

## COMPETING STATE IMAGES ON THE FORMER YUGOSLAV SPACE: MACEDONIA VERSUS ILIRIDA

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### ABSTRACT

During the disintegration of multinational federations at the beginning of the 1990s, existing political units within the Yugoslav political space declared independence and ethnic groups residing in them sought to establish separate autonomous entities. This study specifically focuses on state-building policies in North Macedonia during the Yugoslav turmoil of dissolution with a “state within society” approach. It examines how post-communist Macedonian political leadership attempted to build a dominant state image on the territories of the former Yugoslav socialist republic. The article argues that if an autonomous, united, and centralized state perception fails to resonate with society, alternative state images may emerge within the same national territory- possibly even transcending legitimate borders. This study applied the “states as images” approach to the Macedonian-Albanian relations in North Macedonia during a limited period, from the dissolution of Yugoslavia to the 2001 conflict. It is posited that post-communist Macedonian political elites projected a Macedonian state image through practices. However, Albanians of Macedonia implemented policies on behalf of revived Ilirida perception, where they could unite with Kosovar Albanians in the future. The 2001 conflict demonstrated that the Ilirida state image had reached a war-making capacity, challenging the Macedonian state’s monopoly on violence. As a result, Macedonian authorities were compelled to negotiate and eventually transform the state into a Macedonian-Albanian image.

**Keywords:** Yugoslavia, Macedonia, State image, Albanians, Macedonians.

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## ESKİ YUGOSLAV TOPRAKLARINDA YARIŞAN DEVLET İMAJLARI: MAKEDONYA'YA KARŞI İLİRİDA

### ÖZ

1990'lı yılların başında çok uluslu federasyonların dağılma sürecinde Yugoslavya siyasal alanı içerisinde mevcut siyasal birimler bağımsızlıklarını ilan etmiş ve bu birimler içerisinde yaşayan etnik gruplar ayrı özerk yapılar kurma arayışına girmiştir. Bu çalışma, Yugoslavya'nın dağılması sırasında Kuzey Makedonya'daki devlet inşası politikalarına "toplum içinde devlet yaklaşımıyla" odaklanmaktadır. Post-komünist Makedon siyasi aktörlerin eski Yugoslav sosyalist cumhuriyeti topraklarında dominant bir devlet imajı inşa etme politikalarını incelemektedir. Bu makale toplumdaki özerk, birleşik ve merkezi bir devlet algısının halk arasında yerleşmemesi durumunda, alternatif devlet imajlarının bir ulusun topraklarında ortaya çıkabileceğini ve hatta siyasi sınırları aşabileceğini ileri sürmektedir. Çalışma, Yugoslavya'nın dağılmasından 2001 çatışmasına kadar seçilen sınırlı bir süre boyunca Kuzey Makedonya'daki Makedonya-Arnavutluk ilişkilerine devlet imajları yaklaşımıyla bakmaktadır. Post-komünist Makedon siyasi elitlerinin yürüttüğü uygulamalarla bir Makedonya devleti imajı ürettiği öne sürülmektedir. Ancak, bölgedeki değişen güç dengeleri sırasında Makedonya Arnavutları, İlirida algısını canlandırmış ve gelecekte sınırların ötesindeki Kosovalı Arnavutlarla birleşebilecekleri bu hayali birime yönelik politika yürütmüştür. 2001 çatışması İlirida devlet imajının savaş yapma kapasitesine eriştiğini göstermiş, şiddet tekelinin ortadan kalkmasıyla diz çöken Makedon otoriteler, devletin Makedon-Arnavut imajına dönüşmesini müzakere etmek zorunda kalmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yugoslavya, Makedonya, Devlet imajı, Arnavutlar, Makedonlar.

### Introduction

Established after World War II, the Second Yugoslavia or Tito's Yugoslavia consisted of six republics and two autonomous regions. It consisted of Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Macedonian and Muslim nations. Croats and Serbs in Croatia; Muslims, Croats and Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Macedonians and Muslims in Macedonia had lived in coexistence in contrast to past tensions. Also, Albanians in Macedonia were kept away from the governing authority until 1965.<sup>1</sup> Parallel to the increasing

<sup>1</sup> Bashkim Iseni, "One State, Divided Society: The Albanians in Macedonia", *Civic and Uncivic Values in Macedonia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media*, (ed.) Sabrina P. Ramet, Ola Listhaug and Albert Simkus, The Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013, p. 177.

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national demands in Kosovo, in 1968, the idea of establishing a seventh republic within Yugoslavia was proposed, including the Albanian territories in Macedonia and the Preshevo Valley in Serbia.<sup>2</sup> With the expansion of Kosovo's autonomy in 1974, Albanians in Macedonia attained official recognition as a distinct national group alongside the Macedonian nation within the socialist republic. The elimination of the founding leader cult with the death of Tito in the early 1980s was the first signal for probable political instability at the state level. Moreover, systemic change in the world order caused the rise of nationalism and the demise of multinational communist federations. In 1981, Albanian students at the University of Prishtina initially protested against social hardships, but their demands soon turned political, calling for Kosovo to become a republic. Although it sparked a clash between Albanian and Serbian nationalism, Kosovar and Macedonian Albanians in the early 1980s reflected on their shared fate within Yugoslavia. However, Slobodan Milošević, who began to rise in Yugoslav Serb politics from 1986 onwards, started his policy of imposing Serbian supremacy on the peoples of Yugoslavia from the disputed region of Kosovo, where Albanians constituted the majority, despite Serbs furnished historical narratives. In March 1989, Milošević removed the autonomous political body in Kosovo. Therefore, no clearly defined Albanian province remained in the Yugoslav confederation. In April 1989, the Macedonian Parliament adopted a resolution declaring that the Macedonian state belongs exclusively to the Macedonian nation. Due to the rise of national mobilizations in Yugoslavia, Serbian unification nationalism in the Kosovo region, and separatist nationalisms in Slovenia and Croatia, Albanian politicians of Macedonia initiated to seek alternatives, to establish their own government in their imagining homeland.

In the context of the emergence of new national states during the Yugoslav secessionist wars of the 1990s, the revived concept of the Republic of Ilirida (RoI) was evaluated with a “*competing state images*” approach in this study. The Ilirida had been imagined by Albanians as an alternative state identity to Macedonia in the north-western parts of the country even long before the demise of Yugoslavia. During the shattering of multinational federations, it became the practical agenda of Albanian policymakers in Macedonia, where state-building process was halted, and loyalty towards the state became limited. The argument presents that the state administration

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<sup>2</sup> Aldo Bumci, “Regional Perspectives for an Independent Kosovo-Albania and Macedonia”, *Understanding of the War in Kosovo*, (ed.) Florian Bieber and Zhidas Daskalovski, Frank Cass, London and Oregon 2003, p. 282.

becomes unstable and illegitimate when the perception of the state as “autonomous, united and centralized” is weakened. The study posits that this declining Macedonian state perception destined Albanians to consider their status quo in Macedonia, review their future, and imagining the new country whether it would have an autonomous status or an independent nation-state.

To support the argument, it was first established that ethnicities in Macedonia, which had already been polarized within the Macedonian socialist state, were isolated from each other during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the emergence of the Ilirida state image in opposition to Macedonia was examined through various state practices, including separate independence referendums conducted by Macedonians and Albanians in the early 1990s, constitutional amendments shaping perception of the state and population census that elicited reactions from Albanians, and international conferences reflecting ethnic viewpoints and projections about state’s future. Subsequently, the reinforcement of the Ilirida perception in the northwest of the country and the failure to establish an integrated Macedonian state image are examined through prominent issues among communities. Within this context, the 1997 crisis involving state flags in the public sphere, the boycott policy of Albanians against practices pursued by the central government, and the grand coalition of big ideals that reflected extremist and separatist notions in the late 1990s were discussed in the other section as autonomy seeking and solidarity reinforcement cases among members of the weaker group. As a state image, Ilirida seems to have reached its capacity for war-making with the Kosovo Crisis spilling over into Macedonia and the Macedonian-Albanian conflict in 2001. Thereupon, Macedonian politicians were forced to compromise on the Macedonian state and the state image was transformed into the Macedonian-Albanian state.

The first section of the article examines the development of modern state theories, emphasizing Joel Migdal’s “state within society” approach. Drawing on Max Weber’s definition of the state as a monopoly on legitimate violence, Migdal expands this notion by incorporating the concepts of “image” and “practices.” Migdal’s framework is particularly relevant in analysing post-1991 Macedonia, where competing nationalist narratives have shaped the state’s contested image. In the second section of the article, the focus is on the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe and its impact on Yugoslavia, particularly Macedonia, where Albanians were marginalized through policies like the 1989 constitutional amendments, which redefined the state as belonging to the Macedonian nation. This section delves into the

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response of Albanians, highlighting their boycott of the 1991 census and referendum, their exclusion from constitutional negotiations, and their subsequent disillusionment with the Macedonian state, further fuelling the notion of an alternative state identity, the Republic of Ilirida. In the third section, the article explores the cultural and political demands of Albanians, including struggles for educational autonomy and the right to display national symbols like the Albanian flag, which led to protests and clashes with Macedonian authorities. In the fourth section of the article, the focus is on the rising ethnic tensions and the involvement of paramilitary movements, particularly the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), in Macedonia during the late 1990s. The section also discusses the formation of the National Liberation Army (ONA) and their demands for constitutional amendments and a bi-national federation, reflecting the increasing fragmentation of Macedonia's territorial and political integrity. The fifth section transitions into the 2001 constitutional amendments, which sought to address ethnic inclusion and national identity concerns, highlighting the transformations in Macedonia's governance, legal framework, and representation of minority communities following the Ohrid Framework Agreement. These changes marked a shift from a homogeneous Macedonian state towards a more inclusive, multi-ethnic structure, reshaping the national discourse on identity and governance. While these changes aimed to foster interethnic coexistence, they sparked concerns among ethnic Macedonians about their national identity and sovereignty, marking a significant shift in the country's political and cultural landscape.

### 1. The Development of Modern State Theories and the “*State within Society*” Approach

Joel Migdal's “*state within society*” approach begins by drawing on Max Weber's classical definition of state. Migdal defines the state in its most fundamental form as the “*field of power*”.<sup>3</sup> In his conception, similar to Weber's definition, the state holds a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and the ability to pose threats. However, his argument diverges from Weber's approach by supporting the idea that the state is moulded by images and practices.<sup>4</sup> The image stems from the state's ability to maintain consistent and coherent control over a specific of territory. The stable and controlled

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<sup>3</sup> Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Migdal, *ibid.*, p. 16.

administration disseminates a particular image and covers the representation of inhabitants on the same territory. The analysis reveals that existing states consist of two primary components: image and practices. He draws insights from an ethnographic investigation of the state. By benefiting from Akhil Gupta's ethnography, which focuses on everyday practices and discursive constructions, Migdal's work further illustrates that images and practices exhibit qualities such as mutual reinforcement, overlap, contradiction, and even mutual destructiveness.<sup>5</sup> The image of the modern state, socially constructed in Western Europe between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, has evolved into a political form that encompasses the entire globe. The review of state literature in this section aims to comprehend Joel Migdal's approach. The approach is instrumental in analysing post-1991 Macedonian state image and competing state images of rival nationalisms.

The interest that German scholars like Max Weber and Otto Hintze were concerned about the state during the 1910s was rekindled in the 1960s. Domination of modernization theories in the social sciences, the emergence of national macroeconomic management stemming from the Keynesian revolution, and the birth of new nations from former colonies guided research concerning the state.<sup>6</sup> Belonged to the pluralist school in American social sciences, David Easton's conceptualization of a "*political system*" centred on competing interests and status groups caused a society-focused analysis that neglected the state and its institutions. Both the pluralism school and structural functionalists distanced from the concept of the state, instead suggesting the term "*political system*".<sup>7</sup> The neo-Marxist school, which adopted the "*capitalist state*" as the unit of analysis, gained prominence in Continental European social science studies in the mid-1960s. The school delved into analysing roles of states during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the incorporation of states into the socio-economic sphere within advanced industrial capitalist democracies, and the nature and functions of state in dependent countries within the capitalist world economy.<sup>8</sup> In the

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<sup>5</sup> Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, The Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State", *American Ethnologist*, Volume 22, Number 2, May 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research", *Bringing the State Back In*, (ed.) Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics", *American Political Science Review*, Volume 85, Number 1, 1991, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Skocpol, *op.cit.*, p. 5. Ralph Miliband (1969), Nicos Poulantzas (1973), Perry Anderson (1974), Claus Offe (1974), and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980) are exemplar studies.

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1970s, the debate between Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband reshaped the Marxist perspective concerning the nature of state. Perspectives that viewed the state as a distinct entity with autonomy and separate from society elevated the state above all else, assigning it superior and ascribed ideological responsibilities. Discussions on the state solidified the concept as institutional structures that shape society.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1980s, the book *'Bringing the State Back In'* emphasized reintroducing the concept of the state within the domain of social sciences.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to the academic works of the 1970s, the state was not regarded solely as a territory seized and governed by social groups; it was perceived as an entity possessing capacities and rationality, acting purposefully according to the neo-statist approaches. In alignment with earlier studies, the argument for the state's autonomy from society is maintained. Theda Skocpol initiated the dialogue concerning the autonomy and capabilities of states and viewed the state as an autonomous and rational actor, driven by specific objectives, endowed with a particular capacity, and vested in socioeconomic order.<sup>11</sup> Concerning the rationality of the state, Skocpol posited that civil bureaucrats were capable of formulating comprehensive, long-term strategies that transcend the short-term and profit-driven demands of capitalists. Alfred Stepan contended that assemblages of civil servant cadres employ state intervention to sustain political order, and this cadre plays a role in fostering national economic development.<sup>12</sup> Another state-centred study conducted by Michael Mann, *'The Autonomous Power of the State'*, he criticized Marxist, liberal, and functionalist state theories for disregarding the autonomous power of the state.<sup>13</sup> According to Mann, the state holds two forms of power: "despotic", which centralizes it, and "infrastructural", which anchors it territorially. Aligning closely with Skocpol, Mann defined the state as both an arena and a space. Consequently, he posited that the state derives its primary power from its autonomy.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on Michel Foucault's ideas in the early 1990s, Timothy Mitchell objected to studies that personified the state as a decision-making

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<sup>9</sup> Skocpol, *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Skocpol, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Skocpol, *ibid.*, p. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Mann, *States, War, and Capitalism*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1988, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Mann, *ibid.*, p. 112.

actor and deconstructed the imagery that portrayed the state as a distinct entity from society.<sup>15</sup> Criticizing Skocpol's approaches, Mitchell disputed that she made voluntaristic and ideological assertions and incorporated subjectivity within the state-society divide.<sup>16</sup> As an alternative to the political system approach and neo-statist studies, Mitchell proposed a third approach that tackles the issue of state's ambiguity: Internal methods of managing and controlling social processes have generated an external state structure effect separate from these processes.<sup>17</sup> The approach adopted recent explorations into microphysical forms of power such as "*discipline*". Through Foucault's concept of discipline, he investigated the "*structural effect*" that engenders the perception that the state is separate from society, exploring the "new power techniques" that sustain the continuity of the modern social order. This recently conceived structural effect facilitates the reproduction of the disciplined modern individual by attributing transcendence to the nation-state. Philip Abrams' work, written in 1977 (published in 1988), concentrated on the practices of reification and mystification surrounding the state.<sup>18</sup> The approach posits that the state-society distinction is an internally established aspect of more complicated power dynamics. It contends that modern mechanisms such as the army and bureaucracy effectively create the illusion that the state is a separate entity distinct from society.

Joel Migdal, the architect of the state images and practices approach, utilized the deconstruction method. He distanced himself from the neo-statist approach of the 1980s, producing his own term, "*state within society*". Migdal's approach provides a means of comprehending how society perceived the state without the error of reifying the state. Migdal employs the concept of "*image*" to describe the state, a concept used by Edward Shils to characterize the "*centre*" in the system theory framework.<sup>19</sup> Shils' notion of image symbolizes the dominant and singular centre of society. Therefore, the state image is dominant, integrated, and autonomous. It operates direct control over a designated territory through its representatives and uses full legislative

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<sup>15</sup> Mann, *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> Mann, *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Mann, *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Volume 1, Number 1, March 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Shils, "Centre and periphery", *The Logic of Personal Knowledge: Essays Presented to Michael Polanyi*, (ed.) Polanyi Festschrift Committee, Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited Broadway House, 1961, p. 117-130.

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authority.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Shils' usage, Migdal's concept of an image encompasses perception generated both internally and externally. The perception is related to a single entity, which is predominantly "*autonomous, united, and centralized*". Employing Migdal's approach to the New Macedonian Question, defined as the legitimacy crises experienced at the national and international levels after the declaration of independence, the article investigates the context when an autonomous, united, and centralized Macedonian state perception was failed.

Migdal's concept of perception simultaneously establishes two distinct types of boundaries: territorial boundaries and social boundaries. The image of territorial boundaries demarcates areas of control for different states illustrates the world's organization by geographical division, a concept evident in schoolbook maps and experienced by travellers and exporters. Territory, a fundamental aspect of the state, has already recognized by the Montevideo Convention. However, Migdal's reference to territorial borders highlights the notion of representation.<sup>21</sup> The state functions as an "avatar" of the population, embodying the human body in an image, in symbolic form. This representation manifests in the United Nations voting, interstate diplomacy, and various everyday practices. Alongside the representation, borders of the state's jurisdiction and borders of individuals in communication align within specified territorial boundaries with the geographical coordinates. On the other hand, the concept of a social boundary refers to the legal distinction between the public and private spheres. The social boundary delineates the bureaucratic state from private actors and social forces. Consequently, as a complement to territorial borders that visually depict the state's jurisdiction, social boundaries emerge. In such instances, as the state distances from the realm of non-state actors, it perceptually ascends above these social boundaries, representing an area where 'common interests' converge.

If the state is understood as a set of practices, then all the practices in which individuals engage to fulfil public functions collectively lay the foundation of Macedonia. The transition from Yugoslav passports to Macedonian passports, the process of visa applications and issuance of entry stamps for foreign visitors, all contribute to shaping Macedonia's image. The delineation of the new Macedonian state's borders on official maps, the

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<sup>20</sup> Migdal, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Migdal, *ibid.*, p. 17.

erection of fences along the territorial boundaries, the transition of personnel from the Yugoslav army to the Macedonian national army, and the teaching of Macedonian national history in school curricula, these novel practices serve to reinforce the emerging state image. The inconspicuous presence of national flags adorns public institutions in everyday life,<sup>22</sup> the national anthem played at state ceremonies,<sup>23</sup> and the depiction of the new Macedonian denar featuring the White Tower in Thessaloniki on its design,<sup>24</sup> all contribute to building an image of the state that seeks to establish continuity from past to present, effectively covering the essence of the nation and facilitating its reification. However, when efforts to represent Macedonia as an avatar—an embodiment of the state—failed at the international level, particularly within the UN for considerable period, the Macedonian society rallied and took to the streets, demanding the resignation of President Kiro Gligorov and the incumbent government. Since its independence, the Republic of Macedonia has struggled establishing a state image relying on the superior means violence, as well as collecting sufficient information about the people, systematic taxation, recruitment of the military personnel and penetrate regions inhabited by Albanians. The failure to cultivate a perception of an autonomous, united, and centralized republic caused an alternative and competing state image within its borders called Ilirida, the imagined republic of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia.

## 2. Macedonian and Albanian Efforts in Forming State Images

The wave of nationalism that surged in Eastern Europe during the 1980s extended its influence on Yugoslavia. The leading Union of Communists of Macedonia (CKM) initiated an embargo on Albanians on education matters and cultural activities. Macedonia's "*constitutional nationalism*" policy also caused social segregation in Macedonia.<sup>25</sup> Through a constitutional amendment in April 1989, a pivotal year of change for the Eastern bloc states, Albanians officially lost their status as a founding nation of Macedonia along with the Turks; the state was defined as the state of the

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, Sage Publications, London 1995, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", *Invention of Tradition*, (ed.) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> VMRO-DPMNE proposed it but rejected by the government. It was circulated as a souvenir at Skopje streets.

<sup>25</sup> Robert M. Hayden, "Constitutionalism Nationalism in the Formerly Yugoslav Republics", *Slavic Review*, Volume 51, Number 4, Winter 1992, p. 659-660.

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Macedonian nation.<sup>26</sup> In reaction to demonstrations organized in Gostivar and Kumanovo, Albanians boycotted both the March 31, 1991 census and the September 8, 1991 independence referendum, as they did not embrace the Macedonian state that relegated them to the second-class citizenship status.<sup>27</sup> Ahead of the referendum, the Albanian professors voiced grievances over not being granted the right to represent themselves in constitutional draft negotiations, exclusively conducted between international representatives and Macedonian experts.<sup>28</sup>

Due to the representation issue faced during preparations for the declaration of independence of the Macedonian nation-state, Albanians of Macedonia had questioned the legitimacy, foundational underpinnings, and rationale of the Macedonian state.<sup>29</sup> According to the Albanian perspective, such practices were indicative of an intent to establish a state for the Macedonian cultural nation, prohibiting flag-bearing as well as Albanian national symbols and the use of the Albanian language in the parliament through legislative amendments by CKM in April 1989.<sup>30</sup> As a result, Albanians within the country approached the 1991 Constitution and the 1991 and 1994 censuses with caution, and withheld support for the international recognition of the state. State practices, such as constitutional changes of 1989, the census, the independence referendum, and the constitution-making process in 1991, were designed to cultivate the perception that the state's reformation was based on ethnic Macedonian dominance. As a reaction, Albanians who exhibited reservations towards the new formula of the state once again shared their outlook with the Kosovar Albanians, marked by a post-Yugoslav imagination.<sup>31</sup>

The ascendancy of Macedonian and Albanian nationalist parties within the democratic political landscape, coupled with the exclusionary citizen categorization embedded in the constitution, resulted in reinforcement

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<sup>26</sup> Iseni, *op.cit.*, p. 180-181.

<sup>27</sup> 23 Albanian deputies represented in the 120-member Parliament did not participate in the voting.

<sup>28</sup> Biljana Vankovska, "Constitutional Engineering and Institution-building in the Republic of Macedonia (1991-2011)", *Civic and Uncivic Values in Macedonia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media*, (ed.) Sabrina P. Ramet, Ola Listhaug ve Albert Simkus, The Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Židas Daskalovski, *Walking in the Edge: Consolidating Multiethnic Macedonia: 1989-2004*, Globic Press, Chapel Hill 2006, p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> Iseni, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Vankovska, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

of Macedonian and Albanian identities as separate ethnic communities. Albanians' resistance against suppressive and dismissive policy concerning their demands and practices, such as self-governance, cultural representation, language usage, and access to education from primary to higher levels, has hindered their integration into the Macedonian state. The Albanians' push for independence within their own national community occurred at a juncture when the EU Council had recognized the independence of Slovenia and Croatia but had not yet acknowledged Macedonia as an independent state. Debates revolved around political issues, such as the flag and the use of the Albanian language. Perry indicates ethnic Macedonian perspective on the usage of language and flag in the public sphere: there was a willingness to designate Albanian as an official language in the areas where Albanians predominantly inhabited; however, employing the Albanian flag could not be permissible.<sup>32</sup> Albanians argued that it was the flag of Albanian nation, a symbol with a 500-year lineage, therefore, the selected political rhetoric served to delineate the ethnic division in Macedonia.

Ethnic Macedonians suffered from non-recognition of the national identity by its neighbours after the independence declaration and became isolated diplomatically until January 1992 when recognized by Bulgaria. Therefore, the Republic of Ilirida (RoI) emerged as a competing political entity consisting of several regions of Macedonia. Although the Ilirida concept was declared unconstitutional by the Macedonian government, it was once proposed as an idea and imagined country. In January 1992, Albanians, who had abstained from participating in the RoM's independence voting in preceding months, actively participated in the referendum for political and territorial autonomy for Albanian areas in western Macedonia as a distinctive practice for statehood.<sup>33</sup> The Albanian nationalist PDP's notion of "political and territorial autonomy" was embraced during the referendum held on January 11-12.<sup>34</sup> Albanian participation in the referendum for the Ilirida organized at more than 500 polling stations. There were 276,921

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<sup>32</sup> Duncan M. Perry, "Destiny on Hold: Macedonia and the Dangers of Ethnic Discord", *Current History*, 1 March 1998, p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> Janusz Bugajski, *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe: Guide to Nationality Policies, Organizations, and Parties*, Routledge, London and New York 2015, p. 153.

<sup>34</sup> Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, *Diplomacy on the Edge: Containment of Ethnic Conflict and the Minorities Working Group of the Conferences on Yugoslavia*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press with John Hopkins University Press, Washington and Baltimore 2007, p. 397.

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participants<sup>35</sup> and of whom 74% voted in favour of Albanian political and cultural autonomy.<sup>36</sup> Inspiring from the referendum practice, some Albanian leaders in the early 1990s identified themselves with the RoI.<sup>37</sup> Activists from Albanian municipalities proclaimed the western part of Macedonia as the RoI and expressed their goal of uniting the Albanians of Yugoslavia. The PDP leadership distanced from the idea, however, passed a resolution in its first congress for asking Macedonian leadership to recognize independence of Kosovo and the autonomy of Albanian regions in western Macedonia.<sup>38</sup>

State practices and perceptions among people generate the overarching identity of the state. In the early 1990s, an alternative state image emerged as the Republic of Ilirida (RoI) to challenge the image of the RoM. The Albanian politician, Nevzat Halili, had attempted proclaiming independence of this state twice, in 1992 as a leader of PDP and 2014. Albanians did not identify themselves with the RoM expressing their absence in state practices and institutions.<sup>39</sup> They abstained from parliamentary meetings, evaded tax payments, and neglected their public obligations.<sup>40</sup> They were unable to secure their constitutional rights, displayed no allegiance to the RoM, instead engaged in activities aimed at reinforcing the RoI image. PDP's inaugural congress held in February 1992 and Kosovo's separation from Serbia and principles of Albanian autonomy in Western Macedonia were declared. At the Carrington Conference on March 4th, Nevzat Halili presented a proposal for federalization of Macedonia. The proposal paralleled with models of Belgium and Switzerland and introduced the concept of 'special status-autonomy of Albanians in Macedonia'.<sup>41</sup> On March 31st, a protest organized in Skopje, Halili reiterated Albanians' aspirations for territorial, cultural, and political autonomy.<sup>42</sup> Estimated 40,000 demonstrators urged

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<sup>35</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milošević*, Westview Press, Colorado 2002, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup> Silvo Devetak, "Minorities and Autonomy in Central and Eastern Europe", *Federalism, Regionalism, Local Autonomy and Minorities*, Proceedings, Studies and Texts, No. 52, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 1996, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> Partija za Demokratski Prosperitet (Party for Democratic Prosperity, PDP), behind the movement, won 17 seats in the November-December 1990 elections. It won 3 municipalities in local elections.

<sup>38</sup> Bugajski, *op.cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Ramet, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> Jens Reuter, "Policy and Economy in Macedonia", *The New Macedonian Question*, (ed.) Hames Pettifer, Palgrave Macmillan, London 1999, p. 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> Ahrens, *op.cit.*, p. 398.

<sup>42</sup> Ramet, *op.cit.*, p. 190.

international recognition if the right to autonomy was not granted in Albanian majority regions. On April 6, 1992, Halili proclaimed the Republic of Ilirida in the city of Struga, in front of approximately 2,500 people comprising of local leaders of ethnic Albanian parties and members of minorities such as Turks and Muslims, activists from Albanian inhabited regions supported this declaration.<sup>43</sup> The old aspiration among Albanians of Macedonia to establish a new homeland in the imagined lands of Ilirida was put into action. Halili initially aimed to unite all Albanians in the former Yugoslavia under a single Albanian state. However, he later shifted his stance to supporting the federalization process within Macedonia.

The declaration move was criticized by PDP leaders and condemned by Macedonian authorities as illegitimate.<sup>44</sup> A series of operations were carried out by the Macedonian security forces retaliating against Albanian activism. In June 1992, police searches conducted in Radolišta discovered an Albanian emblem featuring an eagle with two blackheads. In November 1992, Macedonian authorities collected 2,000 leaflets bearing the signature of the Ilirida Albanian Youth Movement. These leaflets contained a declaration about Albanians' intention to wage war for the right to self-determination.<sup>45</sup> Official state sources indicated the collaboration of Albanian activists from three different regions: Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania. In July 1992, the ongoing government had no vote of confidence due to Macedonia's lack of international recognition. The Crvenkovski broad coalition government was established on September in which Albanian PDP secured five ministries and in reaction VMRO-DPMNE called for new elections.<sup>46</sup> The policies and discourses of the Albanian political elites resisting towards Macedonian state image enabled them taking part in the social democratic government. Following the international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, the government initiated an active program against the mobilization of Albanians. In November 1993, prominent Albanian leaders were arrested and prosecuted for their alleged involvement in attempting to overthrow the existing state and establish a separatist Albanian state called Ilirida.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bugajski, *op.cit.*, p. 173; Ahrens, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>44</sup> Bugajski, *ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Daskalovski, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Branko Crvenkovski, the leader of the Social Democratic Alliance, served as the second prime minister of the RoM for two terms from 1992-1998.

<sup>47</sup> James Pettifer, "The Albanians in Western Macedonia after FYROM Independence", *The New Macedonian Question*, (ed.) James Pettifer, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p. 140.

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The RoM, in the early years of its independence, faced not only a representation predicament but also risk of losing its name. The EU Council's decision on June 27, 1992, asserting that the name of the Macedonian state should not incorporate "Macedonia", was reiterated at the EC summit held in Lisbon in September. This decision cast doubt upon the sovereignty of the state, national identity, and international representation. As the Republic of Skopje, a name that had been contemplated for some time did not encompass all ethnic Macedonians, the resolution of the summit further eradicated the only recognized identity -Macedonian- within the country. As noted by Marc Weller, this situation could have potentially triggered the proliferation of other nationalistic sentiments.<sup>48</sup> By the end of the year 1992, as conflicts intensified in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece imposed an embargo against the RoM. The New Macedonian Question gained global attention and prompted its referral to the UN. This marked the first instance in the history of the UN where a state's membership application was rejected due to opposition from another state. Consequently, the RoM could not assume the role of an "avatar" to represent its nation within the UN framework, thus failing to secure a seat. The representation dilemma hampered the state's ability establishing its existence, leading to the emergence of Ilirida as a potential alternative representation. The political instability stemming from the non-recognition issue and the reactionary emergence of the alternative RoI imagining were interconnected. Ultimately, on April 7, 1993, the RoM's application for the UN membership was accepted through the Security Council Resolution 817, bolstering the Macedonian state image. The RoM was granted a place at the UN table due to this decision under the designation of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (the FYROM), within the 'T' row. In December 1993, major EU members established diplomatic relations and opened embassies in Skopje. Having recognized by the UN, many states initiated diplomatic relations with the state under the name of the Republic of Macedonia. The recognition marked a significant achievement in filling an important gap in the political map of the Balkans during the period of turmoil.

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<sup>48</sup> Marc Weller, "Piggy in the Middle", *New Statesman and Society*, 5, 221, 25 September 1992, p. 32.

### 3. The Alienation of Albanians from the State: Cultural Demands and Macedonian Counter Practices

According to Natasha Gaber's research conducted in 1993, 86% of Albanians perceived themselves as second-class citizens in Macedonia.<sup>49</sup> The prevalence of Albanian state passports among them provides insight into their limited allegiance to the Macedonian state. This section demonstrates that Albanians of Macedonia had not developed a significant emotional attachment to the RoM until 2001 due to Macedonian state practices. Between 1991-2001, Albanians struggled to establish their own institutions in places where they consisted of the majority of the population. The dispute on the foundation of an Albanian university even brought the Macedonian state into the question.<sup>50</sup> Albanians founded the University of Tetovo in 1994; it was declared illegal by the RoM and was closed by the Macedonian police in 1995. The founder of the university was caught and sentenced to prison by the Macedonian courts. Therefore, Albanians started a boycott policy within the parliament. The demand of Albanians to receive higher education in their native language was perceived as a rebellion by the political and bureaucratic elites of the RoM. At that time, President Gligorov insisted that anyone from Albanian population desired to receive higher education could go to Tirana. In addition to practices pursued by the Macedonian state, the exclusionary rhetoric of Macedonian politicians further alienated Albanians from the state.

In the 1996 local elections, Albanian candidates affiliated with the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDP-A) secured victory in several municipalities. By taking 70% support of Albanians in elections, it was a significant victory for candidates. Gostivar's mayor, Rufi Osmani, along with Tetovo's mayor, Alajdin Demiri, displayed Albanian and Turkish flags in the town centre on May 1997. Foreign flag hanging practice was evaluated as an act of defiance against the law by state authorities. Osmani urged Albanians in Gostivar to "protect their flag with their blood".<sup>51</sup> On May 27, around 20 thousand Albanians gathered in the city centre and organized a large-scale demonstration. Subsequent to these revolts in Gostivar and Tetovo, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia considered the practice of

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<sup>49</sup> Natasha Gaber, "The Muslim Population in FYROM (Macedonia): Public Perceptions", *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, (ed.) Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki, Hurst and Company, London 1997, p. 111.

<sup>50</sup> Misha Glenny, "The Macedonian Question: Still No Answers", *Social Research*, Volume 62, Number 1, Spring 1995, p. 150.

<sup>51</sup> Daskalovski, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

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hanging of foreign flags within the borders of the Macedonian state as a breach of sovereignty. Organized revolts demonstrated that the Macedonian administration had been unable to foster a sense of an autonomous, united, and centralized Macedonian state in Muslim settlements. The flag-related crisis further highlighted the competition of the Ilirida image to Macedonian state authorities. The Macedonian administration perceived the political and cultural aspirations of the Albanian community as matters of national security and struggled to extend its influence into the northwest regions of the country.

On 8 July 1997, an amendment was enacted with the aim of reducing tensions in the region by imposing restrictions on the usage of non-Macedonian flags. According to the amendment, flags of ethnic minorities were permitted to be displayed on municipal buildings solely on public holidays, and it was deemed appropriate to hang them only on private property. The amendment essentially aimed to reinstate the rights that existed in former Yugoslavia. However, both the Gostivar and Tetovo Municipality administrations declined to accept the new amendment. Albanians contended that the flag was not a representation of the Albanian state, but rather symbolized the Albanian nation with a 500-year lineage.<sup>52</sup> The primary emblem on the flag, the double-headed eagle, alluded to the 15th-century cultural figure, Albanian Skender Bey. The Macedonian commentators viewed the flag crisis as a critical threat to the existence of the Macedonian nation in the context of the RoM's difficult path towards recognition and ongoing economic and political fragility.<sup>53</sup> The sense of threat perception was confirmed at the following day of the amendment by dispatching special forces to lower flags down. Encircled by Albanian protesters, special forces encountered violent clashes in Tetovo and Gostivar, resulting in three fatalities, over two hundred injuries, and the arrest of 312 individuals. A state of martial law was declared in Gostivar, and the OSCE's request to enter the city was denied. Macedonians interpreted these actions occurred at the north-western parts of the country as an attempt to establish Greater Albania.<sup>54</sup> The president of the state, Kiro Gligorov expressed his concerns about autonomy demands of Albanians in an interview with the Belgrade weekly *Economica Policia* on August 25, 1997:

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<sup>52</sup> Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>53</sup> Keith S. Brown, "In the Realm of the Double-edged Eagle: Parapolitics in Macedonia, 1994-9", *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference*, (ed.) Jane K. Cowan, Pluto Press, London 2000, p. 132.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, *ibid.*, p. 133.

*“What is at issue here is to turn part of Macedonia’s territory into an autonomous region to approach the ultimate goal of independence and secession from our state... Also, they want a new Constitution to be drafted, with the Albanians and Macedonians sitting at the same table to agree what kind of state they want and with the idea that the state should be bi-partite. What this state would be called, whether it would be a federation or something else, is a separate issue. They also demand that the Albanian minority exercises autonomy in the municipalities in which it is the majority population. They also want Albanian to become the second official language in Macedonia, which is unprecedented in our history.”*<sup>55</sup>

Following incidents where police forces attempted to prevent exposition of the Albanian national flag, Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) withdrew from the parliament on April 13, 1998, protesting against ongoing imprisonment of Albanian mayors of Gostivar and Tetovo.<sup>56</sup> Subsequent to the general elections held in October and November, two mayors were granted amnesty when the VMRO-DPMNE formed a coalition with DPA. Despite the formed coalition, Ljubčo Georgievski, the VMRO-DPMNE’s candidate in the 1994 presidential election, used the slogan: “We will let the eagle fly, but first we will cut its talons first”.<sup>57</sup> The mentioned eagle refers to the double-headed eagle featured on the Ilirida flag. However, the new coalition challenged SDSM, which had employed state force against the Albanian demands. The leaders of SDSM were remnants of the former communist administration, and their corruption had coalesced Macedonian and Albanian nationalists in the late 1990s. The notion that SDSM politicians were anti-Albanian and pro-Serbian also led the Albanian parties to move closer to VMRO-DPMNE.<sup>58</sup> The alignment of nationalist, pragmatic, and anti-communist VMRO-DPMNE with DPA marginalized the Albanian ultra-left PDP, while positioning DPA – a more centrist party centred around Arben Xhaferi’s personal charisma – as a coalition partner.

Although VMRO-DPMNE was a Macedonian nationalist party, it had close ties to Bulgaria in the late 1990s. Ljubčo Georgievski, who served as the prime minister between 1998 and 2002, re-examined the main historical

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<sup>55</sup> Kiro Gligorov, “The Unrealistic Dreams of Large States”, *The New Macedonian Question*, (ed.) James Pettifer, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2001, p. 99-100.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*, Routledge, London and New York 2007, 419.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>58</sup> Brown, *ibid.*, p. 134.

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narrative and referred to the Bulgarian national identity of Macedonian revolutionaries and intellectuals from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>59</sup> Through revisionist historical and linguistic attempts, VMRO-DPMNE exhibited not only an anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist stance, but also in an anti-Macedonian, thus pro-Bulgarian alignment in the lenses of the mainstream Macedonian establishment.<sup>60</sup> VMRO-DPMNE's electoral victory and its pro-Bulgarian actions raised concerns in Greece that it could mobilize 'Slavophones' in the northern region of the country. Simultaneously, there were officials representing revolutionary IMRO tradition among ministerial cadres in Sofia. The 1998 general election results were evaluated as paving the way for Bulgaria to exert an active role in the region. Indeed, the VMRO-DPMNE and DPA alliance encompassed 'grand ideals' serving pro-Bulgarian VMRO-DPMNE capable of aligning with Bulgaria and facilitating Albanians in their pursuit of Ilirida imagining. While the RoM had been unable to establish a perception of an autonomous, united, and centralized state and prospect for Macedonians incorporation into 'greater' Bulgaria and Albanians shaping their future under a 'greater' Albania united with Ilirida and Kosovo emerged.

#### 4. Ethnic Tensions, Paramilitary Movements and International Mediation

The Kosovo Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës, UCK), a guerilla organization, claimed responsibility for the bombing of police stations in Prilep and Kumanovo in January 1998.<sup>61</sup> It marked the beginning of UCK's activities in Macedonia following its operations against the Serbian forces in Kosovo. NATO's military intervention in Serbia in 1999 aggravated ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians in the country. Ethnic Macedonians adopted an anti-Western stance and expressed sympathy for Serbian cause during the Kosovo crisis, on the contrary, ethnic Albanians, supported the independence aspirations of Kosovar Albanians.<sup>62</sup> The Kosovo War of March to June 1999 caused an influx of 360,000 (circa) mostly Albanian refugees from Kosovo into Macedonia and deepened social and

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<sup>59</sup> Tchavdar Marinov, "Anticommunist, but Macedonian: Politics of Memory in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia", *Currents of History*, Volume 1-2, 2009, p. 70.

<sup>60</sup> Marinov, *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Pettifer, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>62</sup> Heather Rae, *State Identities and the Homogenisation of Peoples*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 273.

political fractures among ethnic communities.<sup>63</sup> Macedonians perceived outnumbering of the Albanian population as an existential threat, on April 22, Georgievski warned that the arrival of Albanian refugees from Kosovo posing a threat to the demographic equilibrium of the country. On May 29, DPA spokesperson Adelina Marku informed the Agency France Press that Macedonian Albanians were dissatisfied with their national minority status and instead aimed for a multi-ethnic country based on equal footing for Macedonian and Albanian nations.<sup>64</sup> However, several Macedonian politicians claimed that the Albanian population was viewed as a stepping stone for the creation of greater Albania, with their loyalty directed toward the ‘virtual unit’ (Ilirida) rather than their country of citizenship.<sup>65</sup> Arming of forces that supported UCK in villages along the Kosovo border caused the emergence of Albanian paramilitary groups. Thus, the ‘imaginary’ Ilirida gained the capacity to engage into local armed conflicts. The Skopje government declared that these Albanian formations and actions as illegal, however, VMRO-DPMNE overlooked them due to the ongoing regional war and refugee crisis. Therefore, a radical Albanian group appeared at the end of the Kosovo War in 2000, and Albanians of Macedonia began to stage consistent protests over issues of status, higher education in mother tongue, and the release of Albanian leaders from imprisonment. The armed rebellion launched by the UCK members of Albanian paramilitaries in 2001 and the armed units of the RoM lost the monopoly of violence on the sovereign territory.

On 23 January 2001, paramilitary groups of the National Liberation Army of Albanians in Macedonia (Osloboditelna Narodna Armija, ONA or NLA) started a military conflict by attacking the Macedonian police and army. Ethnic Albanians became a party of the conflict consisting of two different groups. Those living in the south of Serbia (Kosovo) and the west of Macedonia argued that they were not given their rights and impoverished by the Belgrade and Skopje governments. Demands of the first group were based on constitutional amendments, recognition of Albanians as the founding people and acceptance of Albanian as the second official language. The second group provided financial, weaponry and organizational support to warring factions. Composing small numbers among them, the former war combatants fought creating “Greater Kosovo”, which would later unite with

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<sup>63</sup> Eran Fraenkel, “Nations in Transit – Macedonia”, *Freedom House*, 29 May 2003, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/freehou/2003/en/49863>, (18.11.2024).

<sup>64</sup> Daskalovski, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

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Albania and establish “Greater Albania”.<sup>66</sup> The imagination of the first group on borders of Macedonia points to the image of the Macedonian-Albanian state in which both Macedonians and Albanians share the power. However, the imagination of the second group reflects the program of unification Albanian nationalism beyond borders of Macedonia. Supporters of Albanian rebels in western Macedonia founded the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Skopje in February, calling for a federal Republic of Macedonia. ONA militants and NDP targeted transition of the RoM into a “bi-national federation” and passage of the control of western Macedonia to the Albanians. Fadil Bajrami, one of the founders of the NDP, stated that Albanians had waited provision of their rights for ten years and announced adopting Belgian-style federation for the future of Macedonia.<sup>67</sup> In the middle of March, ONA armed groups called for international mediation preserving their objectives and dividing the RoM into two federated units.<sup>68</sup> In May, surrounded by the nationalist hysteria, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts made a new call reshaping the RoM into two homogeneous structures through territorial regulations and population exchange.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to these events and imaginations, one can argue that autonomous, united, and centralized RoM state perception was being collapsed. In practice, the RoM was rapidly moving towards disintegration through the ongoing conflict and demands of the factions. The armed forces of the RoM lost absolute superiority of having a monopoly on the means of violence in her sovereign territories and ethnic Macedonians lost the image of being a “dominant” nation. The territorial integrity that symbolized the “totality” of the state had also ended. “Greater Kosovo” and “Greater Albania” ideals in the level of discourse had become widespread in the public sphere. Moreover, demands for a bi-national federation and expectations of Albanians to become a founding nation damaged the image of the distinct Macedonian state. The new situation shook imaginations of Macedonians towards the Macedonian homeland, and the rebellion launched by Albanians through ONA created divisions among them.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, Macedonian nationalists adopted a harsh stance in favour of a military solution. Moderate Macedonians also existed who favoured a political solution.

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<sup>66</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *op.cit.*, p. 423.

<sup>67</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>68</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *ibid.*, p. 425.

<sup>69</sup> Iseni, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>70</sup> Rae, *op.cit.*, p. 273-274.

While conflicts with the Albanians continued, the RoM continued its process of adopting to European norms and became the first Balkan state signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in April. On April 9, Prime Minister Georgievski made a speech on the agreement: “The fact that we have become an associate member of the European Union today, believe me, is a great challenge for our country, and I assure you that we will do our best in the future to show serious results”.<sup>71</sup> Accelerated Europeanization efforts during the conflict were aimed at becoming a part of friendly culture, protecting prestige and reputation of the nation, and ensuring future prosperity and security of the country. Albanian politician Arben Xhaferi made an explanation on the process that “[I would like to see] only one simple thing – to correct the concept of the state which is incompatible with the multi-ethnic reality. We need a new concept, a new European concept of the state, which will be in harmony with reality”.<sup>72</sup> The RoM was trying to deepen its harmonization with the EU, but the citizenship legislation had consisted ethnic and exclusionary content. Although the minority regulation appeared being the most developed in the Balkans with regulations such as the recognition of minority categories and the establishment of the inter-ethnic relations committee, in practice it did not grant sufficient rights to ethnicities and seemed far from meeting demands of Albanians.

As conflicts intensified, Macedonian administrators had to focus on efforts harmonizing the legislation on citizenship and minorities with European and globally accepted norms. Prime Minister Georgievski, who changed his policy under pressure of NATO and Javier Solana, announced on 31 May 2001 that the constitution would be rewritten including ethnic Albanians as the constituent nation and Albanian as the second official language. President Boris Trajkovski offered amnesty to the ONA rebels on the condition that they put down their weapons. It became clear that the privileged position of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the constitution would change. Due to indicated discourses of Macedonian politicians and their negotiations with the Albanians, Arben Xhaferi declared that his plan was to disarm the rebels and reintegrate them into society.<sup>73</sup> However, the conflict that spread to civilians devastated the perception of an autonomous, united, and centralized state among all ethnic communities and caused

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<sup>71</sup> Rae, *ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>72</sup> Rae, *ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>73</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *op.cit.*, p. 434.

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sharpening of group boundaries. The distortion of Macedonian national imagination caused mobilization and reactionary action of ethnic Macedonians. On 25 June at least three thousand Macedonian protesters gathered in front of President Trajkovski's house in Skopje and demanded his resignation. About five thousand Macedonians marched through Skopje protesting the Western intervention into the conflict. When clashes reached Aračinovo village close to Skopje NATO intervened into the conflict. However, this manoeuvre strengthened solidarity among ethnic Macedonians and demonstrators occupied the parliament building for hours and burned EU and OSCE flags and Javier Solana's pictures.<sup>74</sup>

Western mediators declared a breakthrough in the negotiations on 1 August. The way paved for Albanian language would be acceptable in the parliament and accepted as an official language in areas where the Albanian population constitutes at least 20 percent.<sup>75</sup> On 5 August, another important break occurred in the negotiations and an agreement was reached on law enforcement forces. The number of ethnic Albanians in law enforcement was planned to reflect the country's ethnic structure. Macedonian leaders also adopted the formula of minimum minority vote required to pass amendments in the parliament and the allocation of public funds for higher education in the Albanian language.<sup>76</sup> In exchange for the complete disarmament of the ONA, Albanians had wider rights through the agreement and the parliament had to vote on this agreement within 45 days. The official signing of the agreement was planned for 13 August. However, five days before the official signatures, a small group of protesters gathered in front of the American embassy in Skopje and expressed their unhappiness about reaching an agreement under American pressure. Hundreds of protesters gathered around the parliament and blocked the main street to traffic. Although the government aimed to prevent possible chaos by declaring a curfew in Prilep, the tension in Tetova was sparked.<sup>77</sup> In the incidents occurred 10-12 August, Macedonian civilians in Tetova fled the city, 10 Albanian civilians were shot

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<sup>74</sup> Ognen Vangelov, "Stalled European Integration, the Primordialization of Nationalism, and Autocratization in Macedonia between 2008 and 2015", *East European Journal of Society and Politics*, Volume 3, Number 4, 2017, p. 25.

<sup>75</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *op.cit.*, p. 439.

<sup>76</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>77</sup> Ian Fisher, "Macedonians Give Tentative Approval to a Peace Accord", *New York Times*, 9 August 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/09/world/macedonians-give-tentative-approval-to-a-peace-accord.html>, (09.08.2024).

by the Macedonian police in Ljuboten.<sup>78</sup> Following incidents, on 13 August 2001, the negotiating parties - 2 Macedonian parties (VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM), 2 Albanian parties (DPA and PDP), Macedonian President Ljubčo Georgievski, EU representative François Leotard and NATO representative Javier Solana - signed the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

### **5. The 2001 Constitutional Amendments: Ethnic Inclusion, Political Reforms, and Debates Reshaping the State Image**

On 16 November 2001, the Macedonian Assembly voted to amend fifteen articles of the constitution. In accordance with the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), the most controversial change involved removing the phrase “national state of the Macedonian people” from the preamble and replacing it with “state of Macedonian citizens”.<sup>79</sup> However, the original proposal, which was based on a citizenship principle, underwent modifications during parliamentary discussions. The new definition of citizenship in the RoM identified not only “the Macedonian people” but also Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks and others living within the country’s borders.<sup>80</sup> The categories previously referred to as “nationality” – such as Albanians, Turks, Vlachs and Roma- were elevated to the status of “people with the status of citizens”. The amended preamble emphasized that these communities had “devoted themselves” and “made sacrifices” in the struggle for the creation of an independent and sovereign Macedonia – an inclusion absent from the 1991 Constitution. The reference to Macedonia as a republic within Federal Yugoslavia was removed, affirming that the state belonged not only to ethnic Macedonians, but to all the peoples living together within its borders.

The Albanian political parties DPA and PDP supported the agreement, legitimizing the Macedonian legal framework in the eyes of the Albanian community. Consequently, Albanians, who did not participate in the voting of the 1991 Constitution that established the RoM, became part of the redefined state image by engaging in the negotiation and voting process for the constitutional amendments in 2001. These amendments transformed the

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<sup>78</sup> HRW (Human Rights Watch), Crimes against Civilians: Abuses by Macedonian Forces in Ljuboten, 10-12 August 2001, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/macedonia/>, (09.08.2024).

<sup>79</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *op.cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>80</sup> Armend Reka, “The Ohrid Agreement: The Travails of Inter-Ethnic Relations in Macedonia”, *Human Rights Review*, Number 9, 2008, p. 59.

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RoM, initially established as the state of the Macedonian nation in 1991, into a state of all people living within its sovereign borders. For laws that directly affect culture, use of language, education, personal documentation, and use of symbols, a critical new provision that “the majority vote of the Representatives attending who belong to communities not in the majority in the population of Macedonia is also required”.<sup>81</sup> This introduced a double majority system into the legislative processes, ensuring that the approval of minority communities was necessary for key decisions. However, the association of ethnic symbols with state symbols creates a loyalty gap among Albanians toward the state.<sup>82</sup>

In case of disputes, the Council on Interethnic Relations (CIR) was assigned the role of resolving issues. Originally composed of 13 members - two each from the Macedonian, Albanian, Turk, Vlach, Roma and other nationalities, along with the parliament speaker- the CIR’s membership was expanded to 19. The new composition included seven members from Macedonian and Albanian parliamentarians, along with one representative each from Turks, Vlachs, Roma, Serbs, and Bosniaks. This new arrangement granted veto power to Macedonian and Albanian representatives, enabling them to block decisions through unified voting. As a result, Macedonians and Albanians were required to reach a consensus on every decision, while other ethnicities were represented through their single votes.

The amendment on language issues regulated the recognition of any language spoken by at least 20 percent of the population as an official language, alongside Macedonian.<sup>83</sup> It allowed the use of a citizen’s native language in official personal documents, such as driver’s licenses and vehicle registrations, but became contentious regarding passports.<sup>84</sup> Obtaining a passport and using it abroad is an important practice in which the state’s perception is perceived. While Albanians advocated for passports featuring Macedonian, English, and Albanian on the front cover, Macedonian leaders insisted that there could be only one type of passport, with English limited to the personal information section. The amendment also stipulated that in any local unit where more than 20 percent of the population speaks a language

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<sup>81</sup> OGRM (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia), Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, No: 91/01. 16 November 2001.

<sup>82</sup> Iseni, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>83</sup> OGRM, No: 91/01.

<sup>84</sup> Brenda Pearson, “Putting Peace into Practice: Can Macedonia’s New Government Meet the Challenge?” *US Institute of Peace*, Washington 2002, p. 9.

other than Macedonian, that language could be used for communication with regional offices of the central government. Furthermore, local municipalities were required to respond in both Macedonian and relevant minority language. Additionally, any citizen could use an official language when contacting the main offices of the central government, and those offices were required to respond in both Macedonian and the language used by the individual. In certain municipalities, where Albanians were close to, but did not exceed, the 20 percent threshold, Serbian, Romany and Turkish were recognized as secondary languages in certain municipalities.<sup>85</sup> Overall, Albanian was designated as a second language in 27 municipalities, Turkish in four, and Serbian and Romany were in one municipality. On 19 June 2002, the Parliament passed nine new laws with broad support, officially granting extended linguistic rights to the Albanian community. The legislation allowed the use of Albanian in all government affairs and ensured its inclusion, alongside Macedonian, in the census scheduled for November 2002.<sup>86</sup>

The addition to Article 8 of the Constitution represents an important step toward fostering coexistence and changing state perception by establishing the principle of equal representation of communities at all levels in public institutions and public life.<sup>87</sup> This regulation aimed to facilitate the employment of individuals from other ethnic groups and gradually increased their representation in the central bureaucracy, local municipalities, and police forces; however, alongside the Macedonian community, employment of members of the Albanian community is favoured in practice, other communities are neglected.<sup>88</sup> A provision was also added to Article 86, requiring the President to ensure that the composition of the Macedonian population is proportionately reflected when appointing members to the Security Council.<sup>89</sup> This regulation, in practice facilitated the employment of individuals from other ethnic groups and gradually increased their representation in the central bureaucracy, local municipalities, and police forces. Notably, The Macedonian Ombudsman was selected from the Albanian community. The inclusion of diverse ethnicities in the public administration transformed the unique Macedonian perception of the state.

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<sup>85</sup> Dejan Marolov, "Understanding the Ohrid Framework Agreement", *Civic and Uncivic Values in Macedonia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media*, (ed.) Sabrina P. Ramet, Ola Listhaug and Albert Simkus, The Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013, p. 150.

<sup>86</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

<sup>87</sup> OGRM, No: 91/01.

<sup>88</sup> Marolov, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>89</sup> OGRM, No: 91/01.

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Further reflecting this shift, key positions such as the national coordinator to NATO and the EU representative were assigned to ethnic Albanians.<sup>90</sup> These appointments played a significant role in shaping the international image of the state. Additionally, affirmative action measures were introduced to increase the enrolment of Albanian students in higher education. Positive discrimination quotas were reserved for minority students, both in two Albanian-language universities established near Tetovo in 2004 and other universities across the country.<sup>91</sup>

Another amendment regulated Article 19 of the constitution, which defines the relationship between religion and state.<sup>92</sup> This amendment was one of the most controversial among Macedonians. It introduced references to the “Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, the Jewish Community, and other religious communities and groups,” officially recognizing them as part of the legal framework. A new paragraph added to Article 19 of the Constitution granted these religious communities the right to establish schools and other social or charitable organizations. This regulation ended the religious monopoly previously held by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which had played a significant role in shaping Macedonian national identity.

Following the agreement, efforts focused on ensuring that the monopoly on the use of force remained under the control of legitimate state authorities. As part of these efforts, 1470 weapons were collected within just three days, and NATO successfully completed the disarmament of the ONA on 22 August.<sup>93</sup> However, Macedonian politicians expressed concerns about the impact of the agreement on Macedonian national identity.<sup>94</sup> The agreement marked a break from the policies pursued since 1944, which had promoted the Macedonian identity. This shift revealed fears among Macedonians that their national identity and sovereignty were at risk. Many Macedonians believed their state, which they viewed as the sole protector of their nation’s existence, could be lost to the Albanians.<sup>95</sup> Petar Atanasov noted that the agreement generated a sense of resentment among ethnic

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<sup>90</sup> Reka, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>91</sup> Marolov, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>92</sup> OGRM, No: 91/01.

<sup>93</sup> Bideleux and Jeffries, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

<sup>94</sup> Ulf Brunnbauer, The Implementation of the Ohrid Agreement: Ethnic Macedonian Resentments, *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, Issue 1, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> Brunnbauer, *ibid.*, p. 9-10.

Macedonians, as they felt compelled to reluctantly make room for Albanians within what they considered their 'natural' state.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Aleksandar Sazdovski argues that the armed conflict and the Ohrid Framework Agreement intensified social insecurity regarding Macedonian national identity, reinforcing the perception that the nation's existence was under threat.<sup>97</sup>

After the OFA, a commission consisting of five ethnic Macedonians, four ethnic Albanians and one member from the Turkish community was formed to rewrite the history books taught in secondary education, and the new curriculum began to be implemented in the 2005-2006 academic year. According to Stéfoska, the revised textbooks reflected a bipolar national narrative, with Macedonian and Albanian perspectives remaining largely isolated from each other.<sup>98</sup> The Macedonian narrative focused on establishing a link between ancient Macedonians and modern-day Macedonia, while the Albanian narrative traced its roots to the Ancient Illyrians and identified the borders of present-day Albania as their homeland.<sup>99</sup> Although the Albanian homeland was portrayed as distinct, Albanians were recognized as an autochthonous population in the region.<sup>100</sup> It was stated that the Macedonians were also autochthonous in the region; however, they started common life (symbiosis) with the Slavs who migrated to the region.<sup>101</sup> The Macedonian-Albanian historiography dated 2005, which examined the histories of the two ethnicities in isolation and emphasized the continuity of these two people from past to present, consolidated the perception of a re-established state with Macedonians and Albanians as its dominant groups. Post-conflict conditions and practices paved the way for the rise of a new type of Macedonian nationalism; this historical narrative was changed through policies to recreate the Macedonian homeland and state image during the successor VMRO-DPMNE government after 2006.

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<sup>96</sup> Petar Atanasov, "Macedonia between Nationalism(s) and Multiculturalism: The Framework Agreement and Its Multicultural Conjectures", *Sociologija*, Volume 45, Number 4, 2003, p. 304.

<sup>97</sup> Aleksandar Sazdovski, "Nation-building under the Societal Dilemma: The Case of Macedonia", *Journal of Regional Security* Volume 10, Number 1, 2011, p. 66-67.

<sup>98</sup> Irena Stéfoska, "Some Aspects of History Textbooks for Secondary School: The Case of Macedonia", *Civic and Uncivic Values in Macedonia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media*, (ed.) Sabrina P. Ramet, Ola Listhaug ve Albert Simkus, The Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013, p. 260.

<sup>99</sup> Stéfoska, *ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>100</sup> Stéfoska, *ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>101</sup> Stéfoska, *ibid.*, p. 265.

### **Conclusion**

The formation of state identity in Macedonia was deeply influenced by nationalist tensions between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. Throughout the early 1990s, constitutional changes, censuses, and referendums reinforced ethnic divisions, leading to Albanian resistance against the RoM. The emergence of the Republic of Ilirida as an alternative political vision reflected this struggle, highlighting the deep-rooted contestation over representation and autonomy. While Macedonian authorities sought to solidify their state image through international recognition, Albanian activists continued to challenge their exclusion. Ultimately, the international acceptance of Macedonia under the provisional name FYROM helped stabilize its statehood, yet ethnic tensions persisted, shaping the country's political landscape for years to come.

The alienation of Albanians from the RoM between 1991 and 2001 was driven by restrictive state policies, cultural suppression, and exclusionary rhetoric. The state's refusal to recognize Albanian demands for higher education, cultural symbols, and political autonomy reinforced a perception of second-class citizenship. Incidents such as the flag crisis and violent state responses deepened ethnic divisions, while political alliances, particularly between VMRO-DPMNE and DPA, reflected shifting nationalist agendas. Ultimately, the RoM's struggle to create a unified national identity, coupled with Albanian aspirations for greater autonomy, fuelled competing visions of statehood, leaving long-lasting implications for interethnic relations in the region.

The ethnic conflict in Macedonia from 1998 to 2001, fuelled by rising Albanian nationalism, paramilitary movements, and demographic anxieties, threatened the state's territorial integrity and unity. The escalation of violence, culminating in the National Liberation Army's rebellion, forced the Macedonian government to seek international mediation. Western intervention, particularly by NATO and the EU, pressured Macedonia into constitutional and legal reforms, ultimately leading to the Ohrid Framework Agreement. While the agreement granted Albanians broader rights and aimed to stabilize the country, the conflict deepened ethnic divisions, reshaping state's identity and highlighting the fragility of its multi-ethnic statehood.

The 2001 constitutional amendments marked a pivotal shift in state image and governance, transforming it from a state primarily defined by

ethnic Macedonian heritage into a shared Macedonian-Albanian state image. By incorporating Albanians and other minority communities into the constitutional framework, the amendments sought to foster political inclusion, equitable representation and cultural recognition. However, the reforms also deepened ethnic divides, as debates over national identity and sovereignty persisted. While the Ohrid Framework Agreement aimed to establish long-term stability, the post-amendment period witnessed new challenges, including concerns over identity politics and historical narratives. However, the Macedonian party VMRO-DPMNE, which won the 2006 elections outright, disrupted the post-Ohrid transformation process. During its decade-long rule, the party pursued a new policy of Macedonian state nationalism. Policies such as the Skopje 2014 project, which were implemented during this period, have been widely studied in academic literature. However, due to word count and scope limitations, they have not been included in this study. Additionally, the RoM's efforts to cultivate a state perception that hinted at overlapping Greek sovereign territories -an idea reflected in the 1991 Constitution through state symbols, political practices, and elite discourses- could be explored further in another study.

In the post-VMRO-DPMNE period after 2016, the signing of the Prespa Agreement with Greece in 2018 and the subsequent renaming of the state to North Macedonia marked the beginning of a new national identity crisis, which warrants further study. During this period, the election of an Albanian parliamentary speaker in 2017, the recognition of Albanian as an official language in 2018, and the appointment of an Albanian prime minister in the transitional cabinet before the 2024 parliamentary elections contributed to the country's shift towards a moderate multicultural path. However, the return of VMRO-DPMNE to power in the 2024 parliamentary elections and presidential runoff, achieved through double victory, once again disrupted this balance. The anti-multicultural stance in President Siljanovska-Davkova's program is evident in the reassertion of the superiority of the Macedonian language and the removal of other languages from the public sphere. Additionally, the emphasis on the state being a Macedonian nation-state for the past 80 years, from ASNOM to the present day, further reinforces this nationalist approach.

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