macedonia is a very multiethnic country, which means it's also a multilingual country in which live ethnic Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Serbs, Vlachs, Roma, Bulgarians and there are spoken different languages such as: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, Vlach, Bulgarian, and Roma. However, this diverse ethnic and linguistic range has never been utilized for an internal state cohesion, on the contrary, there have always been destructive and isolating tendencies that have led to constant conflicts.

Although, at first glance, the interethnic conflict in Macedonia was a relatively new problematic issue and was for the first time actualized with the independence of Macedonia, namely after the 1990s, it has a long history behind itself. Initially, it should be noted that Albanians and Macedonians have a different corpus of values; language, traditions, customs, religious affiliation, etc, which has always led to mutual intolerance. Although this intolerance has been present throughout the whole paradigmatic plane of history, coupled with numerous conflicts even during

different reigns, still it takes the real interethnic conflict contour in 1945, when the foundations of the Republic of North Macedonia are laid by Tito, who on the one hand aimed at weakening the Serbian and Bulgarian influence (see, Weithmann 2000: 230), while on the other hand marginalized the Albanian autochthonous people in today's territory of Macedonia.

And so it happened, the Albanians, not only in Macedonia but throughout the territory of the former Yugoslav Federation, became so marginalized that they did not enjoy any basic human rights, such as the right to use the language and symbols in the state pyramid, the right to education in native language, and also the cultivation and promotion of their culture. Only with the Constitution of 1974 were given some limited rights to Albanians not only in Kosovo but also in Macedonia. Even though, Macedonia with this constitution was defined as the Republic of North Macedonians, Albanians, Turks and others, yet the marginalization of Albanians went further. Dissatisfaction among the Albanian people in all territories, and in Macedonia also, due to these misguided policies, continued to grow.

Communism, unintentionally, united the Albanians around one national cause and significantly cultivated the sense of freedom and democracy. With the beginning of the breakup phase of former Yugoslavia, nationalist feelings, especially of the Serbs and Macedonians, came to the fore, which continued to aggravate the state and political repression on the Albanians. Thus, in 1989, Macedonia through an amendment would redefine the Constitution, calling Macedonia "a national Macedonian state" (Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, preamble) and on January 25, 1991, following the path of Slovenia and Croatia to independence, the Socialist Republic of North Macedonia announced the Declaration of Independence defining the right of self-determination, including the right of secession (Article 1 of the Constitution), and it was decided that the 1974 Constitution of the former Yugoslavia not to be applied in Macedonia as long as it was in conflict with the republic's constitution in force (Article 2), and by doing so, turned it from a multinational state into a unitary state. With this act, Albanians of Macedonia got revolted because they felt marginalized and discriminated.

### **1.3 Closing down of schools in Albanian language in the focus of the Macedonian government after its independence in 1991**

Although Macedonia was physically separated from Serbia, it continued to pursue the pan-Slavic policy outlined by Belgrade's policies, against the existing ethnic groups, especially the Albanian people in Macedonia, which is the largest ethnic group after the Macedonians in this country, officially 25.4% of the population, while informally this percentage is over 30%. Regardless of this factual situation, when even by international norms, if an ethnic group is represented by over 20% in a given state, it must in principle be constituent people, Albanians in Macedonia even in the constitution continued to be called a minority, introduced into a group with other minorities such as Serbs, Bulgarians, Vlachs, Turks, Roma, etc., but with even more excluding political treatment. The biggest irony behind the independence was the tendency of the then Macedonian government to close down the few Albanian secondary schools and to stop the use of Albanian

symbols, which also violated basic human rights under the UN Declaration of 1948. Thus, the main aim of the then Macedonian government was that the Albanians should not be educated and emancipated, always according to their conviction that they could pose a danger to the state, bypassing the universal value that the more educated and emancipated the people are, the more prosperous and peaceful will be. The closing down of Albanian secondary school in Struga, Kichevo, Gostivar, Kumanovo and elsewhere where Albanians lived, except Tetovo and Skopje, where there were only a few secondary school classrooms in Albanian language. This created situation greatly complicated the education of Albanians in their language. The few young people who had completed secondary education were forced to study in Macedonian language, while most of them attended the classes at the University of Prishtina, which for decades has made a valuable contribution to the higher education of Albanians of Macedonia.

#### **1.4 Establishment of the University of Tetova is the largest national event in the 20th century<sup>1</sup>**

However, this difficult education situation represented a great deal of concern to many Albanian intellectuals in Macedonia who, in 1994, led by Professor Fadil Sulejmani founded the University of Tetova.<sup>2</sup> This event was welcomed by the entire Albanian people, but not by the Macedonian politics. To prevent the establishment of the University of Tetova, the Macedonian state set in motion the entire state apparatus, sent large police forces to Reçica and Poroj, killed Abdylselam Emini, but yet failed to reach the goal, because Albanians, led by Professor Fadil Sulejmani and many other intellectuals realized the importance of higher education in their mother language and did not retreat from the Macedonian police guns.

Not only the Macedonian state apparatus but also the entire Macedonian intellectual arsenal was engaged against the establishment of the University of Tetova, calling it a "dead infant", which clearly demonstrated how deeply have been planted feelings of hate against Albanians for centuries. After the state realized that it was impossible to forcibly stop the University of Tetova, it set in motion all the mechanisms for minimizing its activity, using even the propaganda tools for convincing the international organizations in the country, calling it a "nationalist university" and by initiating other multiethnic institutions, with the help of a group of Albanian profiteers, with the only intention the project called University of Tetova not to resist the time and to disappear.

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<sup>1</sup>For the background and fever of this magnificent event and the great difficulties that resulted with the then Macedonian power, you can more closely follow the program: Chronicle for the Establishment of the University of Tetova, broadcasted by the Art Television from Tetovo, during February 2013. Fragments of this chronicle can also be found on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKEC0dFDmg4>.

<sup>2</sup>The founding act of the University of Tetova is based on the fundamental international human rights law and in achieving understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and ethnic groups in the Republic of Macedonia. The date of the signing of this great act is December 17, 1994, and it was done at a joint meeting of all the actors who had preceded the preparatory meetings for the establishment of the University of Tetova, which are the representatives of the assemblies of the Albanian municipalities, political parties, Albanian Women's Forum, Members of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and intellectuals lead by Prof. Dr. Fadil Sulejmani, called the Assembly for the establishment of the University of Tetova (in the appendix of this paper you can find the original document of the signing act).

However, the Albanian people and the hardworking Albanian diaspora, for 10 years, kept alive this nationwide project thanks to the unprecedented philanthropy in the history of the world civilization. Only after the 2001 conflict and the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, in 2004, after a tedious process, was achieved the recognition of the University of Tetova by the state of Macedonia (*Article 1 of the Law on Establishment of the State University of Tetovo*).

### **1.5 The statement "We want pens and notebooks, we don't want violence" by Professor Fadil Sulejmani the basic element for coexistence and peace in Republic of North Macedonia**

Faced with Macedonia's heavily armed police forces in Tetovo on February 17, 1995, on the day of the first lectures, Professor Fadil Sulejmani, founder and first rector of University of Tetova, will raise the pen and the notebook up and say, "We want pens and notebooks, we don't want violence", a statement that clearly signals that Albanians in Macedonia are for coexistence and peace and in no way for violence and conflict. Even though he often experienced the maltreatment, violence, and imprisonment on his skin, never stopped to praise the peace between ethnicities in the Republic of North Macedonia. And his mission with friends has become a reality today, because the University of Tetova, besides contributing to the massive education of the Albanians of Macedonia, he fulfilled another mission, even more important than that: Emancipation of Albanian people in Macedonia, until then held in an educational and cultural compression, as well as in the emancipation of the Albanian women in particular, which wasn't involved in social processes at all, but had a significant impact on the perception of the other and in the recognition of universal human values. On the other hand, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which was a peace compromise agreement after the Albanian-Macedonian armed conflict in 2001, achieved through the mediation of the United States and the European Union, among other things, provided for adequate representation of Albanians in the state pyramid, and this was achieved by the staff prepared by the University of Tetova, giving this country professionals of different profiles and leaders, who are today holders of political, economic and social processes in the Republic of North Macedonia.

### **1.6 Impact of the work of the University of Tetova in building and achieving permanent peace in the Republic of North Macedonia**

In scientific literature, the peace building process is comprised of three important phases: conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict situation (Ledercah, 1997) and all three of these stages can be well analyzed in the context of the work of the University of Tetova, as the most important institution of higher education in Albanian language in the Republic of North Macedonia. University of Tetova was founded at a very fragile political and socio-economic phase of the Republic of North Macedonia, which after the independence faced several consecutive shocks both internally and externally, as it was and still continues to be the non-recognition of the constitutional name by Greece, non-recognition of Orthodox Autocephalous Church by Serbia and the non-recognition of identity by Bulgaria.

In the internal plane, exclusion policy against other ethnicities, especially the indigenous Albanians with 1/3 of the entire population of this country, inherited from the former Yugoslav system, continued to constitute a negative perception of the newly formed, socialist-orientated government. For this political standpoint, it wasn't a problem opening schools and religious higher academic units for Albanians, who in a significant number are Muslims in Macedonia but couldn't stand the opening of a university in Albanian language, failing to understand the importance of education, which leads to education, emancipation and civilization.

The police intervention action on the day of the first lectures in Poroj on February 17, 1995 and the taking of a young life for the right to education in native language led to a situation of an outbreak of a large-scale conflict, however the intellectual wisdom of players led by Professor Fadil Sulejmani contributed to the prevention of massive conflict, which would lead to the taking of many other lives.

State apparatus provocations continued even in the future, by summoning the students, lecturers and supporters of the University to interrogation sessions, and by imprisoning the leadership of the University and members of the Senate, never came to the escalation of the conflict, because thanks to the then leadership and University professors' wisdom, and also to the lobbyists, the University gained international attention.

During the Albanian-Macedonian 6-month conflict in 2001, the University of Tetova played an important role in conflict management, transformed into an umbrella for the vulnerable Albanian people, sometimes by coming out with communiqués of restraint and sometimes by calling on the international factor for the protection of civilians. During the conflict period, the University played the role of an unrelenting mediator in conflict management and achieving of peace.

In the post-conflict situation, the University of Tetova is continuously developing curricula in the education of youth of all ethnicities for mutual respect, reconciliation and integration, organizing national and international conferences with the focal topic of religious and ethnic tolerance, while in a long-term planning, in 2015, in collaboration with Northern Illinois University has established the Center for Peace and Transcultural Communication, which will also play a more intensive and powerful role in raising awareness of young people of all ethnicities and religions in the Republic of North Macedonia to build bridges of cooperation between each other, the best understanding of democracy, tolerance and the peace process, which is necessary for a better future in the common political and cultural territory called Macedonia.

## **1.7 Conclusions**

The establishment of University of Tetova represents one of the most important events not only for Albanians, but for all ethnicities in the Republic of North Macedonia because it shortly after became a center of knowledge for all, regardless of ethnicity and religion, by embracing Albanians, Macedonians, Turks, Roma, Vlachs and Serbs. In this way, the University of Tetova had a significant impact on disclosing the imposed historical prejudices for each other, contributing to the preservation of the foundations of the Macedonian multinational state. The longstanding violence was replaced by the pen and by the notebook, hatred with respect for one another, conflicts preceded the peace, ignorance preceded emancipation and cruelty preceded humanism.

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## Appendix



**Figure 1.** *Founding Act of the University of Tetova, December 17, 1994 (from left to right Zeqir Kadriu, Arben Rusi, Nevzat Halili, Agni Dika, Fadil Suljemani, Murtezan Ismaili, Iljaz Halimi, Arbën Xhaferi, Milaim Fejziu, Myqereme Rusi, Xhevat Halili, Vahid Kamberi)*

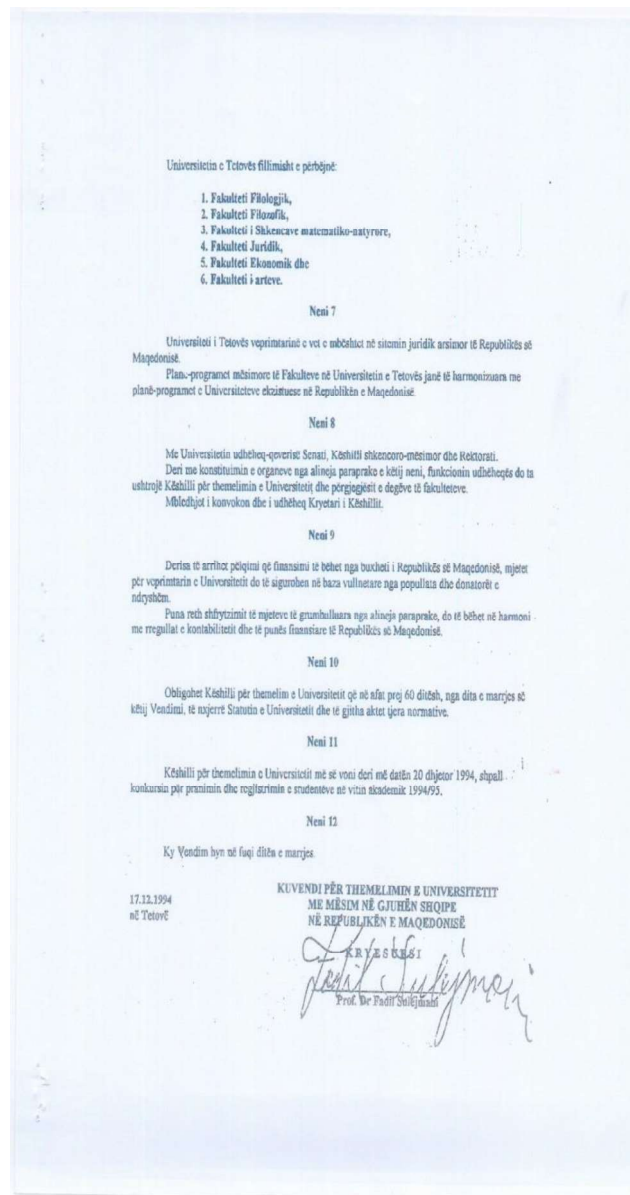
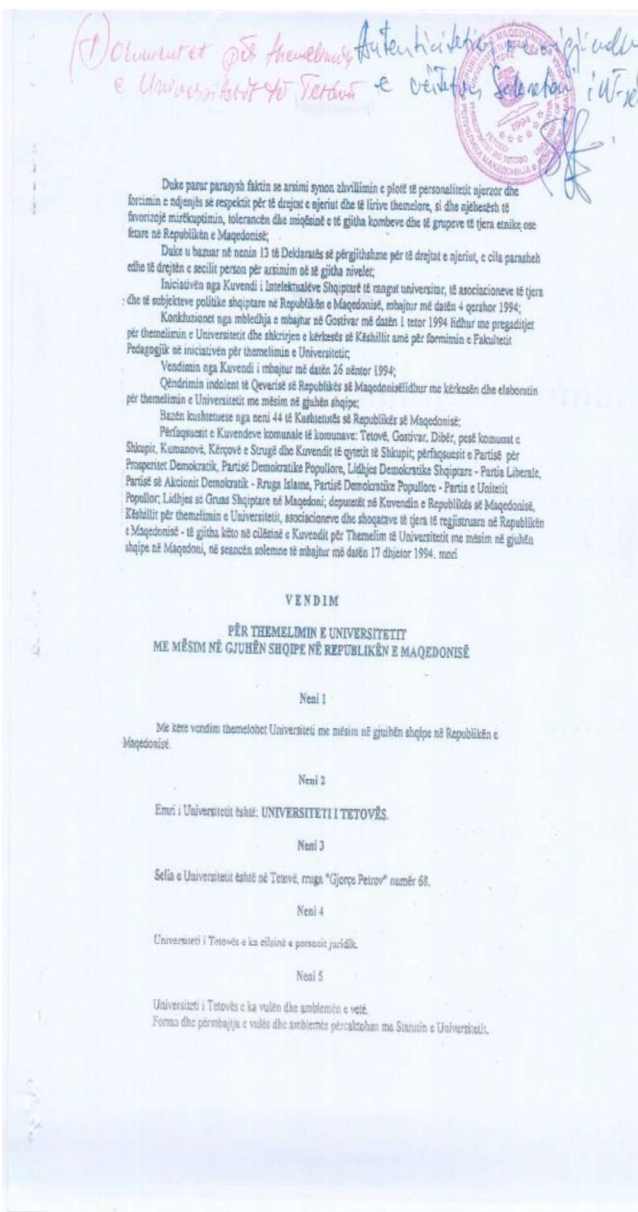


Figure 2. Decision for the establishment of the University of Tetova, December 17, 1994





**Figure 3.** Historical speech of the Rector and founder of the University of Tetova, Prof. dr. Dr. Fadil Sulejmani addressed to the people and the students on the occasion of the first lectures, February 17, 1995, in the village of Poroj, Tetovo "We want pens and notebooks, we don't want violence"



**Figure 4.** Holding of the first lectures at the University of Tetova, support from the people in village Reçicë e Vogël and village Poroj, the intervention of the police forces and the collapse of the building of the University of Tetova in Reçicë e Vogel by the state apparatus of Republic of North Macedonia, February 17, 1995