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articles





# İktidar ve Tarih İlişkisi Bakımından Makedonya ile Bulgaristan Arasındaki Tarihsel ve Kültürel Miras Kavgasını Çözümlemek

Murat Aliu

**Özet:** Bu çalışmada, Makedonya<sup>1</sup> ile Bulgaristan arasında süregiden “tarihsel miras” paylaşımına ilişkin kavga ekseninde iktidar ve tarih ilişkisi tartışılmıştır. Makedonya'nın Yugoslavya Federasyonu içinde bağımsız bir cumhuriyet haline geldiği 1944 yılından bu yana, bölgenin tarihsel ve kültürel mirası üzerinde ciddi bir şekilde yaşanmakta olan bu kavganın temeli bu bölgelerdeki çok sayıda tarihsel olaya ve tarihi şahsiyetlere ilişkin olup başta tarihçiler ve ülkelerin tarih yazımları olmak üzere, siyasetçiler ve diğer kamu aktörlerince tartışılmaktadır. Her iki ülke de kendi tarih yazımlarında bölge tarih ve kültürel mirasının ulusal karakterini vurgulamakta ve kendine mal etmektedir. İki ülkenin takınmış olduğu bu tutum, söz konusu “tarihi” ve “kültürü” paylaşma tartışmasını politik ve ideolojik kılmaktadır. Söz konusu anlaşmazlıkların kaynağı siyasi olduğu gibi çözüme de siyasi araçlar ile varılmaya çalışılmaktadır. Buradan hareketle, bu çalışmada iki ülke arasındaki tarihsel ve kültürel mirasa ilişkin anlaşmazlıklar ele alınarak tarih ile iktidar ilişkisi ortaya konulacaktır. Diğer bir ifadeyle, bu çalışmada iki ülke arasındaki tarihsel mirası konusundaki yaşanan anlaşmazlıkları ve kavgaların konu ederek tarih/tarihyazımın nasıl siyasallaştırıldığını ve söz konusu bu siyasallaştırma veya ideolojikleştirilmenin iki ülke arasındaki nasıl bir siyasi sorun kaynağı haline geldiğini incelenecektir. Bu çalışmanın temel iddiası söz konusu kavgasının temel motifi milliyetçilik ideolojisi olduğu ve özünde iki milliyetçi ideolojilerinin çatışmasının yansıtılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Makedonya Meselesi, Tarih, İktidar, Milliyetçilik, Ulusal Kimlik, Bulgaristan, Makedonya

**Abstract:** This study discusses the relationship between power and history along the axis of the ongoing fight between Macedonia and Bulgaria regarding the shared historical heritage. Since 1944 when Macedonia became an independent republic within the Yugoslav Federation, this struggle over the historical and cultural heritage of the region has been based on many historical events and historical figures in these regions. and other public actors. Both countries have emphasized and appropriated the national character of the historical and cultural heritage of the region into their historiographies. These two countries' attitudes have made discussions on sharing history and culture political and ideological. Because the source of these disagreements is political, the attempt has been made to resolve things through political means. Based on this perspective, the study will reveal the relationship between history and power by discussing these disagreements regarding historical and cultural heritage between the two countries. In other words, the study will examine how history and historiography have been politicized and how this politicization and ideologization have become sources of political problems between the two countries by discussing the disagreements and disputes between the two countries with regard to their shared historical heritage. This study's main claim involves the main motif of these countries' dispute to be the ideology of nationalism and how it essentially reflects the conflict between their two nationalist ideologies.

**Keywords:** The Macedonian Question, history, power, nationalism, national identity, Bulgaria, Macedonia

1 2018 yılında imzalanan Prespa Anlaşması ile Makedonya, adını Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti olarak değiştirmiştir. Prespa Anlaşması, Makedonya meclisinin devletin adını değiştirmek için anayasal değişiklikler yapmasının ardından 2019 yılında yürürlüğe girdi. Bu makalede Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti yerine sadece “Makedonya” kullanılacaktır.

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## Giriş

Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasındaki “Tarihsel ve Kültürel Mirası” veya geçmişi/tarihi paylaşma kavgasının özü “Makedonya Meselesi” ile ilgilidir. Makedonya Meselesi, milliyetçiliğin Balkanlar’da doğduğu 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında başlamış olup özünde üç sorunu barındırmaktadır. Tarihsel bağlama yerleştirilen bu üç mesele şu şekildedir: “Makedonya hangi bölgesel sınırları kapsamaktadır?”, “Bu toprak parçası hangi ülkeye aittir?” ve “Makedonya denilen bölgede yaşayan slav halkın etnik aidiyeti ve kimliği nedir?” (Пери, 2 :2001). Tarihsel gerçeklik bakımından ele alınacak olursa bu üç soruya nesnel bir cevap vermek hakikaten güçtür. İlk güçlüğün kaynağı, Makedonya bölgesinin sınırlarının tarih boyunca değişkenlik göstermiş olmasıdır. Makedonya bölgesinin sınırları, hangi devlet veya imparatorluk tarafından yönetildiğine veya hangi devletin hâkimiyeti altında bulunduğuna bağlı olarak değişmiştir. Makedonya bölgesinin kime ait olduğu, yani geçmişte hangi devlete bağlı olduğu sorusu üzerine net bir cevap vermek zordur. Zira Makedonya bir coğrafi bölge olarak tarihin değişik dönemlerinde farklı imparatorlukların, prensliklerin ve devletlerin hâkimiyeti ve kontrolü altında bulunmuştur. Son olarak, Makedonya meselesini oluşturan üçüncü sorun, yani bu coğrafi bölgede yaşayan slav halkın etnik veya ulusal kimliğinin belirlenmesi konusu 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısından 20. yüzyılın ortalarına kadar tartışmalı ve cevabı en zor verilebilecek mesele olmuştur. Bölgedeki Slav halkın etnik aidiyeti veya kimliği söz konusu olduğunda kesin olarak herhangi bir söylemek imkansızdır. Makedonya’daki slav halkı konusunda söylenebilecek kesin tek şey, bu halkın büyük bir çoğunluğu Hristiyan olmasıdır. Ancak Makedon tarihyazımının iddialarını baktığımızda bölgedeki slav halkının etnik kimliği diğer komşu slav halklarından farklı olduğu yönündedir. Makedon tarihyazımına göre bu halkın etnik kimliği Makedon olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısından sonra Makedonya’nın komşu ülkeleri olan Bulgaristan, Sırbistan ve Yunanistan bu toprakların tarihsel olarak devletlerinin bir parçası olduğunu ve bu topraklarda yaşayan Slav nüfusun etnik kimliğinin kendi halklarının kimliğiyle aynı olduğunu iddia etmeye başladılar. Bulgaristan için Makedonya denilen toprak parçası Bulgar devletine ait bir bölgedir ve bölgede yaşayan halkın etnik kimliği Bulgardır. Sırbistan için Makedonya bölgesi Güney Sırbistan’ın parçasıdır ve bölgedeki Slav halk da Sırp’tır, Yunanlılar için ise bölgede yaşayan Slav halk Slavca konuşan Yunanlılardır. Bu üç ülkenin her biri Makedonya’yı “atalarından kalan” tarihi bölge olarak tasvir etmişlerdir.

Makedon ulusunun varlığının ve ulusal kimliğinin inkârında en yoğun ısrar Bulgaristan tarafından ortaya konulmuştur. Bulgaristan'ın Makedon ulusunun varlığına ve ulusal kimliğine yönelik inkârının, Makedon milliyetçi söyleminin kaynağı olan ve Makedon ulusunun meşruiyetini dayandırdığı tarihi ve kültürel mirasın inkârı anlamında kullanıldığı belirtilmelidir. Makedon ulusal anlatısının dayandırıldığı Orta Çağ ve Modern Çağ dönemine ilişkin tarihsel ve kültürel mirasın Bulgaristan tarafından sahiplenilmekte; Makedon milliyetçi söylemi ve tarihyazımınca Makedon ulusal mirası olarak nitelendirilen tüm birikimin Bulgaristan milliyetçi söylemi ve tarihyazımında Bulgar karakterini vurgulandığı görülmektedir.

## Tarih ile İktidar İlişkisi: Kuramsal Bir Çerçeve

Tarih terimi Yunanca “*istoria, istorien*” sözcüğünden türetilmiştir. Terim “İyon diyalektte” “bildirme, haber alma yoluyla bilgi edinme” anlamında kullanılmıştır. “Attika diyalektte” ise *istoria* “görerek, tanık olarak bilme” anlamında kullanılmıştır (Özlem, 2010: 25). Schelling, tarih için “*geçmişe ait bilgidir*” tanımını yapmış, tarihin konusu için ise “*kalıcı, durağan olan değil, değişken, zaman içinde ilerleyendir*” ifadesini kullanmıştır (Schelling, 2017: 134). Bir başka açıdan tarih, toplumların ve insanların davranış ve işleyiş biçimleriyle ilgili bilgi sağlayan bir depo olarak düşünülebilir (Stearns, 2009: 11). Collingwood tarihin nesnesinin geçmişte yapılmış eylemler olduğunu ileri sürer. Bu anlamda tarih, insanın kendisiyle ilgili bilgisidir. Kendini bilme veya kendini tanımanın genellikle önemli olduğu düşünülür (Collingwood, 2017: 4). Tarih bireylerin kendi toplumsal veya kolektif kimlik kavramlarını belirlemelerini ve geleceğe dair beklenti oluşturmalarını mümkün kılan tecrübelerin bir toplamı olarak tanımlanabilir. Zira tarihi umursamayan veya önemini inkâr eden insanlar bile, attıkları her adımda tarihi referans olarak varsayımlar geliştirmek zorunda kalmaktadır (Tosh, 1997: 3). Michael Foucault, tarihin; “belleğimizin en allâme, en uyanık, en haberli ve en dolu alanı” olduğunu ileri sürmektedir (Foucault, 2001: 310). Hobsbawm ise insanların kendi konumlarını ve yaşamlarını, ait oldukları aile ile grubun süreklilik çizgisine yerleştirmemezlik edemediklerini ifade eder. Geçmiş ile bugünü kıyaslamamak mümkün görünmemektedir. Geçmişten hiçbir şey öğrenemeyen ve geçmişin bugünkü amaçlarla olan bağlantısını görüp kabul edemeyen bir insan kendini zihinsel bakımdan anormal etiketi altında bulma riski altındadır. Tarih geçmiş olaylardan teşekkül etmektedir. İnsanlık geçmişinin büyük kısmı, tarihin herhangi bir toplumun yaşayış ve işleyiş biçimi konusundaki

aydınlatıcı gücünü göstermektedir. Geçmiş bugünün ve geleceğin zamanıdır. Geçmiş her neslin kendi soyunu yeniden üretmesini ve ilişkilerini düzenlenmesi sağlayan ve bununla birlikte genetik kodun anahtarını temsil eden tarih, bir şekilde bilgeliği temsil etmektedir (Hobsbawm, 1999: 41).

Tarih söz konusu olduğunda “nesnellik” tartışmaların merkez konusudur. Burada “nesnellik” kavramı tarihin olduğu gibi yazılması veya aktarılması anlamında kullanılmaktadır. 20. yüzyıl tarihçiliğinin öncülüğünü yapan Alman tarihçi Leopold von Ranke tarihin “Nasılca öylece göstermek” olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Ranke, tarihin gerçekleşen olayların aynen yazılması şeklinde olması gerektiğini iddia etmiş ve tarihin bugüne ve geleceğe hizmet edecek şekilde yazılması gerektiğini savunan yaklaşımı eleştirmiştir. Ancak birçok çağdaş tarihçi Ranke’nin tarih anlayışına şüpheyle yaklaşmaktadır. Eleştirilerin temelinde tarihi yazan tarihçinin toplumsal, kültürel hatta ideolojik ve siyasal yüklerinden kurtulmasının mümkün olup olmadığı sorgusu yer almaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, tarihi yazarken tarihçinin üzerinde günümüzün etkisi nedir? Carr’a göre geçmiş ancak günümüz açısından incelenebilir ve geçmişe ilişkin anlayış bugünün görüşleriyle oluşturulabilir. Ona göre tarihçi çağının insanıdır ve “zamanın ruhuna” bağlıdır ve ondan etkilenmektedir. Tarihçi tarihi yazarken ister istemez öznel deneyim ve dünya görüşlerinden etkilenecektir. Bu bakımdan tarihçinin tarih yapmadaki rolü üstünde ısrar edilmesi, nihai olarak her türlü nesnel tarihi imkânsız kılmaktadır. Carr’a göre tarihin kurulmasında yorum vazgeçilmez bir rol oynasa da var olan hiçbir yorumun bütünüyle nesnel olmaması nedeniyle her yorumun bir öteki kadar iyi olduğu ve ilkesel olarak tarih olgularının aslında nesnel yoruma elverişli olmadığı sonucu da çıkmaz. İnsan çevresiyle tamamen ilişkili ve koşulsuz olarak onun etkisi altında olmadığı gibi çevresinden tümüyle bağımsız ve onun kayıtsız şartsız efendisi de değildir. İnsanın çevresiyle ilişkisi tarihçinin konusuyla olan ilişkisine benzerdir. Tarihçi de tarihsel olguların aciz bir kölesi olmadığı gibi zalim efendisi de değildir. Tarihçi ile olgular arasında bir eşitlik ilişkisi söz konusudur. Tarihçinin çalışma sürecinde, hem yorum hem de olguların seçimi ve bunların sıraya konması, birinin ya da ötekinin etkileşimiyle, ince ve belki bir ölçüde bilinçsiz değişikliklere uğrar. Tarihçi bugünün bir parçası ve olgularsa geçmişe ait olduklarından, bu karşılıklı etkileşim, aynı zamanda bugün ile geçmiş arasında bir karşılıklılığı için içine katar. Buradan hareketle Carr’a göre tarih tarihçi ile olgular arasındaki sürekli ve karşılıklı bir etkileşim süreci, bugün ile geçmiş arasında bitmez bir diyalogdur (Carr, 2016: 73-82). Žižek tarihin “nesnel” olarak yazılmasının ve yorumlanmasının “imkânsızlığını” ve tarihin çarpıtılmasını şu şekilde dile getirir:

“Tarih her zaman geriye doğru yeniden yazılmaktadır. Her yeni anlatı perspektifi geçmişî yeniden yapılandırır ve anlamını değiştirir... (tarihi yazarken) nötr bir konum benimsemek önsel olarak imkânsızdır” (Zizek, 2016: 2010)

Tarih yalnızca üniversite kürsülerinde anlatılan, bilim insanlarının veya tarihçilerin nesnesi değildir. Tarih siyasi iktidarların ve ideolojilerin ilgi alanıdır. Tarih; siyasetçiler, tarihçiler ve entelektüeller tarafından siyasi ve ideolojik çıkarlar doğrultusunda araçsallaştırıldığı bilinen bir olgu ve pratiktir. Tarih ve geçmiş, belirli ideolojilerin ve belirli siyasi iktidar merkezlerinin elverişli bir meşrulaştırma aracıdır (Trouilloy, 2015: 33). Keith Jenkins’e göre “*tarih, asla kendisi için değil, daima birileri içindir*”. Jenkins, tarihin kısmen insanların kimliklerini yaratmakta olduğunu, iktidar ilişkilerinden kaynaklandığını ve bu şekilde meşrulaştırıcı bir araç olduğunu vurgulamaktadır (Jenkins, 1997: 29-31). Tarihin ideolojik olduğunu ve iktidar ile yakından ilişki içinde bulunduğunu savlayan araştırmacıların çoğu, tarihi üreten ve onun taşıyıcıları olarak tarihçileri işaret etmektedirler. Zira tarih; devlet adamları, askerler veya sokaktaki insanlar tarafından değil tarihçiler tarafından oluşturulmaktadır. Tarihçinin işi yaratmak ve yapı kurmaktır (Boucher, 1993: 49-50). Tarih, onu yapan veya yazan tarihçilerin şimdiki zamanıyla ilgili çağdaş arzuları, hırsları ve sorunlarıyla sıkı ilişki içinde olan bir etkinliktir (Aysevener, 2001: 18). Jenkinsin, hiçbir tarihçinin geçmişteki olayların bütünlüğünü kapsayamadığını, ancak sadece bir bölümünü aktarabildiğini ileri sürerek, tarihçinin seçici bir yaklaşım içinde olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Tarih her zaman tarihçinin bakış açısının dışavurumu olarak yazılır (Jenkins, 1997: 23-25).

Tarih, kendilerine tarihçi niteliği yüklenmiş insanlar tarafından yapılır ve tarihçiler tarihi üretirken ideolojik unsurlar veya kendi kabulleri ve özgün değerlerinden arınmış değillerdir. Bu anlamda tarihçi kendi özgün değer, görüş ve ideolojik bakış açısına sahip olan bir kişi olup tüm geçmişî araştırmaya ve açıklamaya çaba göstermez. Bunun yerine tarihçi, anlamlı olayları anlatmaya çalışır ve bu süreçte ister istemez seçici bir yaklaşım benimsemek zorundadır (Fontan, 1992: 63-64). Tarihçilerin toplumsal ve siyasal varlıklar olarak ister istemez belirli ideolojilerin etkisi altında kaldıkları ve mekân ve zamandan kaynaklanan kişisel bilinçlendirmeden tam bağımsız olamadıkları bir gerçektir. Foucault’nun ifadesiyle, “*tarih olarak işlenmiş geçmiş, bir tahayyül gücü faaliyetleri olarak, tarihçinin giriştiği sonsuz bir yorumlama süreci...*” dir. Tarih, ne tarihçiden ne de tarihçinin kendi zamanından ya da kültürel bağlamının etkilerinden bağımsız olması mümkün değildir. Tarih geçmişteki olayların gerçekte olduğu gibi kaydedilmesi

değil; tarihsel verilerin tarihçiler tarafından kendi toplumsal gerçekliklerine uygun olarak örgütlendikten sonra anlattıklarının kayıdır. Dolayısıyla da tarihçi asla nesnellik iddiasında bulunmamalıdır. Nesnellik sadece bir mittir ve tarih bilgisi Foucault'nun ifade ettiği gibi epistemelere bağlıdır. Tarih her zaman belli bir söylem ve ideoloji bakışıyla yazılır (Munslow, 2000: 5).

Tarihin politikleştirilme ve ideolojikleştirilme eğilimleri özellikle milliyetçiliğin ortaya çıkmasıyla görülen bir olgudur. Bu anlamda ulus devlet ve milliyetçilik tarih veya geçmişin politikleştirilmesinden en fazla yararlanan öğelerdir. Avrupa'da milliyetçiliğin ilk filizlerinin ortaya çıktığı ve uluslaşmanın başladığı ilk dönemler, ulusal tarih araştırmalarında tarihin politikleştirilme ve ideolojikleştirilme sürecinin tamamlanmasında büyük bir rol oynamıştır (Tosh, 1997: 5). Dolayısıyla tarihin bir bilim olarak ortaya çıkışı, milliyetçiliğin ve ulus devletlerin ilk filizlerinin ortaya çıkışıyla zamansal, hatta mekânsal bakımdan örtüşmektedir. Ulus devlet aşamasına geçilmesi ile tarihin yeniden yazılmaya başlaması zamansal olarak az çok koşutluk içermektedir (Ersanlı, 1992: 22). Ulusal tarih Aydınlanma Çağının bir ürünüdür. Aydınlanmacılar tarihin didaktik ve ilerlemeci bir yanı olmaması gerektiğine inanıyorlardı. Ulusal tarih, Aydınlanma dönemiyle başlayıp Ortaçağ döneminin evrensel Hristiyan tarih anlayışına bir tepki olarak doğmuştu. Aydınlanma tarihi, ilerleme kavramını temel aldı ve insan aklı ve özgürlüğü ile birlikte giderek artan bir etkiye sahip oldu. İlerlemeci tarih anlayışını destekleyen aydınlanmacı filozoflar, kendilerini ait oldukları tarihsel sürecin içinde ve kendi milletleri için daha merkezi bir yere konumlandırma çabasında bulundular. Bu bağlamda, evrensel tarih yerine ulusal bir tarih tasarlamaya başladılar. Ulusal tarih, tarihin ulusallaştırılması ve tarihin ideolojik kılınması olgusu modern dönemlerde bilgi-iktidar ilişkileri çerçevesi içinde yapıldı. Böyle bir tarihin tasarlanması fikri entelektüeller ile tarihçi çevrelerden geldi. 19. yüzyılda kurulmaya başlayan ulus devletlerin her biri kendi geçmişinin yanında yeni bir tarih yaratma girişiminde de bulundular. Tarihçiler başta olmak üzere milliyetçi entelijansiya, bilim adamları ve düşünürler geçmiş ve tarihi yaratmanın yanı sıra, doğrudan devlet adamları olarak da ulusal devletin ve ulusal tarihin yaratılmasında önemli bir rol oynadılar. John Breuilly, milliyetçi tarihin bugünü ve geleceği bir araya getirmek bakımından etkin bir araç olduğunun altını çizmektedir (Breuilly, 2009: 7-14). Anthony Smith tarihçilerin, özellikle 19. yüzyılda Avrupa ülkelerinde milliyetçiliğin oluşmasında ve desteklenip geliştirilmesinde önemli bir rol oynadıklarının altını çizer. Milliyetçiliğin ilk çağında tarihçiler, ulusu bireysel

özgürlüğün bir teminatı olarak görmeye eğilimlidirler. Fransız Devrimi sonrası birçok tarihçi kardeş çağın başladığını ileri sürmüştür. Artık zengin ya da fakir, soylu ya da pleb yoktur; toplumsal konulardan kaynaklanan anlaşmazlıklar ve kavgalar ortadan kalkmıştır. Herkes, yani farklı mezhepler, inananlar ile inanmayanlar, protestanlar ve katolikler kardeşlik ve barış içindedir (Smith, 1999: 174). Hobsbawm, tarihin milliyetçilik için temel ham madde olduğunu belirtmektedir. Ona göre nasıl haşhaş eroin müptelalığının ham maddesiyse, tarih de milliyetçi etnik ya da fundamentalist ideolojilerin ham maddesidir (Hobsbawm, 1999: 9).

19. yüzyılda Avrupa kültür ve düşüncesinin millileştirilmesi, tarih yazımının da millileştirilmesini içermektedir. 19. yüzyıl döneminde, üniversitelerdeki tarih dersleri ulusal tarih tarafından domine ediliyordu ve birçok tarihçi tarafından tarih yazımının en yüksek biçimi olarak algılanan ulusal tarihin hâkimiyeti giderek artıyordu. Böylelikle ulusal tarihsel anlatılar, Avrupa genelinde çok çeşitli milliyetçiliklerin zeminini oluşturmakla birlikte; ulus devlet oluşumlarının, devrimlerin, iç savaşların, hatta soykırımın ve etnik temizliğin meşrulaştırılmasında etkin araçlardan biri olmuştur. Avrupa'nın her yerinde ulusal tarihçiler, "kendi" ulus tarihlerinin bir şekilde özgün olduğunu ve benzersiz özellikler sergilediğini iddia etmeye istekliydi. Avrupa'daki tarihçilerin bu eğilimleri, ulusal kültürlerinin özgünlüğünü vurgulayan Avrupa Romantizminin bir mirasıydı (Berger, 2009: 30). Tarihçiler meslekleri gereği, bir milletin tarihini doğru yazmak veya en azından bu yönde çaba göstermekle yükümlüdür (Hobsbawm, 2010: 27). Romantik hareketin en büyük özelliği geçmişi nostaljik bir hayranlıkla yüceltmesidir. Burada vurgulanması gereken bir husus, romantik akımın aydınlanma tarih kavrayışıyla çatışmamasıdır. Romantiklerin amacı halkın eğitilmesi yoluyla aydınlanmış insan yaratmaktır. Halkın eğitilmesinden kastedilen ise tarihsel değişimi hızlandırabilmek için irade kavramını öne çıkarmaktır. Böylelikle romantizmin milliyetçi tarih kavramını ilerletici bir güç olarak geliştirdiğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Romantikler sadece insan aklının evrenselliğine değil, aynı zamanda insanoğlunun eğitilebileceğine de inanıyorlardı. Romantik akımının önde gelen düşünürlerinden Herder'e göre her ulus kendini özgün bir biçimde ifade ederek insanlığın gelişimine katkıda bulunuyordu (Ersanlı, 1992: 20; Aksakal, 2015: 231).

Balkanlardaki milliyetçi fikirler Avrupa ülkelerinden gelmiştir ve Balkan milliyetçiliği özünde romantik veya kültürel milliyetçiliktir. Romantik milliyetçilik dediğimizde, bu tür milliyetçiliğin ağırlıklı olarak dil, tarih ve ortak mitler gibi kültürel unsurları

vurguladığını kastediyoruz. Anthony Smith'in tipolojisine bakacak olursak, Balkan milliyetçiliği onun "etnik" milliyetçilik dediği bir milliyetçiliktir. Etnik milliyetçilik, Batı Avrupa ülkelerinin karakteristiği olan sivil milliyetçiliğin aksine, kültürel unsurları ve kan bağlarını öne çıkararak, toplum üyeleri arasında dayanışma yaratmayı başarmaktadır. Topluluk üyelerinin geçmişi veya ortak tarihi ve ortak kolektif hafızası, ulusun ve ulusal kimliğin oluşumunda merkezi bir yer tutar. Millet in ve milli kimliğin yeniden üretimi de bu unsurlara ağırlık verilerek yapılmaktadır. Tarihçiler ve tarihyazımı ise etnik milliyetçiliğin yayılmasında ve (yeniden)üret ilmesinde görevini üstlenmiştir.

## **1945 - 1990 Arası Dönemde Bulgaristan ile Makedonya Arasındaki Tarihsel ve Kültürel Miras Kavgası**

1944'ten sonra Sosyalist Makedonya'da inşa edilmiş milliyetçilik söylemine baktığımızda çağdaş Makedon ulusun tarihsel ve kültürel meşruiyeti, Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy Kardeşlerin ve Aziz Kliment Ohridski ile Aziz Naum'un Hristiyan misyonuna, Ortaçağ dönemi Çar Samuil İmparatorluğu'na, 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında Makedon milliyetçiliğinin öncülüğünü yapan Makedon entelijansiyasının ve diğer vatanseverlerin faaliyetlerine, VMRO<sup>1</sup> Örgütünün bağımsızlık hareketine, İ linden İsyani'nin ve son olarak İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasındaki anti-faşist mücadeledeki hedefler ve değerlere dayandırılmaktaydı. Bulgar milliyetçiliği ve tarihyazımı ise Makedonların sahiplendiği bu bin yıldan uzun dönemlik tarihsel ve kültürel miras ve manevi birikimin, Bulgar etnik karakterini vurgulamaktadır. Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasındaki anlaşmazlıkları; Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy kardeşlerin ve öğrencileri Aziz Kliment Ohridski ve Aziz Naum'un etnik kimliği, Çar Samuil'in etnik kimliği ve kurmuş olduğu imparatorluğun etnik karakteri, bugün Makedonya devleti ve tarihyazımı tarafından Makedon milliyetçiliğinin ve ulusal rönesansının öncüleri olarak görülen 19. yüzyılın birçok entelektüel ve aydınlanmacıları ile VMRO'nun yöneticilerinin etnik bilinci ve kimliği, İ linden İsyani'nin amacı ve arka planı, Makedoncanın Bulgarcadan ayrı bir dil olup olmadığı, Bulgaristan'da Makedon bir azınlığın varlığı tartışması olarak özetlemek mümkündür. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, Makedon-Bulgar "tarih" kavgasının özü her iki tarafın da tarihsel hakikat üzerinde mutlak bir tekel kurma çabasıyla ilgilidir (Aliu, 2020: 163).

1 İç Makedon Devrimci Örgütü.



İki bağımsız devlet olarak Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasındaki tarih ve kültürel miras konusundaki anlaşmazlıklar, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın hemen ertesinde başlamıştır. 1944 yılından bu yana iki bağımsız devlet olarak Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasındaki ilişkilere bakıldığında, 1945-1948 dönemi hariç anlaşmazlıklarla ve ithamlarla dolu olduğu görülmektedir. 1945'ten 1948 yılına kadar Bulgaristan ve Yugoslavya Doğu Bloğu içinde yer aldıklarından Bulgaristan Komünist Partisi Genel Başkanı Georgi Dimitrov önderliğinde Bulgaristan, Makedon ulusunu ve ulusal kimliğini tanıma yolunda önemli adımlar atmıştır. Bu yönde atılan en önemli adım 1946 yılında Bulgaristan'ın Pirin Bölgesinde Makedon azınlığın tanınması olmuştur. Ayrıca 1945 ila 1948 yılları arasındaki dönemde Pirin Makedonyası'nda yaşayan Makedonlara kısıtlı da olsa "kültürel ve siyasi özerklik" tanınmıştır. Bulgaristan tarafından Makedon azınlığın ve "kültürel özerkliğin" tanınması, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra Avrupa'da ve Balkanlar'da oluşan siyasi ve jeopolitik koşulların bir sonucuuydu. Ancak 1948'den sonra Stalin ile Tito arasındaki ilişkiler bozulunca Bulgaristan, Makedonya Sorunu'na yönelik söylemini değiştirerek savaş öncesi konumuna geri dönmüş; Makedonya bölgesinin Bulgaristan'ın bir parçası olduğu, Makedonların etnik olarak Bulgar oldukları ve Makedon dilinin sadece Bulgarcanın bir lehçesi olduğu şeklindeki eski tutumlarını tekrarlamaya başlamıştır. Bulgaristan'ın resmi tutumuna göre Makedon devleti ve ulusu Tito'nun bir icadıydı (Велјановски, 1998: 141-151 ve Маринов, 2013: 55).

Böylelikle 1948 yılında Tito ile Stalin arasındaki ihtilaf nedeniyle Pirin Bölgesi'nde ilan edilen "kültürel özerkliğin" resmen olmasa da sonu gelmiştir. BKP, Merkez Komitenin 16. Genel Kurulu'nda özel bir karar çıkartarak Yugoslavya'nın Pirin Bölgesi'ndeki politikalarını ve orada gerçekleştirilen faaliyetleri "milliyetçi" siyasetin sonucu ve Pirin bölgesinin iç işlerine karışma olarak değerlendirmiştir. BKP Makedonya Halk Cumhuriyetini "Marksizm karşıtı ve Milliyetçilik" politikaları ve eylemleriyle kınamıştır. 1946 yılında yapılan nüfus sayımında, BKP'nin Pirin Bölgesi'nde yaşayan halkın kendi etnik kökenini ifade etmesine izin vermesi ve yaklaşık 170.000 kişinin kendini etnik köken bakımından Makedon olarak ifade etmesi hususu karşısında Bulgar tarihçiler ve siyasilere; rakamın gerçek olmadığını, bu kişilerin kendilerini baskı altında Makedon olarak ilan ettiklerini öne sürmüşlerdir. Bulgar tarihçiler, bu dönemde yerel parti yöneticilerinin Pirin Bölgesindeki tüm belediye başkanlarına Yahudi, Çingene, Bulgar ve Türkler dışında kalanların tamamının kendini Makedon olarak ilan etmesi yönünde dilekçeler gönderdiklerini iddia etmişlerdir (Маринов, 65-60 :2013). Bulgaristan'ın 1944-1948

arası dönemde Makedonya Meselesine yönelik politikaları ve tavrı, Bulgar tarihçiler ve siyasiler tarafından BKP'nin "yanlışları" olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgar tarih yazımına göre Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya Meselesine yönelik bu "ılımlı" tavrı ve Makedon ulusunu tanıma yönünde izlediği politikaları, Bulgaristan'ın savaş sonrası dönemde içinde bulunduğu güçsüz ve yenilmiş konumdan kaynaklanmıştır. Savaştan yenik olarak çıkan Bulgaristan, güçlü Yugoslavya karşısında bazı tavizler vermek zorunda kalmıştır (Kofos, 1986: 165).

Bulgaristan'ın Makedon ulusunu ve ulusal kimliğini inkâr edişi ve Makedon ulusunun ve devletinin tarihsel ve kültürel meşruiyetini tanımama yönündeki radikal söylemi 1956 yılından sonra başlamıştır. Bulgaristan, Yugoslavya ve Makedonya'nın 1944'ten sonraki dönemde Pirin Bölgesi'ndeki azınlık hakları taleplerini, toprak talepleri olarak yorumlayarak Yugoslavya ve Makedonya'yı irredentist politika izlemekle suçlamıştır (Палмер ve Кинг, 2018: 191). 1960'larda Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya Meselesine yönelik tavrı ve söylemi büyük ölçüde değişmiş ve Makedon ulusunun ve dilinin inkârı genel politikası haline gelmiştir. Bulgaristan'a göre Makedon ulusu ve Makedonca dili Sırp propagandasının Tito'nun ürünleridir. BKP Merkez Komitesi Genel Sekreteri Todor Zhivkov da Bulgaristan'dan ayrı bir Makedon ulusallığı ve ulus fikrinin, burjuvazi ve Sırp tarihçiler tarafından ortaya atılmış bir iddia olduğunu ve Makedon ulusunun bir Sırp icadı olduğunu ileri sürmüştür. 1963 yılında, BKP Merkez Komite Genel Kurulunda Zhivkov, Orta Çağ'da Makedon ulusundan söz etmenin mümkün olmadığını ve 9. yüzyıldan itibaren Bulgaristan, Trakya ve Makedonya'da Orta Çağ Bulgar ulusallığının ortaya çıktığını ileri sürmüştür. Bu ulusallık, 18. ve 19. yüzyıllarda gelişerek sonunda Bulgar ulusunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Zhivkov'a göre tüm tarihsel kaynakların gösterdiği budur ve dolayısıyla Makedon ulusallığının varlığını öne süren tezler yadsınmalıdır (Маринов, 2013: 61-66). BKP'nin etkin isimlerinden biri olan Dimitar Ganev 1958'deki bir konuşması sırasında büyük Sırp şovenistleri ve onların Üsküp ajanlarının, Makedon halkın Bulgarlarla olan tüm bağlarını, ortak tarihlerini ve geçmişlerini unutturmak istediklerini ifade etmiştir. Makedonlar, kendi atalarının konuştuğu ana dili reddetmek ve bunun yerine yapay olarak oluşturulan Sırplaştırılmış bir dil konuşmaya zorlanmaktadır. Vardar Makedonya'da (Bugünkü Makedonya'da) yaşayan halkın büyük çoğunluğunun kendini Bulgar olarak tanımlamasına rağmen, bunu ifade etme hakkına sahip olmadığını öne sürmüştür. Bulgar tarihçisi Dimitar Kosev, 1959 yılında yayınlanan "*Üsküp Tarihçileri Tarafından Bulgar Tarihinin Revizyonist Tahriyatı*" makalesinde,

Ortaçağ'da Makedonya'nın Slav isminin Bulgar halkın bir parçası olduğu tezini ortaya koymuş ve Makedon ulusunun tarihsel gelişimin ürünü değil, siyasi konjonktürlerin ürünü olduğunu öne sürmüştür (Требст, 199 ,124 :1997). 1968 yılında Bulgar Bilimler Akademisi, *Makedon Meselesi* adı altında bir kitapçık yayınlanarak Bulgar akademisyenlerce savunulan Makedonların "etnik Bulgarlar" oldukları görüşünü yeniden vurgulamıştır. Bu kitapçıkta Makedonya'nın tüm Orta Çağ ve 19. yüzyılın ulusal canlanma tarihinin aslında Bulgar tarihi olduğu, Makedon ulusal kimliğinin ise Sırp milliyetçiliğin ürünü olduğu ileri sürülmüştür (Маринов, 131 ,86 :2013). Bulgar tarihçisi Georgi B. Dimitrov, 1971'de yayınlanan *Bulgar Komünist Partisi'nin Makedon Sorununa Yönelik Tutumu ve Politikası* adlı kitapçığında, Makedon ulusal bilinçlenmesinin İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra devletin şiddet ve baskı aracılığıyla ve tüm devlet organlarını devreye sokarak oluşturulmaya başladığını ileri sürer. Dimitrov, oluşan bu yeni Makedon ulusunun ve ulusal kimliğinin, Bulgaristan ve temelde Bulgar olan her şey karşıtlığı temelinde ve tarihsel gerçeklerin çarpıtılmasıyla inşa edildiğini savunmuştur (Требст, 218-216 :1997).

19. yüzyıldan itibaren Bulgar tarihyazımında ve siyasi söyleminde Makedonya, Orta Çağ'dan bu yana Bulgar ulusunun ve kültürünün beşiği olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bulgaristan bu iddialarının tarihsel meşruiyetini, Çar Samuil devletinin etnik karakterinin Bulgar olmasına ve bu devletin başkentinin Makedonya'nın coğrafi sınırları içindeki Ohrid şehrinde bulunmasına dayandırmaktadır. Bulgaristan Çar Samuil devletinin Bulgar etnik karakterini vurgulamanın yanı sıra, Makedonya'nın sahiplenmiş olduğu tüm Orta Çağ ve Yeni Çağ dönemine dair tarihsel ve kültürel sermayeyi de sahiplenmekte veya bunlar için Bulgar karakteri vurgusu yapmaktadır. Örneğin Todor Zhivkov, Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy kardeşler ve 19. Yüzyıl aydınlanmacılarından Dimitar Miladinov ve Konstantin Miladinov kardeşler gibi Orta Çağ ve Yeni Çağın tarihsel sembollerinden vazgeçmenin yanlış olacağını ileri sürmüştür (Маринов, 65 :2013). İki ülke arasındaki en hararetli tartışmalar VMRO'nun ve İlinden İsyanı'nın etnik karakteri, gerçek amacı ve liderlerinin etnik kimliği konularında olmuştur. Bu anlaşmazlıkların en iyi örneği, VMRO ve İlinden İsyanı'nın liderlerinden olan Gotse Delçev'in etnik kimliğine ilişkin anlaşmazlıktır. Her iki ülkenin tarihyazımında da Delçev, ulusal kahraman olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bulgar tarihçiler ve tarihyazımı, İlinden İsyanı'nın liderlerini "Büyük Bulgar Vatanseverler" olarak tasvir etmektedir. Bulgaristan'da Gotse Delçev'in 65. ölüm yıl dönümü (4 Mayıs 1948), Makedonya'daki "Bulgarcılığın" sembolü

olarak anılmıştır. (Маринов, 84-79 :2013). 1944-1948 arası dönemde yukarıda belirtilen nedenlerle ve 1948-1956 arası dönemde de Moskova'dan gelen baskılar nedeniyle BKP, Makedon Devrimci Hareketi'nin ulusal söylem ve tarih yazımına dâhil edilmesiyle sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu nedenle Bulgaristan, Makedon devrimci hareketinin başkarakterlerinin ulusal anlatıya dâhil edilmesi konusunda ihtiyatlı davranmıştır. Buna rağmen 1950'lerde Gotse Delçev ve Jane Sandanski'yi anıtlarla, müze sergileriyle ve haklarında yazılan birçok makaleyle onurlandırmıştır. Bunun yanında, Bulgaristan'da bulunan Sveti Vrach şehrinin adı 1949 yılında *Sandanski* olarak, 1950 yılında ise Nevrokop şehrinin adı *Gotse Delçev* olarak değiştirilmiştir. 1960 yılından sonra BKP, VMRO örgütünü Bulgar tarihinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak gösteriyordu. Bulgar tarihçiler, Makedonya'da VMRO önderliğindeki Kurtuluş Hareketi'nin Bulgar karakterini vurguluyorlardı (Frusetta, 2004: 114). 1968 yılında Todor Zhivkov, İlinden İsyanı'nın Bulgar tarihindeki en önemli beş olaydan biri olduğunu öne sürerek, net bir şekilde VMRO örgütünün ve İlinden İsyanı'nın Bulgar etnik karakterini vurgulamıştır (Трѐбст, 131 :1997). Bulgaristan Devleti ve Bulgar tarihyazımı, 20. yüzyılın VMRO örgütünü, o dönemin Osmanlı Makedonyası'nda Pirin Dağları, Vardar Nehri bölgesi ve Ege Kıyısı'nın - Bulgaristan'ın üç tarihi bölgesinin- ilhak edilmesini amaçlayan gerçek bir Bulgar örgüt olarak tasvir etmektedir (Troebst, 1999: 61).

Bulgar - Makedon ihtilafı 1970'ler boyunca da devam etmiştir. 1978 yılında, İlinden İsyanı'nın 75. yıl dönümü nedeniyle, BKP ülke çapında çeşitli kutlamalar ve birçok entelektüel ve akademik faaliyet gerçekleştirilmesini emretmiştir. Örneğin emirlerinden biri, Gotse Delçev'in biyografisinin yeniden basılmasıydı. Aynı zamanda BKP'nin Tarih Enstitüsü, Damyan Gruev'in biyografisini ve İlinden İsyanı'na ilişkin yeni belgeler yayınlamıştır. Tüm bu faaliyetlerin ve hazırlıkların en önemli eseri, Bulgaristan Bilimler Akademisi tarafından yayımlanan *Makedonya: Belge ve Malzeme Derlemesi* adlı belgeler koleksiyonu olmuştur. Bu büyük koleksiyon, Orta Çağ'dan İkinci Dünya Savaşı dönemine kadar Makedonya'da yaşamış Slav halkın ve Yugoslav Makedonlar tarafından sahiplenilmiş bir dizi tarihi kişinin (ulusal kahramanlar, entelektüeller, siyasetçiler gibi) Bulgar etnik veya ulusal kimliğini kanıtlayacak tarihi belgeleri içermektedir (Трѐбст, 107-106 :1997). 1980'lerde ise Makedon ulusunun başkahramanları olan Gotse Delçev ve Jane Sandanski açık bir şekilde Bulgar devletinin tarihsel sembolleriyle özdeşleştirildiler. 1981 yılında Kültür Bakanı Liudmila Zhivkova, Gotse Delçev ve Jane Sandanski'yi "Bulgar ulusunun özgürlüğü için savaşan ulusal kahramanlar" olarak nitelendirmiştir.

Zaman zaman ise Gotse Delçev “bir özgürlük havarisi” olarak Levski’nin düzeyine ulaşmış ve ününe kavuşmuştur (Frusetta, 2004: 115).

Makedonca dili Makedon-Bulgar ihtilafında merkez bir yer işgal eder. 1944 sonrası Makedon halkın ulusluğu ve ulusal kimliğinin kabul edildiği gibi Bulgar dilbilimciler tarafından da ayrı bir dil olarak Makedoncanın kabul edilmesi gerekirdi. Fakat 1948 yılından itibaren Bulgaristan, Makedonca’yı tanımaktan vazgeçmiştir. 1948 yılında BKP’nin Merkez Komitesinin 16. Kurulunda ve 5. Kongresinde Makedonca Sırplaşmış bir dil olarak değerlendirilip eleştirilmiştir. 1949 yılında Bulgar dilbilimci Stojko Stojkov Makedonca’nın lehçelerinin dilbilimsel bakımdan Bulgarcadan farklı olduğunu, ancak aralarında “şiddetli bir ilişki” söz konusu olduğunu ileri sürmüştür. Diğer bir Bulgar dilbilimci Kiril Miņev, Makedoncanın 1945 yılından sonra yapay bir şekilde farklı bir dil olarak geliştirilmiş ve Sırplaştırılmış Bulgarcanın bir lehçesi olduğunu ileri sürer. Miņev, Makedon ulusal bilinçlenmesinin “geç bir ürün”ü temsil ettiğini öne sürmekte ve diğer Bulgar dilbilimciler gibi Makedonca’yı Sırplaş(tır)manın bir ürünü olduğu gerekçesiyle eleştirmektedir (Маринов, 142-138 :2013). Bulgaristan’ın Makedoncanın inkârı doğrultusundaki görüşleri 1950’lerin sonuna doğru daha fazla dile getirilmeye başlanmıştır. Böylelikle 1958’de Bulgaristan tarafından Makedonya’da Slav halkın Üsküp’te uydurulmuş yarı Sırpça (burada “yarı Sırpça” ile Makedonca dili kastedilmektedir) bir dil değil, Bulgarca konuştuğuna ilişkin bazı beyanlarda bulunmuştur (Палмер ve Кинг, 2018: 236). Dimitar Ganev, 1958’de yapmış olduğu bir konuşmada Makedonca’yı yapay, uydurulmuş ve Sırplaştırılmış bir dil olarak nitelendirerek Vardar ve Pirin Makedonya’da yaşayan halk için anlaşılmaz olduğunu ve dolayısıyla Makedon diye bir ulusun söz konusu olmadığını öne sürmüştür (Stamova, 2014: 666). 1963 yılı öncesi Bulgaristan, Makedoncanın cılız bir şekilde olsa da özgün niteliğini, yani Bulgarcadan farklılığını kabul ederken, 1963’ten sonra bu konuda radikal bir tavır sergileyecektir. Todor Zhivkov 1963’te, Makedoncanın yalnızca Bulgarcanın bir lehçesi, Bulgarcanın Batı lehçelerinden biri olduğunu ileri sürmüştür. Zhivkov, tarih ile dil alanlarını ilişkilendirerek Makedonya’da konuşulan Bulgarca lehçesinin Slav alfabesinin kurucuları olan Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy kardeşler tarafından da kullanıldığını vurgulamıştır. Zhivkov bu iddia ile çeşitli bilimsel alanlardan Bulgar uzmanları Makedonya’daki dilin “Sırplaştırılmasına” karşı saldırıya teşvik etti. 1968 yılında Bulgar Bölgesel Diller Bilimi (dialectology) yeniden yazılmıştır ve Makedonca lehçelerin daha önce ileri sürüldüğü gibi Bulgarcadan ayrı ve bağımsız bir dil olarak geliştirilmesinin mümkün

olmadığı vurgulanmıştır. 1967-68 yılında BKP Merkez Komitesi Politik Bürosu'nun aldığı bir kararla Bulgar Bilimler Akademisi'nde Bulgar tarihçi ve dilbilimcilere “*Makedonya'nın tarihi, kültürü ve dil*”i ile ilgili tutarlı bir tez oluşturma görevi verilmiştir (Маринов, 142 ,90 :2013). Bu anlamda resmî Bulgar görüşüne göre, Makedon ulusu etnik olarak Bulgar olan halka dayanarak yapay bir şekilde oluşturulmuş olması gibi Makedonca da yapay bir dildir. Aynı görüşe göre, Makedon ulusunun yaratılması gibi, Makedonca dili de “suni” ve politik bir karara istinaden yaratılmış olup aslında politik güdümlü bir “Sırplaştırma” ile değiştirilen bir Bulgar “lehçesi”dir.

1991'de bağımsızlığını ilan eden Makedonya'yı tanıyan ilk ülke Bulgaristan oldu (Stojanovski ve Mrlov, 2014: 305). Fakat Makedonya'yı devlet olarak tanımak Makedon ulusu ve Makedon dilini tanımak anlamına gelmiyordu. Bulgaristan'ın 1992 yılında Makedonya'nın bağımsızlığını tanımmasının hemen ardından Bulgaristan Cumhurbaşkanı Jelyu Jeleu, Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya Cumhuriyeti'ni yalnızca siyasi bir oluşum olarak tanıdığını, buna karşın Bulgardan ayrı bir Makedon ulusunu ve Bulgarcadan ayrı bir dili hiçbir zaman kabul etmeyeceğini beyan etti. Dolayısıyla Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya'ya yönelik eski iddialarını terk etmediği aksine devam ettirdiği görülmektedir (Marinov, 2013: 420). Jeleu, ayrıca Bulgar ve Makedonların ortak tarihe, dile ve dine sahip olduğunu dile getirmiştir. Jeleu'e göre tarihçiler ve Bulgar halkın çoğunluğu arasında yaygın kabul görmüş olan Makedonların ayrı bir ulus olmadığı düşüncesi buradan kaynaklanmaktadır (Рудометоф, 10 :2003). Bulgaristan'daki *Duma* gazetesinin 1 Eylül 1994 tarihli nüshasında yer alan bir makalede, Makedonya'nın aslında ikinci bir Bulgar devleti olduğu konusunda ulusal bir birlik oluşturulmasının gerekliliğine çağrı yapılmaktaydı (Глигоров, 410-408 :2001). Böyle bir anlayışa sahip olan Bulgar Eğitim Bakanı Marko Todorov, 13 Nisan 1994'te Üsküp'te resmi bir ziyarette bulunduğu sırada Makedonca ve Bulgarca dilinde oluşturulmuş ikili bir anlaşmayı imzalamayı reddetmiştir. Sofya'nın temsilcileri bunun yerine “iki ülkenin resmi dilleri” şeklinde bir formül önermiştir (Marinov, 2013: 420).

Gelinen durumda Bulgaristan, Makedonya'yı devlet olarak tanımaya ve Makedonya'nın 2000'ler sonrası başlatmış olduğu NATO ve Avrupa Birliği üyelik süreçlerini desteklemesine rağmen tarihsel ve kültürel mirası “paylaşma” konusundaki görüşlerinden hâlen vazgeçmemiştir. Bulgaristan komünist dönemden beri Makedonya Meselesine ilişkin sergilemekte olduğu katı tutumu ve izlediği politikaları aynen devam ettirmektedir. Siyasi temsilcilerin dili komünist dönemin diline göre yumuşamış olsa

da özünde Bulgaristan tavrını değiştirmemiştir. Dolayısıyla Makedonya Meselesi 1991'den sonra da kapanmamıştır. Bunun temelinde iki neden vardır: Birincisi Bulgaristan'da hâlâ ciddi bir "anti-Makedonculuk" söz konusudur; ikinci neden ise Makedonya'da "Bulgarofobia" fenomeni hâlen güçlü bir şekilde yaşamaktadır (Maleska, 2002: 2).

## **Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasında Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İş Birliği Anlaşması ve "Fransız Önerisi"**

Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasındaki tarihsel ve kültürel miras kavgasının yakın dönemdeki seyri, Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasında 2017 yılında bir *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşması* imzalanmış olsa da Avrupa Birliği üyesi bir ülke olarak Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakerelerinin başlamasını veto hakkını kullanarak engellediği 2020'den sonra daha da yoğunlaşmıştır. 2017 yılında imzalanan *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşması* aslında pandoranın kutusunu açmış ve iki ülke arasında en azından son 20 yıldır bir kenara bırakılan veya gölgede kalan çatışmaları ve anlaşmazlıkları yeniden alevlendirip gündeme taşımıştır. Anlaşma iki ülke arasındaki tarihsel olaylar ve Makedonca dili konusundaki anlaşmazlıklara son vermek yerine Bulgaristan'ın, Makedonya Meselesi konusundaki eski söylemine geri dönmesine ve eski taleplerin yeniden masaya yatırılmasına neden olmuştur. Bulgaristan Makedonca dilinin Bulgarcanın bir lehçesi olduğu, Makedon halkının 1944 yılı öncesinde etnik kimlik bakımından Bulgar olduğu ve tarihsel olarak Makedonya coğrafyasının Bulgaristan'ın bir bölgesi olduğu yönündeki iddialarını yeniden tekrarlamaya başladı.

"Makedonya Meselesini" çözmek adına imzalanan bu anlaşmanın en önemli ve aynı zamanda en çok tartışılan bölümü, tarih ve eğitim konularının ele alındığı 8. maddenin 2. ve 3. fıkralarıdır. 8. maddenin 2. fıkrasına göre, anlaşmanın yürürlüğe girmesinden itibaren üç ay içinde karşılıklı güvenin derinleştirilmesi amacıyla, tarih ve eğitim konularında iki akit tarafın uzmanlarından oluşacak ortak ve multidisipliner bir komisyon kurulması öngörülmektedir. Bu komisyonun görevi her iki tarafın da tarihi olaylar ve kişilere yönelik iddialarını nesnel bir şekilde incelemek ve anlaşmazlıkları bu yolla çözüme ulaştırmaktır. Komisyon yaptığı çalışmalar hakkında akit tarafların hükümetlerine yıllık raporlar sunacaktır. 8. maddenin 3. fıkrasına göre ise her iki akit taraf, karşılıklı uzlaşma ile Avrupa değerleri ve ruhu çerçevesinde iyi komşuluk ilişkilerini güçlendirmek adına ortak tarihi olaylar ve kişilikler için ortak kutlama törenleri organize

edecektir (Договор за пријателство, 2017). Bulgaristan ile imzalanan bu anlaşma, SDSM Hükümeti tarafından Makedonya Meselesini çözme ve iki ülke arasındaki anlaşmazlıklara son verme adına tarihi bir adım olarak nitelendirildi. Dönemin Makedonya Başbakanı Zoran Zaev, Makedonca ve Bulgarca olarak iki dilde imzalanmış olan bu anlaşma ile Bulgaristan'ın Makedon ulusunu ve ulusal kimliğini dolaylı olarak tanıdığını ileri sürmüştür. Zaev, Bulgaristan'ın anlaşmayı Makedonca dilinde imzalamayı kabul etmesiyle uzun zamandır sadece Bulgarcanın "lehçelerinden" biri olarak nitelemekte olduğu Makedonca'yı resmi bir dil olarak tanıdığını vurgulamıştır (Заев: Договорот, 2017). Dönemin Makedonya Dış İşleri Bakanı Nikola Dimitrov ise, Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasında imzalanan *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşmasının* önsöz kısmında karşılıklı saygıdan bahsedildiğini vurgulayarak, anlaşmanın devletlerin resmi anayasal dillerinde imzalanmış olmasının, Makedoncanın Bulgarca ile kesinlikle aynı konum ve statüye sahip olduğu anlamına geldiğini belirtmiştir (ДИМИТРОВ, 2020).

Bulgaristan ile imzalanan bu anlaşma, Makedonya'da ciddi tartışmalara ve milliyetçi çevrelerin sert eleştirilerine neden olmuştur. Makedonya'da ana muhalefet VMRO DPMNE Partisi, başından beri anlaşmayı ulusal ve devlet çıkarları için "zararlı" olarak nitelendirmiştir. VMRO DPMNE'nin o dönem Genel Sekreteri olan Hristijan Mickovski, anlaşmanın Makedon halkının gerçek ve kimliksel özelliklerini tanımlamadığını ifade etmiş ve anlaşmayı,

“Makedon ders kitaplarını ve tarihi mirasımızın bir parçası olan diğer kimlik özelliklerini değiştirmek için tehlikeli bir fırsat”

olarak nitelemiştir (Мицковски: Договорот со Бугарија, 2017). Makedonya açısından anlaşmanın en sorunlu kısmı, sekizinci maddede yer alan tarihsel olayların ve kişilerin “etnik karakterini” belirleyecek ve iki tarafın tarihçilerinden oluşturulacak olan komisyonunun kurulması ve iki halkın “ortak tarihi” varsayımından hareketle bazı ortak tarihsel olayların ve şahsiyetlerin ortak törenlerle anılmasının öngörüldüğü kısımdır. Komisyonun hükümetlerce kurulacak olması ve çalışmalarını hükümetlere rapor edecek olması, komisyonun bilimsel ve nesnel değil, siyasi kararlar alması kaygısını yaratmıştır. Siyasi bir anlaşmanın ve siyasi iradenin ürünü olan bu komisyonun, bilimin ve nesnel araştırmaların konusu olması gereken tarih ve geçmişin değerlendirilmesi konusunda bilimsel ve nesnel değil, siyasi yaklaşımlar göstereceği kaygısı yaşanmıştır. Dolayısıyla milliyetçilere ve anlaşmaya muhalif olan kesime göre, aslında



bu komisyonda yapılacak olan şey Makedon ulusal geçmişini ve tarihini “pazarlamak” olacaktır. Bununla birlikte, yaşanmış bir geçmiş olarak tarih tek ve nesnel ise siyasi müzakerelere konu edilemeyecek bir unsurdur. Tarihçi Nataşa Kotlar, anlaşmanın 8. maddesine karşılık, bilim ve siyasetin başka perspektifler olduğunun altını çizerek, bilimsel bir mesele olarak tarihsel araştırma ve saptamaların Tarih Enstitüsü başta olmak üzere, Folklor Enstitüsü, Makedon Bilim ve Sanat Akademisi, Makedonya Dili Enstitüsü ve Makedonya Edebiyat Enstitüsü bünyesinde bulunan bilim adamları ve kurumlar tarafından yürütülmesi gerektiğini ifade etmiştir. Kotlar, anlaşmanın simetrik olmadığını, eşitlik ilkesine dayandırılmadığını ve Makedon halkının ve ulusal çıkarlarının yararına olmadığını öne sürmüştür:

“Anlaşmada ortak bir tarih için bir hüküm var. Böyle bir şey olamaz çünkü biz tek millet değiliz, biz özeliiz, özgün devletlerimiz ve kendi tarihlerimiz var (Kotлар, 2018).”

Makedon Bilim ve Sanat Akademisi’nin önde gelen üyelerinden Katica Kulavkova, Makedon-Bulgar “uzman komisyonu”nun meşruiyetinin kaynağının bilim değil siyaset olduğunu ileri sürer. Ona göre komisyonun önerileri bilimsel referanslar değildir, bu nedenle söz konusu öneriler Makedonya ve Balkan tarihi, halkları ve kültürlerinden çok komisyonun işlevi hakkında fikir vermektedir. Kulavkova komisyondan çıkacak öneri ve çözümleri, Balkanlar’daki karmaşık tarihsel süreçlerin bilimsel temelli bir yorumunun meyvesi olmak yerine totaliter ve tutsak bir zihnin yansıması olarak yorumlar (Kýлавкова, 2022). VMRO DPMNE Partisi ve diğer milliyetçi çevreler, Bulgaristan’ın kendilerine Makedon ulusal kimliğini tehlikeye atacak bir formülü çözüm olarak dayatacağı endişesini yaşamaktadır. Tarihçi Nikola Zezov, bu anlaşmanın imzalanmasının Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasındaki ilişkileri iyileştirmek yerine daha da kötüleştireceğini ve bu anlaşmadan önceki dönemde, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesi adına on yıllarca inşa edilmiş olan birikimin bir gecede çökeceğini ileri sürmektedir. İki ülkenin “ortak tarihi”yle ilgili maddenin kabul edilmesi halinde Makedon kimliğinin köklerinin kesileceğini ve ardından Bulgaristan’ın Makedon ulusun Tito tarafından icat edildiği iddialarının Makedonlar tarafından kabul edildiği anlamına geleceğini ifade etmektedir. Benzer şekilde, Tarihçi Nikola Srbov her halkın kendi özgün geçmişine sahip olduğu varsayımından hareket ederek Makedonlar ile Bulgarların ortak bir tarihe sahip olmasının mümkün olmadığını ileri sürer. Anlaşma iki farklı halk arasındadır, ancak anlaşmanın bu halkların ortak bir geçmişinin olduğu kısmı iki farklı ve benzersiz halk

varsayımını geçersiz kılmaktadır. Ona göre bu anlaşma, yüzyıllardır Makedon tarihini kendine mal etmeye çalışan Bulgar tarihçilerin hayallerini gerçekleştirecek bir projedir (Пријателство ДА, заедничка историја НЕ, 2017).

Prespa Anlaşması'nın imzalanmasıyla birlikte Makedonya "dosyası"nın kesin olarak kapandığına ve Makedonya'nın NATO ve Avrupa Birliği'ne entegrasyon yolunun açıldığına yönelik genel bir kanı oluşmuştu. Neredeyse tüm Avrupa Birliği ülkelerinin liderleri, Makedon siyasi liderlerine ve vatandaşlarına, Yunanistan ile isim anlaşmazlığının çözülmesi halinde Makedonya'nın NATO ve AB entegrasyonunun engellenmeyeceğine dair söz vermiştir. Prespa Anlaşmasının imzalanması ve Makedonya'nın gereken anayasal değişiklikleri yapmasının ardından Makedonya NATO'nun üyesi oldu. Ancak sıra AB üyeliğine geldiğinde, Makedonya Sorunu'nu bu kez Bulgaristan yeniden gündeme getirerek 2020 yılında Makedonya'nın AB ile üyelik müzakerelerinin başlamasını veto etti. Aslında, Bulgaristan'ın 2020 yılındaki vetosundan önce, AB'ye tam üyelik için müzakerelere başlayan ülkeleri değerlendirmek için yeni bir metodolojinin onaylanması talep eden Fransa'nın 2019'da bir vetosu olmuştur. Söz konusu yeni metodolojiye ilişkin belgede, fasılların birkaç sözde küme halinde gruplandırılması, aday ülkenin geri adım atması durumunda müzakere sürecinin tersine çevrilebileceği ve aday ülkelerin de reformları uygulamak zorunda kalacağı öngörülmektedir (Нова методологија, 2020). Kısacası söz konusu yeni metodolojinin özü, AB ile müzakere eden ülkelerin bir faslı kapattıktan sonra söz konusu faslın uygulanmasında gecikme veya gerileme yaşanması halinde AB'nin aynı fasıl için yeniden müzakere talep etme hakkına sahip olmasıdır. 2020'nin başında Fransa'nın önerdiği bu metodoloji yetkili AB organları tarafından onaylandı. Metodolojinin onaylanmasının ardından, Kasım 2020'deki Avrupa Birliği Bakanlar Konseyi Zirvesinde Bulgaristan, Makedonya'nın AB ile resmi müzakerelere başlamasını ilk kez veto etti. Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya müzakerelerinin başlamasını veto etmesinin gerekçeleri çok sayıdaydı ve çoğu zaman belirsizdi. Bulgaristan'ın temel gerekçesi, 2017 yılında imzalanan *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşması*'nın uygulanmamasıydı. Daha sonra Makedonya'daki Bulgarların haklarının ihlal edildiğini gerekçe göstererek Makedonya'nın anayasasına Bulgar azınlığın dâhil edilmesi ve haklarına saygı duyulması şartı konuldu. Ayrıca Bulgaristan, Makedonya'nın Bulgaristan'a karşı "düşmanca" tavrını ve bakışını değiştirmesini talep etti. 2022'de Bulgaristan Cumhurbaşkanı Rumen Radev, Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya'ya karşı vetosu konusundaki konuşmasında, Bulgaristan'ın Yugoslavya ve Komintern döneminden kalma bir ideoloji olan Makedonizmi AB'de yer bulması için meşrulaştıramayacağını ileri sürmüştür:

“Eski Yugoslavya ve Komintern ideolojileri olan Makedonizmin AB’de meşruyet kazanmasına izin vermemeliyiz” (Радев не дозволува легитимација, 2022)

Dönemin Bulgaristan Dış İşleri Bakanı Ekaterina Zaharieva, Kuzey Makedonya’nın AB üyeliği için katılım müzakerelerinin başlamasına yönelik müzakere çerçevesini desteklememesinin ana nedenlerini, Kuzey Makedonya’nın 1999’da imzalanan resmi dil formülünün ve 2017 yılının *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşmasının* uygulanmaması olarak sıralamış ve AB üyesi olmak istiyorsa Makedonya’nın Bulgaristan’daki Makedon azınlık için hiçbir iddiada bulunmayacağını açıkça beyan etmesi ve Bulgaristan devletine karşı olan düşmanca tavrını değiştirmesi gerektiğini öne sürmüştür:

“Kuzey Makedonya’nın yolu uzun, müzakerelere hazır olduğunda AB’deki yerini bulabilecek. Bulgaristan düşmanlığı ideolojisine dayalı bir devletin AB’de yeri yoktur (Бугарија стави вето, 2020).”

Bulgaristan’ın Makedonya’ya yönelik vetosu 2021 yılı boyunca devam etti. Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasındaki bu sorunun çözümüne yönelik Avrupa Birliği nezdindeki en ciddi girişimler 2022 yılında, özellikle Haziran ayından sonra başladı. Bulgaristan, Makedonya ve Avrupa Birliği arasında gerçekleşen birçok müzakereden sonra “Fransız Önerisi” olarak bilinen formül gündeme geldi. “Fransız Önerisi” aslında Fransa Başkanlığı’nın üye devletlere gönderdiği iki taslak belge - Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti Müzakere Çerçevesi ve Üsküp ile Birinci Hükümetlerarası Konferansın- düzenlenmesine ilişkin Konsey sonuçlarıdır. Bu belgenin önemli noktaları, Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti’nin Yunanistan ile imzalanan Prespa Anlaşmasına ve Bulgaristan ile olan 2017 Anlaşmasına uyması; Bulgaristan’ın resmi olarak tanımadığı Makedon diliyle ilgili olarak, iki ülkenin ilgili bildirimler yayınlarak tarafların Makedonca’yı kendi konumlarına göre tanımlayacak olmaları; Müzakere çerçevesinde, Sofya ile Üsküp arasında 2017 Anlaşması’nın uygulanmasına ilişkin ikili bir protokolün yer alması ve Bulgarları yerel bir azınlık olarak anayasaya dahil etmek amacıyla Makedonya anayasasının değiştirilmesi olarak sıralanabilir. Fransız Önerisi çerçevesinde, Makedonya ile AB arasında hükümetlerarası iki konferansın düzenlenmesi öngörülmektedir. İlk hükümetlerarası konferans, Fransız Önerisi’nin Makedon Hükümeti ve Meclisi tarafından kabul edilmesinin hemen ardından gerçekleştirilecek ve bununla Makedonya’nın AB’ye tam üyelik müzakereleri başlatılmış olacaktır. Bu konferans “siyasi” bir konferans olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Makedonya ile AB arasındaki ikinci ve asıl hükümetlerarası konferans,

Makedonya'nın gerekli anayasa deęişikliklerini yaparak Makedonya'daki Bulgarların bir azınlık olarak kabul edilmesinin ardından gerçekleştirilecektir (Fransa'nın Sofya ile, t. y.). Makedonya Meclisinde iktidar ve muhalefet partileri arasında yapılan hararetli tartışmaların ardından 16 Temmuz'da meclis 68 oyla hükümetin "Fransız Önerisine" ilişkin önerdiği taslağı onayladı. Onaylanan taslak sonuçlara göre, Avrupa Birliği ile neleri müzakere edebileceği konusunda hükümete talimat verilmektedir. Bu nedenle Makedonya Meclisi, AB ile müzakere sürecinde hükümeti, müzakere edilemez unsurlar olarak Makedon halkının diline; kimliğine; tarihi ve kültürel özelliklerine saygı duy-makla görevlendirmiştir. Bu taslak sonuçların 3. maddesinin 1. fıkrasına göre, hükümetin Makedon dilini açıklamalar, eklemeler veya dipnotlar olmadan müzakere süreçlerine dahil etmek zorunda olduğu belirtilmektedir (Собранието ги изгласа, 2022).

Fransız Önerisi, Makedonya'daki muhalefet partileri ve milliyetçi çevrelerin sert tepkilerine neden oldu. Milliyetçi çevreler Fransız Önerisi'ni bir asimilasyon, kapitülasyon ve ihanet olarak yorumladılar. VMRO DPMNE'nin Genel Başkanı Hristiyan Mickoski, parti tarafından gerçekleştirilen protestoda yaptığı konuşmada, halk asimile olacaksa ülkesinin AB'ye ihtiyacı olmadığını ileri sürmüştür. Protestoya katılan binlerce insanın mesajının, Fransız Önerisi'ne «hayır» olduğunu kaydeden Mickoski,

“Avrupa bizi, medeni Makedonları, ait olduğumuz yere yani Avrupa'ya medeni ve onurlu bir şekilde kabul etmeye hazır değilse bekleyeceğiz, bugün ne demek istediğimizi anlayan insanlar gelene kadar bekleyeceğiz”

ifadelerini kullanmıştır. Mickoski, Makedonya'nın ve Makedon kimliğinin her şeyden önce ve üstün olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Mickoski'ye göre Fransız Önerisi; dil, tarih ve kimlik olmak üzere tüm Bulgar taleplerini içermektedir ve hükümet öneriyi reddetmelidir (Kuzey Makedonya'da, 2022). Makedon Bilim ve Sanat Akademisi Başkanı Lupço Kocarev'e göre Fransız Önerisi'nin mecliste onaylanması, Bulgaristan ile imzalanan Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşması ve Prespa Anlaşması Makedonculuğun<sup>2</sup> yıkımını başlatmak için ilk adımdır. Avrupa Birliği liderliğinde yapılan bu iki anlaşmanın amacı Makedon halkı asimile etmektir (Кочарев, 2022). Makedonya açısından Fransız Önerisi'nin en kritik ve sorunlu noktası, 2017 yılındaki bu anlaşmanın uygulanışının Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakere sürecinin bir parçası haline getirilmesidir. Böylelikle iki ülkeyi ilgilendiren bir sorun tüm AB'nin sorunu haline dönüştürülmektedir. Öte

2 Makedonculuk; Makedonlar'ın ulusal doktrindir.

yandan, 2017 Anlaşmasının AB müzakerelerinin bir parçası olması, Makedonya'nın söz konusu anlaşmayı uygulamadığını düşündüğü durumlarda dolaylı olarak Bulgaristan'a müzakereleri münhasıran engelleme hakkı tanımıştır. 2017 Anlaşması ve Fransız Önerisi'nin muhaliflerde yarattığı kaygılar 2017 Anlaşmasının 8. maddesinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Yukarıda da vurgulandığı gibi 8. maddenin 2. fıkrasına göre iki akit taraf arasında, tarih ve eğitim konularında ortak ve multidisipliner bir uzman komisyonu kurulması ve bu komisyonun hükümetlere rapor sunması öngörülmüştür. Bu anlaşmayı ve Fransız Önerisi'ni eleştiren bakanlar, komisyonunun asimetrik ilişki şartları nedeniyle büyük baskı altına gireceği ve bu nedenle Bulgaristan lehine tavizler vermek zorunda kalacağı endişesini taşımaktadır. Komisyon, Bulgaristan ve Makedonya'nın ortak tarihi konusunda "bilimsel" bir karar vermenin yanı sıra, tarih ders kitaplarının, anıtların, anıt plaketlerin içeriği gibi konularda da karar verecektir. Örneğin, Bulgaristan'ın taleplerinden biri, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında Nazi ekseninde yer alan Bulgaristan'a atıfta bulunan "Faşist Bulgaristan" ibaresinin okul kitaplarından ve anıt plaketlerinden çıkarılması veya kullanılmamasıdır. Bu nedenle milliyetçi çevrelerde, Fransız Önerisi "Makedonya'nın Bulgarlaştırılması" için bir taslak olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Özetlemek gerekirse, Makedon milliyetçileri için Fransız Önerisi iki nedenle sorunludur: Birincisi, bu öneri Makedonya-Bulgaristan anlaşmazlığını tüm AB ülkelerine açık hale getirmektedir. Çünkü 2017 Anlaşması, Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakere sürecine dahil edilmiş ve multidisipliner Komisyon'un belirli bir konuda ortak bir çözüme kavuşamaması halinde, Bulgaristan'a Makedonya'yı veto etme olanağı yaratmıştır. İkinci sorun ise, gücün dayatılması olasılığı yaratabilecek olan asimetrik ilişkidir. Dolayısıyla milliyetçiler, Bulgaristan'ın veto kozunu kullanarak Makedonya makamlarına ve multidisipliner Komisyon üyelerine, Bulgaristan lehine tavizler vermeleri için baskı uygulayacağı görüşündedir.

Burada özellikle vurgulanması gereken diğer bir husus, 2017 tarihli anlaşmanın 12. maddesidir. 12. madde anlaşmanın etkin bir şekilde uygulanması amacıyla yılda bir kez toplanacak olan hükümetler arası ortak bir komisyonun kurulmasını öngörmektedir. Ayrıca bu komisyona anlaşmanın uygulanması sırasında ortaya çıkan anlaşmazlıkları çözüme yetkisi vermektedir. Böylelikle 16 Temmuz 2022 yılında taslak sonuçların Makedonya Parlamentosunda oylanmasının ardından, hükümetlerarası ortak komisyonun 17 Temmuz 2022'de gerçekleştirilen toplantıya ilişkin öneri ve kararlarını içeren ikinci protokol açıklandı. Hükümetlerarası ortak toplantıda alınan ve protokole yansıyan

kararların bağlayıcılığı bulunmamakla birlikte, bu protokolün Tarihsel ve Eğitimsel Konularda Ortak Multidisipliner Uzman Komisyonu'nun üzerinde büyük bir siyasi etkiye sahip olduğu düşünülmektedir (Протокол од вториот состанок, 2022).

17 Temmuz 2022 yılında imzalanan protokol gündeminin ikinci noktası, Bulgaristan ve Makedonya hükümetlerinin komisyonu, çalışmalarını hızlandırması ve daha net çözümlere ulaşması için teşvik etmesidir. Hükümetler, komisyon için elverişli çalışma koşulları yaratılması yönünde desteklerini teyit etmiş ve yeni komisyonu, verimli ve titiz bilimsel tartışmalara dayalı olarak belirli sonuçlar elde etmesi yönünde teşvik etmişlerdir. Hükümetler, çalışmalarında 8. madde hükümlerine, yani 2017 tarihli anlaşmanın 8. maddesi ve 2. fıkrasına sıkı sıkıya bağlı kalmakla ve Komisyon ise, otantik tarihsel kaynakları ve tarihsel olayları bilimsel yaklaşım çerçevesinde ele alarak amaca katkıda bulunmakla yükümlüdür. Ayrıca her iki ülke, iki yıllık bir süre içinde, komisyonun ulaştığı sonuçları veya vardığı çözümleri eğitim müfredatlarına, okul ders kitaplarına, anıt yazıtlarına, hatıra plakelerine, müzelerdeki ve diğer tarihi ve kültürel mekanlardaki bilgilendirici materyallere dahil etmekle yükümlüdür. Ayrıca komisyonun ulaştığı çözümlere kamuoyu niteliği olan elektronik medyada da yer verilmesi öngörülmüştür. (Протокол од вториот состанок, 2022).

Protokolün üçüncü gündem noktasının önemli konularından biri, komünist döneminin kurbanlarının rehabilitasyonuna ilişkindir. Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti, 1945-1990 dönemi rejim baskısı kurbanlarından özür dilediği 2006 tarihli Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti Meclisi Deklarasyonu uyarınca ve Avrupa Parlamentosu'nun 2009'dan beri Avrupa vicdanına ilişkin kararı uyarınca, siyasi ve etnik kimlikleri nedeniyle Yugoslav komünist rejiminin kurbanı olan Bulgarlar da dahil olmak üzere herkesten özür dilemeyi kendine görev edinmiştir. Ayrıca Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti; polis, sivil ve askeri istihbarat dahil olmak üzere komünizm döneminden kalma tüm eski devlet güvenlik servislerinin baskı aygıtı arşivlerinin tamamen açılması için gerekli yasal çerçeveyi kapsamlı olarak oluşturacağını beyan etmiştir. Bu kapsamlı yasal çerçeve, ilgili belgelere ücretsiz, sınırsız ve zamanında erişim, araştırma, kullanım hakkı, yayın ve kurumsal muhafaza için net fırsatlar yaratacaktır. Anlaşmanın 8. maddesinin 3. fıkrası yine tarihi konulara değinmektedir. Bu fıkra uyarınca Tarihsel ve Eğitimsel Konularda Ortak Multidisipliner Uzman Komisyonu tarafından halihazırda üzerinde anlaşmaya varılmış olan ortak tarihi olayların ve kişiliklerin ortak olarak kutlamalarına ilişkin, 2022 ve 2023 yılları için ortak bir takvim üzerinde anlaşmaya

varıldı. Bunun dışında protokolde, Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti'nin Komisyonun tavsiyeleri ve 2017 Anlaşması uyarınca, Kral Samuel hakkında 7. sınıflar için örnek bir ders hazırlanması ve sunumunun eğitim müfredatına dahil edilmesi öngörülmektedir (Протокол од вториот состанок, 2022).

İmzalanan protokolde, Makedonya ile Avrupa Birliği arasında düzenlenen ilk hükümetler arası konferansın (siyasi konferans olarak adlandırılan) ardından alınması gereken tedbirler veya adımlar da yer almaktadır. Ele alınan konulardan biri nefret söylemidir. Bu bağlamda taraflar, kamu binaları ve anıtlar üzerindeki yazılar ve plakette, okul ders kitaplarındaki metinlerde ve öğretim materyallerinde ve ayrıca elektronik medyada (sosyal medya dahil olmak üzere) tespit edilen nefret söylemi unsurları konusunda, Dışişleri Bakanlıkları arasında diplomatik kanallar aracılığıyla bilgi d bulunulmasını kabul ederler. Her iki taraf da nefret söylemini önlemek için mümkün olan en kısa sürede harekete geçmekle yükümlüdür. Ayrıca her iki taraf devlet, kendileri tarafından finanse edilen yeni kitapların, belgesellerin, çeşitli dergilerin, kültürel anıtların, filmlerin ve diğer sanat eserlerinin *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşması* ruhuna uygun olacağını garanti eder. Taraflar, kurum ve kuruluşların kasıtsız propagandalarını önlemek ve özel kuruluşların şiddet, kin ve benzeri eylemlere teşvik edici ve ikili ilişkilere zarar verebilecek faaliyetlerini önlemek için etkili tedbirler alacaklardır. Bunun dışında Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti, bir yıl içinde, eski devlet güvenlik servislerinin komünizm döneminden kalma baskı aygıtı arşivlerinin tamamen açılması için gerekli yasal çerçeveyi kapsamlı olarak oluşturmayı taahhüt eder. Ayrıca, her iki ülke de Multidisipliner Komisyonun önerilerine dayalı olarak bazı ders örnekleri hazırlayacaklardır. Taraflar, Multidisipliner Komisyonun bu önerilerini eğitim müfredatlarına, ders kitaplarına, çeşitli eğitim materyallerine, tabela yazıtlarına, tarihi eserlere, anıtlara ve bilgilendirici materyallere dahil etmekle yükümlüdür. Bu değişiklikler, devlet yetkinde bulunan seçim bilgi dosyalarına da yansıtılmalıdır. Bunun dışında, her iki devlet de en geç 2024-2025 akademik yılına kadar tarih kitaplarını Multidisipliner Komisyonun önerilerine göre değiştirmekte mutabık olmuştur. Bütün bunların yanı sıra Protokolde, Makedonya'nın Makedonya'daki Bulgar azınlığın haklarının korunması için gereken bütün önlemleri alması kabul edilmiştir. Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti'nin, Kuzey Makedonya Cumhuriyeti'nde yer alan Bulgar azınlığın eşit haklara etkin erişimini, ayrımcılığa karşı korunmasını ve kültür ve kimliğinin korunmasını sağlamak

üzere önlemler alacağı ifadelerine Protokolde yer verilmiştir (Протокол од вториот состанок, 2022).

VMRO-DPMNE'nin lideri Hristijan Mickoski, Protokolün aslında Bulgarlaştırma taleplerini içerdiğini ve Bulgar asimilasyon politikalarının, yani ders kitaplarının değiştirilmesi ve tarihin değiştirilmesi gibi taleplerinin AB'ye girmenin ön şartı haline getirildiğini ve bunlar yerine getirilmeden hiçbir müzakerenin başlayamayacağını ileri sürmüştür. Fransız Önerisi kabul edildikten ve Protokol imzalandıktan sonra, Protokolün Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakere süreçlerinin bir parçası olup olmayacağı konusunda kamuoyunda ciddi bir tartışma ortaya çıkmıştır. VMRO DPMNE ve Fransız Önerisi'ne karşı çıkan gruplara göre Protokol, kesinlikle Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakere sürecinin parçasıdır. Hükümet ise bu protokolün Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakere sürecinin bir parçası olmadığını ve Protokoldeki hükümlerin yerine getirilmemesi halinde Bulgaristan'ın Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakere sürecinde veto hakkına sahip olmadığını ileri sürmüştür. Başbakan Kovaçevski, Fransız Önerisi'nin Makedon halkının ulusal kimliğine yönelik olumsuz bir etkisinin bulunmadığını, aksine Makedon ulusal kimliğini koruduğunu savunmaktadır. Ona göre Fransız Önerisi ve bu müzakere süreci ile Makedon dili korunmaktadır. Ayrıca, hükümetlerarası Komisyon tarafından imzalanacak olan Protokolün, müzakere sürecinin bir parçası olmayacağını ileri sürmüştür (Собранието на Северна, 2022).

Ancak Fransız Önerisi'nin mecliste kabul edilmesine rağmen Makedonya'nın AB ile müzakereleri gerçek anlamda başlamadı. Çünkü daha önce anıldığı üzere, Fransız Önerisi gereği Makedonya ile AB arasında hükümetler arasında iki konferans öngörülmektedir. Önergede, Fransız Önerisi mecliste kabul edilir edilmez ilk konferansın yapılacağı öngörülmektedir. Ancak Makedonya'nın AB ile resmi müzakerelerinin başlayacağı ve fasılların açılmaya başlayacağı konferans, Makedonya'nın anayasa değişikliklerini yapıp anayasada Bulgarları azınlık olarak kabul edeceği zaman gerçekleşecektir. Bunun için 18 aylık bir süre tanınmıştır. Fransız Önerisi'nin parlamentoda oylanmasından ve Makedonya ile AB arasındaki ilk hükümetler arası konferansın düzenlenmesinden neredeyse 1 yıl sonra bile, ülkede anayasa değişiklikleri hala yapılmamıştır. VMRO DPMNE ve diğer muhalefet partileri, sürecin başından itibaren anayasa değişikliklerini desteklemeyeceklerini beyan etmişlerdir. Hristijan Mickoski, VMRO DPMNE Partisi'nin Bulgarların anayasaya dahil edilmeyeceği konusunda bir garanti olduğunu ileri sürmüştür.



## **Tarihsel ve Eğitimsel Konularda Ortak Multidisipliner Uzman Komisyonu'nun Önerileri**

Multidisipliner Tarih Uzmanları Ortak Komisyonu konusunda kısaca bilgi verilmesi gerekirse, komisyon 2018 yılı Mayıs ayında oluşturuldu. Komisyon, yedi Bulgar ve yedi Makedon üye olmak üzere toplam 14 üyeden oluşmakta olup eş başkan sistemiyle işlemektedir ve biri Bulgar tarafı diğeri Makedon tarafı temsil eden 2 başkanı vardır. Komisyon kararlarını oy birliği ile alır. Yukarıda ifade edildiği gibi 2017 tarihli anlaşmanın 8. maddesi uyarınca komisyonun görevi, iki ülke arasındaki tarihi olay ve figürlere ilişkin ihtilafları bilimsel ve nesnel bir şekilde yorumlayarak çözmektir. Komisyon, akit tarafların hükümetlerine çalışmaları hakkında yıllık raporlar sunacaktır.

Multidisipliner Tarih Uzmanları Ortak Komisyonu'nun çalışmaları halen devam etmekte olup taraflar pek çok konuda müzakerelerini halen devam ettirmektedirler. Bugüne kadar Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy, Aziz Kliment ve Aziz Naum ve Çar Samuel gibi tarihi figürlerin iki ülke tarafından birlikte kutlanması ve anılması Komisyon tarafından önerilmiştir. Komisyon, Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy Kardeşlerin eserlerinin Makedon ve Bulgarların ulusal ve kültürel gelişimlerinde özel bir öneme sahip olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Komisyona göre, Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy'in eserleri, o dönem Orta Çağ Bulgar Devleti'nin toprakları içinde bulunan Preslav ve Ohrid şehirlerindeki edebiyat merkezlerinde geliştirildi ve korundu. Bu, Makedonya ve Bulgaristan'ın Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy'in doğum gününü ortaklaşa kutlamaları için iyi bir temel oluşturuyor. Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy'in öğrencilerinden olan Aziz Kliment Ohrindski de Komisyon tarafından Bulgaristan ve Makedonya'da Hristiyan kültürünün ve okuryazarlığının gelişmesine katkıda bulunan önemli bir şahsiyet olarak değerlendirildi. Aziz Kliment, Ohri'de edebiyat okulunun temellerini atan ve bu okulun gelişmesine önemli katkılar sağlayan bir din adamı ve aydındır. Ohri o dönemde Bulgar devletinin bir parçası olduğu için Aziz Kliment Ohrindski her iki ülke için de ayrı bir öneme sahiptir. Aziz Kiril ve Metodiy'in diğeri bir öğrencisi olan Aziz Naum da Komisyon tarafından Bulgaristan ve Makedonya'nın ortak olarak anacağı ve kutlayacağı bir değer olarak önerilmiştir. Aziz Naum, Pliskov-Preslav Edebiyat Okulu'nun kurucularından biridir. 893 civarında Çar Simeon tarafından Aziz Kliment Ohridski'nin eğitim faaliyetlerine devam ettiği Ohri'ye gönderildi. Kliment'i Ohri Edebiyat Okulu'na gönderir ve Ohri Gölü kıyısında bugün onun adını taşıyan bir manastır inşa eder. Bunların dışında Komisyon, Çar Samuil'i birlikte kutlanması ve anılması gerektiğine karar vermiştir. Çar Samuil, Balkan

Yarımadası'ndaki devletlerin ve halkların büyük bir bölümünü içeren büyük bir Orta Çağ devletinin kralıdır. Komisyon Çar Samuil'i, iki ülkenin ortak tarihinin bir simgesi olarak değerlendirmiştir (Препораки на Македонско-бугарската, 2022).

Ayrıca söz konusu komisyon, Bulgaristan'da 5. sınıf ve Makedonya'da 6. sınıf tarih kitaplarını inceleyerek bu kitaplarda bazı eksiklikler olduğu değerlendirmesinde bulunmuş ve bazı düzeltmelerin yapılması gerektiğini önermiştir. Komisyon, şu unsurlardan kaçınılması gerektiğini değerlendirmektedir: antik tarih hakkında temelsiz tarihçilik önerileri; belirli bir tarihsel zaman ve bağlama karşılık gelmeyen haritaların kullanılması nedeniyle oluşan tarihi coğrafyadaki eksiklikler; olgusal (faktografik) hatalar (Препораки на Македонско-бугарската, 2022).

Yukarıda bahsedildiği üzere, Makedon tarihyazımına ve milliyetçi düşüncesine göre 19. yüzyıl ve 20. yüzyılın ilk yarısına denk gelen ve Makedon ulusunun ve devletinin çekirdeğini oluşturan tarihi ve kültürel sermaye Bulgaristan tarafından reddedilmektedir. Bulgaristan'a göre bu tarihi ve kültürel sermaye tamamen Bulgaristan'a aittir. Gotse Delçev ve Jane Sandanski'nin etnik kimliği başta olmak üzere, VMRO örgütünün, İlinden İsyanının ve birçok tarihi olay ve şahsiyetlerin etnik kimliği bu müzakerelerin nesnesi olacaktır. Bu anlamda Gotse Delçev'in etnik kimliğinin, iki ülke arasındaki tarihin "paylaşılması" müzakerelerinin nesnesi haline getirilmesi, tartışmaların temel sorununu oluşturmaktadır. Komisyon'daki Bulgar üyeler, Gotse Delçev'in etnik kimliğinin Bulgar olarak tanınmasını istemektedir. Komisyonun 2022 yılındaki toplantılarından birinde, Komisyonun Makedon Eş Başkanı Dragan Gjorgiev, Gotse Delçev'in etnik kimliğinin herhangi bir ilerleme sağlama önünde ana sorun olmaya devam ettiğini ifade ederken, Bulgar Eş Başkanı Angel Dimitrov Gotse ise Delçev'in kimliğini kendilerinin değil Delçev'in kendisi tarafından belirlediğini ileri sürmüştür (Македонско-бугарската, 2020). Komisyon'daki Makedon üyeler ise, Gotse Delçev'in etnik kimliğini belirlemenin Komisyonun işi olmadığını ileri sürmüşlerdir (Историска комисија, 2022). Komisyonun Makedon Eş Başkanı Gjorgiev'e göre 19. ve 20. yüzyıllara ait meseleler tartışılması en zor meseleler olarak görünmektedir (Ѓоргиев: Периодот на 19 и 20 век, 2022).

"Ortak tarih" terimi, Komisyonun tarihsel olayların ve tarihi şahsiyetlerin etnik kimliğini belirlemesi ve paylaşılması "müzakereleri" önünde bir başka engel oluşturmaktadır. *Dostluk, İyi Komşuluk ve İşbirliği Anlaşmasında* "ortak tarih" terimi kullanılmaktadır ancak birçok Makedon tarihçiye göre muğlak ve belirsiz bir kavram olduğu için bu kavram, Bulgaristan'ın etnik anlamda suiistimaline açıktır. Gjorgiev'e göre, Bulgarlar

“ortak tarih” terimi ile tek bir halkın tarihini, yani 9. yüzyıldan 1944’e uzanan Bulgar halkının tarihini kast etmektedir. Bulgaristan tarihyazımı, Makedonya Halk Cumhuriyeti ve Makedon ulusunun 1944 yılında komünistler tarafından bir gece içinde yaratıldığını ileri sürer. Bulgar tarihçiler “tarihi millet” kavramına inanmakta, “ilkçi yaklaşım”<sup>3</sup> benimsemektedirler. Bu bağlamda, Bulgar milletinin doğuşunu 9. yüzyıl olarak göstermektedirler. Bulgar tarihçilere göre ilk Bulgar Krallığının sınırları içinde yaşamış olan halkların tamamı Bulgardır. Böylece Makedonya bir coğrafi bölge olarak ilk Bulgar Krallığın sınırları içinde bulunduğu için, Makedonların 1944’e kadar Bulgar olduklarını, dolayısıyla ortak tarihin tek bir milletin, yani Bulgar milletinin tarihi olduğunu savunmaktadırlar (Горгиев: Историската комисија, 2022). Gjorgiev toplantılar sırasında Bulgar tarafın tarihçilerinin “Makedon milleti”, Makedon kültürü, “Makedon dili” gibi terimleri kullanmaktan kaçındıklarını ileri sürmektedir. Makedon tarihçilerin kaygıları, ortak tarih kavramından hareketle Bulgaristan’ın, ortak bir dili, tarihi ve kültürü olan tek bir halk anlamını çıkarmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Tarihçi Vanço Gorgiev, Bulgaristan ve Makedonya’nın ortak tarihinin ancak Makedonya’nın Bulgaristan tarafından işgal edildiği 1915-1918 yılları ve İkinci Dünya Savaşı gibi dönemlerde konuşulabileceğini savunmaktadır. Bunun dışında ortak bir tarih yoktur. Ona göre Makedonlar, komşu halklardan farklı bir tarihe ve geçmişe sahip olan özgün bir millettir (Македонско-бугарската комисија, 2020).

## Sonuç

Balkanlarda tarih başından beri ulus devleti ve ulusu mekânda ve zamanda meşru-  
laştıran bir araç olarak işlev göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla 19. yüzyıldan bugüne Balkanlardaki

3 Ulusların nasıl ortaya çıktığı, nasıl oluştuğuna ilişkin sosyal bilimler literatüründe en büyük tartışmalardan biri inşacılar ile ilkçiler arasında gelişmektedir. Modernist yaklaşımını benimseyenler milliyetçilik, uluslaşma, ulus ve ulusal kimlik gibi kavramlar ve kategoriler veya süreçleri tamamen modern çağa özgün olarak kavramaktadırlar ve tüm bunların tarihsel ve sosyolojik mahiyetini vurgulamaktadır. Modernistler milliyetçiliği, uluslar ve ulusal kimlikler siyasi ve entelektüel seçkinler tarafından belirli çıkarlar doğrultusunda icat edildiğini vurgulayıp bilinçli projeler olarak kavramaktadır. Başka bir deyişle ulus oluşturma ve ulusal kimlik inşa etmenin tamamen sosyal bir olgu olup belirli iktidar merkezler tarafından tasarlandığı, hayal edildiği ve inşa edildiği olgular ve ya yapılar olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadırlar. Bunun aksine ilkçi yaklaşım göre bütün milletleri, yüzyıllardan beri var olan bir birlikteliğin günümüzdeki bir uzantısı oldukları ve milletlere Ortaçağ’da hatta antik çağlarda bile rastlanmanın mümkün olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. İlkçiler tarihsel süreç içinde değişen tek şeyin milletlerin büründükleri biçim olduğunu, milli öz ise her zaman aynı kaldığını vurgulamaktadır. Sözün kısası ilkçiler milletleri veri olarak kabul ederler, modern çağın veya modernitenin ürünü olmadıklarını ve modernistleri ileri sürdüklerinin aksine hiç “kimse” tarafından bilinçli olarak inşa ve hayal etmediği düşüncesini paylaşırlar. Yani millet, eskiciler nezdinde tarihsel bir gerçekliktir. Bkz: Umut Özknımlı, Milliyetçilik Kuramları Eleştirel bir Bakış, İstanbul, Doğu Batı, 2016.

milliyetçiler bir tarih ve tarihsel mitler üretme yarışına girmiştir. Balkanlarda milliyetçilerin uluslarına ve ulus devletlerine meşruiyet kazandırmak adına giriştikleri bu tarih üretme tutkusu ülkelerin aralarında savaş, düşmanlıklar ve anlaşmazlıkların yaşanmasına neden olmuştur. Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasında tarih konusunda yaşanan kavga ve anlaşmazlıklar her şeyden önce bu tarih üretim “fazlalığı” ve tarihin politikleştirilmesi ilgilidir. Bu kavganın kaynağının tarihin ve tarihten kaynaklanan mitlerin değişik şekillerde, özellikle milliyetçilik ekseninde, yorumlanması olduğu görülür. Dolayısıyla Bulgaristan ile Makedonya arasındaki tarihsel ve kültürel mirası konusunda yaşanan bu anlaşmazlıklar, iki milliyetçi ideolojinin çatışmasının bir yansımasıdır.

Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasındaki tarihi paylaşım anlaşmazlıkları ve bu anlaşmazlıkların çözülmesine yönelik başvuru yöntem göstermektedir ki tarihi nesnel bir şekilde yorumlamak, aktarmak ve yazmak neredeyse imkânsızdır. Bu imkânsızlık iki nedene bağlıdır: birincisi tarihi yorumlayan, aktaran ve yazan tarihçilerle ilgilidir. Yukarıda vurgulandığı gibi tarihçi tarihini yazarken kültürel, toplumsal ve siyasal yükünden arınmış bir kişi değildir. Tarihçi toplumsal bir varlık olduğu için tarihi yazarken ister istemez yaşadığı ve faaliyet gösterdiği toplumun dünya görüşünü, siyasi görüşlerini ve ideolojik duruşunu da yansıtacaktır. İkinci neden ise belli aktörler tarafından sık sık tarih bilincinin çarpıtılarak tarihin kendi ideolojileri doğrultusunda yorumlanıp yazılmasıdır. Daha somut olarak, modern çağın önemli bir aktörü olarak ulus devlet, ideolojisini meşrulaştırmak ve devamlılığını sağlamak için tarihi bu amaca yönelik yorumlamakta ve yazmaktadır.

Makedonya ile Bulgaristan arasındaki tarihi anlaşmazlıkları çözüme girişimi, pratikte tarafların tarihi devlet ideolojisine ve ulusal çıkarlarına göre yorumlama ve yazma girişiminin ifadesi haline gelmiş olup her iki taraf da ötekine iddialarını empoze etme amacındadır. İki devlet arasındaki ihtilafları çözmek için tarihçilerden oluşan komisyon aslında tarihin veya “hakikatin” müzakere edildiği bir komisyondur. Komisyon ne kadar profesyonel tarihçilerden oluşuyorsa ve bu görüşmelerde bilimin son sözü söyleyeceği söylene de özünde bu komisyon politiktir. Politik bir sorunu çözümlen bir sonucu olarak oluşturulmuştur ve dolayısıyla sunulan çözümler objektif olmaktan uzaktır. Komisyon, devletlerin siyasi ve ideolojik amaçlarını tatmin edecek çözümler üretecektir. Ayrıca devletlerin siyasi gücü ve uluslararası politikada ağırlığı açısından asimetrik oran dikkate alındığında bu komisyon Bulgaristan lehine çözümler üretebilme ihtimali yüksek gözüküyor.

# Resolving the Historical and Cultural Heritage Conflict Between Macedonia and Bulgaria in Terms of the Relationship Between Power And History

Murat Aliu

Disputes over the historical and cultural heritage between Macedonia and Bulgaria are related to what is known in the literature as the Macedonian Question. The Macedonian Question started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when nationalism was born in the Balkans and nation states were formed. At the core of the Macedonian Question lie three problems: 1) How far do the territorial borders of the geographical region known as Macedonia extend, 2) to which country does this land or territory belong, and 3) what is the ethnicity and identity of the Slavic people living in the region known as Macedonia?

Afterward, the neighboring countries of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece began to claim these lands as being historically part of their state and the Slavic population living in Macedonia to have the same identity as their populations. For Bulgaria, the territory known as Macedonia is a region that belongs to the Bulgarian state, and those living in the region have a Bulgarian ethnicity. For Serbia, the Macedonian region is part of Southern Serbia, and the Slavic people in the region are also Serbian. For the Greeks, the Slavic people living in the region are Slavic-speaking Greeks. However, Bulgaria was more persistent in this race to deny the existence of Macedonia as its own nation.

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When looking at the nationalist discourse that was built in Socialist Macedonia after 1944, the historical and cultural legitimacy of the contemporary Macedonian nation is seen to have been based on the Christian missions of St. Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, St. Kliment Ohrid and St. Naum, in the medieval Empire of Tsar Samuil; on the activity of Macedonian intellectuals and other patriots of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; on the independence movement of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO); on the goals and values of the Ilinden Uprising, and on the end of the anti-fascist war during World War II. Therefore, the issues lying at the center of the conflict between Macedonia and Bulgaria involve the ethnic identity of the brothers St. Cyril and Methodius and their students, St. Clement of Ohrid and St. Naum; of Tsar Samuil; of the ethnic character of his empire; and of the many intellectuals and patriots of the 19<sup>th</sup> century whom the Macedonian state and historiography recognize as pioneers of Macedonian nationalism and national renaissance, as well as the purpose and ethnic character of the Ilinden Uprising. Also at the center of this debate is the issue of whether Macedonian is a separate language or just a dialect of the Bulgarian language. Another subject of discussion between the Macedonia and Bulgaria involves the presence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria and of a Bulgarian minority in Macedonia.

Disputes between Macedonia and Bulgaria as two independent states began immediately after 1945. Although the relations between the two countries had been relaxed initially from 1944-1948, during which Bulgaria had taken some steps toward recognizing the Macedonian nation and language, as well as the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, once Yugoslavia broke off relations with the USSR after 1948, the conflict between Bulgaria and Macedonia (Yugoslavia) returned to its starting point. The entire period from 1948-1990 saw a tense, hostile atmosphere between the two countries, throughout which both countries accused the other of falsifying history. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria was the first country to recognize the independence of Macedonia, but not the Macedonian nationality or language. So, although the language of political representation had softened compared to the language of the communist era, Bulgaria had not fundamentally changed its attitude. Therefore, the Macedonian Question didn't resolve until after 1991.

The Macedonian Question was opened again in 2017 when Macedonia and Bulgaria signed the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness, and Cooperation (United Nations, 2017) in the name of resolving the historic conflict. In 2022, Macedonia also

accepted the French Proposal, which aimed at to unlock the Bulgarian veto of 2020 that Bulgaria had put in place to prevent the start of negotiations for Macedonia's membership in the European Union.

The most problematic part of the 2017 Treaty involves Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 8, which deal with the issues of history and education. According to Paragraph 2 of Article 8, establishment of the Joint Multidisciplinary Committee of Experts on Historical and Educational Issues composed of experts from both sides was expected within three months of the treaty's enactment. The task of this commission is to objectively and scientifically examine the claims of both sides regarding historical events and figures and to resolve disputes between the two sides. The commission is to submit annual reports to both governments regarding its work. According to Paragraph 3 of Article 8, both parties are to also organize joint celebration ceremonies for common historical events and personalities in order to strengthen good neighborly relations within the framework of mutual reconciliation and European values and spirit.

The 2017 Treaty actually opened a Pandora's box and reignited the old conflict between the two countries. Bulgaria has accused Macedonia of not fulfilling the obligations arising from the treaty. Meanwhile, Macedonia has accused Bulgaria of having hostile intentions toward Macedonia. Therefore, when Macedonia started negotiations for membership in the European Union in 2020, Bulgaria used the right of veto against Macedonia. Bulgaria had many, though often unclear, reasons for its veto, the main one being non-implementation of 2017 Treaty. Later on, Bulgaria began accusing Macedonia of not respecting the rights of the Bulgarian minority in Macedonia and demanded the Bulgarian minority be incorporated into the Constitution of Macedonia. Bulgaria has also accused Macedonia of anti-Bulgarian propaganda and requested that Macedonia prevent its hostile propaganda toward Bulgaria.

Bulgaria's re-vetoed Macedonia's bid in 2021. After many negotiations among Bulgaria, Macedonia, and the European Union in 2022, the formula known as the French Proposal appeared. The main points of this document are that the Republic of North Macedonia must respect the 2017 Treaty with Bulgaria. As for the Macedonian language, which Bulgaria does not officially recognize, both countries are to publish relevant statements and define Macedonian according to their positions. The French Proposal also envisages the signing of a bilateral protocol between Sofia and Skopje on how to implement the

2017 Treaty and how to amend the Macedonian Constitution in order to include Bulgarians as a minority. Two intergovernmental conferences have been planned between Macedonia and the EU within the framework of the French Proposal. The first intergovernmental conference is to be held immediately once the Macedonian Government and Assembly accept the French proposal, after which the negotiations for Macedonia's full membership in the EU will begin. This conference has been described as a political conference. The second and main intergovernmental conference between Macedonia and the EU is to be held once Macedonia recognizes Bulgarians as a minority in its constitution. After fierce debates between the parties in power and the opposition, the Assembly approved the French Proposal on July 16, 2022 with 68 votes. According to the approved draft results, the government is to be guided on what it can negotiate with the European Union. The Assembly obliges the government to protect the national and cultural identity of Macedonians during the negotiation process. The most important point regarding these conclusions is that the Macedonian language is to be recognized as an equal language with all other official languages of the European Union.

The French proposal was offered as a solution for unblocking Macedonia's EU integration process. According to the Macedonian opposition, however, this proposal has many shortcomings. First, the Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute has now turned into a dispute between Macedonia and the EU, because the 2017 Treaty is part of Macedonia's negotiation framework with the EU. This being so and Bulgaria's apparent right of veto, the Macedonian opposition argues that Bulgaria will always have reasons to blackmail Macedonia into making concessions in its favor throughout the negotiation process. Meanwhile, the most controversial point involves how the French Proposal also foresees the signing of a protocol between Macedonia and Bulgaria that will also serve as a guide for how implement the 2017 Treaty. The Intergovernmental Meeting where this protocol was signed took place on July 17, 2022, with the signed protocol emphasizing that the government encourages the Commission to speed up its work. The protocol also states that the commission in question should work according to Article 8 of the 2017 Treaty by addressing the disputed points objectively. The protocol also has provisions for the rehabilitation of Bulgarian victims who'd been persecuted by the Yugoslav communist regime, as well as a number of other issues related to the past and historical events.



The Joint Multidisciplinary Commission of Experts on Historical and Educational Issues between Bulgaria and North Macedonia was formed in May 2018. The Commission consists of a total of 14 members (seven Bulgarians and seven Macedonians) and operates with a co-chairman system of two presidents, one representing the Bulgarian side and the other the Macedonian one. The commission votes on decisions unanimously. The commission will submit annual reports on its work to the governments of the contracting parties. According to the agreement, everything that the commission proposes to the government is required to be implemented by the government.

So far, the commission has come to an agreement regarding several historical figures, with the commission members having agreed that the medieval figures of St. Cyril and Methodius, as well as their students St. Clement and St. Naum, should be celebrated and remembered together. According to the commission, these are common figures who have made a great contribution to the development of Macedonian and Bulgarian national culture. Also, the commission has reviewed the 5<sup>th</sup>-grade history books in Bulgaria and the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade history books in Macedonia, assessed some deficiencies to be present in these books, and suggested certain corrections to be made. The works and meetings of the commission still continue, with the ethnic identity of the revolutionary Gotse Delchev and other figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as issues still under discussion.

The historical divisionary disputes between Macedonia and Bulgaria and the method used to resolve these disputes reveal the practical impossibility of interpreting, conveying, or writing history objectively. This impossibility has two reasons: First, it concerns the historians who interpret, transmit, and write history. Historians are not people undetached from the cultural, social, and political contestation in the writing and interpretation of history. They will inevitably reflect the world view, political views, and ideological stance of the society in which they live and act. The second reason is that historical consciousness is often distorted by certain actors, and history is interpreted and written in accordance with their ideologies. Thus, the Commission, which is composed of historians so as to resolve the conflicts between the two states, is actually a commission that negotiates history (i.e., the truth). Although the commission consists of professional historians and science has been said to have the last word in these meetings, this commission is essentially political. It was created in order to solve a political problem, and thus the solutions offered are far from the target. The commission will produce solutions that will satisfy the political and ideological goals of the states. Also,

taking into account the asymmetric ratio in terms of the political power of the states and their weight in international politics, that this commission will be able to produce solutions in favor of Bulgaria appears very unlikely.

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# Agia: An Open-Air Middle Paleolithic Site in Northwestern Greece


Stephen A. Spathas


**Abstract:** The pause in scientific research in the prehistory of Corfu and adjacent areas in Epirus between the years 1969-1990 prompted exploratory field research to locate and record open-air Paleolithic sites threatened by destruction due to residential, commercial, and industrial development. Of the sites discovered and put on record, this paper focuses on Agia (or Ayia), a hitherto unknown Middle Paleolithic site, and examines its position as a probable “kill and butchering” site in the Kokkytos river area. The typological analysis of the lithic assemblage shows an advanced Middle Paleolithic industry of Mousterian and, predominantly, Levalloiso-Mousterian types of Levalloisian tradition with elements of Eastern Mousterian affinities. The paper discusses the diffusion of technology in the coastal areas of Epirus and the island of Corfu and notes the gradual decrease of pure Mousterian technology in favor of Levalloiso-Mousterian as one moves westwards. The paper points to specific candidate sites in the vicinity of Agia and recommends further research.

**Keywords:** red beds, Epirus, Middle Paleolithic, flints, Levalloiso-Mousterian

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## Introduction

Prior to 1962, little had been known about the Paleolithic period in northwestern Greece. This started to change with the arrival of the British exploration team led by E. Higgs (Dakaris & Higgs 1964, Higgs et al., 1966 & 1968) under the sponsorship of the British School of Archeology in Athens and backed by the British Academy and the Museum of Archeology and Ethnology of the University of Cambridge. Following Higgs' methods of surveying and sampling, many open-air Paleolithic sites and chipping floors were discovered and subsequently excavated, including the rock shelters of Asprochaliko on the Louros River and Kastritsa cave in Ioannina. In the following years, A. Sordinas (Sordinas, 1969) carried out research on Corfu and other Ionian Islands and adjacent areas on the Greek mainland with many Paleolithic and later-period discoveries. Apart from sporadic Paleolithic research and further diggings in the previously-discovered shelters of Kleidi and Megalakos, little systematic progress had been made since 1969. The scientific community had to wait until the 1990s for interest in Paleolithic research to be rekindled.

This two-decade gap compelled the author to conduct field research and small-scale surveys on the island of Corfu between 1974-1989 with the aim of locating and putting on record previously unknown Prehistoric sites, as well as salvaging archeological evidence before being lost to the destructive forces of commercial and residential development. These self-funded efforts gradually expanded to the districts of Thesprotia, Ioannina, Preveza, and Arta on the Greek mainland opposite Corfu. Several sites were discovered on Corfu and on the mainland that, together with the findings, were reported to the competent authorities. Among them, Agia was discovered in 1988 and reported in November of the same year to the competent authorities of Corfu and Athens. Due to resource constraints, there was no opportunity to devote an apt amount of time to each and every site discovered, and most were simply recorded with just coordinates and no extensive sampling.

In the 1990s, a small number of these sites were rediscovered by university- and state-backed expeditions, mainly as part of the Thesprotia Project and the later Nikopolis Project. The latter was an interdisciplinary archeological investigation of southern Epirus from Paleolithic to medieval times and has been credited with finding a few Paleolithic sites in relict red beds, including the open-air Paleolithic site of Agia during their field summer seasons from 1991-1994.



This paper does not examine the causes that lead to rediscoveries, nor does it speculate on what could have been achieved had resources been better allocated and the duplication of efforts avoided. This paper discusses the site of Agia to fill research gaps, address inaccuracies, draw further conclusions, and recommend specific further research. This paper is also a plea and an invitation to amateur and independent archeologists who lack backing to continue to report or otherwise announce their efforts and findings and in so doing protect sites, contribute to the advancement of a collective body of knowledge, and support and trigger further research.

## The Agia (Ayia/Aghia) Site

As part of the survey of the Kokkytos river area, a series of peculiar shelters and recesses were investigated on the perpendicular red rock cliffs on the way from the town of Parga to the village of Agia. Just below and west of the village of Agia, a narrow plateau is formed at a height of about 345m above sea level. The coordinates in the middle of the site are 39°18'39.61"N 20°21'04.91"E, and the barometric altimeter gives a reading of  $330 \pm 5$  m. The site itself measures roughly 400x600 meters.



*Figure 1.* The yellow dotted line marks the delimitation of the terra-rossa sediment. A: The present-day village of Agia., B: The vector marks the torrent that drains the remnants of the sediment southwards.

The site consists of a thick clayey-sandy deposit (*terra rossa*) of Pleistocene origin with a maximum thickness of about 8-12 meters towards the center, which is subject to heavy erosion due to the high annual average rainfall (160-180cm), strong winds, and steepness of the terrain. This deposition rests uncomfortably on light colored Middle Pliocene clays and marls, soft and hard chalk heavily eroded and leached, and conglomerates of various sizes. In the very few parts where erosion has not destroyed the superficial *humus* layer, the deposit is covered by thick native vegetation of semi-mountainous character that is typical on red bed-type soils, comprising among others the species *Quercus coccifera*, *Erica arborea*, *Arbutus unedo*, *Laurus nobilis*, and *Myrtus communis*. The long-distance search for this kind of vegetation, including *Pinus halepensis* (Aleppo pine), is a sure indicator that relict red earth lies underneath. A naturally-formed stream that drains the site towards the south during the winter months further contributes to the erosion of the site.



Figure 2. Partial view of the site, with the photo taken slightly toward the northeast.

Shortly after its initial discovery, the follow-up visit to the site was of equally high value, as heavy rains had created new gullies on the sediment slopes and refreshed the exposed sections, bringing new specimens out of the matrix onto the surface. After

collecting, cleaning, sorting, cataloguing, labeling, and photographing, the findings were dully reported to the Archeological Authorities of Corfu and Athens.

Today, the site has been impacted by human activity that has reduced its value and renders further scientific research onerous. A communal soccer field has been constructed, partially leveling the deposition. A road also cuts through the sediments, and agricultural and livestock storage facilities as well as residential buildings have been built on and near the site. The site is now reduced to a mere 100x70 meters, a fraction of its size from its discovery back in 1988. Human activity continues to accelerate the pace of deterioration, threatening the very survival of the site.

## The Lithic Assemblage

Over two hundred flint specimens have been collected from Agia's eroded surface, gullies, and exposed sections. Care has been taken not to show partiality for finished implements, and a big proportion of knapping by-products were also collected to properly conduct the typological analysis. The method is mainly based on F. Bordes' (Bordes, 1979) typology, but others were also consulted where appropriate. This paper does not burden the reader with the detailed analysis, but this can be made available to the passionate specialist who wishes to dive deeper into this work and progress it further.

The state of preservation of the flint specimens is excellent in their totality from rolling and chemical standpoints. Compared with assemblages from other sites in the vicinity, similarities in preservation are noticed with places such as the Morfi lower and upper sites as well as Marathia I in Corfu; however, sharp contrasts are found with the Karvounari upper & lower sites and especially with the well-known site of Kokkinopilos on the Louros River. In fact, the chemical action in the latter two sites was substantial, making a good portion of the tools and by-products of knapping brittle.

From the standpoint of wear occurring from utilization, the tools appear to have been abandoned after minimal use and while still in a good state. This is in full contrast with the majority of tools from Corfu<sup>12</sup> (mainly the extended site of Saint Georges south) and many other sites (e.g. northwestern Peloponnesus) where tools have been

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1 Research and assemblages from the Island of Corfu will be covered in a future paper, along with the report of stray Lower Paleolithic finds (including the Xanthátes Acheulean handaxe, discovered and reported to the authorities in 1981).

repeatedly reused and resharpened until totally worn. Such heavy reuse is indicative of a lack of quality raw materials in the vicinity, a problem not faced by the Prehistoric inhabitants of Epirus.



*Figure 3.* A selection from the assemblage. From left to right: Top row: Five Mousterian points; far right: Ovate or “limace” and a peripherally trimmed flake = convergent double-side scraper and/or knife. Middle row: Three double-sided scrapers on flake and a double-sided scraper on flake-blade exhibiting one convex side and the other side with straight-line retouch; right: bifacial foliated Mousterian points: #3, leaf bifacial uni-pointed, #4, leaf bifacial bi-pointed. Bottom row: Convex side and steep-end “carinated” scraper and six Levalloiso-Mousterian points.

The artifacts are also noted to exhibit no or very little signs of rolling, proving that they have not been leached through horizontal erosional transportation. They are still sharp and in a “usable” condition.

Despite the diligence and constant care to avoid overlooking evidence that may characterize a site, Agia has yielded no cores. This total absence of any type of core was a surprise. A plethora of blanks (half-finished implements), as well as bits and chips, have been observed ranging from 2-10mm.

Scrapers are abundant and still in sharp condition. Various types have been recognized; among these, the simple convex type holds a dominant position in the assemblage, with other types like the convergent and double-sided trailing behind. Some “déjeté” types have also been recognized. Over 60% of the specimens derive from typical Levalloisian flakes with careful and detailed preparation of the striking platform (10 to 15 facets), proving their provenance from typical Levalloisian cores (none found). Among the scrapers, three are of the composite type, also exhibiting a concave retouch, which may suggest the presence of wooden javelins during a hunt (for thrusting rather than throwing). The presence of ovates or “limaces” may have served nearly the same purpose, which is to grind or smooth down wood, bone, and/or antler.

No denticulate, borer, or burin tools were found, nor were other Middle Paleolithic tools of the “Upper Paleolithic type”. The same goes for specimens from later periods, thus safely positioning Agia as a site in use only up to the later Middle Paleolithic times.

The assemblage contains about two dozen points.

First are four typical Levalloisian points that by all probabilities were struck from point tortoise cores and bearing the telltale signs, such as detailed preparation of the striking platform (up to 14 facets) and the typical shape of the platform “en chapeau de gendarme”.

Another six points fall within the types classified as *circum Mediterranean* Levalloiso-Mousterian according to D. Garrod (Garrod, 1937 & 1961), but only as retouched Levallois according to F. Bordes (Bordes, 1979). In this case, the additional minute retouch of the Levalloisian point (sometimes also with an inverse retouch toward the point) and the regularization of the sharp edges by additional retouch characterizes the type. A great similarity is found with the single-level Levalloiso-Mousterian assemblage

of Hajj Creiem on the Wadi Derna in Cyrenaica (McBurney & Hey, 1955). These specimens may have been retouched more likely on elongated Levalloisian flakes that came from flake blades. This is important because it marks the presence of another technological advancement in Agia: Instead of consuming a whole lump of flint (Levalloisian or tortoise core) for just a single tool, a series of blanks has now been found that could be extracted from one lump of flint (disc or continuation core) and then retouched into different types of tools. In fact, flake-blades were usually struck on disc cores. This technique marks a milestone in raw material savings; albeit in this case, its application was likely driven by speed and efficiency of production rather than lack of materials. Of course, these two types of cores coincided for thousands of years (up to the Early Bronze Age in some places).

Another five points are clearly recognizable as pure, typical Mousterian points with invasive and plano-convex retouch (ablation of the percussion bulb), two of which are cordiform (heart-shaped) with a foliate retouch.

Finally, five bifacial foliates mark the highlight of the site. These points are similar to very rare findings in sites on the island of Corfu and Epirus and even specimens from the Penios River and Theopetra in Thessaly. Thus, finding five such points meters away from one another on a single site like Agia seems extraordinary from the experience in the field so far. Therefore, in conjunction with the plano-convex and bi-convex retouch, the ablation of the bulb, and the invasive foliated retouch, there is little hesitation, albeit with great reserve<sup>23</sup>, in linking these leaf-shaped bifacial foliates with the *blättspitzen* [leaf points] from Mauern Caves 1 & 2 (Zotz, 1955), and Starosel'ye in the Crimea (Formozov, 1952-56). Variants of leaf points also come from the recently discovered site of Uşak-Sürmecik in Western Anatolia, but whether these belong to the Mousterian assemblage or developed locally from a Mousterian of Acheulean tradition remains to be demonstrated. Western Anatolia lays on the path of cultural and technological diffusion from Africa and the Middle East to the Balkans and eventually Europe. These details may show a relationship with the Eastern Mousterian industry and a possible cultural exchange or tradition between groups. That said, there is no attempt to

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2 Due to the continuous perpendicular erosion of the sediment, more recent artifacts from above inevitably tend to mix with older ones below (with the exception of those collected from the cuts). This is a known limitation and drawback of surface collections and is mitigated by careful typological work and meticulous observation of the patina.

attribute a cultural characterization but to indicate a direction for further research on the matter.

Setting the aforementioned leaf bifacials aside, the Mousterian pieces bear similarities with other known open-air sites in the wider area, such as the site of Kokkinopilos, the lesser site of Galatas, and (for comparison purposes only) the Salzgitter-Lebenstedt (Tode et al., 1953), where a radiocarbon date of  $48,000 \pm 2,000$  BP was obtained.

## Conclusion

The experience gained so far in the field strongly indicates that the more one moves away from the Paleolithic Age coast inland, the more Levalloiso-Mousterian gradually decreases in favor of pure Mousterian technology. This retreat continues toward the Pindus mountain range with an increase in the appearance of earlier or more primitive forms of Mousterian. By this, I do not mean nor suppose the presence of Mousterian of Acheulean tradition, traces of which have not been found. The Pindus posed a formidable barrier for settlers and the diffusion of technology, so tracing the extent of this trend east of the mountain range is not in the scope of this paper.

Agia shares equally the Levalloiso-Mousterian primordial character with the Morfi upper and lower sites (less so in Karvounari 1 & 2) and with Corfu's Levalloiso-Mousterian concentrations on the remains of the *terra-rossa* sediments. The later work of C. N. Runnels and T. H. Van Andel (Runnels & van Andel, 2003) that focused mostly on the depositional environment of Agia failed to recognize the strong Levalloiso-Mousterian character of its industry, seemingly positioning all their findings under the Mousterian. The predominance of artifacts deriving from Levalloiso-Mousterian industry (almost 70% of the assemblage) overshadow the other Middle Paleolithic findings on this site, which are of the Levalloisian and the Mousterian industries.

The analysis of the findings leads to the following conclusions:

1. The important Middle Paleolithic Morfi upper and lower sites have a predominantly Levalloiso-Mousterian character. According to the model proposed by E. Higgs (Higgs et al., 1966 & 1968), a band of hunter-gatherers using Morfi as their home base ventured within a ~10km radius for hunting and gathering. The lack (so far) of a home base, cave, or shelter in the immediate vicinity of Agia, makes it reasonable

to suppose that Agia was used by the same band or members of the wider group who shared and exploited the same territory.

2. Vast remnants of relict terra-rossa depositions strewn with Levalloiso-Mousterian implements exist on the island of Corfu. Corfu became an island only after the end of the Boreal Stage (~7,600 B.P.) at the beginning of the Atlantic (i.e., during the Mesolithic); before that, it had continuously been subject to marine transgressions and regressions. The aforementioned roaming band(s) of hunter-gatherers may have been responsible for the diffusion of technologies on what is today the island of Corfu and, more precisely, primarily of the Levalloiso-Mousterian. The distance between the Agia site and the closest point on the island of Corfu today being just over 20km is worth noting.
3. The lack of cores combined with the abundance of bits and chips may have importance. As the erosion continues, the discovery of cores in the future can't be precluded; however the current minimal by-products of secondary knapping and retouch strongly suggest that the initial primary flaking was done elsewhere in another locality unknown to this study and perhaps at a source of readily available raw material. The presence of blanks may also suggest that blank pieces had been brought from such a source (quarry) and subjected to the final secondary retouch on site to meet the needs of the task at hand.
4. The observed lack of charred, fossilized, or petrified bones;<sup>34</sup> burned stones; and other remnants indicating hearths suggests that Agia was probably a "kill and butchering" site, after the American fashion of characterization for similar sites in the United States, with the hunting product taken *elsewhere* for consumption and further processing. However, further research including faunal studies would be required to confirm this characterization.
5. As proposed above, the hunted or gathered product was not consumed onsite at Agia but probably taken elsewhere. This word is not an easy way to deflect the question of the home base location. As far as the short summer conditions permit, even in the harsh conditions of Würm I, II & III, the Paleolithic band(s) could have

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3 Charred and petrified fragments of ribs were observed in 1978 in a gully in the Middle Paleolithic site of Stroya on Corfu, later identified as belonging to the genus *Sus* (whether they come from *Sus strozzi* or *Sus scrofa* remains unclear).



coped out in the open, but the severe winter conditions make the question of their permanent home base pertinent and compel one to provide an answer. Morfi is just one of the candidates in the vicinity of Agia. Beginning with the earliest Cambridge expedition directed by E. Higgs in 1962 and re-investigations in 1979 by the second Cambridge University team directed by G. Bailey, followed by the Thesprotia Project of the Finnish School at Athens 2004-8 directed by B. Forsén, and finishing with the Nikopolis Project, all seem to have failed to recognize the archeological potential of the Saint Arsenius cave (Agios Arsenios, 39° 18' 3.8" N 20° 29' 50.2" E, at ~340m) and its projecting shelter located on the presumed edge of the Paleolithic site of Morfi on the slope of Erimitis Hill (518m), which faces north and has a long, wide talus. The same goes for another similar geological feature known as the Abyss of the Styx (Varathro tis Stygos, 39° 17' 46" N 20° 30' 54" E, at ~190m), situated on the eastern slope of the same hill about 1.5km away from Saint Arsenius near the hamlet of Tzara on the way from Morfi to Kanalaki. This feature was a large, two-chambered cave with a westward-facing opening. The roof of the main chamber has collapsed over the eons and appears today as a depression, leaving intact the adjacent lower chamber of 30m in length, 20m in width, and 20m in height. The east side of this antechamber has a small pond formed from waters percolating from the ceiling. Colluviums consisting of rocky debris and red earth have covered the passage to the collapsed main chamber and much of the floor. These two caves on the slopes of Erimitis Hill are hard to miss, so their total absence from the literature is indeed surprising. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this hopefully accidental omission; however, unfamiliarity with the terrain, lack of resources, conflicting priorities, negligence, St. Arsenius cave functioning as a Christian Chapel, and safety concerns in the Abyss cave could have been some of these reasons. There is little doubt, however, that these caves warrant extensive future research and may prove to be of the outmost importance to the Paleolithic past of northwestern Greece, importance equal to or greater than that of Asprochaliko cave on the Louros River, with implications to the archeology of the nearby islands.

During the classification work and while following F. Bordes' (Bordes, 1979) typology of the French Paleolithic, the challenges previously encountered while working on assemblages from Corfu resurfaced. Artifacts that do not fit neatly in a defined type need to

be considered atypical or be reluctantly classed as the nearest type. However, when specimens of advanced conception, excellent craftsmanship, exquisite aesthetic value, and with fully evolved specialized features to fit particular needs consistently and repeatedly emerge, then due consideration must be given. This is meant as a call and an invitation to specialists to study the artifacts and to define, if appropriate, a new typology or type(s), at least for the Middle Paleolithic, that would be more applicable to Greece and the wider Balkan Peninsula and more representative of the area's rich prehistory.

The discovery and significance of the Middle Paleolithic site of Agia has put the planned investigation of the aforementioned shelters and recesses between Parga and Agia on hold, but future investigation must be scheduled. Their current use as sheep and goat pens may trace back to the long tradition of reuse, adaptation, and habitation of pre-existing structures, further supporting the need for investigation. These features may be connected to the nearby Paleolithic sites and be pieces of the broader puzzle.

Based on the current findings it can be said with a high degree of confidence that Agia is a site and an industry of advanced Middle Paleolithic in age and in technology and of Mousterian and, predominantly, Levalloiso-Mousterian types of Levalloisian tradition with elements of Eastern Mousterian affinities.<sup>45</sup>

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4 Outside Epirus, Mousterian industries containing variants of leaf-shaped points have occurred in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Rumania, as well as further north in Hungary and Czechia and Slovakia. However, no obvious connection has been found with the Szelettian leaf points, as they tend to merge into the Upper Paleolithic at ~31,000 BP.

5 Readers may wonder about the limited or poor amount of literature presented in this bibliography, but this paper is the product of an original research on the field and not a study based on the work and research of third parties, therefore only documents occasionally consulted are displayed.

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## RESUME EN FRANÇAIS

Plusieurs sites d'Age Paléolithique existent dans la Grèce Nord-Occidentale à coté de celles dans les Iles Ioniennes, une quantité qui va sans aucun doute augmenter. Elles appartiennent toutes au Paléolithique Moyen et Supérieur avec peux d'indications pour des phases plus vieilles.

Dans l'île de Corfoù, un endroit limité par rapport à l'Epire, une abondance de sites Paléolithiques a été enregistrée. Une brèche de quarante-neuf kilomètres vide de restes Paléolithiques reste le problème principal de la connexion culturelle et technologique entre les deux régions. Cette brèche vient alors se remplir en partie par la découverte du site d'Agia dans le District de Préveza sur la Grèce Nord Occidentale.

Au milieu d'un petit plateau quelques 345 mètres au-dessus du niveau moyen de la mer, une déposition d'argile altérée rouge érodé reposant en partie sur des calcaires et des marnes, ont livré un assemblage du Paléolithique moyen dans un excellent état de préservation. Des outils en silex comprenant des formes typiquement Moustériennes comme feuilles bifaciales, pointes sur lames-éclat, lames-éclat à retouche périphérique et beaucoup de blancs. Plano-convex et retouche rectiligne sont communs. Cette technique suggère des relations culturelles avec des industries similaires dans le Nord et l'Est. D'autre part la présence de pointes Levalloisiennes retouchées suggère autrement. L'absence totale des nucleus et la présence des pointes et des racloirs suggèrent qu'il s'agissait d'un site de chasse et de carnage. En tout cas de la recherche supplémentaire est exigée avant que des conclusions définitives soient faites.

# Serbia Hedging Its Bets Between the West and the East

Kristina Nikolic

**Abstract:** This article explains the evolution of Serbian political, economic, and security relations with the European Union, Russia, and China over the period of 2009-2023. The analysis of Serbia's ambivalent relations with these three partners relies on the existing literature regarding the strategies small states use in their dealings with the great powers. An overview of various theoretical concepts has ensured the identification of the hedging model as appropriate for understanding Serbia's approach toward external actors. In this regard, the study shows the inadequacy of labeling Serbian behavior as balancing, which is currently the dominant approach in the literature. The theoretical model of hedging as offered by the author Cheng-Chwee Kuik was chosen as suitable for analytically clarifying Serbia's behavior in recent years as a complex combination of the hedging components of economic pragmatism, binding engagement, limited bandwagoning, dominance denial, and indirect balancing. Such a theoretical interpretation of Serbian policy is important, as the country does not yet have a written form of its foreign policy strategy, nor is a more detailed doctrinal basis of this model found in the domestic literature. In practical terms, this study will help better understand how Serbia has found itself in the uncomfortable position of choosing between the West and the East due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Serbia, hedging, European Union, Russia, China



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## Introduction

“Vučić must have felt like Goethe’s Faust: two souls in one chest, one in love with Putin, the other pragmatic-Western, both wanting to separate from each other” (Deutsche Welle, 2022). This quote from Serbian journalist Andrei Ivani, refers to the complicated geopolitical reality in which Serbia currently finds itself. The Faustian dilemma between sanity and imagination metaphorically introduces the complexity of the geostrategic challenge that the Serbian President faced as a result of Russia beginning its aggression against Ukraine in 2022 and the external expectations for him to choose a side between the West and Russia. This decision would mean a choice between the economic benefits coming from the West and the historical and occasionally irrational attachment to Russia.

Serbia has been described by political analysts as “East in the West and West in the East,” (Lazić, 2003; Kolarić, 2019) and the current situation for the country has automatically brought a dose of political nervousness and social polarization regarding the current conflict. To act pragmatically, Serbia voted in favor of the UN General Assembly Resolution that condemned Russia’s violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Due to the domestic problems related to Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence, voting differently would contradict the fundamental interest in preserving the borders of states under the UN Charter. However, Serbia remained unaligned with any of the Western packages of sanctions against Russia. By such inaction, the country has put itself in an uncomfortable position concerning its Western partners.

To make things more complex, Serbia domestically has experienced alternate pro-Putin and pro-Ukraine protests, which presents a street reflection of the non-existent social consensus about the current conflict in Europe. The lack of social cohesion over such a critical issue also testifies to the non-existence of any social agreement concerning the country’s basic orientation toward the West and the East.

The current situation is the result of the country’s long-standing state of flux regarding its foreign policy. This situation implies strategic inconsistency and a variability of preferences toward the great powers over time. In this way, Serbia has become the scene of the confrontation of influence from the West and the East, with the absence of a complete commitment to one side or the other. This intricate approach has not been described in any official strategic foreign policy document. Serbia has yet to adopt a

national foreign policy strategy. For these reasons, this work aims to explain the evolution of such performance over the 2009-2023 period by offering a theoretical interpretation that will enhance the analytical clarification of what this approach entails, how it has been implemented in practice, and what its consequences are. In this sense, this paper's contribution is reflected in explaining the country's approach, which is inconsistent in practice and insufficiently elaborated upon at the strategic level. Also, this approach in the literature is most often referred to as balancing between East and West (Bekić, 2013; Djukanović, 2014; Varga, 2016). This paper will show that, for a concrete model of behavior, using the concept of hedging is more correct instead of the concepts of pure balancing or pure bandwagoning.

This study is limited to the 2009-2023 period. 2009 was chosen as the beginning of this analysis because, in August of that year, former Serbian President Boris Tadić had formulated the Serbian concept of hedging known as the four pillars of Serbian foreign policy. The four strategic foreign policy pillars included the European Union, Russia, USA, and China. This was a clear sign of a weakening of the country's predominantly pro-Western orientation in the early 2000s. Providing a brief review of the development of the overall foreign policy position of the country in international relations after the end of the Cold War in 1989 will be important for clarifying this and will provide insight into how Serbia has found itself in the position of implementing hedging in its relations with external actors.

The circumstances of war surrounding the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) led to the international isolation of Belgrade as a result of the sanctions United Nations Security Council Resolution 757 on May 30, 1992 imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). After the dissolution of the former SFRY, Serbia having been within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had had no foreign policy strategy from 1992-2000. This position was the result of it having been great burdened with the process of dissolution and the absence of any effort to bring the country into European and Euro-Atlantic structures (Djukanović, 2015).

Significant changes occurred after the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime on October 5, 2000. As Simić (2007, p. 263) stated, "The departure of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000 and Serbia's democratic changes led to Belgrade's shift towards the West and encouraged expectations that this would lead to a gradual calming and compromise

solution to the Kosovo crisis.” The country’s new Western approach could be seen in the October 2001 exposé by then Federal Foreign Minister Goran Svilanović. This document emphasized the country’s lean toward the EU and NATO (Djukanović, 2015). Political dialogue with the European Union was also established in practice. It began with the first visit of FRY President Vojislav Koštunica to the European Council in Biarritz in October 2000. Following this visit, the FRY officially joined the Stabilisation and Association Process the following month by signing the FRY-EU Framework Agreement on the implementation of the EU Assistance and Support Programme for FRY (Ladjevac, 2008). In addition, Serbia took steps toward joining NATO. In November 2006, the country was admitted to NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

However, the ongoing problems with Pristina have caused Serbia’s relationship with the leading countries in the West to begin strongly being questioned. First was the failed negotiations between the Albanian and Serbian sides in Vienna in 2006. The Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (i.e., the Ahtisaari Plan) was unacceptable to Serbia and caused great discontent among the domestic public (Simić, 2007). Due to the subsequent recognition of Kosovo’s independence in 2008 by the USA and leading EU member states, the Serbian side additionally began to openly seek new non-Western partners to support the preservation of its territorial integrity. This opened the door to hedging and gave space to Russia and China having greater geopolitical influence as an alternative to the West in the coming period of 2009-2023. As one of the interviewed experts pointed out:

*At first the emphasis was on Kosovo, but after that, Boris Tadić and Vuk Jeremić tried to use Russia and China more strongly as a way to get a better deal with the West, not only because of Kosovo but also because of the narrative that, if Europe does not accept us, we may have to look for someone else. (V. Vuksanović, personal communication, March 9, 2022)*

For these reasons, the foundations for the parallel development of cooperation with the EU, Russia, and China were laid down in 2009. Namely, not only was the foreign policy of the four pillars officially formulated in 2009, but concrete steps were also taken during the same year to develop cooperation with several different sides. In February 2009, former Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremić and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed mutual interest in building a strategic partnership



between the two countries (Petrović, 2009). In August 2009, Serbia and China signed a joint statement on the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two countries, while in December 2009, Serbia applied for EU membership. This has created a wide space for Serbia to hedge its bets between all the mentioned options from 2009 to the present. Therefore, the focus of this analysis will be on showing how this approach has been maintained and implemented throughout the entire 2009-2023 period.

The research is based on the combination of semi-structured interviews with Serbian foreign policy experts and the analysis of secondary statistical data on Serbian foreign trade and foreign direct investments (FDI) as collected from the UN Comtrade Database, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, and National Bank of Serbia. The input obtained from Serbian experts is important for identifying the key factors that have guided the state's behavior in the field of foreign policy, economics, and security. Indicators of economic cooperation are needed to explain the hedging component of economic pragmatism in the case of Serbia. However, the study is limited to input from Serbian experts, which excluded foreign researchers from the interview process. In a thematic sense, the scope of this research only latently includes the US geopolitical influence in Serbia due to attention being primarily paid to Serbia's relations with the EU within the accession process and the parallel ties that the country has achieved with Russia and China during the observed period.

## **The State of the Theoretical Debate**

Three general theoretical explanations are found for the possible strategic positioning of small countries concerning great powers: balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. During the Cold War, the theoretical debate on states' behaviors toward great powers was dominated by the concepts of balancing and bandwagoning. Balancing was defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat, while bandwagoning implied alignment with the source of danger (Walt, 1987). The premise of traditional approaches was that states always take clear sides in the face of a threat that can be identified under the conditions of the bipolar international structure. However, the collapse of bipolarity in 1989 reduced the practical applicability of traditional Cold War theories. As Ciociari and Haacke (2019, p. 368) pointed out:

Those theories suggested a dichotomy that belied state practice in the post-Cold War period. Rather than taking clear sides to address ascertained threats or ride the coattails of a surging great power, many states' behavior suggested efforts to mitigate risk in uncertain strategic conditions.

In this way, the hedging model as a strategy for dealing with new uncertainties has become increasingly present in recent debates as an alternative to traditional Cold War approaches. The concept of hedging was not originally developed within the discipline of international relations but rather was taken from the field of economics and finance, where it implies a strategy aimed at offsetting the potential losses of an accompanying venture (Boon, 2016). The concept was adopted in the theory of international relations, but no consensus exists among political scientists on how to define a hedging model. As an example, hedging has been defined as:

*A set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality. Instead, they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another.* (Goh, 2005, p. 8).

In contrast to Goh, Salman (2017, p. 354) offered a more structural explanation of hedging that occurs under the conditions of power diffusion during the transformation from unipolarity to another system and noted, "Strategic hedging is used by second-tier states in order to improve their relative position *vis-a-vis* the system leader."

These different concepts testify to the developed theoretical basis for understanding how small states strategically position themselves against large powers. With that in mind, situating the behavior of Serbia in one of the general conceptions becomes necessary. This will help the theoretical clarification of the Serbian approach in the recent period (2009-2023).

### **Theoretical Explanation of the Serbian Case Study**

No evidence is found to indicate the adoption of pure forms of balancing or bandwagoning in Serbian behavior. Serbia has avoided both forms with its policy of military neutrality proclaimed by the Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and the Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia in 2007. This Resolution

declared Serbian military neutrality toward existing military alliances until a referendum was eventually called to make a final decision on the issue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, 2009). The concept of military neutrality excluded Serbia's potential NATO membership, which would be the case of the pure balancing strategy against Russia and China. It also excludes a pure bandwagoning strategy, which would hypothetically mean joining the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or forming some military alliance with China. Avoiding both models, Serbia has opted for a hedging strategy.

Within the literature on hedging, shortcomings can be noted regarding the application of the mentioned Goh (2005) and Salman (2017) models to the case of Serbia. Goh's model envisioned Chinese domination or hegemony, American withdrawal from the region, and an unstable regional order that states want to avoid by implementing a hedging strategy. While explaining these conditions, Goh only had Southeast Asian countries in mind. On this basis, the model remained limited to the growing Chinese-American rivalry in the region. Serbia's security environment is different due to the lack of visibility for this competition as a result of the reduced US interest in Balkan politics and leanings toward other areas (Vujačić, 2015), as well as China's geographical distance from the region.

Salman's (2017) model operationalized hedging strategy in the foreign policy of great powers or middle powers whose position strengthens in terms of power diffusion from the system leader (i.e., countries such as Russia, China, and Brazil in their relations with the US). Therefore, the model does not consider the behavior of small countries, which makes it inadequate for analyzing the Serbian approach. Bearing in mind the weaknesses of these theoretical frameworks regarding their potential application to Serbia's behavior, the next section will first describe in more detail the theoretical model that is considered adequate, after which three sources of its relevance will be explained.

### **Cheng-Chwee Kuik's Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical model offered by Malaysian author Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2008) has been chosen because of its advantages over the above-represented hedging models: 1) the possibility of adaptation outside the Southeast Asian security context, which is not the case with Goh's model; 2) the ability to apply it to small states' strategies in their

relations with the great powers in the system, which is not the case with Salman's model, which is reserved for great powers' or middle powers' strategies. These advantages will be shown in a more detailed explanation of the model itself, as well as in the justification of its relevance in describing Serbia's behavior, which has three sources: 1) Serbian fulfillment of all three conditions that Kuik envisages for the hedging strategy to be implemented, 2) evidence of implementation of all five components of a hedging strategy in the spectrum between pure balancing and pure bandwagoning in the Serbian approach to the EU, Russia, and China, and 3) the existence of motive from political elites, which Kuik predicts for the strategy to be applied.

### **Kuik's Definition of Hedging**

Kuik (2008, p. 163) defined hedging as "A behavior in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects, under the situation of high-uncertainties and high-stakes." Kuik also perceives small states as actors that lack the resources to mitigate risks on their own. For this reason, great powers often play a crucial role in a small state's risk management by providing them with the needed capacities to deal with uncertainties. The criterion that determines the behavior of a small country toward a great power is the way it is perceived by the political elites in the country. If the great power is seen as an imminent security threat, the state is likely to pursue a balancing strategy *vis-à-vis* the actor. Kuik states that, in the case when the great power is seen as a source of aid, the small state will opt for bandwagoning. More often, circumstances exist where elites perceive uncertain risks more than any imminent threat. These uncertainties result from the small states' inability to anticipate how the power structure will fluctuate over time. For this reason, small countries will often tend to hedge and avoid taking sides or speculating about the future of great power relations. According to Kuik, whether such a tendency will be actualized as a behavior is influenced by three factors: 1) the absence of an immediate threat (that might compel a state to ally with a power for protection), 2) the absence of any ideological fault lines (that might rigidly divide states into opposing camps), and 3) the absence of an all-out great power rivalry (that might force smaller states to choose sides). Hedging behavior is possible only when all three conditions are fulfilled.

## **Relevance of Kuik's Theoretical Model in the Case of Serbia (2009-2023)**

### **Conditions of the Serbian Strategic Environment**

The relevance of Kuik's model to the analysis of Serbian orientations toward Russia, China, and the EU relies on three sources. The first source is the fulfillment of all three above-mentioned strategic conditions that Kuik predicts for the hedging strategy to be implemented. Namely, Serbia's National Security Strategy of 2019 does not identify any immediate security threats that could compel a state to ally with power for protection. As pointed out in the Strategy, "Armed aggression against the Republic of Serbia in the coming period is unlikely, but it cannot be completely ruled out" (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2019, p. 16). The external threat is presented as latent rather than an immediate threat to Serbian security, so the need to ally with any great power for protection has not been recognized.

In addition to this, ideological fault lines and an all-out great power rivalry are not recognized as characteristics of the strategic environment in which Serbia finds itself. As stated in the Strategy, "Political, economic, cultural, and security relations in the world take place in a global multipolar and multilateral environment in which the balance of power and complex interdependence of states is increasingly manifested" (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2019, p. 13). The absence of an immediate threat, a multipolar environment that does not pressure the country to take either side, and the recognized interdependence of states instead of an all-out great power rivalry represents a suitable basis for implementing a hedging strategy in Serbian foreign policy.

However, the conflict in Ukraine has contributed to the impression that the Serbian Security Strategy of 2019 is becoming a reflection of an outdated and naive perception of the country's strategic environment. The current war calls into question the viability of hedging in the future due to Western countries' deteriorated relations with Russia (i.e., the growth of all-great power rivalry in the international system). Hand in hand with this is an intense value distancing between Russia and the West. Although no ideological fault lines exist as had been in the Cold War, the value distance of conservative Russia, which perceives the West as steeped in decadence, and the West's view toward Russia as a non-democratic authoritarian system, calls into question the mentioned

Serbian notion of a lack of radical value division in Europe. This further implies the risk of Serbian hedging's survival under these conditions.

### **Serbian Implementation of Hedging Policy Options**

Regarding the operationalization of the hedging strategy, Kuik (2008) points out that hedging consists of pursuing multiple policy options between the balancing-bandwagoning spectrum. It implies return-maximizing options such as economic pragmatism, binding engagement, and limited bandwagoning, as well as risk-contingency options such as dominance denial and indirect balancing. The analysis has shown all five components to have been present in the Serbian approach toward Russia, China, and the EU during the 2009-2023 period.

#### **Serbian Economic Pragmatism**

Economic pragmatism refers to a policy wherein a state seeks to maximize economic gains from its direct trade and investment links with great power, regardless of any political problems that may exist between them (Kuik, 2008). This component implies a relationship in which a small country strives to achieve multiple economic benefits from a great power through trade flows, direct investments, energy supply, reconstruction projects, and loans. In this regard, a comparative analysis of Serbia's economic cooperation with the EU, Russia, and China based on the indicators of trade volume, the number of foreign direct investments (FDI), and secured loans reveals the country to have a very lucrative and pragmatic attitude about the search for economic gains from these three actors.

When addressing the total trade in goods, the European Union can be noted to have been unquestionably a much more important trading partner for Serbia compared to Russia or China during the period under review (Figure 1).

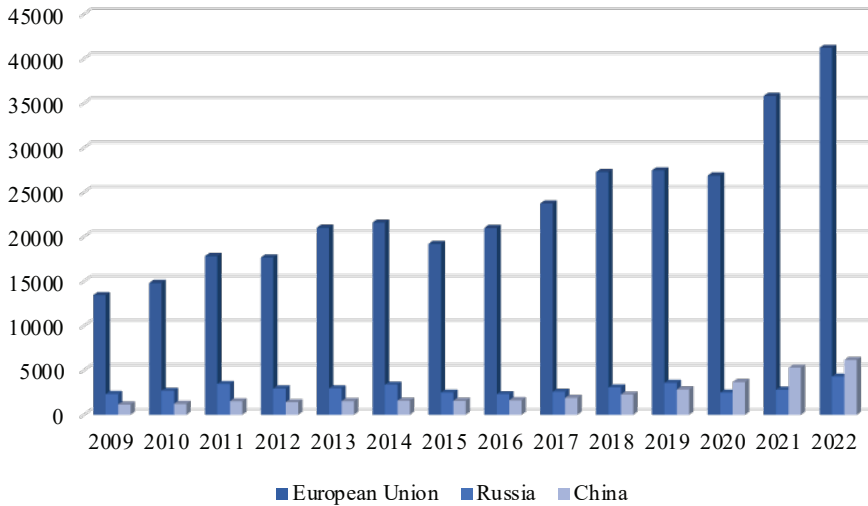


Figure 1. Serbia’s total trade in goods with the EU, Russia, and China (in million USD; Source: author’s calculations and representations based on UN Comtrade Database and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Trade Statistics).

As a candidate country for EU membership and an associate member of the European Union, Serbia has successfully used the trade preferences arising from the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) and increased its trade flows with the EU over time (Table 1). Although an upward trend has occurred in both exports and imports, exports from Serbia to the European Union have grown faster than imports from the European Union to Serbia. In this regard, a decrease in Serbia’s trade deficit has occurred over time.

**Table 1.**

Volume of Goods Traded Between Serbia and the EU

Year	Exported goods (value in million USD)	Imported goods (value in million USD)	Total traded goods (value in million USD)	Balance of traded goods (value in million USD)	Coverage rate of imported over exported goods (%)
2009	4,478	8,960	13,438	-4,482	49.98
2010	5,615	9,184	14,799	-3,569	61.14
2011	6,791	11,025	17,816	-4,234	61.6
2012	6,597	11,056	17,653	-4,459	59.67
2013	8,751	12,256	21,007	-3,505	71.4
2014	9,135	12,453	21,588	-3,318	73.36
2015	8,348	10,847	19,195	-2,499	76.96
2016	9,313	11,667	20,980	-2,354	79.82
2017	10,596	13,133	23,729	-2,537	80.68
2018	12,222	15,034	27,256	-2,812	81.3
2019	12,450	14,987	27,437	-2,537	83.07
2020	12,007	14,864	26,871	-2,857	80.78
2021	16,493	19,316	35,809	-2,823	85.37
2022	18,627	22,587	41,214	-3,957	82.47
January – April 2023	6,657	7,456	14,113	-799	89.28

Source: Author's calculations and representations based on Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, External Trade

Serbia's economic pragmatism regarding trade with Russia was reflected in the use of trade preferences stemming from the free trade regime that exists between the two countries. This regime was established by the free trade agreement (FTA) signed between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Russian Federation in August 2000. Serbia inherited the rights and obligations under the agreement as a successor to the former FRY. In the meantime, the agreement was amended by free trade exception protocols signed in 2009 and 2011. This is a very suitable legal basis for the development of trade relations between the two countries, as around 99% of products are exempt from customs payments (Simić, 2019).



When addressing Russian imports, it absolutely dominated with crude oil and petroleum gas regarding total imports to Serbia (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2009-2023). This composition of imports from Russia reflects Serbia's inelastic demand for Russian gas and oil. However, Serbia's economic pragmatism in this field can also be seen through the tendency to increase Serbian exports to the Russian market (Table 2). Exports from Serbia to Russia have risen about threefold between 2009-2023, but Serbia's trade deficit remained constant. Serbian exports to Russia were dominated by apples, pears, packaged medicaments, knitted socks, and plastic floor coverings (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2009-2023).

**Table 2.**

Volume of Goods Traded Between Serbia and Russia

Year	Exported goods (value in million USD)	Imported goods (value in million USD)	Total traded goods (value in million USD)	Balance of traded goods (value in million USD)	Coverage rate of imported over exported goods (%)
2009	349.424	1,969.931	2,319.355	-1,620.507	17.74
2010	534.746	2,157.150	2,691.896	-1,622.404	24.79
2011	792.310	2,654.225	3,446.535	-1,861.915	29.85
2012	866.197	2,076.630	2,942.827	-1,210.433	41.71
2013	1,062.701	1,903.546	2,966.247	-840.845	55.83
2014	1,029.133	2,340.354	3,369.487	-1,311.221	43.97
2015	724.825	1,748.539	2,473.364	-1,023.714	41.45
2016	794.504	1,510.177	2,304.681	-715.673	52.6
2017	995.477	1,588.747	2,584.224	-593.27	62.66
2018	1,023.572	2,037.087	3,060.659	-1,013.515	50.25
2019	977.178	2,583.949	3,561.127	-1,606.771	37.82
2020	911.035	1,566.237	2,477.272	-655.202	58.17
2021	996.156	1,806.056	2,802.212	-809.9	55.16
2022	1,194.5	3,083.8	4,278.3	-1,889.3	38.73
January – April 2023	451.0	956.5	1,407.5	-514.5	47.15

Source: author's calculation and representation based on UN Comtrade Database, Trade Statistics

Importance is also had in pointing out that, despite the free trade regime and an increase in trade volume during the observed period, factors were found that disturbed Serbian pragmatic intentions related to trading with Russia. As an interview with one economist indicated:

*The main obstacles in Serbia's exports to the Russian market are the geographical distance, an insufficient supply of goods by assortment and quantity, large size differences between the two countries, high transaction costs, poorly developed distribution channels, failure to meet standards for exports of goods. Russia's obstacles to exports to Serbia are the relatively small Serbian market, low consumer pay, low quality of products relative to EU products, non-competitive prices, limited assortment.* (D. Mladenović, personal communication, March 29, 2022)

Traded goods between Serbia and China were not subject to any preferential treatment. The two countries have yet to establish a free trade regime, although announcements occurred in the Serbian media in the first half of 2022 about signing an FTA with China by the end of the year, as well as the statement “only the sky will be the limit” for the Serbian economy after signing such an agreement (Radio Free Europe, 2022). Such a move would send an unequivocal political message about not planning Serbia's entry into the European Union any time soon. Given that the EU is a customs union, the contract would cease to apply with membership. As one of the interviewed experts pointed out:

*Now the topic is being raised for us to conclude a free trade agreement with China, which would show that we are not counting on European membership for the next 10 years. This is because in practice, it takes about 10 years for a free trade agreement to start showing full effects.* (V. Medjak, personal communication, April 5, 2022)

Although no free trade regime occurred, trade between Serbia and China did increase between 2009-2023. A constant trade deficit was seen on the Serbian side, as well as an increase in coverage rates of imports by exports from 0.79% in 2009 to 23.41% in 2022 and to 25.8% in the first four months of 2023 (Table 3). This shows a high level of Serbian pragmatic intention toward increasing its exports to the Chinese market.

**Table 3.**

Volume of Goods Traded Between Serbia and China

Year	Exported goods (value in million USD)	Imported goods (value in million USD)	Total traded goods (value in million USD)	Balance of traded goods (value in million USD)	Coverage rate of imported over exported goods (%)
2009	8.954	1,135.316	1,144.27	-1,126.362	0.79
2010	7.258	1,202.476	1,209.734	-1,195.218	0.6
2011	15.257	1,488.491	1,503.748	-1,473.234	1.02
2012	19.767	1,385.477	1,405.244	-1,365.71	1.43
2013	9.119	1,509.567	1,518.686	-1,500.448	0.6
2014	14.205	1,561.097	1,575.302	-1,546.892	0.9
2015	20.245	1,540.212	1,560.457	-1,519.967	1.31
2016	25.269	1,603.040	1,628.309	-1,577.771	1.58
2017	62.158	1,819.442	1,881.6	-1,757.284	3.42
2018	91.725	2,167.522	2,259.247	-2,075.797	4.23
2019	329.168	2,507.661	2,836.829	-2,178.493	13.13
2020	377.027	3,290.107	3,667.134	-2,913.08	11.46
2021	971.749	4,308.792	5,280.541	-3,337.043	22.55
2022	1,166.5	4,982.4	6,148.9	-3,815.9	23.41
January – April 2023	378.1	1,465.6	1,843.7	-1,087.5	25.8

Source: author's calculation and representation based on UN Comtrade Database, Trade Statistic

Foreign direct investments make up an important part of Serbia's GDP at about 22% (Vukadinović, 2023). These investments reduce the domestic unemployment rate and bring innovative technologies into the country. For these reasons, Serbia has even tried to facilitate investment influx by providing tax breaks and subsidies for investors. In this regard, the country is less interested in where investors come from as long as they create positive effects on domestic economic growth. These facts also explain the hedging approach of economic pragmatism toward the EU, Russia, and China in this field.

The largest number of investments in the observed period was provided by EU countries. Serbian membership candidate status was an important trigger for large capital inflows from the EU (Figure 2).

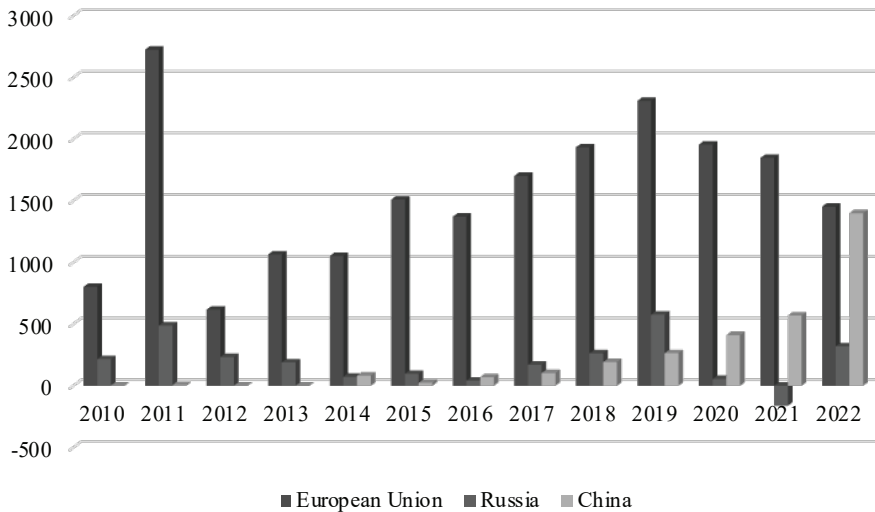


Figure 2. FDI from the EU, Russia, and China in Serbia (in million EUR; Source: author's calculation and representation based on National Bank of Serbia, FDI by country).

Meanwhile, Russian investments lacked steady growth during the observed period, but this country did manage to secure significant dominance in Serbia's energy sector when 51% of Serbia's national oil refining company was purchased by Russia's Gazprom in December 2008. It sold for EUR 400 million, without the previous announcement of the tender. The Russian company was also granted the right to exploit the oil deposits in Serbia with a favorable mining lease (Čongradin, 2015). Although this represents an important Russian economic foothold in Serbia, the net value of Russian direct investments remained below 600 million EUR annually (Table 4).

**Table 4.**

*Net FDI from Russia to Serbia*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Assets (in million EUR)</i>	<i>Liabilities (in million EUR)</i>	<i>Net FDI from Russia in Serbia (assets - liabilities in million EUR)</i>
2009	not available	not available	not available
2010	-3.3	216.2	-219.5
2011	-24.7	488.5	-513.2
2012	-0.8	232.5	-233.3
2013	-16.5	189.7	-206.2
2014	3.7	73.5	-69.8
2015	8.0	96.4	-88.4
2016	21.1	41.1	-20.0
2017	7.4	170.4	-163.0
2018	14.7	263.0	-248.3
2019	18.1	576.8	-558.7
2020	53.1	55.5	-2.4
2021	27.0	-162.2	189.1
2022	10.1	319.8	-309.8
2023	not available	not available	not available

Source: author's calculation and representation based on National Bank of Serbia, FDI by country

In the period before 2016, China had not positioned itself as an important direct investor in Serbia (Table 5). This is evident in the very low values of Chinese direct investments during the 2010-2013 period. The increase in Chinese FDI in 2016 can be attributed to the first major Chinese direct investment in the form of the acquisition of the Smederevo steel mill by the HBIS Group, at a worth of 46 million EUR (Serbian Monitor, 2019).

**Table 5.***Net FDI from China to Serbia*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Assets (in million EUR)</i>	<i>Liabilities (in million EUR)</i>	<i>Net FDI from Russia in Serbia (assets - liabilities in million EUR)</i>
2009	not available	not available	not available
2010	0.0	2.0	-2.0
2011	0.0	6.0	-6.0
2012	0.0	1.0	-1.0
2013	0.0	-0.4	0.4
2014	0.0	82.5	-82.5
2015	0.0	24.1	-24.1
2016	1.4	69.5	-68.2
2017	0.0	103.5	-103.5
2018	1.3	191.8	-190.5
2019	3.8	264.2	-260.4
2020	0.0	410.3	-410.3
2021	0.0	569.4	-569.4
2022	-0.2	1,399.3	-1,399.5
2023	not available	not available	not available

Source: author's calculation and representation based on National Bank of Serbia, FDI

In this case, Serbian pragmatism toward China stemmed from the fact that Chinese companies were ready to take business risks and save non-profit industrial complexes from bankruptcy, in addition to the general need for investments. As one interviewed researcher pointed out:

*The Chinese bought old industrial plants, such as RTB Bor and the Smederevo steel mill, which were old communist industrial plants, almost non-competitive in the European market, but which employ many Serbian working families. They were the only ones willing to take risks and thus save them. Now, these investments are the channels of Chinese influence in the country. (V. Vuksanović, personal communication, March 9, 2022)*

Serbia has also demonstrated its economic pragmatism toward the three actors in terms of seeking loans for reconstruction projects in the field of railway transport, energy sector development, and reforms of its domestic system to gain EU membership. The accession process, which includes preparations for membership in the form of strengthening the rule of law, public administration reform, and raising environmental standards, has made the EU the most important contributor of grants and loans in the country. The main mechanism through which grants have been provided to Serbia has been the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). According to data from the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, the country was provided with 2.166 billion EUR through the IPA (2007-2018), while 0.378 billion EUR was given to Serbia through programs that included several countries during the period from 2014-2017 (EU in Serbia, n.d.).

However, the analysis also showed a significant increase in Chinese loans to Serbia throughout the 2009-2023 period. Cooperation between the two countries in this field began with the signing of the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation in the Field of Infrastructure on August 20, 2009. The loans were primarily provided for the development of Serbian road and rail transport by engaging Chinese companies and workers within these projects. Some of the most important projects financed through Chinese loans in Serbia were the construction of the 1.5 km-long Zemun-Borča Bridge, the revitalization of the two existing 350 MW blocks of the Kostolac-B thermopower plant, and the construction of a heating pipe from Obrenovac to Novi Beograd (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2010, 2012, 2020).

Serbia also pragmatically sought Russian loans during the observed period, but Russia was not intensively engaged in this aspect of economic cooperation. Some of the Russian loans were aimed at consolidating Serbia's national budget and reconstructing the country's railway sector, such as the loan provided for financing 85% of the value of the construction works in the rail sector in Serbia, as well as the loan borrowed for the construction of electrical infrastructure on the Stara Pazova-Novı Sad and Valjevo-Vrbnica-state border with Montenegro railway sections (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2013, 2019).

## Serbian Binding Engagement

Binding engagement consists of engagement, which entails a policy in which a small country seeks to establish and maintain contacts with a great power to create channels of communication and influence the power's policy choices, and binding, which refers to an act in which a state seeks to institutionalize its relations with a power by enmeshing it in regularized diplomatic activities. Combining binding and engagement serves to integrate and socialize a great power into the established order and to neutralize the revisionist tendency of the power's behavior (Kuik, 2008). During the 2009-2023 period, Serbia applied this policy, striving to shape great power policy choices through close diplomatic interaction.

The form Serbian binding engagement took involved the accession negotiations with the EU. The negotiations started by holding the first Intergovernmental Conference of Serbia and the EU in Brussels on January 21, 2014, and this model of regulated communication continued in this way annually in the period that followed. Serbia has achieved significant benefits from the entire process, such as trade liberalization with the EU, visa liberalization, and moneys received from EU funds to prepare for membership. During the observed period, however, the country also developed binding diplomatic arrangements with both China and Russia.

In parallel with the EU accession process, Serbia engaged in regularized dialogue with China within Framework 16+1. This transregional platform gathers China and 16 Central and Eastern European countries, including Serbia, with the intent of deepening their economic, infrastructural, and cultural relations in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is also a way in which China, as a rising great power, was socialized in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Serbia's binding engagement consisted of regularly taking part in annual multilateral meetings of the countries' prime ministers within the platform. Belgrade even had the opportunity to host the multilateral meeting in 2014 in the presence of the former Chinese PM Li Keqiang. In this way, Serbia managed to achieve significant economic and political gains from China and influence its policies. For example, the 16+1 platform provided an opportunity to attract Chinese investments and loans for individual and regional infrastructure projects. One of these infrastructure projects is the construction of a high-speed railroad from Belgrade to Budapest (Jojić, 2017).



In addition, Serbia has managed to coordinate politically with China within this mechanism. As Jojić (2017, p. 10) indicated, “A good example of that coordination is a frequent exchange of political ideas, intentions, and interests between officials of Serbia and China at bilateral or multilateral meetings within the framework of forums and summits of The Belt and the Road’ and the 16+1 initiatives.” Also, the participation in the Trilateral Group of China, Hungary, and Serbia for Traffic and Infrastructure Cooperation illustrates another Serbian approach of binding China to discuss sitting at the same table. The meetings within the Group had the purpose to review the progress of the Reconstruction and Modernization Project of the Belgrade-Budapest Railway by considering the working plans and reaching a consensus with China on the common targets in the region (China Railway Group Limited, 2019).

Regarding Russia, Serbia’s policy of binding engagement was primarily based on close diplomatic interactions with this country aimed at preserving Russia’s decision not to recognize Kosovo’s independence. In this regard, importance is had in mentioning the diplomatic campaign of withdrawing its recognition of Kosovo, which Serbia began to actively lead after the early parliamentary elections in 2014 and the arrival of Ivica Dačić as Serbian Foreign Minister. In such an engagement, developing close diplomatic interaction with Russia and binding with it to support Serbia in this diplomatic lobbying were important. In several cases, Russian diplomacy has indeed opened the door to the actions of Serbian diplomats. One of the interviewed experts confirmed this by pointing out:

*There are indications that Russian diplomacy has assisted Serbia in the process of withdrawing Kosovo’s recognition. In several cases, like in Latin America or Africa, Russian diplomacy has opened the door to Serbian diplomats. For example, the Central African Republic withdrew its recognition of Kosovo six months after its evident improvement of cooperation with Russia in 2019. (I. Novaković, personal communication, March 8, 2022)*

In addition, Serbia applies a binding engagement policy vis-à-vis Russia by fulfilling its obligations stemming from the observer status granted to the country in 2013 within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This represents an institutionalized channel of communication with Russia, as the most influential member of the CSTO, through Serbia’s regular participation in the annual meetings of the CSTO

Parliamentary Assembly. Therefore, this is a way Serbia binds Russia to sit at a common table, sending a message to this great power about their reliable security partnership. Such a policy is also an attempt to neutralize Russia's potential dissatisfaction with Serbia's security cooperation with NATO in the form of military exercises or participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

### **Serbian Limited Bandwagoning**

Limited bandwagoning is a policy based on a political partnership manifested in policy coordination regarding selective issues, with voluntary deference given to a larger partner. Compared to pure bandwagoning, this kind of behavior implies that a small state may opt for political coordination of attitudes with a certain great power while keeping good relations with its competitor in the region (Kuik, 2008). This kind of approach was particularly clear in the field of Serbian alignment with the declarations and measures of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) within the Negotiation Chapter 31: Foreign, Security and Defense Policy.

The European Commission's annual progress reports on Serbia state an exceptional Serbian sensitivity to be present regarding EU declarations and measures concerning Russia and China. Serbia has a clear tendency to prioritize foreign policy cooperation with these two countries and a consistent lack of alignment with the EU measures that are disadvantageous for them, especially when regarding Russian sanctions over the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The key reason for this Serbian act is Russia and China's non-recognition of Kosovo's independence, which is an important asset to Serbia within the UN Security Council. In this sense, Serbia's sensitivity towards these two states goes hand in hand with their support for the country's territorial integrity, which has not been the case with most EU member states. The political partnership with China went even a step further with Serbia's open support for the One China principle (including support over disputes in the South China Sea and Tibet).

This type of policy has remained at the level of limited bandwagoning, because Serbia has also aligned itself with EU measures that are not at odds with its fundamental domestic interests. This approach has survived for an extended period with moderate criticism from European officials. The war in Ukraine, however, has led to greater

diplomatic pressure on the country to change its position and impose sanctions on Russia. This is another factor that calls into question the survival of Serbian hedging under current circumstances.

### **Serbian Dominance Denial**

Dominance denial aims to prevent and deny the emergence of a predominant power that may exert undue interference on smaller states. This political behavior implies that small states, either individually or collectively, seek to avoid the dominance of great power by developing their resilience and strengthening their collective diplomatic coat (Kuik, 2008). This component of hedging arises from the small country's tendency to avoid excessive influence from any of the major powers, especially when that influence begins to threaten its basic internal interests. Serbian implementation of this theoretical concept began to develop in practice in 2004 when former President Boris Tadić formulated the three pillars of Serbian foreign policy and stated, "Today our foreign policy priorities are: European integration, good neighborhood, and balanced relations with the three centripetal points of world politics: Brussels, Washington D.C., and Moscow" (Knežević, 2010, p. 188).

However, due to growing problems on resolving the Kosovo issue and noticing that Serbia's interests conflict with those of the US and most EU member states in terms of Kosovo's statehood, China's importance to Serbia has increased over time. In this regard, after the same president returned from Beijing in 2009, he advanced this foreign policy stance by including China alongside the EU, USA, and Russia in his four pillars of foreign policy (Radio Television of Serbia [RTS], 2009). Such an evolution cannot be understood alone in the context of the appropriation of benefits from all four sides; it must also be understood in light of avoiding any of their overly dominant and occasionally negative influence on Serbian internal affairs.

### **Serbian Indirect Balancing**

The last hedging policy in Kuik's (2008) theoretical model is indirect balancing, which implies that the state strengthens security cooperation with different external actors and upgrades its military capabilities with the intent of preparing for contingencies without having a specifically named external threat. Serbia has continuously implemented this hedging component throughout the observed period of 2009-2023.

Serbian security cooperation with the European Union took place within the EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) framework. The EU accession process involves expectations from a candidate country to prove its commitment within this specific part of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This cooperation has manifested itself in three ways. The first form was the participation of Serbian personnel in EU military missions such as EU NAVFOR Somalia – Operation Atalanta, EUTM Somalia, EUTM Mali, EUFOR RCA, and EUMAM RCA. This engagement was not only a way for the country to build its image as a credible security partner of the EU, but also a way to improve the practical experience and knowledge of the sent personnel as part of an indirect balancing policy. The two remaining forms of security cooperation with the EU were the accession of the EU HELBROC battle group in 2017, as well as the signing of an administrative cooperation agreement between the Serbian Ministry of Defense and the European Defense Agency in 2013, which secured the joint certification of military ammunition. This increased the space for Serbian arms exports to EU countries.

However, the country has also actively bought or received weapons donated from Russia and China throughout the period. To mention just a few transactions, this cooperation has involved the purchase of two new Russian medium-haul Mi-17v5 transport helicopters in 2016, the donation of six MIG-29s from Russia in 2017, and the purchase of one Russian battery of six Pantsir-S1 anti-aircraft vehicles in 2020, as well as the recent purchase of the FK-3 missile defense system from China that was delivered to Serbia in 2022 (RTS, 2020; Srbija Danas, 2022). This was a way to strengthen domestic military capabilities while leaving open options for cooperation with all interested actors. Factors contributing to successful cooperation with Russia in the field of armaments involved the experience of the Serbian army in using Soviet military techniques and the affordable prices of Russian weapons. Meanwhile, security cooperation with China has remained at a lower level compared to Russia and has manifested itself through joint patrols of Serbian and Chinese police officers on the streets of Belgrade and Novi Sad in September 2019, as well as a joint police exercise in November of the same year. Also, several arms transactions were conducted from China to Serbia. Factors that contributed to this cooperation are the increased economic cooperation between China and Serbia, which has encouraged security cooperation, Serbia's gradual seeking of an alternative to Russia due to Western diplomatic pressures to stop maintaining security links with this country, and also China's aspirations to gain access to the European defense market through military cooperation with Serbia.

## Serbian Elites' Motivation for Hedging

A small state's strategy toward a great power is driven by an internal process of regime legitimization in which the ruling elites evaluate and then utilize the opportunities and challenges of the great power for their goal of consolidating their authority to govern at home (Kuik, 2008). Serbian political elites use parallel cooperation with the EU, Russia, and China to obtain support from the domestic electorate. In this way, hedging becomes a convenient position from which to win the support of various parts of a Serbian society divided into pro-West and pro-East groups. Such a tendency shows the last source of the relevance of Kuik's model for explaining Serbian hedging. As Kuik's model predicts, the country's external orientations are being instrumentalized to legitimize the power of political elites at home.

This approach was often clear in the discourse of the current Serbian President Vučić. He has openly presented the Chinese investment in the Smederevo steel mill as one of the greatest successes of Serbian authorities (Srbija Danas, 2021). The President has also applied similar rhetoric to Russia after meeting with President Putin in November 2021, when Serbia was emphasized to have received an incredibly fair price for gas (B92, 2021). The President's public statements have also targeted the EU, as in the imminent claim that Serbia's place is in the EU and that this path needs to continue forward in a dignified way (Nešić, 2022). The motive for such performances is always the instrumentalization of foreign policy to receive the support of the domestic electoral body.

## Conclusion

This work has aimed to offer a theoretical interpretation of the development of Serbian political, economic, and security relations with the European Union, Russia, and China over the period of 2009-2023. The need for such an analytical clarification of Serbian behavior towards the three actors arose from the fact that Serbia currently does not have its own written foreign policy strategy document, nor does a more detailed doctrinal foundation of this model of behavior exist in the domestic literature. In a theoretical sense, the research contribution of this paper is reflected in the operationalization of Cheng-Chwee Kuik's (2008) hedging model regarding the case of Serbia and the rejection of the currently dominant position in the literature regarding the balancing model as being adequate for understanding Serbia's ambivalent approach toward

external partners. The practical contribution of this analysis involves the detailed illustrations it offers of how the five hedging components are applied regarding Serbian behavior, as well as the help it provides for better understanding how Serbia found itself under pressure to choose a side between the West and Russia due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

The first research step in this paper included an overview of the status of the theoretical debate on the three general strategic positioning of small states concerning great powers: balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. The study determined that, during the period of the Cold War and the bipolar structure of the international system, the dominant theoretical conceptualizations had been balancing and bandwagoning. In understanding these two concepts, the authors started from the assumption that the state always takes a clear position when facing a threat by allying with the source of danger (bandwagoning) or forming a coalition with others against it (balancing). However, the collapse of bipolarity in 1989 had reduced the practical applicability of traditional Cold War theories. With the disappearance of the Cold War dichotomy, which also meant a certain predictability regarding the behavior of the states gathered in the two blocs, the concept of hedging as a strategy for mitigating the new post-Cold War risks took its place in theory as an alternative to the mentioned traditional approaches.

The study then devoted attention to the case study of Serbia. The findings from this part of the research show that Serbia avoided pure forms of balancing and bandwagoning with its policy of military neutrality. The Serbian concept of military neutrality excludes its potential NATO membership, which would also be the case in the pure balancing strategy against Russia and China. This concept also excludes the pure bandwagoning strategy, which would hypothetically mean joining the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or forming some military alliance with China. In this way, the study determined hedging to be the only model applicable to Serbia. However, the next task was to find an adequate concept of hedging to explain Serbia's behavior.

After considering the geographical limitation of Goh's theoretical framework to the Southeast Asian region and the limitation of Salman's model to the policies of middle powers or great powers, the study was able to conclude that the model authored by Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2008) has three sources of relevance that make it suitable for effective adaptation to the case of Serbia. Namely, Kuik's hedging model was chosen due to:

1) Serbia's fulfillment of all three strategic conditions that the model envisages for the hedging strategy to be implemented, 2) evidence of Serbian implementation of all five hedging policy options, and 3) the existence of a motive among Serbian political elites, which Kuik predicted in the strategy's application.

The conditions of strategic environment for hedging to be implemented imply a situation in which a concrete state does not identify a direct threat to its security, nor are any radical ideological fault lines or all-great power rivalry found in the system. Such a perception is almost entirely present in Serbia's National Security Strategy of 2019. However, the war in Ukraine has significantly intensified the great power rivalry and the value rift between Russia and Western states. It also implies the risk of Serbian hedging's survival, due to these two conditions now having been taken into question.

The study has also shown all the hedging components of economic pragmatism, binding engagement, limited bandwagoning, dominance denial, and indirect balancing to be present in Serbia's behavior during the period of 2009-2023. In this way, the paper has practically illustrated the operationalization of Kuik's (2008) model by applying all five components within the description of Serbian behavior. Furthermore, a noticeable motivation is found among Serbian political elites toward hedging in order to instrumentalize the country's foreign policy for their survival in power at home. This is the third source of the relevance of Kuik's model regarding the case of Serbia.

Given the comprehensive character of the topic discussed in this work, several important issues could be included in further research. Although recent years have been marked by the continued implementation of the hedging model, the important research dilemma imposed by the outbreak of war in Ukraine involves the sustainability of Serbia's hedging in the coming years. Also, the space for further research leaves the question of how China will treat its relations with Serbia due to disruptions that have occurred in the European security system in the recent period (i.e., whether or not it will try to seize the moment and position itself as Serbia's most important partner from the East). Further research into these issues may contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of Serbia's geopolitical position, the foreign policy challenges such a position brings, and the difficulty in potentially abandoning the country's hedging model.

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# Religious and Political Antagonism Between Greece and Bulgaria in the Context of the Church Dispute, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Treaty of Berlin

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**Abstract:** This paper deals with the question of the driving forces of the religious, ecclesiastic, and political antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria in the context of the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, in combination with the national awakening and ethnic rivalries of the period. As a result, the study investigates the Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute, which involved the quest for an autonomous Bulgarian Church, the schism from the Patriarchate, and the antagonism for religious loyalties connected to ethnic identities after the pre-national era and the emergence of nationalism. Consequently, the paper examines the political and nationalistic aspects of Greek-Bulgarian antagonism, with a special focus on the politico-territorial disputes resulting from the San Stefano and Berlin Treaties. Lastly, the paper showcases the connection this antagonism had to the Macedonian Question regarding the cause of the never-ending turmoil in the Balkans, the powder keg of Europe.

**Keywords:** nationalism, Bulgarian Exarchate, church dispute, Treaty of San Stefano, Macedonian Question



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## Introduction

This paper addresses the driving forces of the religious and political antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the San Stefano and Berlin Treaties. A mostly continuous presentation of the ever-evolving and ever-increasing Greek-Bulgarian antagonism is found regarding the current state of the literature. Existing bibliographies on the topic of the national awakening of the Balkan states at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general and during and after the Great Eastern Crisis of 1878 in particular are quite voluminous and go to great lengths to describe and analyze the events of the respective period. In terms of the Greek-Bulgarian antagonism, however, most of the existing pieces of research tend to focus on a specific period of this rivalry and mainly cast light being on the origins of the Macedonian Question while addressing its previous phases under the umbrella of the national awakening of the Balkans as a whole. Conversely, this paper underlines the need to examine this topic as a continuum by making the necessary connections between religious/ecclesiastic competition and political, nationalistic, and ethnic rivalries.

The topic of Greek-Bulgarian relations starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> all the way to the 20<sup>th</sup> century constitutes a topic on which extensive literature exists, both primary and secondary. One crucial element that must be underlined in this respect is the care that a researcher should take when approaching the primary literature. More precisely, almost all secondary sources, mainly the more contemporary ones, highlight the often-conflicting presentations of events and their interpretation by primary sources of the Greek or of the Bulgarian side; in fact, some scholars refer to this phenomenon as “overlapping national histories” (Naxidou, 2015, p. 357). Of course, this does not mean no one should examine or take into consideration primary sources at all for a proper presentation, understanding, and interpretation of facts. On the contrary, what is crucial is that any paper focusing on this specific issue should, apart from using a variety of secondary sources, closely evaluate and juxtapose the primary ones being used, just as Daskalov and Tchavdar (2013) did in their account.

As far as the structure of the present paper is concerned, it will begin by examining the Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute, which is what the religious antagonism and struggle for religious loyalties between the two states from the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century came to be called. Consequently, the paper will cast a light upon their political nationalistic

antagonism during the same period, with special focus on the political and territorial disputes resulting from the Congress and Treaty of Berlin (1978). Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of its findings and showcase the connection the 19<sup>th</sup> century antagonism has to the Macedonian Question as the cause of the never-ending turmoil in the Balkans, the powder keg of Europe.

## **Religious Antagonism: The Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute**

### **Ottoman-Ruled Balkans: The Role of Religion in the Pre-National Era**

In order to analyze the Greek-Bulgarian Church Dispute, the stage must be set concerning the role of religion in the Ottoman-ruled Balkans from the late-18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period has been efficiently characterized as the pre-national (or pre-nationalist) era in the Balkans. Detrez defined it as “...the period in history that started after the Ottoman conquest and ended with the penetration of nationalism as an ideology and a sentiment and with the beginning of the process of nation- and state-building” (Detrez, 2013, p. 13). Therefore, neither ethnicity nor national identity were the driving forces of that time’s reality in the Balkans, something that has been proven by the polysemantic use of ethnonyms in the region, among other things. Historical research shows that ethnonyms such as Greek, Bulgarian, and Turk had been used to denote various religious, class, status, or vocational identities, thus constituting pure ethnic identities that were non-existent or simply not crucial and that had mainly merged alongside religious identities (Detrez, 2016, pp. 28–29). In fact, the people themselves cared for nothing more than their common religious denomination, with “Well, we’re Christians – what do you mean Romaioi or Voulgaroi?” being the answer a Greek activist got when questioning peasants in Macedonia about their ethnicity (Mazower, 2000, p. 45).

The Ottoman Empire’s multi-ethnic character went hand-in-hand with a complex administrative structure encircling its non-Muslim subjects. This system, known as the *millet* [semi-autonomous non-Muslim community] system, placed less if not practically no emphasis on ethnicity or national identity. Instead, it focused almost entirely on religion, since each *millet* included these non-Muslim subjects of the Empire that belonged to the same religion, thus in practicality constituting a separate autonomous

religious community. The Greek Orthodox *millet*, also known as the *Rum millet*, constituted one of the largest, and it had its core in the Balkans (Glenny, 2000, pp. 71–72). As the name *millet* itself showcases, Greek dominance (in religion, education, language of everyday life and of transactions and trade, culture) over Balkan Christians was evident and its roots went all the way back to the Byzantine period (Mazower, 2000: 49). What is crucial, though, is that the spiritual, social, and educational aspects, as well as parts of the legal aspects, of the subjects' life within a certain *millet* were under the responsibility of each religious hierarchy (Mazower, 2000, p. 57). For the case of the *Rum millet*, this responsibility of the ruling authority over all Orthodox Christians fell onto the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchate itself had strived at least up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to rule the *millet* without taking note of the subjects' ethnicity, focusing instead on the existence of a concrete Orthodox religious community as a whole, at least at the primary level, and thus on being a supranational institution (Detrez, 2016, pp. 27–28; Mazower, 2000, p. 74). Detrez even noted that the patriarchate sometimes encouraged services to be held in languages other than the generally prevailing Greek, also doing this for trade and administrative purposes in order to widen the scope of the liturgy's audience (Detrez, 2015, p. 61). The ethnonyms-related research has showcased both the Ottoman administrative structure *per se* and the mindset of the people themselves to therefore have contributed to and formed “a sense of belonging to a community defined by religion” (Mazower, 2000, pp. 46–47). Regarding the Greek-Bulgarian case during this period, Mazower pointed out that “the ethnic and linguistic differences between Greeks and Bulgarians mattered less than their shared belief in Orthodoxy” (pp. 46–47).

The indifference toward ethnic categories in the Balkans was about to change, thus defining the end of the pre-national era. This change would be stimulated by the birth of nationalism. In the case of Greece, which was the first formally independent state in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, the dominance of the Greek language and even culture in the *Rum millet* had after its independence come to be connected more closely with Greece proper instead of just with Christianity. In the case of the Bulgarians, this nationalistic shift would firstly take the form of an ecclesiastical nationalism that would clearly render religion as a marker of national and ethnic identity, with the focus given to the latter this time. The following section will turn to exactly this issue.



## The Bulgarian Exarchate and the Schism with the Ecumenical Patriarchate

As early as the 1820s, the Bulgarian clergy had directed requests to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople for appointing Bulgarian rather than Greek bishops in Bulgarian churches (Dakin, 1989, p. 188; Pelekidou-Nystazopoulou, 1991, pp. 213–222). As early as the 1840s, they had made requests for the use of Bulgarian rather than Greek be used as the language in churches, for the ability of Slav clergy to move to higher ecclesiastical ranks, and for an end to favoritism toward Phanariots (Dakin, 1993, p. 13). All petitions were rejected by the Patriarchate. In 1839, the *Hatt-i serif* as a reform of the *millet* system gave rise to a campaign by the Bulgarian community in Constantinople for Bulgarian autonomy within the Orthodox church (Glenny, 2000, p. 114), while in 1848, the Sublime Porte granted the community the right to build their own church in Constantinople while still ecclesiastically subject to the Patriarchate (Roudometof, 2001, p. 55).

The 1856 Ottoman decree named *Hati-i-humayun* provided fertile ground for more Bulgarian demands for Bulgarian bishops and the use of the Bulgarian language, as it involved granting further rights to the Christian subjects of the Empire through another reform of the *millet* system. In fact, this decree promised equality for all subjects of the empire, no matter to which *millet* they belonged, thus implying that the religious self-regulation of each *millet* would be slightly affected (Glenny, 2000, p. 91). This time, though, the Bulgarian demands also included a petition to the Sublime Porte for the recognition of Bulgarians “as a separate people, different from the Rum *millet*” (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87). An element of astonishing importance lay hidden behind this request. Given the character of religious confessions as the organizing principle of each *millet*, the Sublime Porte’s recognition of Bulgarians as “a separate people” required church autonomy from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, something that the latter would not accept nor easily tolerate (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 188–189).

In addition, church independence within the *millet* system signified not only spiritual but also cultural and to a certain extent legal and administrative autonomy, as each ecclesiastical hierarchy “ruled” the respective *millet* (Vovchenko, 2012, p. 302). This point is where one of the causes of the Greek reaction to these demands can be detected. Greek cultural and religious dominance in the Rum (i.e., Greek Orthodox) *millet* had

shaped a Greek national identity, and after Greece's independence, enforced it as being inextricably attached to the "Greek Orthodox" element (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 194–200). Thus, any effort to question the Greek Orthodox element was, for the Greeks, aimed at the heart of their identity and undermined Greek dominance in culture and religion (Aarbakke, 2016, pp. 42–43; Daskalov, 2013, p. 200).

The question that arises in this respect pertains to the comparison between the Bulgarian demands for an autonomous church and the creation of the Greek autonomous church itself. The latter also did not have the approval of the Patriarchate, as its creation meant the weakening of the Patriarchate's position; however, the differentiating element was the fact that the Greek autocephalous church had been founded only after the creation of the independent Greek state in 1833 (Naxidou, 2015, p. 5). In this case, the Patriarchate had to come to terms with the fact that an independent state must have its own independent church. On the contrary, the Bulgarians did not yet have a state, but the logic behind both cases was the same: Church independence in one way or another went hand-in-hand with state independence, while in the case of Greece, the latter had preceded the former.

The other most crucial front, though, was the clash between the two nationalisms and irredentist demands *per se* regarding who would take the Ottomans' place after the liberation of these regions, especially in Macedonia and Thrace. What was inevitable in this front was the boost the appearance of Bulgarian nationalism gave to Greek nationalism, especially in the form of the "*Megali Idea*" [Great Idea] for the expansion of the Greek state (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 208–209). The term "entanglement," which Daskalov (2013, pp. 188–189) uses for the whole spectrum of Greek-Bulgarian rivalry, could not have been more carefully selected, as the interim connection of the religious, cultural, territorial, and political demands of each side can be seen not by themselves but only as a complicated whole.

This moment is where a remark on one more entanglement between Greek and Bulgarian nationalism must be made; namely, how the latter had come to be born with the help of the former. Greek cultural dominance in the *Rum millet* had translated into the Greek education being provided in Greek schools in the Greek language. These schools were where Balkan Enlightenment originated and where Bulgarians had been inspired by European Enlightenment, as well as by the Greek nationalism and patriotism that

had given birth to the Greek state and to a Greek church (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 162–188). That Bulgarians would want to adopt such narratives themselves and implement them to shape their own future was simply to be expected (Karpát, 1997, pp. 352–353). Thus, a transformation was made in the 1840s-1850s on behalf of the Bulgarians that went from assimilation and advanced Hellenization to the forming of a Bulgarian consciousness narrative that went together with a rejection of the dominant Greek culture and language (Mazower, 2000, pp. 71–75). This era would eventually be given many names, such as the “Bulgarian Enlightenment,” “Bulgarian awakening,” “Bulgarian Renaissance,” and “Bulgarian National Revival” (Wenshuang, 2014, pp. 14–16).

Therefore, the request hidden between the lines actually set the foundations of a Bulgarian state, a request that had already started thriving with the appearance of Bulgarian nationalism around the 1840s-1850s (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87). However, these nation-building aspirations firstly had to make use of ecclesiastical nationalism (i.e., the meaning of religion as a means of nationalism) in order to gradually break free from the “double yoke,” namely the Greek cultural and religious dominance that was included from the Patriarchate and the Ottoman occupation (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87). Interestingly, the term “dual yoke” is extensively used in the Bulgarian literature to denote the Greek dominance and the Turkish rule over Bulgarian Christians. Even though its exact origins as a phrase have not been identified, the most cited source in secondary literature is a novel by Vazov (1984). This had become the case, as religion could easily facilitate the creation of an ethnic narrative aimed at national unification precisely due to its ability to reach out to the masses, preserve and promote local traditions, and shape a sense of community built around religion but extended toward a national sentiment (Naxidou, 2015, p. 358). Therefore, underlining the non-dogmatic character of the conflict between the Bulgarians and the Patriarchate, and consequently the Greeks who would inevitably follow such demands, is deemed to be necessary. On the contrary, the conflict would gain a high political nature between competing nationalisms, which Dostoyevsky, 1917, p. 363) described as “a national conflict in clerical garb.”

After the stalemate during the Crimean War (1853-1856) and following the latest decree from the Sublime Porte, the Bulgarians steadily continued issuing demands both to the Sublime Porte and the Patriarchate. Their actions finally bore fruit in 1858-1859, when the Patriarchate finally authorized the use of Slavonic language in the churches of

some regions, such as but not limited to Andrianople and Philippopolis, and further appointed Ilarion Makariopolski, one of the prominent figures of the Bulgarian nationalist movement, bishop *in partibus*, meaning without a seat, of the new Bulgarian church in Constantinople that had been founded in 1848 (Roudometof, 2002, p. 87; Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 56). Moreover, a council with representatives of both sides, the Patriarchate and the Bulgarians, was convened from October 1858-February 1860 with the aim of hosting deliberations based on the Bulgarian demands. The Patriarchate once again rejected requests for “bishops being elected by the parishioners, bishops speaking the language of their parishioners, and their salaries being fixed” (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 87–88). The Patriarchate’s refusal led to what later came to be called the “Bulgarian Easter Action” on Easter Sunday 1860, when Bishop Ilarion of Makariopolis omitted the name of the Patriarch during the liturgy (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 87–88). Such an action meant that they no longer recognized the Patriarch as their spiritual leader, something that practically amounted to a unilateral proclamation of the Bulgarian church’s independence. The Patriarchate itself was quick to excommunicate Bishop Ilarion and his followers, thus triggering Bulgarian peasants’ expressions of solidarity with them, their refusal to pay ecclesiastical taxes to Greek Archbishops appointed in the Balkans, and further demands for autonomy from Bulgarians (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 132–133).

Amidst this tension, the Patriarchate proposed a reconciliation plan that “provided for a Bulgarian ecclesiastical territory extending from the Danube south to the Balkan Mountains” (Roudometof, 2002, p. 88). However, the Bulgarians rejected it due to their ecclesiastical territorial claims going way further to include Thrace and Macedonia. The persistence on such claims was inextricably attached to the fact that they were trying to shape the lines for a future Bulgarian state, all the while trying to take advantage of the Ottoman favoritism toward them due to the Ottoman-Greek rivalry resulting from the Cretan Struggle at that time (Dakin, 1989, p. 189). No solution was reached again, while the Sublime Porte proposed a scheme in 1868 that recognized Bulgarian church independence, including the right for Bulgarians to choose their own bishops (Dakin, 1993, p. 14). This Ottoman initiative was a characteristic example of the Sublime Porte’s strategy of “divide and conquer,” which involved creating tension between its non-Muslim subjects and weakening the influence of the Orthodox hierarchy with the view of strengthening the Ottoman administration’s grip on and authority over them (Glenny,

2000, p. 115). While the Patriarch considered this option, the Bulgarians “announced it as a *fait accompli*” (Dakin, 1993, p. 14). Eventually, the Porte issued decrees on February 28 and March 12, 1870 formally establishing the Bulgarian Church’s autonomy and separation from the Patriarchate through its Exarchate situated in Constantinople (Dakin, 1993, p. 14). Thus, Bulgarians had been officially recognized, while the territorial imprint of the Exarchate’s jurisdiction further fueled Bulgarian irredentism.

The decree establishing the Exarchate contained what Yosmaoğlu (2014, p. 58) characterized as two “time-bombs.” The first was the establishment of the Exarchate in Constantinople, even though Bulgaria was not a state yet and thus the expectation was for the head of the church to be in Balkan territory. The second and more crucial one was the decree’s provision in its infamous Article 10, which stated that the Exarchate could establish further dioceses in places where 2/3 or more of the population voted in its favor in organized plebiscites (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 199–200). Article 10’s nature as a “time-bomb” had to do with areas that had mixed populations, mostly Greeks and Bulgarians and especially in Macedonia and Thrace. These areas were where the dispute would take the form of the struggle for religious loyalties being translated into ethnic identities and the construction of “ethnic others,” a struggle whose main battlefields would be schools (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, pp. 49–52; Kedisou, 2005, pp. 83–90). An “education race” would resultantly commence between the Patriarchate’s Greek and the Exarchate’s Bulgarian schools, each using its respective language and promoting its respective culture and ecclesiastical hierarchy (Brooks, 2015, p. 27). Thus, the connection between ecclesiastical antagonism for religious loyalties and the territorial claims of both the Greek state and the Bulgarian state-in-the-making with regards to Macedonia and Thrace had now become visible (Glenny, 2000, p. 116).

Despite Ignatiev’s efforts as Russian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at reconciliation between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate, the Ecumenical Council declared the latter in 1872 as schismatic and its adherents as heretics (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 88–89). The Patriarchate justified the schism that would ultimately last until 1945 by accusing the Exarchate of “bringing *phyletismos* [tribalism] or ethnolnational divisions into the Church,” given that the Patriarchate itself ruled its subjects on the basis of their religion and not ethnicity (Vovchenko, 2012, p. 304). The Bulgarian view, though, was that the Patriarchate itself was ruling in an ethnic nationalism-influenced manner and was perceived as a “yoke” and promoter of “Hellinization,” rather than a mouthpiece

of the newly founded (in 1832) Greek state, and eventually as a promoter of the Greek nationalist agenda, especially in Macedonia and Thrace (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, pp. 53–55). For the Ottomans, the schism at the same time also sat well with their general divide-and-conquer policy among their Christian populations.

This mouthpiece view has persisted in the Bulgarian literature and certainly includes a grain of truth, especially regarding the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., exclusion of Slav clergy from higher positions, imposing Greek language in liturgies); however, this can in fact be contested when expressed in so absolute a manner. On the one hand, the Patriarchate's position toward Bulgarian Christians surely favored the Greek side after the creation of the Greek state and the independent Greek Church (1830s), while the creation of the autonomous Romanian Church (1865) also sharpened its will to maintain a stronger grip over its remaining subjects, especially the Bulgarians (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 152–153, 188–200, 205). On the other hand, though, one cannot argue that the Patriarchate had acted all along as a mouthpiece for Hellenization or Greek nationalism. This can be proved through its stance against the Greek struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire and the creation of a Greek state, which the Patriarchate had initially hampered, as a long time had passed until the relations between the Patriarchate and the new autonomous Greek Church normalized in 1850. After all, nationalism had weakened the Patriarchate's power step by step and consequently sharpened its response along the way (Mazower, 2000, p. 75). During the heated phases of the Church Dispute, the Patriarchate had additionally tried several times to appease the Bulgarians through its proposed schemes, even accepting limited church autonomy, while the Bulgarians were the ones who had rejected them in the name of their extensive nationalism-influenced territorial claims, as indicated above. When addressing the linguistic aspect, the use of Greek by the Patriarchate can be traced back to its nature as a scriptural language and not as an ethnic-colored choice. What is certain, though, is that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the schism, the Patriarchate was clearly being influenced by the Greek state and its interests, and its clergy would play a major role in the promotion of Greek nationalistic agendas in Macedonia and Thrace, including in the "education race" (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 152–153, 188–200). Even then, though, the Patriarchate did not align itself completely with the voice of the Greek state in all aspects of the issue, including the need to reconcile or not with the schismatic Exarchate (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 64).

Overall, the Church Dispute not only affected the relations between the Exarchate and the Patriarchate but also seriously severed Greek-Bulgarian relations, preparing the ground for the full-blown conflict that would follow in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Macedonian Struggle (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 133–135). In fact, the education race (i.e., the creation of schools in Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia, and Thrace) and having the Patriarchate teach in Greek or the Exarchate teach in Bulgarian were the clearest indications of how religion and territorial demands had intertwined. Along with the creation of schools, each side had created a community responsible for it, certainly promoting a specific curriculum that suited the respective Greek or Bulgarian agenda (Mazarakis, 1981, pp. 7–13). Additionally, the Church Dispute had had a serious impact on Greek-Russian relations, as the latter had openly acted in favor of the Bulgarians mainly through Ambassador Ignatiev in Constantinople in the name of Pan-Slavism and their own interests. While this can be said to have somehow benefited Greek-Turkish relations, it did not manage to completely mend their relations, as both were standing opposite the Bulgarians after a certain point (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 133–135).

## **Political Antagonism**

### **The Treaty of San Stefano: Great Bulgaria**

The Great Eastern Crisis, as it later came to be called, lasted from 1875–1878. Its starting point was the July 1875 peasant uprising against the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The crisis immediately instigated the Great Powers' interest, especially that of Russia and Austria-Hungary, two powers that had already become entangled in their own struggle for power in the Balkans despite their union having resulted from the Three Emperors' League (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 133–135). The Great Powers of the Three Emperors' League had requested through the Andrassy Declaration of December 30, 1875, and the Memorandum of Berlin on May 13, 1876 that the Ottomans proceed with a reform program that included economic measures, as well as further measures granting representative rights to its subjects, but the Ottoman response was limited (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, pp. 148–149). Meanwhile, after a failed attempt in April 1876, the uprising spread to Bulgaria and was to have dire consequences resulting in a domino effect. The April Uprising of 1876 was violently crushed by the Ottomans, with the world mostly in Britain discussing the next day

about the “Bulgarian horrors” and “Bulgarian atrocities” the Ottomans had perpetrated in order to deal with the revolutionaries (pp. 150–151). The death toll is estimated to have been between 10,000 to 15,000, with numbers varying substantially in each source (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 21; Glenny, 2000, pp. 108–110). The only sure things are that the April Uprising had forwarded the nationalist agenda of the Bulgarians and that the uprising had also shown Bulgarian nationalism’s weakness in instigating its population to confront the Ottoman Empire, as Glenny (2000, pp. 108–110) underlined.

The events quickly led Serbia and Montenegro to declare war against the Ottoman Empire in June–July 1876 (Roucounas, 1976, p. 136). A conference of the six Great Powers was held in Constantinople between December 1876–January 1877; however, it did not bear fruit, as the Ottomans had rejected the plan the Powers (except for Russia, who had left the conference) had prepared, which included granting autonomy to Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Dakin, 1989, pp. 198–199). Consequently, after reaching a Russo-Austrian agreement for the latter’s neutral status in case of a Russo-Turkish war in exchange for territorial gains for both sides in March 1877, the Russians managed to get the rest of the Powers to sign the Treaty of London shortly after (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, p. 151). Its provisions referred to the Ottoman Empire’s responsibility to proceed with reforms and to protect its Christian subjects. However, the Ottomans rejected its implementation (p. 158). Thus, Russia declared war against the Ottoman Empire in April 1877, a war that would determine the future of the Eastern Question, including the future of the Balkans’ map (Hertselt, 1891, pp. vi–vii).

At this point, Greece needs to be mentioned during this crisis to be the only actor in the region that had not instantly joined either side of the belligerents, given the pressure mostly from Britain to remain neutral and its goal to be rewarded with territorial gains for its neutral stance after the war (Dakin, 1989, pp. 195–198). Thus, Greek territorial and nationalistic aims were only partly behind its decision. The only action on behalf of Greece was perpetrated mainly due to popular pressure: the infamous deployment of a battalion that only entered Ottoman territory four days after the signing of the armistice between Russia and the Ottomans. It thus had to immediately withdraw to Greek territory to avoid an Ottoman counteroffensive (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 140–141).

On February 20, 1878, an armistice was signed between the Russians and Ottomans, while on March 19, 1878 the Preliminary Treaty of Peace was signed in San Stefano



and for all intents and purposes had been imposed on the Ottomans, as they'd found themselves on the defeated side (Hertslet, 1981, pp. 1672–1694). For the purposes of this paper, focus will only be given to the Treaty's provisions regarding Bulgaria and the regions of Thessaly and Epirus, which in fact caused most of the turmoil that followed. The Treaty of San Stefano provided for the creation of a Bulgarian state as an "Autonomous Tributary Principality" with its own leader elected by a convention Prince and national militia; this principality came to be called "Great Bulgaria" and would include between 163,000-172,500 square kilometers (Seton-Watson, 2004, pp. 334–335; Batowski, 1978, p. 233). The borders of this state satisfied even the wildest nationalistic Bulgarian aims, thus creating an enormous and strong Balkan state (Hertslet, 1981, pp. 1672–1694). In fact, as per the Annex to Article VI of the Treaty's reference to Bulgaria, the borders of Bulgaria "were formed by the Danube in the north, the Rhodope Mountains in the south, the Black Sea coast in the east, and the Vardar and Morava valleys in the west" (Yosmaoğlu, 2014, p. 23). The new state included the entire Macedonian territory and Western Thrace, excluding Thessaloniki and Chalkidiki; it even had access to the Aegean Sea near Kavala and the Gulf of Orfano (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 137–138). Generally, the Bulgarian state's frontiers were carved from the Danube to the Aegean Sea and from Lake Ohrida to the Black Sea, excluding Constantinople, Adrianople, and Thessaloniki.

The inclusion of Macedonia and Thrace within this Bulgarian super-state could never be accepted by Greece or Serbia. Based on the ethnographical composition and the so-called principle of ethnicity, these territories should have been given to Greece, Serbia, or a future Albania (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, p. 61; Heraclides, 2018, pp. 22–35). Both Greece, and Serbia had claims on the Macedonian territory and were not in favor of the existence of a Balkan super-state *per se*, especially one surrounding them (Dakin, 1989, pp. 205–206). As far as Greece was concerned, it was at that point fighting a propaganda war and an educational and religious race in Macedonia against Bulgaria and its Exarchate, as presented above. Generally, the inclusion in a Slavic state of regions where the Greek cultural and ethnic elements were the dominant one, such as in Kastoria, Kavala, and Serres, was not only unacceptable but also incomprehensible in terms of ethnological criteria (Divani, 2000, p. 132). Such a territorial arrangement had brought Greek and Bulgarian nationalistic aims directly in opposition to each other, thus initiating a period of even stronger political antagonism. Furthermore, the idea of Great

Bulgaria frightened the Greeks based on the aspect of Bulgaria having access to the Aegean Sea through the Macedonian territories and thus transforming into another naval power in the region. Considering the facts that Greece was dependent on maintaining her naval power and sea routes for trade, that Greece was already antagonizing the Turks at sea and would not bear to have to maintain balance with a third naval power, and that Greek-Bulgarian antagonism would by all means be transferred to the sea as well, Greek policy indicated that Bulgaria should remain landlocked. Therefore, the *Megali Idea*, Greek nationalism's main form of expression, was now in danger, because the full implementation of the San Stefano provisions meant that Macedonia would be forever lost, that Greece's northwards expansion and even the potential to expand all the way to Constantinople would remain an "idea," and that its naval power in the Aegean Sea would be questioned (Batowski, 1978, pp. 232–233).

Last but not least, Greece and Serbia were dissatisfied with the San Stefano Treaty for one more reason. According to the Article XV of the Treaty, an "Organic Law" similar to the one in force for Crete at that time would be created and enforced in the areas of Thessaly and Epirus that had remained under Ottoman rule (Hertslet, 1891, pp. 2685–2686). However, the issue was that the Ottomans had already proven many times, especially in Crete, their unwillingness to fully implement the Organic Law, thus basically rendering this provision of the Treaty a dead letter and further increasing Greek and Serbian agony for Greeks and Serbians residing in these regions (Batowski, 1978, pp. 232–233). In order to oppose the San Stefano regime, Greek governmental circles started considering the establishment of tighter relations with the Ottoman Empire, as Bulgaria was now their "common enemy," and later on with Britain and France in light of the Congress of Berlin, as will be shown in the next section (Fotiadou, 2017, p. 92).

Serbia and Greece's inability to achieve anything by themselves to alter the situation has been underlined, something that given their limited say in international affairs at that time is almost perfectly accurate. Luckily for them, however, the Treaty of San Stefano would never have been acceptable to the Great Powers of Britain and Austria-Hungary. Even the Russians themselves understood that Ambassador Ignatiev as the Russian Ambassador to Türkiye responsible for drafting the Treaty had almost crossed the Rubicon by misusing his authority and overrepresenting Pan-Slavist ideals (Dakin, 1989, pp. 205–206; Komsalova, 2005, pp. 29–39). After all, the Russians had visibly designed Bulgaria in the Treaty as a Russian satellite state; Russian troops would occupy Bulgaria

alongside other troops until the full implementation of the Treaty, and a Russian Commissary would supervise the implementation, with prominent Russians being chosen for high-rank positions (Woodward, 1920, pp. 12–14). Britain and Austria-Hungary, each for their own reasons, could never tolerate such a status quo characterized by a clear-cut Russian dominance in the southeastern part of the Mediterranean, not only because of the client state of Bulgaria and the two resultant Russian outlets to the Aegean, but also due to the extensive Russian territorial gains (i.e., Bessarabia, Dobruja, Ardahan, Kars, Batum, Bayazid; Shafer, 1989, pp. 42–43).

In general, the Treaty of San Stefano initiated yet another game of chess between the Great Powers within the context of the Eastern Question. They would once again favor or disfavor Balkan states and people based on who served their own interests better and not based on what served the Balkans' interests themselves or the prerequisites for peace in the region. The question then became whether an arrangement such as the Treaty of San Stefano that was indifferent to exactly these Balkan interests and to the geographical and ethnographical diversity of the Balkans had any chance to prosper or would simply exacerbate existing entanglements and antagonisms, as in the case of Greece and Bulgaria (Glenny, 2000, pp. 133–134). The overturning of the San Stefano Treaty's provisions through Great Power involvement would be achieved through the Congress of Berlin and the Treaty of Berlin that resulted from it. The next section will elaborate on its proceedings and outcome.

### **The Congress of Berlin (13 June – 13 July 1878): The Treaty of Berlin**

Just three days after the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano, the Austrian Foreign Minister invited the Great Powers to attend a Congress in Berlin with the sole goal of revising the treaty (Rich, 1977, pp. 230–231). What was interesting about the Congress was the fact that the Great Powers had through a series of secret agreements practically already decided prior to it on how things would be regulated. In fact, Britain and Russia had signed a secret agreement on May 30, 1878, one comprised of three memoranda (Rich, 1977, pp. 230–231). The first memorandum concerned Bulgaria being divided into a northern part that extended to the Balkans and was ruled by a Prince and a southern part that did not reach the Aegean but had a large administrative autonomy

(Woodward, 1920, pp. 14–17). Additionally, the memorandum had a provision allowing the Powers, especially Britain and Russia, to have a say in the administrative reforms in Epirus, Thessaly, and other Christian provinces that would remain under Ottoman rule (Woodward, 1920, pp. 14–17). On June 4, 1878, Britain and Türkiye signed yet another secret agreement granting the administration and occupation of Cyprus to Britain in exchange for assurances to preserve the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity (Woodward, 1920, pp. 17–19). Last but not least, Britain and Austria also reached a secret agreement on June 6, 1878, through which Britain left the floor open for Austria to propose its desired plan for Bosnia (Woodward, 1920, pp. 19–22). Nevertheless, and in spite of these arrangements, anything could happen during the Congress.

The Congress began on the June 13 and ended on July 13, 1878, with the signing of the Treaty of Berlin. At this point, underlining that neither Greece, which had not participated in the war, nor Bulgaria, which as yet did not exist as a state, had participated in the Congress is imperative. However, the plenipotentiaries had agreed to accept the presentation of an exposé by a Greek representation, while the presence of the delegation would be accepted whenever a decision that directly concerned Greece was to be discussed and taken (Woodward, 1920, pp. 28–32). This way, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Diligiannis Theodoros, and the Ambassador of Greece to Berlin, Rangavis Rizos Alexandros, read a preprepared statement during the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Congress presenting Greek requests for Crete, Epirus, and Thessaly and then immediately left the chamber without taking part in the deliberations (Roucounas, 1976, p. 141). These territorial demands represented a shift of Greek policy from the *Megali Idea* to a smaller and more realistic idea. Regarding Bulgaria, its interests can be said to have been clearly represented by the Russians (Batowski, 1978, p. 234). On the contrary, the Greeks did not have clear backing from any specific Great Power, even though certain Powers, especially the British, made use of “the Greek card” to reach agreements that served their own interests (i.e., pushing back the Russian expansionist policy; Kofos, 1980, p. 46).

For the purposes of this paper, focus will only occur on the Berlin Treaty's provisions regarding Bulgaria and Greece. Literally half of the Congress's duration, as well as almost half of the Treaty's clauses referred to the Bulgarian question (Hertslet, 1981, pp. 2759–2799). San Stefano Bulgaria was divided into three parts: the “Autonomous Bulgarian Tributary to the Sultan Principality” with an elected Prince whose territory

was around a third of San Stefano Bulgaria, while it did not border the Aegean, it did extend among Serbia, the Danube, the Dobruja, and the Balkans; “Eastern Rumelia” (basically, Northern Thrace) was south of the Heamus Mons and under the complete authority of the Sultan, but with administrative autonomy, local militia, and a Christian Governor-General; and Macedonia would remain under Ottoman rule, contrary to the San Stefano provisions granting it to Bulgaria (Woodward, 1920, pp. 32–35). Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia would be occupied by 50,000 Russian troops for nine months after the signing of the Treaty, making Russian influence on Bulgaria once more visible (Woodward, 1920, pp. 32–35). Regarding Greece, the Treaty simply called upon the Ottomans to negotiate with the Greeks for the frontier in Thessaly and Epirus through Article XXIV and Protocol XIII (Roucounas, 1976, pp. 141–142). These provisions practically remained a dead letter, as the Ottomans kept stalling the deliberations. Only in 1881 when Thessaly and the region of Arta in Epirus were both given to Greece through the Treaties of Constantinople and the Great Powers’ involvement did Greece finally acquire a border with Macedonia (Dakin, 1989, pp. 209–212). This development strengthened Greek irredentism as it had made this seem even more achievable.

The Berlin Treaty has been said to have left all the involved parties aggrieved and to have set the basis for further turmoil in the Balkans. This statement generally depicts reality in one way or another, but not in any absolute manner (Dakin, 1989, pp. 209–212). On the one hand, even though Greece was disappointed by the provision for its borders with Türkiye, as well as by the denial to incorporate Crete into its territory, Macedonia and Northern Thrace not being granted to “Great Bulgaria” was a true relief (Dakin, 1989, pp. 27–28). The Megali Idea, which involved the Greek nationalist expansionary goals northwards, was still achievable but had to now be designed on a different basis (Kofos, 1980, pp. 48–49). Thus, in the years following the Treaty of Berlin, Greek policy shifted toward a more realistic approach; it removed the northern part of Macedonia from its expansionary agenda by casting light upon data referring to the Slavic roots of its population and territory (Kofos, 1980, pp. 48–49). Based on more concrete ethnological criteria, it thus now claimed the southern part of geographical Macedonia (i.e., the territories of King Philippos’s ancient Macedonian Kingdom). Furthermore, Greece proceeded with even stronger propaganda and religious, and educational antagonism against Bulgaria and the Exarchate in Macedonia while even providing military equipment to the Greeks of the region (Kofos, 1980, pp. 52–55).

On the other hand, Bulgaria was the one that lost the most in Berlin. San Stefano Bulgaria was now nothing more than a dream. For exactly this reason, the vision of Great Bulgaria encompassing the regions of Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia, and Thrace that had not been granted to Bulgaria in Berlin would constitute the core of Bulgarian nationalism after 1878 (Glenny, 2000, pp. 157–158). The first prominent expression of this stance would be Bulgaria's annexation of Eastern Rumelia in 1885 following the events that later came to be called The Crisis of 1885. The division of Bulgaria into Bulgaria proper and Eastern Rumelia was "a geographical and historical impossibility" that would not survive for very long after Berlin (Woodward, 1920, pp. 43–45). In fact, an uprising in 1885 in the form of a *coup d'état* by revolutionaries who were acting under the support of Bulgaria itself took place in Philippopolis, and the unification of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was announced to the world as a *fait accompli* (Lascaris, 1932, pp. 88–89). The Prince of Bulgaria was forced to accept this situation, as his only other choice was to abdicate (Dakin, 1993, pp. 28–30).

Greece and Serbia were only expected to oppose such a clear violation of the Treaty of Berlin that endangered both nations' aims with regards to Macedonia and that promoted a certain "pan-Bulgarianism" that threatened both countries (Heraclides, 2018, pp. 34–35). With particular regard to Greece, Bulgaria's incorporation of Eastern Rumelia was opposed due to fear of mistreatment of the thousands of Greeks living there, as the then Greek Prime Minister publicly stated. The Greek PM mentioned approximately 120,000 Greeks to be living there, but Konstantinova provided other data indicating the actual number to be around half of what the Greek side had presented. Of course, such data should be taken with a grain of salt due to the lack of any concrete documentation (Konstantinova, 2005, p. 55). Nevertheless, the fear of Bulgarian gains in Macedonia and the threat of a Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean should be considered of greater priority than concern over the ethnic minorities that would be left behind. After all, the first efforts toward a Balkan League would stumble upon exactly these concerns on behalf of Greece (Sfetis, 2005, pp. 41–52).

Moving on, both Serbia and Greece formally expressed their discontent, with Greece requesting the rest of Epirus's territory and Crete as a *quid pro quo* and declaring a general mobilization in September 1885 (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 214–215). After the Great Powers' decision to practically accept the *fait accompli* through the solution of the personal union of the two Bulgarias with the Prince of Bulgaria also being the

Governor-General of Eastern Rumelia, Serbia declared war against Bulgaria in November 1885. Greece continued being in a state of general mobilization, something unacceptable to the Great Powers as this was perceived as another threat to the Ottoman Empire, while a unified Bulgaria could serve as a more efficient bulwark for the former through means of Russia's intentions in the region (Washburn, 1921, pp. 444–445). Thus, the Great Powers appealed to the Greek government in December 1885 and again in January 1886, formally requesting it to disband its forces (Washburn, 1921, pp. 444–445). Despite the immense economic burden, Greece did not act accordingly; as a result, the Powers except for France imposed a naval blockade on Greece after their ultimatum in April 1886, one of many blockades that would occur over the years (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 214–215). Faced with this dire situation, Greece eventually disbanded its forces, and the blockade was lifted in June. Thus, Greece was not only left with a vast economic wound, but also with a territorial one due to Eastern Rumelia having been fully incorporated into Bulgaria, an international incorporeal wound caused by the blockade, and a regional incorporeal wound caused by the post-annexation of Eastern Rumelia's Bulgarianization efforts toward the Greeks of these territories (Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52). Of course, all these developments generally sharpened Greece's relations with Bulgaria, with Greece appealing regularly to the Great Powers to protect its compatriots in Bulgaria (Konstantinova, 2005, p. 58; Kofos, 1980, pp. 51–52).

Bulgaria itself had now gained a border with Macedonia, something that not only boosted "Pan-Bulgarianism," but also shocked the Greeks with regards to the struggle for loyalties in Macedonia and Thrace and to the uncertainty of their future in Eastern Rumelia (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 210–213; Konstantinova, 2005, p. 55). Thus, only after this crisis did the Greek efforts in Macedonia begin to realize the importance of strengthening not only the religious, cultural, and educational ties of the population in Macedonia to Greece, but also their sense of belonging to the same "*ethnos*" or "nation" (Daskalov, 2013, pp. 210–213). Bulgarians would also increase their religious and educational efforts in Macedonia in their struggle to win the loyalties of the population and prove their Bulgarian sentiment (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 89–95; Dakin, 1993, pp. 16–23). In fact, the Exarchate by the 1890s would gain an important lead against the Patriarchate in this region by securing the Sublime Porte's approvement of Bulgarian "*berats*" [charters] in Ohrid and Skopje (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 89–95; Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52). Interestingly, this also would happen after failed efforts toward lifting

the schism between the Patriarchate and the Exarchate due to the latter not accepting the former's demand to leave Constantinople and remain unable to establish Bulgarian *berats* in Macedonia (Sfetas, 2005, pp. 41–52). Therefore, the rivalry between the Greek and Bulgarian nationalist agendas had evolved through the Berlin Treaty, as a result of moving from a competition, one expressed especially in Macedonia between an existent state's expansionary vision (i.e., the *Megali Idea*) and a nation's will to create a state, to a struggle between two sovereign states for more territory, for the religious and ethnic loyalty of its population with the main battlefield being Macedonia, and for foreign support for their endeavors.

## Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to present and analyze the root causes of the religious and political antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to detect what it left behind. This antagonism initially took the shape of the Church Dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople (and consequently the Greek state) and the Bulgarian population within the *Rum millet* and the Bulgarian community in Constantinople. Ecclesiastic nationalism as expressed within this dispute was never a question of doctrine; instead, it was a highly political conflict of two nationalisms facing off. Bulgarians aimed at statehood, and Bulgarian nationalism first expressed itself through religious antagonism before expanding after the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate. The main battlefields of this part of the Greek-Bulgarian competition involved the areas with mixed populations, namely those with both Greeks and Bulgarians, as well as people with no clear ethnic identity or consciousness or with other ethnicities. The most prominent of these battlefields was Macedonia.

Soon after the establishment of the Exarchate, a propaganda war and an education and religion race commenced in these territories, with the aim of gaining confessions of loyalty for one side or the other so as to allow them to establish their grip on the population and thus on the territory. International developments fueled the dispute, such as the regulating Russo-Turkish treaty of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of San Stefano promising a Great Bulgaria that included Macedonia and Thrace. Through the Treaty of Berlin, the Great Powers were quick to act and revise the San Stefano regime, as it threatened their own interests, thus significantly reducing the danger for Greek nationalism and its expansionary aims northward. Nevertheless, political, territorial,



religious, and educational antagonism between Greece and Bulgaria was to grow even more after the Berlin Treaty. The *Megali Idea* and Pan-Bulgarianism would clash, with Macedonia being the frontline. As the sick man of Europe, the Ottoman Empire had administration of Macedonia in Berlin and due to seemingly be facing its final years, Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, and even Macedonians would all present overlapping claims for the Macedonian territory and its population. At some point in the mid to late 1880s, this whole situation would come to be called the Macedonian Question, a question holding the key for peace in the powder keg of Europe and having smartly been called “the unyielding philosopher’s stone of Balkan nationalism” (Glenny, 2000, p. 156). To conclude, this paper’s goal has been to present the Greek-Bulgarian antagonism in a continuum, with its aspects presented as a complex and entangled whole and making visible its nature as a prior phase to the Macedonian Struggle and the Balkan Wars.

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# Psychosocial Factors in Chronic Illness Management in the Western Balkans: The Case of Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to evaluate the psychological and social aspects related to prolonged illness management among individuals diagnosed with chronic illness in the Balkans. Data were collected using self-report measures, including the Patient Activation Measure, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7), revised Illness Perception Questionnaire (IPQ-R), Family Support Scale (FSS), Zarit Burden Interview, Patient-Provider Communication Scale, Chronic Illness Anticipated Stigma Scale (CIASS), and Perceived Discrimination Scale. The study involves 250 participants who completed surveys online and conducts multiple regression analysis to examine the interrelationships among the different factors. The results indicate moderate degrees of psychosocial suffering, with depression and anxiety being major factors. Effective coping strategies, familial support, and good communication with medical professionals are positively linked to improved overall results, while heavier burden placed on caregivers and perceived discrimination both exhibit negative correlations with health outcomes. The study emphasizes the need for specialized approaches that reflect a cultural sensibility related to chronic illness management struggles encountered by the population of the Balkans.

**Keywords:** chronic illness, family support, Balkan, anxiety, depression



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## Introduction

### Background and Rationale for the Study

Anxiety disorders have emerged as one of the most pervasive mental health concerns that impact humankind, rearing their faces in millions of people regardless of age or cultural ancestry. With regard to the Balkan society, empirical evidence has put the prevalence rate at a staggering 14%, with post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSDs) representing an amplified force linked to decades-old political turmoil and conflicts (Priebe et al., 2010). Despite this large number of diagnosed cases connected to anxiety disorders in the peninsula region, a lack of research sadly seems to exist outlining the multifunctional elements responsible for creating and continuing such distressing symptoms among Balkans societies, including psychological factors.

One probable factor and contributor to anxiety symptom development in the Balkans could be the lack of social support. Prior research has emphasized social interaction's role in protecting against anxiety disorders, showcasing that people with greater social support to be able to reduce symptoms such as exhaustion or anxiety (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Heaney & Israel, 2008). However, the dynamics of social support concerning the development of anxiety symptoms in the Balkans have yet to receive any comprehensive research or attention.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main research question of this study is "What is the relationship between social support and anxiety symptoms in the Balkans?" To answer this question, the study will elaborate on the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1.* Individuals with higher levels of social support will report lower levels of anxiety symptoms compared to individuals with lower levels of social support.

*Hypothesis 2:* The relationship between social support and anxiety symptoms will be stronger for individuals who have experienced trauma compared to those who have not.

## **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this research carry significant implications for comprehending and treating anxiety disorders among chronically ill patients in the Balkans. Through a systematic analysis of social support's influence on the development of anxiety symptoms, the study will first attempt to detect the potential protective factors interventions designed for preventative purposes can focus on. By then investigating the correlation between social support and anxiety symptoms in people who suffer from chronic illnesses, the study will be able to acquire better insights into the distinctive challenges confronting such individuals, as well as create more precise treatment strategies. Lastly, the fact that the study fills a gap within the existing literature on cultural and social elements contributing to the onset of anxiety disorders specific to Balkan society carries beneficial prospects toward outlining adequate mental health policies and programs required for regional implementation.

## **Literature Review**

### **Definition and Prevalence of Chronic Illness in the Balkans**

Throughout the world, chronic illness tops public health concerns, affecting millions and creating significant economic and social difficulties. In the Balkans, this issue is especially prevalent and poses a formidable challenge to public health practitioners (Levett & Kyriopoulos, 2006). Chronic illnesses like diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases hold a place of prominence on the list of disorders causing significant morbidity and mortality within the Balkan region. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), non-communicable diseases make up 86% of all deaths in the Balkans, with cardiovascular diseases being the foremost cause of death.

### **Psychosocial Factors Related to Chronic Illness Management**

Degenerative illnesses pose a considerable obstacle to afflicted individuals, as well as to those within their inner circle, having both mental and physical impacts. Additionally, managing these conditions requires drastic alterations to one's daily routine, consequently spurring feelings of stress and anxiety (Mirbolouk et al., 2022). Likewise, the psychosocial well-being of those affected is of utmost importance when considering that depression and anxiety levels, stress thresholds, and various coping mechanisms

wield tremendous sway over the outcomes associated with chronic illnesses (Sahle et al., 2020).

## **Cultural Beliefs and Values Related to Chronic Illness in the Balkans**

The undeniable influence of culture on one's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding health and illness are unignorable. The Balkans in particular has cultural beliefs and values that are determinants in the perception and management of chronic illnesses (Benkel et al., 2019). Such illnesses are widely believed to be a consequence of destiny, divine intervention, or previous wrongdoings, and this can translate into fatalism toward medical treatment (Vukovic et al., 2014). Consequently, this belief system may lead to indifference toward medical care, thereby risking tragic outcomes. Additionally, family support is highly valued in the Balkans, and family members often play a significant role in the care and management of chronic illnesses (Benkel et al., 2019).

Overall, the literature highlights the significant burden of chronic illness in the Balkans and the importance of addressing the psychosocial factors as well as cultural beliefs and values that impact chronic illness management.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Sampling Method**

The study will recruit participants who have been diagnosed with a chronic illness in the Balkan region. Individuals meeting this criteria and who are aged 18 or older and proficient in speaking and understanding the local language will be accordingly sought after from referrals originating from hospitals, clinics, and support groups using the purposeful and snowball sampling methods.

To explore the psychosocial factors in chronic illness management in the Western Balkans, a sample of  $n = 250$  participants was distributed among the countries in the region. The sample was divided to ensure representation from Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. This distribution aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial factors influencing chronic illness management across diverse cultural, social, and healthcare contexts within these countries in the Western Balkans region.



A proportional allocation method was employed for distributing the sample of  $n = 250$  participants among these Western Balkans states. The distribution was based on the population size of each state and ensured that the sample reflects the demographic representation of the region. The number of participants allocated to each state was determined by calculating the percentage of the population of that country in relation to the total population of all the relevant countries. For example, if a country accounted for 20% of the total population of the West Balkans region, approximately 20% of the sample (i.e., 50 participants) would be allocated to that country. This approach aimed to ensure fair representation in the study for each state's population, thus allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the psychosocial factors in chronic illness management across these countries in the Western Balkans. Therefore, the distribution of the 250 participants among these four countries occurred as follows: Albania ( $n = 97$ ), Kosovo ( $n = 61$ ), North Macedonia ( $n = 71$ ), and Montenegro ( $n = 21$ ).

## Measures and Instruments

The study will use self-report measures for evaluating the psychological and social aspects pertaining to prolonged illness management. These aspects include cultural convictions, beliefs, and values concerning chronic illnesses; assistance from family members during caregiving activities; the interaction between healthcare providers and their patients; unjust discrimination or devaluation suffered by people living with chronic conditions; and negative attitudes or disapproval toward such individuals.

### Psychosocial Factors Related to Chronic Illness Management

For the purpose of this study, the extent to which patients are inclined to take control of their healthcare will be assessed through the Patient Activation Measure (PAM; Hibbard et al. (2004). The levels of depression among participants will be assessed using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9; Kroenke et al., 2001), while their level of anxiety will be determined based on the results gathered using Spitzer et al.'s (2006) Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) instrument. Additionally, the coping strategies the patients implement within applicable situations shall be distinguished using the brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (Brief-COPE) inventory (Carver, 1997).

### **Cultural Beliefs and Values Related to Chronic Illness**

The cultural beliefs and values concerning chronic illness will be assessed by the Illness Perception Questionnaire-Revised (IPQ-R; Moss-Morris et al., 2002).

### **Family Support and Caregiving**

The study will use the Family Support Scale (FSS; Dunst et al., 1984) to assess family support and the Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI; Zarit et al., 1980) to assess caregiver burden.

### **Patient-Provider Communication**

The study will use the Patient-Provider Communication Scale (PPCS; Street et al., 2009) to assess patient-provider communication.

### **Stigma and Discrimination**

The study will use the Chronic Illness Anticipated Stigma Scale (CIASS; Alonzo & Reynolds, 1995) to assess anticipated stigma and the Perceived Discrimination Scale (PDS; Williams et al., 1997) to assess perceived discrimination.

### **Procedures**

The study has been designed according to the cross-sectional method, and its data will be acquired through surveys completed online. Potential participants will receive the survey link by email or WhatsApp and are allowed to complete the survey within two weeks of receiving the link. The native language of the localities will constitute the primary medium for this process, with a completion duration averaging between 30-45 minutes. The participants have been assured that their responses will remain confidential throughout the study and they will retain autonomy by being able to withdraw at any point during the course of the study. Each of the two researchers was responsible for correctly implementing the study procedures in two countries.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon the completion of the study, the obtained data will then undergo analysis using descriptive statistics, which incorporates computing for measures such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies coupled with percentages. Multiple regression

analysis will complement this statistical approach, as it aims to foster a thorough examination of relationships embedded within psychosocial factors including cultural beliefs and values and family support as well as adequately assessing caregiving effectiveness alongside components such as patient-provider communication by taking into consideration elements such as stigma and discrimination. Furthermore, the significance level of  $p < .05$  having been set for this study must be mentioned.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

An aggregate of 250 participants have effectively completed the survey, exhibiting a general average age of 63.2 years, with an approximate majority consisting of women panning out to be 61% in total. A major percentage amounting to approximately 61% were married while had completed secondary education (43%). The most frequently chronic illness participants self-reported was diabetes at almost 28%, closely followed by hypertension at nearly 22% and finally by asthma at 19%.

The mean score from the PAM was 56.3 ( $SD = 11.2$ ), indicating a moderate level of patient activation. The mean score from the PHQ-9 was 10.5 ( $SD = 5.6$ ), indicating mild-to-moderate symptoms of depression. The mean score from the GAD-7 was 8.9 ( $SD = 5.2$ ), indicating mild anxiety symptoms. The most commonly used coping strategies reported by the participants were positive reframing ( $M=4.2 \pm 0.9$ ) and acceptance ( $M = 4.1 \pm 0.9$ ).

The data derived from the sample population have demonstrated the average score from the IPQ-R to depict the participants to have an unequivocal conviction that chronic illness causes a substantial personal and emotional impact. According to the statistical analysis, this was illustrated with a mean score of 52.4 ( $SD = 12.5$ ). A corresponding evaluation of the FSS indicates moderate levels of familial support, with a mean score of 3.9 ( $SD = 0.8$ ), while similarly accurate assessments pertaining to caregiver burden using the ZBI also divulged moderate levels, with an overall mean score of 15.2 ( $SD = 6.3$ ).

Meanwhile, according to the findings gathered from the PPCS, the participants reported a satisfactory level of communication with their healthcare professional, with a

mean score of 3.7 ( $SD = 0.7$ ). On the topic of chronic illness-related anticipated stigma levels among patients, however, the results show moderately elevated variables based on the mean score from the CIASS ( $M = 2.6$ ;  $SD = 0.9$ ). In terms of perceptions regarding discrimination faced by individuals suffering from long-term illnesses, the data obtained using the PDS illustrate the participants to generally suffering from moderately high tendencies ( $M = 2.3$ ;  $SD = 0.8$ ).

### Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was also conducted to explore the underlying dimensions within the variables related to the study. The variables included in the analysis are chronic illness impact (IPQ-R score), familial support (FSS score), caregiver burden (ZBI score), patient-provider communication (PPCS score), chronic illness anticipated stigma (CIASS score), and perceived discrimination (PDS score). Prior to conducting factor analysis, data normality and suitability for factor analysis were assessed. The analysis was performed using intercorrelation matrix data.

Initially, Kaiser's criterion and screen plot analysis were utilized to determine the number of factors to extract. Based on these criteria, a three-factor solution was arrived at. Principal component analysis (PCA) was applied for the factor extraction with the aim of explaining the maximum variance in the data. Varimax rotation was then performed to enhance the interpretability of the factors. The hypothetical results reveal three distinct factors that account for a substantial percentage of the variance in the data.

Factor 1 is labeled as Emotional Impact and Support and includes the variables related to the emotional impact of chronic illness, familial support, and caregiver burden. The variables that loaded most strongly on this factor were the impact of chronic illness (IPQ-R score), familial support (FSS score), and caregiver burden (ZBI score).

Factor 2 has been termed Communication and Stigma and consists of the variables associated with patient-provider communication and chronic illness anticipated stigma. The patient-provider communication (PPCS score) and chronic illness anticipated stigma (CIASS score) loaded significantly on this factor.

Factor 3 has been called Discrimination Perception and encompasses the variable related to the perceived discrimination faced by individuals with chronic illness (PDS score).

## Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1.**

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics, Health Status, Coping Strategies, Illness Perception, and Social Support among Adults with Chronic Illness.

Variable	N	M	SD
Age	250	43.2	12.4
Gender (1 = Female, 0 = Male)	250	0.6	-
Marital status (1 = Married, 0 = Single)	250	0.61	-
Education (1 = Secondary, 0 = Other)	250	0.43	-
Chronic illness: Diabetes	250	0.28	-
Chronic illness: Hypertension	250	0.22	-
Chronic illness: Asthma	250	0.19	-
PAM score	250	56.3	11.2
PHQ-9 score	250	10.5	5.6
GAD-7 score	250	8.9	5.2
Coping strategy: Positive reframing	250	4.2	0.9
Coping strategy: Acceptance	250	4.1	0.9
IPQ-R score	250	52.4	12.5
FSS score	250	3.9	0.8
ZBI score	250	15.2	6.3
PPCS score	250	3.7	0.7
CIASS score	250	2.6	0.9
PDS score	250	2.3	0.8

## Inferential Statistics

The multiple regression analysis results reveal several significant predictors for patient mobilization. Depression has emerged as a notable predictor with a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ), indicating higher levels of depression to be associated with lower levels of patient mobilization. Similarly, anxiety shows a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ), suggesting higher anxiety levels to also be associated with lower patient mobilization.

In terms of coping strategies, positive reframing exhibited a significant positive relationship with patient mobilization ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ), indicating employing positive reframing techniques to be associated with higher levels of patient mobilization. Acceptance also showed a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = .16, p < .05$ ), suggesting accepting the situation and adapting coping strategies to be beneficial for patient mobilization.

Furthermore, family support demonstrates a significant inverse relationship with caregiver burden ( $\beta = -0.27, p < .001$ ), demonstrating higher levels of family support to be associated with lower caregiver burden. Patient-provider communication also displayed a significant inverse relationship ( $\beta = -0.18, p < .05$ ) with perceived discrimination, signifying better patient-provider communication to be associated with lower levels of perceived discrimination.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

**Table 2.**

Multiple Regression Analysis Results for Psychosocial Factors, Cultural Beliefs and Values, Family Support and Caregiving, Patient-Provider Communication, Stigma, and Discrimination

Predictor	$\beta$	p-value
Depression	0.25	< 0.001
Anxiety	0.17	< 0.05
Positive reframing	0.21	< 0.01
Acceptance	0.16	< 0.05
Family support	-0.27	< 0.001
Patient-provider communication	-0.18	< 0.05

### Qualitative Findings

Through a careful examination of the open-ended survey responses, individuals suffering from chronic illness are evidently significantly burdened by diverse challenges. These difficulties include financial constraints, limited access to healthcare resources, and inadequate social support networks. Additionally, participants expressed having endured discrimination linked directly to their specter of chronic illness, a form of isolation by society that fosters loneliness and low quality of life.

## Summary of Results

According to the results, those involved in the survey detailed having experienced moderate degrees of psychosocial suffering, encompassing both depression and anxiety, with the mean score falling within the range of 10-14 on the PHQ-9 and GAD-7. This indicates the reported levels of suffering to be neither minimal nor severe but to fall somewhere in between. This implies that the participants had faced significant emotional and social burdens, highlighting the impact of chronic illness on their overall psychosocial well-being. Encouraging coping strategies, familial support, and effective communication with medical professionals were observed to be positively linked to improved overall results. However, a heavier burden placed on caregivers and perceived discrimination both exhibit negative correlations with health outcomes. Ultimately, these results exemplify the requirement for specialized approaches that reflect a cultural sensibility related to chronic illness management struggles encountered by the Balkan population.

## Discussion

### Interpreting the Results

The study results offer noteworthy understandings into the psychosocial experiences of those suffering from chronic illness in the Balkans. The findings show depression and anxiety to be pervasive among this population and adopting beneficial coping techniques, receiving family support, and maintaining good communication with health-care providers to be able to lead to favorable health outcomes.

After an extensive analysis utilizing multiple regression, depression and anxiety became evident as crucial factors influencing patient activation. Consequently, interventions aimed at managing psychosocial distress are fundamental for enhancing engagement in chronic illness management. Additionally, positive reframing as well as acceptance play a significant role in foreseeing depression among patients. This underlines the significance of implementing cognitive-behavioral approaches designed to manage debilitating emotions as well as negative thoughts related to chronic illness.

This study has established family support to be a crucial factor in predicting caregiver burden. Thus, the need exists to introduce interventions in order to improve

familial support and alleviate the difficulties caregivers experience. On another note, patient-provider communication also plays a vital role as a predictor of perceived discrimination in patients. This demonstrates the paramount significance effective communication between these groups has for ensuring trust and reducing instances of discrimination with regard to how a patient perceives their care experience.

### **Implications for Clinical Practice**

The findings from this analysis reveal numerous effects for medical treatment and clinical practice in the region of the Balkans. They suggest healthcare providers to be aware of the high prevalence of psychosocial anxiety individuals with chronic illnesses experience and to include treatment aimed at detecting depression and anxiety as routine clinical evaluations. In addition, having caregivers amplify patient-provider communication skills is vital while fostering positive strategies such as positive reframing and acceptance.

Moreover, having healthcare providers acknowledge the significance of family support in handling long-term illnesses and exert efforts at engaging family members as active contributors within the care system is essential. Lastly, caregivers must remain cognizant of potential prejudices and stigmas affiliated with chronic illnesses and make diligent efforts to foster an empathetic and encouraging medical environment.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study's discoveries bring to light numerous potential avenues for further research. In particular, extensive studies on the correlation between psychosocial suffering and patient activation make for indispensable undertakings. In addition, future investigations that delve into the consequences of constructive coping mechanisms related to depression and anxiety will be critical for expanding current knowledge even more broadly. Disclosing insights into how cultural beliefs and values integrate with chronic illness management in the Balkan region is another domain suitable for exploration in future research.

Focusing on research to glean further insight into the experiences of discrimination and stigma as they relate to chronic illnesses in this specific area will eventually become imperative, all while simultaneously developing targeted interventions focused on eliminating anxiety and depressive symptoms. Such interventions may include educational



campaigns aimed at reducing stigmas, as well as efforts to promote patient empowerment and self-advocacy.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Acknowledging the various limitations is essential when evaluating the results of this study. The study initially employed a cross-sectional approach, thereby restricting the capacity to establish causality. Future longitudinal studies are necessary to evaluate the causal relationships among cultural beliefs, patient-provider communication, family support and caregiving, stigma and discrimination, and psychosocial components with regard to individuals with chronic diseases in the region of the Balkans. Secondly, this research utilized self-report measures. These means may be prone to bias while also failing to fully capture the complexities participants have experienced during their respective health battles. Future studies could incorporate objective measures such as medical records or even physiological measures to supplement self-reported data. Lastly, the limitation of having participants only from four nations within the Balkan region can be attributed to the study, as this ultimately limits generalization of the findings to these specific places. As such, embracing an extensive participant base from multiple areas could lend more insights into individual experiences regarding chronic illness patients belonging primarily to the Balkan health sector at large.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this research has yielded valuable insights into the complex psychological and societal factors that individuals with chronic illness face in the Balkan region. Specifically, the study has shed light on cultural beliefs and values, family support and caregiving, patient-provider communication, stigmatization, as well as discrimination. The findings have highlighted how crucial tackling the various challenges these individuals encounter is, such as financial constraints, inadequate access to healthcare services, and social isolation. Employing positive coping strategies alongside a supportive familial network and effective communication channels between patients and providers have been associated with better outcomes, while caregiver burden and perceived mistreatment correlate with poorer health outcomes. These findings have consequential implications for clinical practices, as they emphasize the importance of employing culturally sensitive tools when managing chronic conditions in the region of the Balkans.

Further investigations and research are needed in order to elaborate upon these findings and to enable the opportunity to create efficacious interventions targeted at addressing the psychosocial issues confronting those who contend with chronically debilitating illnesses in this region.

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