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Macedonia's Colourful Revolution and the Elections of 2016. A Chance for Democracy, or All for Nothing?

Abstract. This article analyses Macedonia's Colourful Revolution and elections of 2016 against the background of the criticism and protests directed against the Skopje 2014 Project. It also provides a photographic reportage of Skopje 2014 during the political turmoil from July 2016. It examines the main grounds for resistance and opposition to Nikola Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE government by further investigating the controversies surrounding Skopje 2014. Those controversies are manifold but stem mainly from the project's tremendous cost and corruption, its controversial rewriting of history and its exclusion of Albanians and other minorities. Finally, the article argues that the Colourful Revolution has until now failed to overturn or decisively upset Macedonia's politics or political system, as is evident from election results there. However, it has borne fruit in one respect in that two Albanian MPs have been included in the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), a tentative step towards overcoming the ethnic deadlock of Macedonian politics.

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Between April and June 2016, the newly built marble monuments and edifices of the Skopje 2014 Project were the focal point of the ire of anti-government protesters.* Both Alexander the Great and the special prosecutor's office found themselves splattered in the rich colours of a rain of paint bombs, which earned the nationwide protests the nickname 'The Colourful Revolution' (see Fig. 1).¹ In May 2015 the social democrat and opposition leader Zoran Zaev made public that the government had eavesdropped on 20,000 phone numbers and illegal-

* In the period from 13-15 and 25-27 June 2016, I sojourned in Skopje as part of field research on Macedonian monument and memory culture since 1991. All the photographs in this article were taken during that period.

¹ First used by Kristina Ozimec, Osmi den od 'šarenata Makedonska revolucija', *Deutsche Welle*, 19 April 2016, http://www.dw.com/mk/осми-ден-од-шарената-македонска-револуција/a-19199808?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_makedonija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss. All internet references were accessed on 24 October 2016.

ly listened to 670,000 conversations, including those of politicians, police officers, and judges. Ever since that revelation the Republic of Macedonia has been in political turmoil. The illegal tapes provided evidence of a multitude of crimes committed by top members of government, from threatening and controlling the media to rigging elections, corruption and even covering up the murder of a young man by the police. Eventually, after months of heated debate and talks and due to intervention and mediation by the European Union (EU) an agreement was brokered between the coalition and the opposition. Right wing prime minister Nikola Gruevski of the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (*Vnatrešna makedonska revolucionerna organizacija—Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo*, VMRO-DPMNE) was to

step down in January while a mixture of coalition and opposition politicians would form an interim government until early elections could be held the next year.² Crucially, alongside democratic reforms to prevent rigged elections, the four main political parties agreed to allow a special prosecutor to investigate the electronic eavesdropping scandal that was still at the centre of the political crisis.

Despite Gruevski's stepping down in January as agreed, three months later the situation escalated. Macedonia's VMRO-DPMNE president Gjorge Ivanov disregarded the agreement of 12 April 2016 and issued a pardon to all involved in the scandal, stating, 'I am convinced that this is a big step forward toward reconciliation, and that this will help in creating an atmosphere for normal political and democratic competition, based on ideas and results, not accusations and destruction.'³ However, Ivanov's decision had the opposite



Figure 1. The Porta Macedonia triumphal arch, standing on the 11th October Street which connects Macedonia Square in the centre of the city with the parliament building a hundred metres away. Through the gate the 22 metre tall 'Warrior on a Horse'—Alexander the Great—can be seen on Macedonia Square. Both are covered in the residue of paint bombs.

² Siniša-Jakov Marušić, Late-Night Deal Saves Macedonia Crisis Agreement, *BalkanInsight*, 6 November 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-parties-clinch-deal-on-ministers-reforms-11-06-2015>.

³ Aleksandar Dimishkovski, Protests Erupt in Macedonia as President Halts Wiretapping Inquiry, *New York Times*, 12 April 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/world/europe/macedonia-gjorge-ivanov-wiretapping-corruption-investigation.html>.



Figure 2. The Macedonian parliament covered in paint from paint bombs. The crush barriers for the nightly protests were still in place on 14 June 2016. In front of the parliament is the newly built statue of Nikola Karev (1877-1905), one of the leaders of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) and a leading figure in the Ilinden uprising of 2 August 1903.

effect as that very day thousands of Macedonians took to the streets of the capital in protest. Protests continued for weeks outside the parliament building, other government buildings, and the special prosecutor's office. Yielding to both domestic and international pressure, a month later Ivanov revoked the pardons. On 14 May the state election commission revealed that the opposition—and Gruevski's Albanian coalition partner the Democratic Union for Integration (*Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim/Demokratska unija za integracija, DUI*)—were to boycott the planned early elections out of fear that the election process would be rigged and undemocratic. Mass protests continued until July when once again the EU mediated talks between the warring political parties until eventually a new deal was brokered (see Fig. 2 and 3). This time, after two postponements it was decided that early elections would take

place on 11 December 2016. Although parliament was indeed dissolved in good time on 17 October, the coalition and the opposition could not agree on key matters concerning the special prosecutor's office nor the budget.⁴ However, the VMRO-DPMNE saw no problem in allowing Gruevski and various other politicians then under criminal investigation to stand for parliament again. So far, the long awaited election has failed to provide a solution to the longstanding political crisis.

Despite the long list of well-substantiated allegations about his incumbent government, Gruevski won his fourth parliamentary election in a row on 11 December 2016. A few days later the Macedonian judiciary again betrayed its blatant entanglement with the government by refusing to hear accounts from key witnesses and allow other crucial material as evidence in the trial against

⁴ BIRN Staff, Macedonia Parties Form Interim Govt Ahead of Polls, *BalkanInsight*, 2 September 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-to-appoint-interim-govt-09-02-2016>; Siniša-Jakov Marušić, Macedonia Parliament Dissolves for Early Elections, *BalkanInsight*, 17 October 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-parliament-dissolves-for-snap-polls-10-17-2016>.

Nikola Gruevski. Gruevski, portraying foreign ambassadors and George Soros as external forces threatening Macedonia, responded furiously to criticism of the election process from both the opposition and the EU.⁵ Nevertheless the elections were a very close call after a heated campaign in which Gruevski stated in so many words that Goche Delchev, a Macedonian revolutionary hero, would have assassinated Zoran Zaev, leader of today's Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski sojuz na Makedonija*, SDSM) and the main opposition leader. The VMRO-DPMNE lost 10 seats in parliament and now holds 51, whereas the SDSM gained 15 and now holds 49 seats. The DUI lost nearly half their seats because they were coalition partners of Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE, a party which has been vehemently criticized by Albanian Macedonians for



Figure 3. The monument to the Fallen Heroes of Macedonia directly opposite the National Assembly is also covered in paint.

its divisive political rhetoric and its politicization of ethnicity. The three other Albanian opposition parties gained as many seats as the formerly all-powerful DUI, reaping the rewards of their criticism of the government's blatant nepotism and corruption. However, the ultimate consequence of that has been a splintered Albanian voting bloc consisting of parties who refuse to cooperate. In theory, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI could restore their government, albeit with a shaky parliamentary majority of one seat. Indeed as things stand that appears to be Gruevski's only option in view of the other parties' outright refusal to cooperate with him. Despite the huge losses inflicted on the DUI in the elections, its leader Ali Ahmeti has so far refused to rule out a return to power, stating that all options are still on the table, for without the DUI the opposition would be two seats short of a parliamentary majority.⁶ So has Macedonia's Colourful

⁵ Cf. Siniša-Jakov Marušić, Macedonia Court Rejects Key Evidence Against Former PM, *BalkanInsight*, 16 December 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-s-former-pm-stands-trial-for-ordering-violence-12-15-2016>; Siniša-Jakov Marušić, Macedonia's Gruevski Issues Threats, *BalkanInsight*, 17 December 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-s-gruevski-gives-threatening-speech-12-17-2016>.

⁶ Semra Musai, Macedonian Albanian Party Mulls New Coalition with Gruevski, *BalkanInsight*, 11 January 2017, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonian-main-albanian-party-mulls-coalition-with-gruevski-01-11-2017>.

Revolution all been for nothing? Before suggesting an answer to that question, I shall first illustrate the main reasons for the protests against Gruevski and his government on the basis of the highly controversial Skopje 2014.

Despite its name the Skopje 2014 project was initiated in 2008 and is still going on. The direct motivation for it appears to have been 2008's NATO summit in Bucharest, where Greece once again refused point blank to recognise Macedonia and vetoed talk of Macedonia's membership of NATO. However it is evident that the Skopje 2014 project itself is part of a much larger scheme to rewrite Macedonia's history – to which I shall return later. Even though the economic crisis had hit Macedonia hard, the Gruevski government continued to divert funds to the reconstruction and renewal programme in Skopje. So far, it is believed that it has cost the Macedonian tax payer at least 600 million euros, although the actual sum is shrouded in mystery.⁷ More importantly, as the total Macedonian government budget consists of around three billion euros, Skopje 2014 extensively siphoned off funding that was vital for education, healthcare and investment in a country suffering economic hardship on a large scale. Furthermore, both local and national governments claim that Skopje 2014 provides a much-needed reconstruction of the city which apparently was still suffering the consequences of a disastrous earthquake that had occurred in 1963. Indeed, the city's medieval fortress and several other buildings such as the national theatre are being restored, but simultaneously the city's modernist reconstruction is being ignored and destroyed. After the natural disaster in 1963, renowned architects such as Kenzo Tange and Yugoslav futurist architects had envisaged a modern, modernist city suited to its inhabitants' needs with large international support and input (see Fig. 4 and 5).⁸

The destruction of 'Skopje 1963' has also amounted to a negation of the country's communist past. The VMRO-DPMNE styles itself as the anachronistic successor to the VMRO, the revolutionary movement that was active in the early 20th century in what is now Macedonia and adjacent territories. The VMRO was the organisation behind the unsuccessful Ilinden Uprising of 1903, which Macedonians now regard as one of the pivotal moments in their history. But the VMRO was also a terrorist organisation and had been responsible for the murder of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliiski and carried out paramilitary activities and occupation in interbellum Bulgaria.⁹ Skopje 2014 therefore represents a new national historical narrative foregrounded by the VMRO-DPMNE, acting as a counter narrative to the old communist identity-building project which focused on the efforts of Tito's partisans in the Second

⁷ Cf. Skopje 2014 Uncovered, *BalkanInsight*, 18 October 2016, <http://skopje2014.prima.birn.eu.com/en>.

⁸ For a concise overview cf. Iris Meder, *New Literature on the Architecture of Socialist Modernity in Yugoslavia*, *Südosteuropa* 64, no. 3 (2016), 396-418, DOI: 10.1515/soeu-2016-0033.

⁹ Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?*, London 2000, 79-85.

World War. Those stories have subsequently been ignored and marginalised as communist-era monuments were either destroyed or moved within Skopje, whereas a great variety of pre-communist revolutionary heroes are now being honoured with massive marble statues and streets named after them. Effectively, the only way in which the Yugoslav period is being commemorated has been with the highlighting of the victims of communism. Statues are dedicated to those punished for their criticism of the communist regime or for their active opposition to it. Names such as Metodija Andonov Čento are commemorated, and there are museums, such as here the newly built *Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence – Museum of VMRO – Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime* (see Fig. 6).¹⁰

Problematically, history is by and large split along political and ideological lines in Macedonia. Many Macedonians are supporters of the Communist Party's successor SDSM and they strongly disagree with the portrayal of Macedonian history expounded not only by Skopje 2014's monuments and museums but also by the explicit 'renovation' of the communist, modernist architecture of the city. Indeed, the only non-controversial component of Skopje 2014's representation of the past appears to be its explicit omission of the Ottoman period. Nevertheless, Skopje 2014 provides a skewed vision of Macedonian history by focusing intensively on a number of small scale revolts and terrorist attacks which are rarely unanimously or unambiguously linked to actual Macedonian nationalism, and by offering an erroneous representation of the nation's past. The independence of the Macedonian nation, which the VMRO-DPMNE claims to cherish so much, was not achieved by the force of a few revolutionaries before the First World War, but is ulti-



Figure 4. An example of the reconstructed eclectic neo-baroque/rococo/classicist facades at Macedonia Square. In the foreground is a statue of Dimitrija Čupovski (1878-1940), a prominent Macedonian lexicographer and philologist.

¹⁰ Cf. Ulf Brunnbauer, *Historiography, Myths and the Nation in the Republic of Macedonia*, in: Ulf Brunnbauer, ed. (Re)Writing History. *Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, Münster 2004, 262-296.



Figure 5. This is the most expensive building of the Skopje 2014 project, costing 43 million euros. It is a neo-classical edifice housing the State Archives, the Constitutional Court and the National Archaeological Museum. In front of it is 'The Bridge of Civilizations', showing myriad people who once lived on geographically Macedonian soil, from early Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages. The statue of the Serbian Tsar Dušan (ca. 1308-1355) has elicited particular criticism and attacks from the Albanian minority.

mately derived from the statehood guaranteed and developed by Yugoslav communism.

Skopje 2014 is in line with the VMRO-DPMNE's agenda to rearrange Macedonia's past and bolster and utilize nationalist Macedonian fervour for its own ends. Another vital component of their scheme is so-called 'antiquisation', the idea that ultimately the Macedonian nation does not originate in a late 19th century nationalist reawakening but in the Macedonia of classical antiquity.¹¹ Problematically

for prime minister Gruevski and president Ivanov who are both of mixed Macedonian-Greek heritage, those claims are naturally strongly contested by Greece which also looks to Alexander the Great as one of its progenitors.¹² Nevertheless, the new international airport of Skopje is named after Alexander the Great and the main monument of Skopje 2014 is a massive 22 metre-tall statue dedicated to him on the city's main square, opposite a large monument of his father, Philip II. The communist past of Skopje's city centre is being erased with neo-baroque and neo-classical façades to create a sense of continuity between the nation's alleged ancient roots and the present. Along with Greece, Bulgaria too has vehemently criticized the Macedonian government for explicitly stealing its history, from the medieval Tsar Samuil to 19th and 20th century revolutionaries, scientists and artists. The Bulgarians refer specifically to the veneration of the VMRO, which Bulgaria itself claims too. Underlying Skopje's 2014 revisionism and its determined claim on dozens of historical figures is the somewhat bizarre

¹¹ Cf. Anastas Vangeli, Nation-Building Ancient Macedonian Style. The Origins and the Effects of the So-Called Antiquization in Macedonia, *Nationalities Papers. The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 39, no. 1 (2011), 13-32, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2010.532775.

¹² On the conflict between Macedonia and Greece cf. Adamantios Skordos, *Griechenlands Makedonische Frage. Bürgerkrieg und Geschichtspolitik im Südosten Europas, 1945-1992*, Göttingen 2012; Victor Roudemetof, ed, *Collective Memory, National Identity and Ethnic Conflict. Greece, Bulgaria and the Macedonian Question*, Westport/CT 2002.



Figure 6. This Yugoslav-era monument is dedicated to the communist partisans who liberated Skopje. It used to stand prominently at the head of a park on the bank of the River Vardar next to the stone bridge, but is now hidden between the newly built Stone Bridge Hotel and the National Archaeological Museum.



Figures 7 and 8. Macedonian phalangites on the column of the statue of Alexander the Great. The fountain is surrounded by lions which also adorn the coat of arms of the VMRO-DPMNE. In the background is the Macedonian flag—still controversial. This statue in particular is the main affront in Athenian eyes.



Figure 9. An eight metre high monument to Tsar Samuil (958-1014) who was the ruler of the Bulgarian Empire. Because Samuil is a well-known historical figure whose capital Ohrid lies today in modern Macedonia, Samuil is a hotly debated figure in the historiographical arguments between Macedonia and Bulgaria.

notion that by competing with other nations' historical claims and building the biggest monument, then that history somehow becomes yours to claim, as if by magic (see Fig. 7-9).

The construction project has therefore not only come to symbolize the VMRO-DPMNE's attempts at faking history or rewriting it erroneously, but has turned out to be much more extensive than when it was first announced. The scope of Skopje 2014 is much broader than just reconstruction and consists of a large variety of monuments, reconstructions of façades, hotels, fountains, bridges and so on that have completely transformed the nation's capital. So far, 136 structures have either been built or are planned for completion by 2018.¹³ The city centre is now packed with monuments and statues honouring the heroes of Macedonian history alongside the ubiquitous neo-classical façades that have been given to all the government ministries and other official buildings

as a sort of 'makeover'. Despite her Albanian roots the recently sainted Mother Teresa too has been claimed by the nationalist agenda of Skopje 2014. A new memorial centre has been built and plaques recording quotations of her words are displayed on the Porta Macedonia and various government buildings (see Fig. 10). Macedonia square now boasts its enormous statues of Alexander the Great, Tsar Samuil, Justinian and various other great figures from 'Macedonian' history, whilst it is surrounded by luxurious hotels and eclectic historicized façades. Across the Vardar River a new opera house has been constructed alongside new national museums of Macedonia's history, a rebuilt medieval Orthodox church, a statue of Philip II, and various other statues of revolutionary heroes from before the Second World War. A visitor to Skopje can scarcely help but notice the music continually broadcast from loudspeakers at the main sites of Skopje 2014—this is not traditional Macedonian music nor even

¹³ Skopje 2014 Uncovered.

modern popular songs, but music from the 'Indiana Jones' films or other 'heroic-sounding' tunes. It is no surprise then that both Macedonian and international critics have lambasted Skopje 2014 for being not only completely out of touch with Skopje's communist heritage and architecture but also for turning the capital into something like a vulgar Disney-style theme park full of rococo-esque kitsch.¹⁴

There were many and varied reasons why Skopje 2014 was both the setting of 2016's anti-governments protests and its catalyst. First, to many people the whole project stands for the widespread corruption, nepotism and clientelism of the Gruevski regime. The financing of the project has represented the polar opposite of transparent governance; in fact costs have spiralled out of control due to suspected corruption and political bribery. However, that suspicion, despite numerous substantiated indicators, cannot be proven entirely because the government has so far refused to give any insight into its financial dealings concerning Skopje 2014. The redrawings of the city centres of Prilep and Bitola not only share the same characteristics as Skopje 2014, such as statues dedicated to VMRO revolutionaries—and Alexander the Great—and the characteristic neo-classicist façades, but crucially they are attended by the same vagueness as to costs and reveal similar evidence suggesting extensive money-laundering schemes. Secondly, the government's makeover of Skopje reflects its highly controversial rewriting and rearrangement of the country's past. An independent survey conducted in September 2013 shows that most Macedonians disagree with



Figure 10. Despite being a Catholic nun with Albanian roots who spent almost her entire life abroad, Mother Teresa has been enthusiastically claimed by the Macedonian government for its own aims, in this case increasing the nation's birth rate (as by the Albanian government). This quotation is on the Porta Macedonia.

¹⁴ Cf. Kit Gillet, How Skopje Became Europe's New Capital of Kitsch, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/apr/11/skopje-macedonia-architecture-2014-project-building>; Catriona Davies, Is Macedonia's Capital Being Turned Into a Theme Park?, *CNN*, 10 October 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/04/world/europe/macedonia-skopje-2014>; Jasna Koteska, Troubles with History. Skopje 2014, *ARTMargins Online*, 29 December 2011, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/2-articles/655-troubles-with-history-skopje-2014>.



Figure 11. ‘VMRO Nevermore’ is the caption placed on a monument of the Catholic priest Pjetër Bogdani (ca. 1630-1689), one of the first authors to write in Albanian. Rather than originally planned, this statue, alongside two others, was forced upon the VMRO-DPMNE by its junior Albanian coalition partner (DUI) after fierce criticism by the Albanian minority of Skopje 2014 and its complete lack of Albanian representation.

monuments and dozens of smaller statues, none was Albanian. Only after there was complaint that Macedonian Albanians’ interests were not being protected did a row break out between the VMRO-DPMNE and its junior Albanian coalition partner the DUI. Thereafter, three monuments representing Albanians were set up (see Fig. 11).¹⁶ The recent election performance of the DUI has shown that its supporters reject both backroom political deals of that sort and revealed how the DUI was complicit in Gruevski’s party’s corruption and anti-Albanian ac-

the outline and costs—in fact with the entire plan of Skopje 2014 and specifically its revisionist agenda.¹⁵ It then becomes clearly logical that those very monuments of Skopje 2014 and its side projects in Bitola and Prilep formed the focal point of the tens of thousands of anti-government protesters who then actively targeted the actual monuments and buildings with their paint bombs.

Thirdly, Skopje 2014 has often been criticized because of the evident orthodox Macedonian national identity it asserts. Despite the fact that the project has incorporated dozens of figures who could be linked to Macedonia from all possible epochs, it is still a nation-building project that is based ultimately on an exclusive perspective on the Macedonian nation. Rather than further analysing what Skopje 2014 represents, it is painfully obvious whom it does not include—namely the country’s Albanians. Roughly a quarter of the Macedonian population are ethnically Albanian and largely Muslim, and there are sizeable Roma and Turkish minorities as well. Of the first 34 larger

¹⁵ Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Skopje, Skopje 2014 Poll by ISSHS, *Infogr.am*, September 2013, <http://infogr.am/skopje-2014-poll-results-by-isshs?scr=web>.

¹⁶ Siniša-Jakov Marušić, Albanian Monuments to Decorate Macedonian Capital, *BalkanInsight*, 9 October 2013, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/green-light-for-albanian-monuments-in-skopje>.

tions. Furthermore, Orthodox churches and monuments honouring Orthodox saints are being both constructed and reconstructed whilst ancient Ottoman mosques are used as galleries or left to decay. Apart from ethnic and religious exclusion, Skopje 2014 is a traditional and pointedly masculine project. Statues represent strong, masculine warrior men and heroes who have fought and shed blood for their nation through the ages. In this masculine ideal of the national hero, women are not only naturally underrepresented but when they do appear are portrayed in traditional gendered roles. Women are either pious, charitable and chaste like a Paeonian priestess or Mother Teresa herself, or they are nursing mothers like Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great. Her statue concomitantly urges Macedonian women to have more children!¹⁷ (see Fig. 12).

However, although both the VMRO-DPMNE and the DUI lost heavily in December's elections, the former lost only 10 of its 61 seats in a parliament of 120 seats. Despite allegations of corruption, systematic abuse of the country's secret services, election fraud and various other crimes—not to mention the electoral decimation of the government's coalition partner—the opposition failed to defeat Gruevski. The VMRO-DPMNE's message of assertive nationalism and similar rhetoric both towards foreign countries and the country's Albanians, has resonated as well with its electorate as in the last four elections, in which the VMRO-DPMNE won between 50 and 60 seats. Additionally, Gruevski's hard-line approach to the refugee crisis perhaps proved to many that he is just the man, strong and resolute, whom Macedonians need to defend their nation in what are perilous times. To a sizeable portion of the Macedonian electorate, the controversy surrounding Skopje 2014, or the gov-



Figure 12. A bride and her groom photographed next to the Fountain of the Mothers of Macedonia. The fountain depicts young Alexander the Great with his pregnant mother and is located next to the iconic Stone Bridge. Its aim is to encourage people to have more children, as many members of the Macedonian elite fear the higher reproduction rates of Muslim minorities.

¹⁷ On this topic cf. Ulf Brunnbauer, *Fertility, Families and Ethnic Conflict. Macedonians and Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia, 1944-2002*, *Nationalities Papers. The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 32, no. 3 (2004), 565-598, 567-568, DOI: 10.1080/0090599042000246406.

ernment, is simply irrelevant or not enough to dissuade them from voting for Gruevski.

More importantly, a return to the previous coalition that ruled the country appears to be at least feasible, as the recent splintering of the Albanian vote reflects the polarized situation between the Albanian parties. An SDSM-led government is dependent on DUI support, but the other Albanian parties refuse to cooperate with the DUI because they hold it responsible as well for Gruevski's corrupt and divisive regime. However, all this political unrest in Macedonia has produced one certainty: membership of the EU and NATO now seems further away than ever. So far, it appears that the Colourful Revolution has indeed been for nothing as Gruevski will most likely return to power and more importantly, he and his many accomplices will elude imprisonment or other punishment. Nevertheless, the anti-government protests have borne fruit in one way that might prove vital in the long run, that fruit being the possible end to the one great divisive spectre that has haunted Macedonian politics ever since its independence in 1991, namely ethnicity. The SDSM has campaigned actively for support—and votes—from Albanians to finally overcome the deadlock of polarized hindrance to productive governance. In Macedonia's newly elected parliament two ethnic Albanians will represent not an exclusively Albanian party, but the SDSM, in an effort to overcome difference and in an endeavour to forge a truly united Macedonia.¹⁸

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¹⁸ Sefer Tahiri, Macedonia Social Democrats Set Sights on Albanian Votes, *BalkanInsight*, 11 November 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-social-democrats-set-sights-on-albanian-votes-11-11-2016>.