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BEING SELF OR BECOMING OTHER: REVISION OF HISTORY AND THE EU INTEGRATION OF THE REPUBLIC MACEDONIA

Abstract

The political elites, through state institutions, utilize the past to mobilize memory, reflecting collective identity as an integral component of the nation. Therefore, when a state is confronted with the imposed revision of its national history, coupled with its adaptation to the narratives of other nations, the function of history becomes a catalyst for the erosion of the nation's identity. This phenomenon will be examined in the case of the Republic of Macedonia concerning the enforced revision of national historiography and history textbooks, stemming from political agreements with Bulgaria (2017) and Greece (2018). The focus of the analysis is given to the implications of the politically constructed "common history" deriving from the work of Joint Macedonian-Bulgarian Multidisciplinary Commission on Historical and Educational Issues. Furthermore, the bilateral protocol with Bulgaria from July 2022 entails direct interference in the Macedonian educational system. It stipulates that the Commission's agreed-upon historical definitions would delineate and designate public spaces (inscriptions on monuments, signs, tourist guides, state institutions, media) and shape official speeches during state celebrations. Consequently, the

imperative revision of history under political pressure becomes a crucial factor for the nation's accession to the EU, exerting profound effects on the identity and sovereignty of the Macedonian nation.

Keywords: *Republic of Macedonia, Macedonians, Politics, History, Identity, EU integration, Greece, Bulgaria.*

THE GENESIS OF THE MACEDONIAN – BULGARIAN DISPUTE ON HISTORY

The joint Macedonian-Bulgarian Commission on Historical and Educational Issues was established in 2019 under the Treaty of friendship, good-neighborliness and cooperation. Although the Treaty itself did not outline specific provisions of the work of the Commission, its members devised a methodology wherein they took on the responsibility of selecting and characterizing the historical personalities. This process aimed to contextualize them within the constructed framework of imagined “common history”. As a result of such a methodological framework, the Commission so far established historical definitions for Saints Cyril and Methodius Saints Climent and Naum of Ohrid, and Tsar Samuel. On the other hand, Bulgaria’s political agenda involved leveraging the notion of “common history”, aimed at perpetuating the narrative of an unbroken lineage of a particular ethnic group dating back to the Middle Ages. This effectively marginalized or disregarded the historical presence and identity of the Macedonian people. It challenges the historical recognition of the Macedonian people as a unique entity with its own distinct heritage and identity.

The genesis of the issue of history can be traced back to the second half of the 19th century when Russia exerted direct influence on the construction of the Bulgarian national narrative, subordinating it to geostrategic goals for justifying the incorporation of Macedonia into its Greater Bulgaria project. These historiographic theses focusing on the Middle Ages became a constant in Bulgaria’s national narrative and were later exploited to historically legitimize their territorial aspirations towards Macedonia, based on the imaginary borders of San Stefano treaty. This also fueled the Balkan historiographical clash over the appropriation of medieval figures associated with Macedonia, who

were utilized to justify military conquests during the Balkan Wars, as well as in the First and Second World Wars (Panov 2019).

The Macedonian-Bulgarian historiographical conflict resurfaced with heightened intensity in the 1960s, following the cooling of relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR. The conflict persisted with even greater intensity after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the declaration of Macedonian independence. Explaining the decision to recognize the independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1992, the then Bulgarian President, Zhelju Zhelev, and the Bulgarian Government categorically declared that this act did not imply recognition of the existence of the Macedonian nation, Macedonian people, and Macedonian language (Култура. 2010; Sega. 2011; Е-вестник. 2012). Bulgaria in fact conditioned good neighborly relations on solving three fundamental issues – “common history”, the non-existence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, and the non-existence of the Macedonian language.

The declaration signed by the Prime Ministers of the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria, Ljubco Georgievski and Ivan Kostov, on February 22, 1999, reflected a political compromise on the language, defining it as Macedonian but with the clarification that it is an official language “according to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia” (“Joint declaration of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria and of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia 1999. *Bulgarian policies on the Republic of Macedonia*” 2017/2018, 73–75). However, the declaration did not address the key issue for Bulgaria - history. Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov in 2006 sent a clear message that “when it comes to history, and we have a common history, I think there is a line to be drawn beyond which our own history cannot be stolen by anyone else” (Euro news 2006). Bulgarian Minister of foreign affairs, Ivaylo Kalfin openly conditioned the support of the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU “with the principles of good neighborliness and we will ensure that Macedonia does not show aggression towards the Bulgarian history and nation” (Cera 2006).¹ By the end of 2012, Bulgaria raised the issue of history at the EU level, opposing setting a date for the start of negotiations of the Republic of

¹ In 2009, the then mayor of Sofia and informal leader of the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party, Boyko Borisov, even suggested using economic measures to “make them recognize their true history... and then there will be no to have a bigger friend and a better neighbor than Macedonia”, “Бойко Борисов: В България остана кофти човешки материал,” *Cera*, 5.02.2009. Accessed January 31 2020.

<http://old.segabg.com/article.php?id=0001001&issueid=3380§ionid=5>.

Macedonia. Sofia made the ratification of a friendship agreement, aligned with the 1999 Declaration, a prerequisite for Macedonia's progression towards European integration. The Minister of foreign affairs, Christian Vigenin, outlined three issues: "One has to do with general history and the celebration of individuals and dates from that history. The second element is related to a commitment that we expect the Macedonian side to undertake. It is related to an article in their constitution that talks about minorities in neighboring countries. And the third element is related to language. These issues are not easy, but I think that if there is enough, yes, good will on both sides, the issues can be resolved, as long as this European treaty will regulate our relations, at least some basic issues, it will unblock from there on the possibilities for both accession, i.e. for the negotiations and subsequent accession of the Republic of Macedonia to the European Union" (Вигенин 2013а). At the meeting of the Bulgarian President, Rosen Plevneliev and Prime Minister, Boiyo Borisov in December 2012, the clear policy was drawn that the Republic of Macedonia must sign an "Agreement on good neighborly relations, friendship and cooperation on the principles of the 1999 Declaration" as a precondition for the consent of Sofia for setting the date for start of negotiation with EU. The emphasis was given to reaching an "agreement on the joint celebration of notable personalities and events from our common history and to end the anti-Bulgarian campaign and the manipulation of historical facts" (*President.bg* 2012).

In this political context, the erection of the monument to Tsar Samuel in the square in Skopje, along with other figures from the history of Macedonia, as part of the "Skopje 2014" project, has drawn sharp criticism in Sofia. The comment of the then Acting Prime Minister, Marin Raiykov, that the Republic of Macedonia must recognize the historical reality that "until 1945 we were part of the same nation" and thus share "common language traditions, common history, common past", demonstrated the essence of Sofia's position (*News.bg* 2013). The Bulgarian political leadership has assessed that the capital of the Republic of Macedonia is effectively adorned with Bulgarian national heroes, reflecting a "common history that should be celebrated together" (Вигенин. 2013б).

During the commemoration of the 1000th anniversary of the death of Tsar Samuel on October 6, 2014, the then Bulgarian Prime Minister, Georgi Bliznashki, emphasized that in Skopje "so many monuments to Bulgarian historical figures were erected, including Tsar Samuel the Bulgarian, which only confirms that we were an ethnic whole in the past" (Гюзелев, Николов 2015, 15–18).

During the official unveiling of the statue of Tsar Samuel in the center of Sofia, in 2015, the Bulgarian president stated that “the return of the bones of Tsar Samuel from Greece to Bulgaria would be an act of historical reconciliation between the two nations – Bulgarian and Greek”. At the same time, he did not fail to convey the hope that “with our brothers in Macedonia, we will soon jointly honor Samuel”, thereby alluding to reaching a political agreement on the common history (President.bg 2015).

The concept of “common history” was finally politically embedded in the Treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation, concluded between the prime ministers of the two countries, Zoran Zaev and Boyko Borisov, in 2017, which allowed Sofia to politically condition the revision of Macedonian national history and historical education. This implies that for the Republic of Macedonia to pursue EU membership, it must meet Bulgaria’s conditions, which involve accepting the notion of “common history.” This entails acknowledging a common language, tradition, and identity, and recognizing a historical continuity as a single nation since the Middle Ages.

CONSTRUCTING THE POLITICAL CONCEPT OF “COMMON HISTORY”

Considering the genesis of the question and the results of the Commission on Historical and Educational Issues established by the Treaty, it is evident that the medieval epoch assumed a crucial dimension regarding the historical legitimization of the politically constructed “common history.” Through this lens, Bulgaria seeks to assert its thesis of uninterrupted continuity of over a thousand years for the ethnic “Bulgarians” in Macedonia, who, since 1945, have undergone violent and ideological conversion into “fictional” Macedonians.

An example that showcases the Bulgarian historiographical-linguistic theses aimed at negating the historical distinctiveness of the Macedonian people and the identity attributes of the Macedonian nation is the publication titled “The Official Language of the Republic of North Macedonia” by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAN). Released on May 7, 2020, this publication presents arguments aligned with Bulgarian perspectives on the linguistic and historical connections with Macedonia, negating the historical narrative and unique identity of the Macedonian people. The collective view of the authors openly demonstrate that, for

them, “common history” means “Bulgarian”, not only in the past but also in the present. The title itself refers to the intention of identity denomination of the Macedonian language, which is put in function of reducing it to a Bulgarian dialect (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. 2020, 7).² The self-presentation of the authors as exclusive promoters of “objective scientific truth” (60) quite clearly illustrates the dogmatic conception of historical and linguistic science. In that sense, the publication constructs an idea that within the newly named “young” state “Republic of North Macedonia” there are no ethnic Macedonians at all. According to the authors, today’s territory of the historical-geographic region of Macedonia is divided between six countries, in which 4,900,000 people live, of which over 40% are of Bulgarian origin. Among the rest of the inhabitants in the area of Macedonia are noted: Greeks, Albanians, Vlachs and Aromanians, Turks, Roma, Jews, as well as an insignificant number of Serbs (7–8). In other words, within the modern states on the territory of geographical and historical Macedonia, all nations are represented, except Macedonian, which for the authors is non-existent, that is, Bulgarian, which thus becomes the most numerous. Such imagined ethnic mapping is the main goal of the publication which claims to “prove” that Bulgarians who spoke the “(old) Bulgarian” language lived continuously in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia since the Middle Ages. In that context, the old theses of Bulgarian historiography in relation to the history of Macedonia are incorporated, which in relation to the Middle Ages can be sublimated into several conceptual interpretations.

The authors primarily aim to exclude any name and identity connection of the Slavs with the names Macedonia and Macedonians, constructing for this purpose an idea that there were no Macedonian Slavs in history, but “Bulgarian Slavs”. According to their interpretation, the Slavs never identified themselves or were identified with the name Macedonia, because this term was used exclusively as a geographical (and in certain cases also as an administrative area) and not as an ethnic designation. Furthermore, the authors claim that, in the middle of the 9th century, the name “Sklavinia” disappeared in the sources, with the inclusion of a part of the area of Macedonia to the Bulgarian state, after which it received the name “the Third Part of the Bulgarian Tsardom” or “Lower lands of Ohrid” (9). According to them, Byzantium used the name “Bulgaria” to denote the “Western Bulgarian lands”, incorporated

² “In its origin and structural and typological characteristics the official language of the Republic of North Macedonia is a southwestern written regional norm of the Bulgarian language”.

by the Byzantine emperor Basil II into the newly named Byzantine theme of 1018 (9). At the same time, it is stated that, during the period of medieval Serbian rule in the 14th century, Macedonia was identified as a “Greek (Byzantine)” land, or as “not a small part of the Tsardom of Bulgaria” (9). In this way, the authors, in fact, claim to suggest that Macedonia, in a historical sense, “belongs” only to Bulgaria and Greece, that is, that the only constant in Macedonia was ethnic, namely Bulgarian and Greek. From there, they draw the conclusion that, until the Second World War, the name Macedonian was “used primarily as a designation for a resident of the historical-geographical area: Macedonian Bulgarian, Macedonian Vlach, Macedonian Greek”, whose traditional meaning, according to them, is retained until today (8). In other words, just as there were no ethnic Macedonians in the past, the Macedonian people do not exist in the present either.

Bearing in mind Macedonia’s direct connection with the beginnings and spread of Slavic literacy, the authors completely subordinate their narrative to “proving” that “the first written Slavic language based on the translations of Cyril and Methodius was Old Bulgarian” (10). In order to “Bulgarianize” the Slavic language, they construct a representation of the supposed existence of “Bulgarian Slavs” in Macedonia and Thessalonica, even before the appearance of Saints Cyril and Methodius. From there, the authors draw the conclusion that “The Slavs under Bulgarian sovereign power and influence have been referred to scientifically with the technical historical terms ‘Bulgarian Slavs’, or ‘Slavs from the Bulgarian group’ (10). In the absence of original and scientific support, they use such a constructed representation to draw far-reaching conclusions – that Constantine/Cyril created the first Slavic alphabet and translations on “based on the Salonica vernacular, a southeastern Bulgarian dialect”, as well as that “ethnically the language of the two brothers from Salonica was Old Bulgarian” (10–11).

Through the “Bulgarianization” of the Macedonian Slavs, the authors, in fact, strive to ethnicize, that is, to “Bulgarianize” the Old Slavic language, and thus also Macedonia in the medieval period. However, faced with the absence of sources to support the “Bulgarian” character of St. Cyril and Methodius and their activity, the authors insert the term “Lower lands of Ohrid”, pointing out that it was one of the designations for Macedonia in the Middle Ages. This term is used as an addition by the editor of the Slavic translation of the Chronicle of the Byzantine author Constantine Manasses, compiled during the time of the Bulgarian

tsar Ivan Asen (1331–1371). In the first addition to the Byzantine original, it is stated that “during the reign of Emperor Anastasius (491–518), the Bulgarians began to occupy that land, they came to Vidin and began to occupy the lower land of Ohrid, and then all that land” (11–12). Evidently, the authors of the publication, in this way, try to imply that the Bulgarians were in Macedonia even before the Byzantine sources registered any settlements of the Slavs in the 7th century, and even before the reign of Emperor Justinian I. However, the Slavic translation of *The Chronicle of Manasses* dates from the 14th century and has no historical validity for reconstructing the specific period and, in general, for the early Middle Ages. All the more so that in the original Byzantine text of the *Manasses Chronicle*, such information does not exist at all. In contrast, the authors of the publication use this later testimony to construct a projected representation of the alleged existence of “Bulgarian Slavs” in Macedonia, as well as in Thessalonica, since the 6th/7th century. The ultimate goal of the publication can be clearly seen in the statement that, for the authors, the label “Old Slavic language”, used by Slavists, “does not reflect the ethnic and state provenance and character of the first written Slavic language but rather highlights its international functions”, because in that epoch, “in the region of Macedonia, which was partly included in the Bulgarian Tsardom, and partly in Byzantium, dialects of the Bulgarian language were spoken” (11).

The authors conclude that the Slavic alphabet was created by the ethnic Bulgarians who inhabited Macedonia. By analogy, it should be labeled as “Old Bulgarian” because it was based on the “Old Bulgarian language” spoken in the Macedonian region, making it the only South Slavic language in the areas around Thessalonica (11). According to the authors, “historical truth” should be their constructed interpretation that “the first Slavic alphabets were created for the Old Bulgarian language” and that “the Glagolitic alphabet was the first Slavic and Bulgarian alphabet; it reflects the phonetic characteristics of the Old Bulgarian language” (12). This claim is based solely on their unfounded assertion that St. Cyril created the Glagolitic script based on the “Salonica spoken variant of the Old Bulgarian language”, becoming the basis of “the first Old Bulgarian translations of Cyril and Methodius” (12).

The attempt to construct a Bulgarian ethnic link with the Slavic language also aims to portray St. Clement and St. Naum of Ohrid as successors to the “Bulgarian” legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius, a portrayal not supported by original sources. The authors cite Theophylact

of Ohrid's detailed account of St. Clement's life, highlighting his role as "the first bishop in the Bulgarian language" (14). This assertion serves as a pivotal argument for advocating the "Bulgarianization" of the Slavic language, highlighting the "appurtenance of both the Ohrid School and Kliment Ohridski (St. Clement of Ohrid) to the history of the Bulgarian language and letters" (14). This argument serves as a crucial point in advocating for the "Bulgarianization" of the Slavic language, emphasizing the connection between the Ohrid literary school and Clement of Ohrid with Bulgarian language and literature history. However, it overlooks the fact that Theophylact of Ohrid wrote from a markedly different ideological perspective compared to St. Clement, reflecting the shifting dynamics of the late 11th and early 12th centuries, where the term "Bulgarian" held different connotations within Byzantine contexts. This complexity of terminology was often manipulated to serve Byzantine political and ideological agendas. Consequently, the question arises as to how the authors of the publication would interpret the assertions would interpret the perspective of Byzantine author Nicephorus Gregoras, who, in the 14th century, asserted that there were no "Bulgarians" in Macedonia at that time, designating Ohrid as a "Macedonian city" and Thessaloniki as "the foremost city in the land of the Macedonians" (Niebuhr and Schopen, 1829).³

Numerous sources advocate for critical analysis as the foundation for reconstructing historical events, emphasizing the importance of avoiding simplification, fabrication, and instrumentalization. The unfounded and constructed "Bulgarian" ethnic connection of St. Cyril and Methodius, which "Bulgarianizes" the Slavic language, is considered "historical truth" by the authors. They also aim to propagate the notion that "Old Bulgarian" manuscripts spread to Serbia and Kievan Rus, suggesting that during the 14th to 15th centuries, "the medieval Bulgarian literary language became the third classical language of Europe following Greek and Latin" (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences 2020, 15).

With the presented theses about the 'Bulgarian' character of St. Cyril and Methodius, the authors attempt to "Bulgarianize" the Slavic language and project it as such in the political context of the contemporary Republic of Macedonia. Consequently, they conclude that the neighbor will have to accept that "the official language of the Republic of North Macedonia is the southwestern written-regional norm of the

³ *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantine historia*, ed. B. Niebuhr and L. Schopen, 3 vol., CSHB (Bonn, 1819-55), I. For the analysis on Gregoras, see Panov, *The Blinded State*, 139–142.

Bulgarian language and therefore can be labeled as North Macedonian Bulgarian.” The fact that the Bulgarian parliament redefined the meaning of the celebration of St. Cyril and Methodius in 2021, giving it a ‘Bulgarian’ context in order to “Bulgarianize” the Slavic language and the Cyril and Methodius traditions continued by St. Clement of Ohrid, clearly illustrates Sofia’s intention to mold history to align with current political goals and nationalist agendas.

THE COMMISSION’S NARRATIVE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE POLITICAL AGENDA

While the definitions endorsed so far by the Multidisciplinary Commission offer a brief and general historical context, they largely align with the Bulgarian narrative and political concept of “common history”. The Commission justified the joint celebration of Saints Cyril and Methodius by defining that their work was “preserved and developed in the literary centers of Preslav and Ohrid, which were then located on the territory of the medieval Bulgarian state, where their students found conditions for work.” Additionally, the Commission highlighted that the memory of St. Cyril and Methodius became ingrained in the world cultural tradition in the mid-19th century, thanks to Bulgaria. This was exemplified by the commencement of celebrating their church holiday in schools, starting in Plovdiv in 1851. As a result, the process of spiritual awakening and emancipation found expression in the ubiquitous celebration of the holiday in many schools on the territory of modern Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Bulgaria. Consequently, owing to Bulgaria’s influence, the endeavors of St. Cyril and Methodius, along with their disciples, started being commemorated in other Slavic nations. Furthermore, their contribution to European civilization has been acknowledged by the Catholic Church, which designated them as protectors of Europe. This agreed historical contextualization, according to the Commission “provides a basis and obliges both states with the responsibility to conserve the memory of the work of St. Cyril and Methodius and their students through annual joint celebrations”.

Based on these definitions, it appears that only Bulgaria is attributed responsibility for the revival of the cult of Saints Cyril and Methodius, as well as for the “spiritual awakening and emancipation” in Macedonia. Consequently, this allows Bulgaria to assert its right to request that the Republic of Macedonia celebrate the holiday of St. Cyril and

Methodius as a Bulgarian national holiday and acknowledge Bulgarian contributions for the spiritual revival and emancipation in Macedonia. Essentially, this argument provides that Bulgarians played a crucial role in the 19th-century spiritual and societal developments in Macedonia due to their inherent identity as the same people residing in the region. This was essentially agreed upon by the Commission, which gives the recommendations a one-sided and exclusively Bulgarian historiographic view, ultimately corresponding to the concept of Bulgarian historical continuity from the Middle Ages. Evidently, Bulgaria aims to nationalize Ss. Cyril and Methodius and their Slavic heritage, portraying them as “Bulgarians” (Panov 2022, 347–362).

Through this conception, the Commission also historically characterized the work of Saints Clement and Naum of Ohrid. The same is true for the definition of Tsar Samuel who is considered as ruler of a “large medieval state, which most of modern historical science considers it to be the Bulgarian tsardom with its center in the territory of today’s Republic of North Macedonia” and thus a “a symbol of the common history, which is shared by the two modern states Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Bulgaria” (Министерство за надворешни работи. 2022a).

Hence, Bulgaria’s role is again exemplified, with Samuel’s State is regarded as emblematic of a “common history” for the present countries. From there, the “Bulgarian” political and church traditions related to Samuel’s state and the Samuel’s Church – Ohrid archdiocese will be extracted. Such a revision of the Macedonian narrative will actually mirror the old Bulgarian theses constructed in the second half of the 19th century, with which it was claimed to demonstrate that Samuil’s state, as well as the autonomy of the Ohrid archdiocese which was recognized by Emperor Basil II after the liquidation of the kingdom, in fact enabled the continuation of the Bulgarian national ideal and traditions, thus maintaining the Bulgarian name and the Bulgarian ethnic consciousness in Macedonia. Thus, the uprisings in Macedonia for the restoration of Samuel’s Kingdom in the 11th century, as well as the church traditions associated with the Ohrid archdiocese, including the aspirations for its restoration after its abolition in 1767, will be interpreted as tendencies to restore “Bulgarian” traditions. Indicatively the term Macedonia as regards to historical contextualization of the medieval period was completely neglected.

The definitions of these personalities by the Commission were embraced by the governments of both countries as a political justification for joint official celebrations. As declared in the political decision, in every “official honoring of these persons, the historical truth about our common history must be clearly marked” (Влада на РСМ. 2019). Hence, the historical characterization of the Commission, was politically dogmatized as a “historical truth”. Furthermore, with the second bilateral protocol with Bulgaria signed in July 2022 that became in fact an annex to the Treaty of friendship, good-neighborliness and cooperation, the Republic of Macedonia has been placed in a position of direct conditionality regarding its EU integration, contingent upon the results of the commission as regards the revision of history. According to the protocol, the historical formulations of the “historical figures from the common history” agreed upon by the commission will have to be included in the “relevant curricula, textbooks, and other relevant teaching materials, and to take them into account and reflect on the contents of inscriptions on tables, historical monuments, memorials, and information materials in museums and other objects of educational and cultural importance, as well as in publicly owned information media”. Meanwhile, “the approved texts” will determine how “properly” it will be necessary to “organize a joint or individual celebrations” and they will determine the truthfulness of “public speeches and statements about common persons and events for which such celebrations are organized” (Министерство за надворешни работи на РСМ. 2022б). The positioning of the commission with the political agreement and the protocols as the only ones relevant to the state in the context of the historical definition of persons and events in the educational system and in the public space essentially implies that the Republic of Macedonia forfeits its sovereignty in shaping its own national narrative and defining its identity. This practice not only deviates from established norms but also contradicts scientific standards, European values, and, ultimately, human rights.

Viewed from this perspective, Bulgaria’s insistence on discussing the ethnic identity of Goce Delchev, revered as a national hero by Macedonians, is understandable. The Bulgarian side contends that Delchev was Bulgarian, striving to liberate Bulgarians in Macedonia from Ottoman rule. the concept of a “common history”, which historically categorized figures like Delchev as ethnically Bulgarian, including his role in the Ilinden uprising, Macedonians would consequently lose their basis for celebrating him as a national hero. Applying the concept

of “common history” would entail declaring Goce Delchev ethnically Bulgarian, which would include characterizing the Ilinden uprising. Declaring him a part of the “common history” would also mean recognizing his Bulgarian character (Panov 2021, 223–252). Consequently, this would deprive the Macedonians of the very reason to celebrate Goce Delchev as a national hero.

Furthermore, Macedonian and Bulgarian politicians have begun promoting the idea of removing the labels “fascism” and “fascist occupier” as regards Bulgaria from all monuments and inscriptions reflecting the historical period of the Macedonian Liberation War during the Second World War. The readiness of the Macedonian Government to erase these labels from the monuments, inscription and textbooks was promoted by then Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev (Влада на РСМ. 2020). The co-president from the Macedonian part of the Commission, Dragi Gjorgiev followed this notion by challenging the portrayal of Bulgaria as a “classic fascist country,” deeming the term “Bulgarian fascist occupation” inappropriate (Слободна Европа 2022). This suggests that the Macedonian people fought against an abstract enemy during the Second World War, raising doubts about the fundamental nature of the anti-fascist struggle.

The readiness to erase the Bulgarian fascist labels found in the historical records of the antifascist fight in fact obliterate the historical memory of the Macedonian people and the state-building traditions based on ASNOM. And that is precisely what the Bulgarian political leadership is trying to prove – that there was no occupation, but rather the liberation of Macedonia by the Bulgarian armies, and that ASNOM is a reflection of the Yugoslav ideology with which the Bulgarians of that time were ideologically and forcibly converted into Macedonians.

CONCLUSION

The Republic of Macedonia is currently facing significant challenges regarding the negation of its national identity, particularly due to persistent attempts by its neighbors to impose revision of its national history through political agreements. These agreements aim to solidify their respective national historiographies, with the intention of delineating the history of Macedonia. Greece, for example, has sought to monopolize historical terms such as “Macedonia” and “Macedonians,” defining them exclusively as part of Hellenic heritage through the Prespa

Agreement. Similarly, Bulgaria aims to incorporate significant historical figures from Macedonia into a political concept of “common history”, aimed at demonstrating the continuity of the historical presence of the ethnic Bulgarians since the Middle Ages. The reinterpretation of history to conform with the neighboring countries’ narratives, endorsed as historical “truth” threatens to reduce the Macedonian nation to a commodified modern construct – a product of political agreements – devoid of historical distinctiveness. Consequently, since the revision of the national history emerges as a crucial political condition for the nation’s integration into the European Union, it poses a significant challenge to the preservation of Macedonian identity.⁴

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4 Maybe the best definition is provided by the late Professor Spyridon Sfetas, former member of the Macedonian-Greek Committee on historical, educational and archaeological issues, indicating that the Greek side achieved “national success” on key historical issues, in what he characterized as “the contemporary Macedonian struggle with historians from the neighboring country” (Spiridon Sfetas, “ Η απόρρητη έκθεση για τα σχολικά βιβλία των Σκοπίων”, *Ethnos*, 6.7.2019, <https://www.ethnos.gr/Politics/article/48845/monostoethnosgrhaporrhthektheshiatiasxolikabibliatonskopion>, accessed November 11 2023.

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БЫТЬ СОБОЙ ИЛИ СТАТЬ ДРУГИМ: ПЕРЕСМОТР ИСТОРИИ И ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ МАКЕДОНИЯ В ЕС

Аннотация

Политические элиты через государственные институты используют прошлое для мобилизации памяти, отражая коллективную идентичность как неотъемлемый компонент нации. Поэтому, когда государство сталкивается с навязанным пересмотром своей национальной истории в сочетании с ее адаптацией к нарративам других наций, функция истории становится катализатором эрозии национальной идентичности. Это явление будет рассмотрено на примере Республики Македонии, касающегося принудительного пересмотра национальной историографии и учебников по истории, вытекающего из политических соглашений с Болгарией (2017 г.) и Грецией (2018 г.). Основное внимание в анализе уделяется последствиям политически сконструированной «общей истории», вытекающей из работы Совместной македонско-болгарской многопрофильной комиссии по историческим и образовательным вопросам. Более того, двусторонний протокол с Болгарией от июля 2022 года влечет за собой прямое вмешательство в систему образования Македонии. Он предусматривает, что согласованные Комиссией исторические определения будут очерчивать и обозначать общественные места (надписи на памятниках, вывесках, туристических путеводителях, государственных учреждениях, средствах массовой информации) и формировать официальные

речи во время государственных торжеств. Следовательно, императивный пересмотр истории под политическим давлением становится решающим фактором для вступления страны в ЕС, оказывая глубокое влияние на идентичность и суверенитет македонской нации.

Ключевые слова: *Республика Македония, Македонцы, Политика, История, Идентичность, интеграция в ЕС, Греция, Болгария.*