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The Macedonian–Albanian political frontier: the re-articulation of post-Yugoslav political identities

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ABSTRACT. The article examines the re-articulation of national identity in Macedonia since its independence in 1992. Both ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political identities have been engaged in a complex process of redefinition. Two ethnic groups had previously been strongly influenced by the Marxist paradigm and its Yugoslav official interpretation. During the 1990s, the elements of the old paradigm were combined with elements of the new – liberal democratic – concepts of nationhood. While some of the concepts developed within the old Yugoslav framework are still in use, the new liberal-democratic political paradigm finds it difficult to include them into an official discourse on nationhood. At the same time, introduction of the concepts inherent to the liberal-democratic paradigm has disturbed the fragile balance achieved through the old Yugoslav narrative. In new circumstances, the ethnic Macedonians transformed themselves from the 'constitutive nation' to 'majority'. However, the ethnic Albanians found it more difficult to accept the status of 'minority', which was once (in Yugoslav Marxist narrative) considered to be politically incorrect. Thus, they insist on being recognised as a 'nation', equal to ethnic Macedonians. In its essence, the conflict in Macedonia is – to a large extent – a conflict between two different concepts of what is Macedonia and who are Macedonians. The questions posed are: is the minority (ethnic Albanians) part of the nation? Could two nations exist peacefully within one state? The article maps out differences between two different discourses on the identity of the new Macedonian state.

Introduction

This article focuses on the construction of a political frontier between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia between September 1991 and the beginning of a six-month-long military conflict between two communities, between February and August 2001. The military phase was by no means the beginning of this conflict.[1] Problems were signalled as early as 1991, when Albanian parties led a boycott of the Republic's referendum on independence. In 1993 a proposal to create an autonomous province of 'Ilirida' emerged among Albanian political forces. Incidents between Albanians and (ethnic Macedonian-dominated) police have

been frequent ever since independence. Disputes arose over the 1991 census, national symbols in Gostivar, and the establishment of an Albanian University at Tetovo. Despite 'multicultural' rhetoric, and political co-operation between Macedonian and Albanian parties, discord between the two communities continuously grew.

We examine how this social division has been constructed and instituted, by charting the historical process that has resulted in the drawing of a political frontier between Albanians and Macedonians. The concept of political frontier is central to our study given that it captures the socially constructed and historically contingent nature of this conflict.[2]

The development of political identities in Macedonia today is tied to larger ideas and symbolic political horizons that Tito's Yugoslavia created for both Albanians and Macedonians. Of equal importance is the contemporary re-inscription of dominant ideas related to nationhood in the new context of independence, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the new geo-political context in South-Eastern Europe.[3] Conflict between ethnic groups is not predetermined by their coexistence. It is conditioned by discourses that construct and disseminate the political relevance of ethnic identities.

The new Macedonian state emerged as the ideological paradigm of Yugoslav socialism upon which politics was based gave way to liberal democracy. However, specific elements of nationalist discourse were present in both paradigms.[4] This changeover from one paradigm to the other has never been fully completed. The narrative that has constituted the political system in the first ten years since independence had elements of both Yugoslav socialism and of liberal democracy. The new discourse of the state favoured ethnic Macedonians relative to the *status quo ante* by treating them as the only 'constitutive nation' of the republic (a notion from the old narrative) and as a 'majority' (a notion from the new liberal-democratic narrative).[5] Thus an important distinction was drawn between 'majority' and 'minority', which was neither articulated nor institutionalised under Yugoslav socialism. Indeed it was explicitly negated.[6] While ethnic Macedonian elites agreed with the status of 'majority' of the new nation-state (and thus reconfirm their status as the new state's 'constitutive nation'), ethnic Albanian elites did not agree to becoming a 'minority' in a state which they saw as being entirely controlled by ethnic Macedonians.[7] The construction of this new nation-state has thus been fraught with difficulties. In the first eight years since independence, the conflict between the political elites who represent the two communities remained largely un-mobilised except at the electoral level. Extra-parliamentary conflict was avoided partly because of the existence of 'hostile others' on Macedonia's borders.

However, with the fall of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000, the most direct foreign threat disappeared. Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia were faced with the question of 'who are Macedonians?'. Who is the nation, and who is the minority? Is the minority part of the nation? Is there only one, or are there two nations within the Macedonian state? Could

two nations exist peacefully within one state – or do they somewhat naturally tend to divide the state between them? Does one nation (Albanians) have the right to constitute more than one state? The conflict between Albanian nationalist paramilitaries and Macedonian state forces between February and August 2001 was the conflict between two different and irreconcilable discourses of which these seemingly fundamental questions at the centre of the debate form an integral part. This article maps out the differences between the dominant ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian discourses on the identity of the new Macedonian state.

Macedonian–Albanian political conflict: historical and theoretical perspective

The main paradox of Macedonian politics in the 1990s is that socialist Yugoslavia was inscribed as the golden age of the Macedonian nation. Indeed, it was also inscribed as the golden age of Albanians in Macedonia (and in Yugoslavia in general). It was only in socialist Yugoslavia (i.e. after 1944) that Macedonians became recognised as a nation (thus, as a *political* entity) – and that Macedonia became equal to the other five Yugoslav republics. Before socialist Yugoslavia, Macedonians and Macedonia were not politically recognised categories in the official vocabulary of the Yugoslav state. Instead, Macedonia was considered a geographical term. What is today the Macedonian state was then described in Yugoslav discourse as 'South Serbia' (as between the end of the Balkan Wars and the end of Word War I, 1913–1918), or 'Vardar Banovina' (as between 1929 and 1941).[8] Similarly, Albanians in Yugoslavia became politically recognised only under socialism – not as equal to Yugoslav 'constitutive nations' – but as nearly equal nevertheless.[9] It was this recognition of Macedonians and Albanians (just as much as of Bosnian Muslims – now Bosniaks) that allowed the Communist Party to influence the identity of these newly recognised nations more fundamentally than it could in the cases of the ''more established'' ones: Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

'Nationhood' under Yugoslav socialism claimed to protect smaller (weaker and historically 'newer')[10] nations from larger, stronger and older ones. The creation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in 1944 was justified by a new state ideology, formulated by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and its leader, Tito.[11] The ideological basis of this discourse was Marxism, interpreted in a specific Yugoslav model – often referred to as 'anti-statist' (or 'self-management') socialism.[12] An important element of the discourse was the notion of the 'withering away of the state' and the 'equality of nations within Yugoslavia', regardless of the size of their territory or population. Both ideas implied substantial decentralisation of state institutions. The Yugoslav socialist federation, created in 1945 as a response to the existence of the 'national question', was in a process of permanent decentralisation. By 1974, when the last Yugoslav Constitution was enacted, it treated its six republics as

'nation-states'.[13] All republics had, nominally, equal status at the federal level, represented by an equal number of delegates, regardless of actual number of inhabitants or of the size of their territory. The principle clearly favoured smaller Yugoslav nations.[14]

Recognition of the Macedonian republic and nations gave Tito and the CPY (since 1952: League of Communists of Yugoslavia, LCY) a central role in defining and developing the identity of the new Macedonia.[15] As an equal unit of the Yugoslav federation, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was characterised like the other republics, as being based on a constitutive Yugoslav (always Slavonic) nation, thus conferring nation status upon the Macedonians. The vocabulary of Yugoslav communism distinguished between three categories of national communities. Nations (or 'constitutive nations', *narodi*) were at first five, and since the 1960s, six (including Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina) Slavonic nations: Slovenes, Croats, Muslims, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians. Larger non-Slavonic ethnic groups, such as Albanians, Hungarians and Italians, were recognised not as 'minorities' (the term was considered derogatory and was also confusing, since in some territories, for example in Kosovo, these groups made up a majority of the local population, and were not a minority) but as 'nationalities' *(narodnosti)*. Finally, smaller ethnic groups (such as Roma people, Austrians, Czechs and Slovaks, etc.) were treated as 'ethnic communities' *(etničke zajednice)*. No one was a 'minority' *(manjina)*. The difference between Slavonic 'nations' and non-Slavonic 'nationalities' was based on two elements: (1) Yugoslavia was – at least until constitutional changes in the 1970s – still defined by its specific socialist character, but also by Slavonic, i.e. ethnic, origins that about eighty percent of its population shared; (2) unlike 'nationalities', the constitutive nations of Yugoslavia had no other nation-state anywhere in the world, only Yugoslavia. According to Yugoslav communism, Albanians, although a larger group than some constitutive nations (in 1981 larger than Montenegrins, Macedonians and Slovenes), could not be recognised as a 'nation', nor could Kosovo become a republic (i.e. 'nation-state'). Republics (unlike Provinces) and nations (unlike nationalities) had a 'right to self-determination'. In the 1990s, Serbs used the socialist discourse extensively to justify self-determination (i.e. separation) of the Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, while still denying the same 'right' to Albanians in Kosovo. Strictly speaking this was exactly the spirit of the Yugoslav discourse on the national question. In the Macedonian case, this discourse enabled separation of Macedonia from Yugoslavia, but denied separation of ethnic Albanian territories (which in 1993 declared their own 'Republic of Ilirida') from Macedonia. Thus, in advocating the unity of newly independent Macedonia, ethnic Macedonians relied on the discourse developed by Yugoslav communists.[16]

A new history of the Macedonian people played a key part by building a narrative closely linking Macedonian to Yugoslav historical developments. This history gave the Communist Party a pre-eminent role in safeguarding the continuity of the Macedonian nation. One important myth was that

membership of the Yugoslav socialist federation guaranteed the protection of the Macedonian nation. Arguing that it was only because of the 'socialist revolution' that the Macedonian identity was officially recognised, this dovetailed with socialism by articulating *socialist* Yugoslavism as a necessary condition for the progress and existence of the Macedonian nation.[17]

However, this new discourse, in linking the solution of the national question to the idea of socialism, had to be supplemented in order to represent a point of identification for non-Slavonic communities (i.e. 'nationalities' and 'ethnic communities') within the republics. The response was to bolster the class dimension of the concept of 'Brotherhood and Unity'. Instead of referring to ethnic similarities between Slavonic nations, both 'brotherhood' and 'unity' now referred to a common vision of the future and the past, i.e. the common (socialist) ideology.[18] Recasting the dominant discourse of Yugoslav socialism from its first 'Slavonic unity' phase to its latter 'unity of all peoples' phase allowed the incorporation of 'non-Slavonic' others within the system. As a slogan, *brotherhood and unity* was thus filled with detailed and intricate meaning related to the citizenship of individuals at one level, and explaining the statehood of the constituent republics (or important elements of statehood for autonomous provinces) at the collective level.

The 'no majority, no minority' principle of Yugoslav socialism thus helped non-Slavonic groups to integrate in Yugoslavia. This integration was also helped by the elevation of the symbolic value of the citizenship of the Hungarians and the Albanians by increasing the real and symbolic status of the autonomous provinces *almost* to the same level as that of the republics.[19]

In reality, Albanians did participate in Macedonian public, political and economic life more than ever before. Regardless of having no institutionally recognised autonomy within Macedonia, there were less public protests about the status of Albanians in Macedonian than was the case with Albanians in Kosovo and Serbia.[20] The Macedonian 'success-story' continued when protests and violence emerged in Kosovo (first in 1981, and then continuously since 1988), and even in the years of the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, in 1990–1992.[21]

Macedonia is an example that illustrates how wrong it would be to claim that the socialist period in Yugoslavia witnessed a suppression of national identity. On the contrary, the socialist period in Yugoslavia witnessed a flourishing of the political relevance of national identity. Indeed, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) built its policy on the promise that it would grant full recognition to all nations and to others who lived in Yugoslavia. Recognition and protection of those 'exploited' and 'weak' identities was the essence of their rhetoric on both the class and the national issue.[22] National identity was privileged as an institutionalised feature of the political system, through, for example, 'national quotas' introduced for public jobs, including political positions at all levels. In addition, while pluralism was not promoted in the political sphere (except as 'pluralism of self-managing interests', as formulated by Kardelj in 1977), it was recognised as the main

principle for the 'resolution of the national question'. This created the parameters within which official discourse articulated separate political identities for Macedonians and Albanians , through the socialist-Yugoslavist prism.

Yugoslav socialism (especially the one promoted after 1966) did not even consider promoting a 'supranation' of Yugoslavs. On the contrary, as Edvard Kardelj, the leading ideologue of Yugoslav socialism stated in 1957, it was based on the belief that 'socialist forces would be making a big mistake if they allowed themselves to be carried away by futile ideas of creating some new kind of nation' (1957/1981: 127). Instead, Yugoslavia was seen as providing a shelter for all existing separate national identities, to protect 'weaker' and 'newer' identities from both foreign intrusion and assimilation or denial by other, stronger and historically 'older' identities in the country. Nor was the promotion of some sort of 'supra-nation' encouraged *within* republics. The notion of 'Bosnianism', a supra-nation created by Bosnia-Herzegovina, was never a part of the official discourse in socialist Yugoslavia. Neither was Croatia encouraged to create a 'civic Croatian nation' out of the coexisting 'ethnic Croatian' and 'ethnic Serb' nations there. The same applied to all others, including Macedonia. There was never an attempt to create a 'civic Macedonian nation', to include 'ethnic Macedonians' and 'ethnic Albanians'. Indeed the concept of 'civic', i.e. political, nation was considered to be a product of bourgeois ideology. The communists believed that they should not borrow – as Kardelj expressed – 'second hand ideas' from an ideology that had been defeated by socialist revolution. They also argued that only socialism allowed nations to develop freely and fully.

Paradoxically, Marxist concepts were used in an attempt to neutralise the very 'national' and 'nationality' identities reified by the ethnic institutional structure of Yugoslavism. While acknowledging and institutionalising 'new' identities, a central tenet of the Brotherhood and Unity discourse was the Marxist idea that affirms that national and ethnic conflict are merely a bourgeois ideological trick. Yugoslav discourses on the national question acknowledged difference between national groupings, thus legitimising the constitution of separate political identities based on ethnicity. It also created a supplementary hierarchy between nations and nationalities. While equality was instituted through the combination of the 'Brotherhood and Unity' and the 'economic democracy' myth, 'equality' was sharply qualified by the positioning of nations within an institutional hierarchy. Moreover, many felt that the gap between developed Slovenia and Croatia, and underdeveloped regions of Yugoslavia (Kosovo and Macedonia) was actually widening, and therefore that fairness could not be achieved according to the 'nations' and 'nationalities' hierarchy. These issues seriously affected the legitimacy of the Yugoslav socialist discourse, and compounded the various political and economic crises beginning from the late 1970s until the crisis in inter-republican relations of the late 1980s.

On balance, although Albanians and Macedonians did not have the same status within the hierarchy of ethnic groups, they both received substantial

political recognition in Yugoslavia. Macedonians were for the first time recognised as a 'nation', and their republic became a 'nation-state', equal to other, larger and older identities/political units. Albanians were no longer treated as a 'minority', but a 'nationality', whose economic, political and ethnic status improved significantly when compared to any previous period of living in a 'Slavonic state'. Yugoslavia guaranteed that no hegemony by the largest and strongest ethnic (namely, the Serbs) or linguistic (namely, the Serbo-Croat, to which neither Macedonians nor Albanians belonged) group would occur. In many ways, despite not achieving equality in status, these two groups (and especially Macedonians) were having their 'golden age' in socialist Yugoslavia. This is why neither of these two groups was a front-runner in promoting an alternative, liberal democratic concept for Yugoslavia.[23] In the minds of many of the elites representing more recently recognised nations and national categories in Yugoslavia, liberal democracy was closely associated with the first decade of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929). This period ended with the assassination of Croatian leader Stjepan Radić (1928) and the beginning of the Royal Dictatorship (1929). It was also seen as being a system characterised by the domination of stronger nations over the weaker.[24] It was also the period in which neither of these two identities was recognised. On the contrary, assimilatory politics threatened their existence.

Change: the rise of Milošević and the introduction of liberal democracy

The context in which Macedonian and Albanian identities had been defined, however, changed with the rise of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, and the crisis of the Yugoslav communist ideology through the country. Milošević's centralising rhetoric was the direct opposite of the trends of decentralisation promoted by Kardelj and the earlier generation of the CPY/LCY leaders. Milošević's discourse provoked adverse reactions not only within the Albanian elite in Kosovo,[25] but within the elites of other nations in Yugoslavia, including Macedonia. It was seen as an attempt to reintroduce Serbia's domination over Yugoslavia, and over all other national communities in it. It aimed to change the status, particularly of Albanians, back to a 'minority'. Milošević's rhetoric of centralisation[26] provoked fears of renewed domination and assimilation both among the Albanians and the Macedonians.[27] These fears created favourable conditions for the promotion of authoritarian and nationalist tendencies by elites throughout Yugoslavia, mobilising public opinion against Milošević's 'expansionism'. Milošević soon became the 'Hostile Other', against which Macedonian and Albanian identities were reformulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While Macedonians had three other 'Others' – Bulgarians, Greeks and Albanians – it was the fear of Serbian domination that they shared with Albanians. Perceived as a potential threat, Milošević's discourse encouraged Albanian and Macedonian political elites to

articulate a *modus vivendi* in these years of crisis. Equally fearful of the possibility of 'Greater Serbia', they accepted a new Macedonian state.[28] The decision to separate was seen as a necessity, not the realisation of a long-held dream about nationhood. Macedonian nationalism (just as for example Bosniak nationalism) had yet to take a clearer, post-Yugoslav form.

This form emerged with the rupture caused by the LCY's collapse at the 14th congress in January 1990. Even then, it was insufficiently strong to prevail during the 1990 Macedonian presidential elections, which were an overwhelming success for the former Communist, Kiro Gligorov. Macedonian nationalism had difficulty defining what borders the new state should have and thus entered into conflict with others, both within Macedonia and with its neighbours. Macedonian nationalism was divided between its 'maximalist' and 'minimalist' strategy. Maximalists aimed at including 'all Macedonians' (including those in Greece and Bulgaria) in the new Macedonian state. Minimalists aimed to consolidate the existing state in such a way that ethnic Macedonians would be treated as the only political nation in it, with Albanians as one of a number of minorities. Albanian nationalism was divided along similar lines. The 'maximalist' option included the unification of Albania, Kosovo, western Macedonia and eastern Montenegro within a new Greater Albania. The 'minimalists' insisted on autonomy or a federal settlement for ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. As a result, both Macedonian and Albanian political forces were structured in more than one 'nationalist' political party. Several extra-party organisations, such as social movements, pressure groups and paramilitaries also emerged.

This complexity at first prevented the creation of two firm and stable ethnic blocs in Macedonian politics. Just a couple of examples illustrate that neither Albanians nor Macedonians acted as a united political force, but were divided over the main issues of Macedonian politics in the first year of its independence. Since independence, both government and opposition were bi-ethnic. No single party could claim to represent the entire ethnic Albanian or Macedonian electorate. Controversial and contradictory decisions on key political issues have been another result of this division. For example, the majority of the Macedonian Albanian electorate boycotted the referendum on independence (8 September 1991). The new constitution was promulgated without the support, but with the acquiescence, of deputies from the Albanian minority parties in the *Sobranie* (uni-cameral parliament). The reasons both for the Albanian parties' opposition and acquiescence had in themselves implications for the course of Macedonian political conflict since independence. First, independent Macedonia divided the Albanians of Yugoslavia with a new international border, between what remained of Yugoslavia and Macedonia. Second, the closest cultural and educational centre for the Albanians of Macedonia, Priština, with the Albanian University, television and publishing, was now in a foreign country. Third, the group status of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia changed to a 'minority'. The Albanian parties opposed a constitution that downgraded their status, making Albanians 'less

than equal'. They feared that free elections and the introduction of liberal concepts would inevitably lead to 'majoritarisation', a term they used to describe permanent domination of the numerically larger group.[29] However, Albanians did participate in Macedonian political institutions, and – ultimately – accepted independence too. Clearly, Yugoslavia was not going to continue in its previous form. However, centralisation and Serbian nationalism threatened not only the autonomy of the Macedonian republic, but also the collective status of all of Yugoslavia's Albanians. Albanian elite acceptance of the new state was largely based on an articulation of a temporary definition of the interests of their group, as the result of a *fait accompli*, rather than of their activism. Although the reasons for the Albanian parties' rejection of the new settlement were clear enough, for the time being Albanian acquiescence and the Macedonian advocacy of full nation-statehood could rest on one common element. That was the threat of Serbia under Milošević, which was perceived as a threat to the collective status quo of both Albanians and Macedonians. It was Milošević who played the role of the most threatening and most visible 'Hostile Other'. It was against Milošević and what he symbolised that ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians could agree on a minimal compromise.[30]

We use the term 'dislocation' to capture the experience of the break-up of Yugoslavia in terms of the crisis of many of the political identities that had dominated up until that point.[31] This dislocation of the Yugoslav imaginary occurred over a period of years, during which time battles raged between the elites of the constituent republics, and between the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina and the Serbian Republic. Yugoslavia as a state collapsed after a long crisis of legitimacy, which was in its essence a crisis of its constitutive narrative, i.e. the Yugoslav interpretation of Marxism. Liberal democratic and nationalist narratives emerged at the same time vying to replace the communist one. It was within the context of a vacuum between two narratives – the defeated and weakened narrative of Yugoslav socialism and the emerging concept of liberal democracy within both Macedonian and Albanian communities – that the Macedonian political elite opted for independence. Once the decision was made, the only option left to it was to link nationalism with the newly adopted discourse of liberal democracy. A new nation-state would be difficult to legitimise and consolidate unless a liberal-nationalist concept was invented and promoted. This is how the former communist elite moved closer to nationalism, promoting nationalist ideas within the 'government of national unity' in 1990 when the new state institutions were being moulded. The new platform (shared by all the ethnic Macedonian parties, without exception) envisaged a new Macedonian nation-state, inscribed as the next stage in the historical development of the Macedonian nation towards *full* statehood.[32] The new ethnic Macedonian nation-state narrative was supplemented by a notion of civic nationalism, which was an attempt to take account of the existence of minorities. For ethnic Albanians, however, the ethnic understanding of 'nation' remained paramount and was never seriously

challenged by the attempt to add the 'civic' definition of nationhood to what was essentially seen as a Macedonian nation-state.

The paradox was, however, that both of these propositions for the new narrative were radically different from the old one, which had been very popular. The new narrative sought to be anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav, even though both communism and Yugoslavia were the birthplace of, at least contemporary, Macedonian and Albanian collective political identities. The new narrative struggled to reinscribe elements of the old narrative, thus creating a mixture of positions. This did not assist in constructing a clearer identity for the new Macedonia. Indeed, it would be hard to fit together 'brotherhood and unity' with liberal democracy, not to mention the Yugoslav 'economic equality' discourse between republics and national groupings. Both had been popular with smaller and less economically developed nations in Yugoslavia (i.e. with both Macedonians and Albanians). The ethnic hierarchy (i.e. 'nations', 'nationalities' and 'ethnic communities') and the notion of their 'near-equality regardless' of size and historical experience had to be replaced with something else too. At the same time many of these ideas (and especially the one on the hierarchy of nations) were 'borrowed' from the socialist narrative in order to justify not only the 'right to independence' of Macedonia, but also the difference between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians within it. A blend of arguments taken from nationalist, liberal and communist concepts, therefore, appeared in the constitutive concepts of 'post-Yugoslav' states – not only in Macedonia. Nationalist forces, reformed communists and liberal democrats forged political alliances, using elements of the 1974 Constitution to argue the case for independence.

By the time Macedonia became independent in 1991, pluralism and party politics were already emerging in an arena marked by the dislocation of the Yugoslav imaginary and the consequent redefinition of Macedonian and Albanian identities. Competing discourses emerged that attempted to give meaning to the new state and nation(s). Neither the existing definitions of group identities nor the framework of their mutual relationship held sway any longer, being as they were tied to the Yugoslav system of group definition. Abandoning this system, and introducing pluralism, led to a much more complex battle to rearticulate the *political* meaning of ethnic collective identities. 'Nations' and 'nationalities', both contested concepts in their time, had to be recast or replaced with something else. But with what?

Macedonian and Albanian identity in post-1991 Macedonia

As the 'Yugoslav guarantee', 'qualified statehood' and 'constitutive nation' disappeared, Macedonian national identity evolved around the concepts of 'full statehood' and 'majority'. This implied a diminution of the collective political status of Macedonian Albanians. Albanian nationalist platforms contested the moral validity of the Constitution.[33] At the same time the very

identity of both the Macedonian state and the Macedonian nation was questioned or even denied by many in both Greece and Bulgaria.[34] Macedonian politicians capitalised on the popular feeling that outsiders opposed the right of the Macedonians to have 'their' nation-state, to call it Macedonia, and to call themselves Macedonians. The Albanian parties, in contesting the nation-state constitution, became attached in Macedonian nationalist discourse to the series of enemies or 'negative others', against which they endeavoured to forge Macedonian unity and a new political identity. At the same time, the fact that post-Yugoslav Albanians were spread across, and divided between, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Southern Serbia was used as part of a platform around which Albanian political elites in Macedonia could create parties of national defence. In this narrative, Macedonian nationalism (Macedonian civic nationalism, more than ethnic) was represented as the obstacle to the national fulfilment of the Albanians of Macedonia.[35] According to the Albanian parties, this barrier was deliberately created and maintained by the representatives of the Macedonian majority who used their electoral dominance unjustly in order to maintain the political, social and economic subordination of the Albanians. The Albanian parties' discourse therefore constructed a link between the lack of an appropriate collective status and subordination.

The *collective* status of Albanians is thus one of the principal political issues in the new Republic of Macedonia. The conflict around this issue is not the result of 'ancient hatreds'. It evolved as a consequence of a set of important political responses to the task of recasting both Macedonian and Albanian post-Yugoslav identities. It is contentious because any redefinition 'upwards' in the status of Albanians is contested as a denial of the right of ethnic Macedonians to have and control their own nation-state. It is exactly the 'right' to have their own state that makes Macedonians a 'constitutive nation', in opposition to Albanians who are conceived as a 'nationality' or 'minority', therefore having no right to dilute the ethnically based sovereignty of the Macedonian nation-state. This notion was promoted not only by the new narrative, but was the key element of the Yugoslav communist narrative too. Republics were nation-states, and Macedonians (unlike Albanians) were a 'constitutive nation' – thus, they (unlike Albanians) had a right to create their own state. If they had that right in Yugoslavia, how could one deny them the same right now, when Yugoslavia disintegrated? The rhetoric used by ethnic Macedonians in explaining why they should control the Macedonian state relies significantly on the socialist distinction between (Slavonic) 'nations' and (non-Slavonic) 'nationalities'. It also borrows from the liberal concept of 'one-person-one-vote'. Ethnic Macedonians, being the majority in the only Macedonian state, have somehow a 'natural' right to control it. Finally, it incorporates the state-centred notion originating from the concept of (Macedonian) nationalism.

Yugoslavia claimed to protect 'new' nations and 'nationalities' through the principle of 'no majority – no minorities'. In new circumstances, groups like

the Macedonian Albanians had to renegotiate such protection. In addition, they had to negotiate it not with the neutral and impartial (in the ethnic sense) federal leadership (internationalist by its political orientation), but with ethnic Macedonians, whom they saw as being neither neutral nor impartial. On the contrary, Macedonian elites claimed that the state belonged to the ethnic Macedonians, and thus did not even want to be 'neutral and impartial' towards Albanians. While rights for minority groups were constitutionally guaranteed, a sticking point for Albanian parties has been the constitutional basis of the state as a Macedonian nation-state.[36] While Macedonian parties vie for power on a nationalist platform designed to protect the state as being based on the concept of the right of the Macedonians to a nation-state, Albanian parties contest this as being unjust. It is the characterisation of the Albanian population as 'minority' that was (and to large extent still is, despite the constitutional changes of 16 November 2001) at the centre of political debate in Macedonia. The 'national question' was the main cause of military conflict between Albanian extremists (organised in the National Liberation Army, NLA, and other paramilitary groups) and the Macedonian state (dominated by ethnic Macedonians). But not only extremists in the Albanian population demanded redefinition of Macedonia from a 'nation-state' to a 'bi-national state'. Following a decade of divisions and disunity, Albanian parties (taking advantage of the international attention occasioned by the military conflict) for the first time stood on a united platform of constitutional change to eliminate what they saw as injustice and inequality.[37] The conflict in 2001 has only highlighted the level to which two polarised and politicised ethnic identities have been mobilised. The political frontier which as early as 1991 became one of the key organising ideational oppositions of Macedonian politics, has by 2001 become the dividing line between two antagonistic camps which now include almost the whole society, not only elites.[38] This political frontier is constructed on the basis of a political logic remarkably similar to that developed during the last years of the Yugoslav period in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, and – unfortunately – to that developed during the years of conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Conflict or/and a resolution?

Paradoxically the only Yugoslav 'velvet divorce', between Macedonia and Yugoslavia in 1992, was followed almost a decade later by an armed conflict that seemed to be leading to a civil war. In explaining this paradox, one should consider the following two elements. First, while both Macedonian and Albanian nationalism were weak in the early 1990s, they have since then consolidated, found their 'Other', and strengthened under the influence of their newly promoted national programmes. In 1992, both Macedonian and Albanian parties were internally divided along ideological/personal lines. By the end of the 1990s Macedonian politics became characterised principally by divisions

along the Albanian–Macedonian ethno-political frontier. By 2000 politics was entirely dominated by appeals for ethnic solidarity either to protect or advance group status. It became clear that the weak attempt of the Macedonian nationalist platform to convince Albanians that they live in a multi-ethnic democracy had failed. At the same time Albanian elites contested ever more fiercely the validity of the Macedonian discourse on multi-ethnic democracy.

Second, in early 2001, following the fall of the Milošević regime in Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Yugoslavia signed a treaty on the countries' mutual borders (including the border between the Republic of Macedonia and the former autonomous province of Kosovo).[39] Also, in the first quarter of 2001 Serbia-Montenegro (then still under name of the FR Yugoslavia) became Macedonia's most significant trading partner. Thus, instead of the last potential threat on Macedonian borders, a new democratic neighbour stood as a new friend. The effect of this change was enormous. The fragile status of the common enemy of both ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians could no longer be plausibly maintained, and the discourse upon which the post-Yugoslav Albanian–Macedonian *modus vivendi* had been built, collapsed. In addition, it was no longer possible to build Macedonian identity on negative considerations, i.e. on what Macedonia is not. For the whole period since 1945, Macedonia was defined more on the notion of being not (South) Serbia, (Western) Bulgaria, (Northern) Greece and (Eastern) Albania. The same was the case for Macedonians, who were not Serbs, not Bulgarians, not Greeks and not Albanians. But: the question is not only who they are *not*; but also who they *are*: and this question seems to be much more difficult to answer. The conflict that followed was between two different sets of answers to this fundamental question.

With the disappearance of 'enemies' on its borders, Macedonia faced a situation not so dissimilar to the one in which the former Yugoslavia found itself with the end of the Cold War: needing to construct its identity on positive, rather than negative considerations; on internal cohesion, rather than external differences. The compromise over the interpretation of identity of both the Macedonian state and nation was possible only as result of foreign intervention, which indeed happened at the beginning of the conflict (in February 2001), only to be intensified as it was unfolding. Antagonisms between the two groups became so large that only by changing its role from a negotiator to an arbiter did the foreign factor achieve its objective: the end of the military phase of the conflict and a return to the political arena for both sides involved. Even that intervention was not always successful. The first attempt to formulate amendments to the Constitution (the Ohrid Agreement of 13 August 2001), which offered a 'civic' rather than an 'ethnic' definition of Macedonian national and state identity, was originally accepted, but then rejected by ethnic Macedonians after a month (in September 2001). The second attempt (the re-negotiated Ohrid Agreement, which was accepted by the Macedonian parliament on 16 November 2001) was successful, but this success was a result of intensive pressure, including direct threats to both sides

by representatives of the foreign arbiters. However, at the time of writing, there have been new signs of conflict, this time between new and openly secessionist Albanian guerrillas (the Albanian National Army, ANA) and government forces. The future will show whether the Ohrid Agreement indeed brought lasting stability to Macedonia, or whether it was just yet another stop on the road towards the partition of Macedonia into two separate states.

Conclusion

This article has mapped out the main elements in the emergence of the Macedonian–Albanian political frontier in the 1990s. We argue that both Macedonian and Albanian political identities have been engaged in a complex process of redefinition. Elites of both groups continuously re-articulated the political meaning of Macedonian civic and ethnic identity, Albanian ethnic identity and its place in the new state, and attempted to impose their versions of the meaning of Macedonian sovereignty and citizenship. The identities 'under reconstruction' had previously been strongly influenced by the Marxist paradigm and its Yugoslav official interpretation. In this process, the elements of the old paradigm were combined with liberal democratic concepts. Nationalism appeared in a vacuum, in which it had to link itself with the new concept – regardless of both Macedonians and Albanians having had their 'Golden Age' in socialist Yugoslavia. In many ways, the current conflict in Macedonia is being played out within the ideological parameters of the Yugoslav Marxist-inspired framework. This means that while the Macedonian nationalists recognise the existence and 'rights' of 'nationalities' including the Albanians, they do not recognise that two communities – Macedonians and Albanians – should have the same status within the republic. According to them, the *raison d'êitre* of the Republic of Macedonia is to provide a homeland for the Macedonian nation. If this is so, the Albanian nationalists argue, then Albanians cannot be treated as equal. Regardless of actual policies of Macedonian governments, they would remain discriminated against as long as Macedonia is conceived as an *ethnic*-Macedonian nation-state. To prevent this, Albanians claim the status of a 'nation', thus of an 'equal partner'. Macedonia should then cease to be a Macedonian-only nation-state, and remain a shared nation-state of two equal nations, in which Albanians are treated as a nation, not as a 'nationality' or (even less) a 'minority'. Seen therefore through the spectacles of Yugoslav identity politics, the current conflict reflects older conflicts and is understood through categories that have developed according to a language of politics developed during the Yugoslav period.

In its essence, the conflict in Macedonia is a conflict between two very different concepts of what is Macedonia and who are Macedonians. During the 1990s, a gradual consolidation of two clearly different sets of answers to questions: 'Who are (and who are not) Macedonians?', and 'What is (and

what is not) Macedonia?' have developed, causing incidents and smaller conflicts during the whole period between 1992 and 2000. However, only with the disappearance of the last remaining shared 'Hostile Other' (after the fall of Slobodan Milošević in Yugoslavia, in October 2000), the conflict between Albanians and Macedonians entered its military phase. Just as it occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the collapse of the Marxist paradigm, Macedonia faces serious questions about its ability to reconstruct itself as a stable state in new circumstances. The two nationalisms are, however, still too weak to successfully endanger the very existence of one another, and thus the international community was still in a position to prevent an all-out civil war. What it cannot do however, is to answer their identity questions for them.

Notes

1 See Kola (2003: 377).

2 The work of Fredrik Barth (1969) on the influence of boundaries on the identities of group members highlights the symbolic bases of ethnically based political divisions. While drawing on the work of Barth, we deploy the analytical category of 'political frontier' as elaborated in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 127–34) to look at the *discursive construction* of the Macedonian–Albanian political frontier.

3 Several recent studies have analysed the politics of the newly independent republic. Allcock (1994: 279–91) documents concisely the contours of the Macedonian party system and ideologies. Caca (1999: 149–64) examines the 1991 Constitution in relation to international standards regarding the status and rights of minorities. Pettifer (1999: 137–45) deals with the politics of the Albanian community following independence, although his account of the status of Albanians both within 'Titoist Yugoslavia' and the post-1991 republic is contradictory and tends to oversimplify matters in places.

4 By nationalism we understand political doctrine and/or action whose primary objective is the creation and preservation of a nation-state. Within the nationalist discourse, it is less important whether the nation-state is based on a Marxist or Liberal concept. Political differences are treated as secondary to the principle of 'national unity'.

5 'Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people'. See Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia (1992).

6 See Jović (2001).

7 'Albanians in Macedonia feel extremely marginalized in the society. One third of the population of Macedonia participates in the state administration by only three percent. This … has provoked frustration in the whole Albanian community and, then, that community has lost rights it had in the previous system.' See Arben Xhaferi's interview with Jelena Bjelica (2001).

8 For the status and position of Macedonia in the early twentieth century and in the interwar period see Mazower (2000), Pavlowitch (1999) and Banac (1984). At present, there is no monographic study of the history of Macedonia available in English.

9 Kola (2003: 133–55).

10 For the concept of 'new' nations in Yugoslavia see Urbančič (1987). He argues that the nations of Yugoslavia could be classified as 'old' (Serbs, Slovenes and Croats) and new (Montenegrins, Macedonians and Muslims). The third category consists of only one member – Albanians. Urbančič argues that the new nations were the main pillar of Yugoslavian 'unitarism', because they felt they could not survive without Yugoslavia. Urbančič, a Slovene intellectual opposed to Yugoslav unity, was not sympathetic to the nationalism of 'new nations': 'These nations were created by the national state-creating force, which was the Communist Party, at the expense of those nations that emerged in its own historical national movement, and were therefore also

capable of their federal self-sustainability' (1987: 47). On the contrary, he – together with many other Slovenes at the end of the 1980s – was sympathetic towards Albanians, who had not been recognised as a nation (but as a 'nationality') although they had formed a genuine national movement and a strong sense of identity (1987: 45–6). For the identity of Macedonians see Poulton (1995), Ackermann (2000), Cowan (2000) and Roudometof (2000). For Albanians see: Duijzings (2000), Judah (2000) and Kola (2003).

11 See Tito (1983). For the LCY policy on the Macedonian national question, see Declaration of the First Session (2 August 1944) of the Anti-fascist Council of People's Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) – http://www.big-blue.net/lib/asnommanifest.html.

12 For analysis of the nature of Yugoslav communist ideology and its role in stabilising a new state after the Word War II, see Malešević (2002), and Lilly (2001).

13 For analysis of the 1974 Constitution see Dimitrijević (2000), Hayden (1999) and Koštunica (1987/8).

14 For example, Montenegrins, who had the same number of representatives in federal institutions as Serbia, despite being almost 15 times smaller in terms of population. Problems in post-communist Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) are rooted in Montenegrins' refusal to lose the political status of a nation they had in communist Yugoslavia, i.e. to cease being equal to Serbs.

15 Symbolically, this was represented in the flag of the new Macedonian republic, which was red with a yellow-bordered five-pointed star; both symbols of communism. For the politics of symbols in Macedonia see Brown (2000).

16 For the link between the 1974 Constitution and the ruling of the Badinter Committee in 1991 see Radan (2002).

17 Katherine Verdery (1991) points to how the communist discourse of social progress after 1944 used myths of national emancipation to place the communist party firmly at the centre of the historical progress of the nation.

18 See Kardelj (1970). For Kardelj's views on the national question, see Kardelj (1981). Edvard Kardelj's views enormously influenced the Yugoslav interpretation of Marxism and the constitutional structure of Yugoslavia. He chaired the Constitutional Commission that prepared all three Yugoslav Constitutions (1946, 1963 and 1974). For analysis of Kardelj's discourse, see Jović (2002).

19 Kosovo was first an Autonomous Region, an Autonomous Province since 1963, became 'a Province, the constituent element of Yugoslav federalism' in the 1974 Constitution. The position of Albanians improved significantly. It became difficult to distinguish between Republics and nations on one hand, and Provinces and nationalities on the other. However, the difference still remained – Albanians were not a nation but a nationality.

20 Unlike in Kosovo, protests against the political elite (whether federal, that of the republic, or local) during the years of socialism were very rare in Macedonia. The protests of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo erupted in 1968 and then again in 1981 (see Mertus, 1999). Since 1985, the ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo organised their own public protests (see Vladisavljević, 2002 and Dragović-Soso, 2002). Since 1987, public protests of both ethnic Serbs and those of ethnic Albanians became frequent and ever more powerful. At the same time, there was only one protest registered in Macedonia – in the village of Vevče over police brutality against local functionaries of the Socialist Youth organisation who brought the issue of inadequate public infrastructure into the public domain. The 'Vevče' case did not have an ethnic connotation. The lack of public protests in Macedonia was remarkable even when compared to Slovenia and Croatia. Not surprisingly, it matches that of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, another two republics that received public recognition only in socialist Yugoslavia.

21 See Kola (2003: 212–13).

22 On the ideology of socialist Yugoslavia in its first post-war phase see Malešević (2002).

23 See Kola (2003: 212–13).

24 For the national question in Yugoslavia see Banac (1984) and Djokić (2002).

25 See Kola (2003: 175–6).

26 For Milošević's views on the national question see his speeches in the 1984–1989 period (1989), and Cohen (2001). A useful source is Marković (1996).
27 For the importance of these fears see Jović (2001).
28 For the sense of 'Yugonostalgia' among Macedonians, see Brown (1998) and Thiessen (1999).
29 'The concept of the state as it is put forth in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia … was imposed by the Macedonian majority in the parliament. … it did not incorporate the inherited rights of Albanians from the former Yugoslav system.' In Xhaferi (2001).
30 This is not a unique case in which Milošević had a homogenising effect for the creation of new identities/states in the former Yugoslavia. He successfully homogenised Bosnian Muslims (since 1995 – Bosniaks), and to a large extent Croats too. Milošević was a pivotal symbol used to consolidate all post-Yugoslav nationalisms.
31 Dislocation occurs as the result of the destabilisation or collapse of a discourse. Macedonian politics experienced a dislocation as a result of the collapse of Yugoslavist discourse. Events and contesting discourses (such as antagonistic discourses about Yugoslavia from the increasingly nationalist elites of the republics) could not be 'domesticated, symbolised or integrated' within the original discourse. See Torfing (1999: 301). For an example of the use of the category of dislocation as an analytical tool, see Norval (1996: 12–56).
32 See http://www.soros.org.mk/mk/en/const.htm for the Preamble of the Constitution.
33 'The Constitution was adopted against the will of the representatives of the Albanians, who abstained en bloc. The ''one man, one vote'' concept was used to impose the will of one people over another during the secession.' In Xhaferi (1998).
34 Greece objected to the name of the new state for well-known reasons. Bulgaria denied the existence of a Macedonian language, treating it as a dialect of Bulgarian. However, by 1995, compromises were found on all these problems, and these two 'Hostile Others' became friends. Greek investments have increased dramatically ever since 1995, while Bulgaria offered military support during the conflict with the Albanians in 2001. For the name dispute, see the ICG Report (10 December 2001).
35 Albanians feared Macedonian civic nationalism more than ethnic nationalism, just as the Slovenes and Croats in 1990 feared Yugoslav civic nationalism more than Serb ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism in a multi-ethnic state is assimilatory, and its promoters may be less likely to agree to partition than ethnic nationalists of the largest ethnic group. Fear of civic nationalism was the main reason that Albanians voted for a VMRO-DPMNE candidate at the Presidential elections in 2000, and that an otherwise paradoxical government coalition was created by two ethnic nationalist parties, the VMRO-DPMNE and the DPA in 1998.
36 The key problem is that ethnic Albanians do not see themselves as a minority, and thus have not accepted the standards of minority protection developed within the EU. Famously, their representatives hesitated to talk to EU representatives for minority rights, claiming that they were not minorities.
37 See Latifi (2001).
38 Citing *Dnevnik* and *Fakti*, Veton Latifi (2002) writes that the conflict is even encouraging division in the national football league.
39 The Agreement on a 330-km long border between the two countries was reached in a very speedy process already in January 2001, only two months after the change of government in Belgrade, and was signed on 23 February 2001. Milošević's government refused to resolve the problem, keeping the option of contesting a part or even the whole border always open. See *EIU Country Report*, Macedonia, February 2000.

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