

# IDENTITY LOSS OR...?



Identity Loss or Deliverance and Prosperity? – A project for deconstruction of nationalist narratives and fake news in the light of the solution of the Macedonian name issue



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**CIVIL**  
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## **LOSS OF IDENTITY OR...?**

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**Xhabir DERALLA**



# **About identities, from all aspects, without restraints**

[introduction]

It is necessary to understand the events and processes in order to form an opinion and to plan an action, both at the individual and collective level, both within the society sphere and the domains implied under the terms of institutions and state. This project is a response to that need. Starting from personal experiences and standpoints related to identity issues, and ending with the outstanding analysis of the global trends and of the important historic and socio-political processes that are inevitably interlinked, this project is a unique public resource with answers to essential questions about the Macedonian, regional and world reality in which we live in.



## CONTEXT

The accelerated process of overcoming the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece, which has been ongoing for almost three decades, has caused an avalanche of nationalist rhetoric and tensions in both countries. The tensions began particularly with the Davos Summit in January 2018, when the leaders of the two countries, Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras, started the long-awaited process of solving the dispute that later resulted with the Prespa Agreement for overcoming the name dispute.

Nationalists, gathered around the former ruling party of VM-RO-DPMNE and the smaller parties, which are openly supported by Russia, have started a campaign with an unprecedented hate speech and radical nationalist rhetoric, accompanied by inflammatory public appearances throughout the country. Even from the very beginning of the process, and especially after the signing of the Prespa Agreement on June 17, 2018, the radicals organized several violent protests with the purpose of obstruct the Government's efforts of overcoming the dispute.

The agreement reached was welcomed by the entire world, and also by the majority of citizens in Macedonia, aware that it is necessary to make changes in the name of the country, internationally known as FYROM, into the Republic of North Macedonia, with the purpose of accelerating the Euro-Atlantic integrations that were entirely blocked during the 11-year ruling of an autocratic, nationalist and criminal regime. The nationalist opposition called the Prespa Agreement a "capitulation", claiming that it will endanger the ethnic, national, cultural, historical and linguistic heritage of ethnic Macedonians. They led their campaign with an ultra-nationalist and exclusive



rhetoric, and used explicit speech and hate speech against all ethnic communities that live in Macedonia, especially against Albanians and Roma communities, and also created an atmosphere of public lynch against the Macedonians who supported the historic agreement between the two countries. The nationalist narrative was accompanied with a well-thought-out and obviously richly sponsored production of fake news that were distributed through the social networks and some of the electronic media in the country.

This situation in the country has worsened even more during the referendum process, which was held on September 30, 2018. As a result of the insanely dirty campaign that had the aim to scare and passivize moderate and pro-Western majority of citizens in the country, the referendum had only partial success (37% turnout, of which 91% voted positively). On top of everything, the partial success of the referendum was a consequence of a series of omissions of the state institutions.

The tensions and nationalist rhetoric continued after the referendum, whereas the country is still facing instability and tensions.

Because of this all, the Macedonian society remains deeply divided along ethnic, religious and political lines, where the anti-Western sentiment is spreading through hate speech and fake news, and often with direct violence.

## JUSTIFICATION

Immediately after the referendum was held, at which voters had the opportunity to vote for or against the Prespa Agreement for overcoming the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece, CIVIL and the Heinrich-Böll Foundation recognized



the need for a comprehensive view of the processes related to identity issues.

The social and political circumstances in Macedonia have not been by far reassuring for a long time. Gruevski's regime leaves deep traces within the societal fabric and deforms the manners of political action in relation to – and perception of – the basic values of civilization, devastated culture, education and science. The destructive policy of the regime has carried out aggressive social engineering where fabricated myths were built about the origin and identity of ethnic Macedonians.

Then, we had the “gloomy conspiracies” of the “rotten” West, and especially of the neighboring countries, primarily, Greece, Albania and Bulgaria which, in different ways, are “involved” in the “theft” of everything that is Macedonian, as well as the danger of “dirtying” the “ancient and sacred Macedonian blood and soil” with the extremely “ungrateful and predatory”, and so less valuable, ethnic minorities in the country.

A perfect formula for ruling for a long time: to make up, if such do not exist, internal and external enemies, and to keep the society under constant pressure and fear of danger, and to portray the regime as a protector sent from heaven.

The next generations of political leaders will have to invest great efforts to overcome the consequences and the situations that are not always visible, but are part of the social, cultural and political existence. That implies a decisive and long-term fight against the growing nationalism and ethnic, religious and political divisions. The Macedonian society needs to recognize the fact that the growing anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments and political actions will cause heavy damages to the concept of multiculturalism, for which, on the other side, the society and the political establishment in this period have

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shown strong will and declared commitment to carry out in practice.

Further divisions in the society will threaten the stability of the country and its national and regional security. These are areas of social and political action that must not remain on the margins, and even more, it needs to become part of the top priorities when it comes to creation of a concept for the society in which we live in. That all demands an essential need for deliverance and looking ahead, a genuine aspiration for progress that is never restricted to only material needs and economic wellbeing, but is, nevertheless, a precondition for such progress.

## CONCEPT AND PROJECT

It is necessary to understand the events and processes in order to form an opinion and to plan an action, both at the individual and collective level, both within the society sphere and the domains implied under the terms of institutions and state. This project is a response to that need. Starting from personal experiences and standpoints related to identity issues, and ending with the outstanding analysis of the global trends and of the important historic and socio-political processes that are inevitably interlinked, this project is a unique public resource with answers to essential questions about the Macedonian, regional and world reality in which we live in.

Therefore...

Starting from the deep need to define, think and rethink the terms, perceptions and practices related to the identity issues that are in the essence of the dispute between Macedonia and Greece, but also much wider, CIVIL has set the concept of a



comprehensive and multilayered project that is an open platform for further actions, at the same time.

The main goal of the project is to confront hate speech and fake news that were the main tools attacking the Prespa Agreement process, and to raise awareness about the true dimensions and benefits for the entire country. And more than that. This project is a decisive call for overcoming the culture of hostile and destructive action in the public discourse, and an attempt to promote culture of dialogue and promotion of contemporary, progressive ideas and values.

Therefore, this project invited prominent intellectuals and public opinion makers to talk and write articles about their standpoints and experiences, with which this project will oppose the fake news and destructive dimensions of the nationalist rhetoric and anti-Western action. Here, the public will find well-known names from the spheres of science, politics, media and civil society. They have publicly shared their findings and views in terms of the identity issues from many interesting aspects.

CIVIL's entire team participated in the project, some of which are also authors at the panel discussion and in the book that emerges from it, while the others are authors in the media production of the organization and creators of activities for public awareness raising and civic education.

**Saso ORDANOSKI, PhD**



# **The new generations are overcoming the ethnic, national and religious identities**

Today's generations are increasingly adopting two types of identities. One is the real identity, with which they recognise themselves, and it is quite fragmented, in their everyday life when they are socially awake, and in direct contact. However, they also live in a virtual identity, at the same time. That virtual identity becomes even more important for them, the one they foster for themselves and start to believe in, even more than in the real identities. It is all about how they look like on Facebook, Instagram, what they tweet, what their favorite Facebook pages are, what they post about themselves, for others to consider them as such, as they wish to be.



**I**t is difficult to talk, in the old way, about what collective and personal identities mean and how they are formed nowadays. The old definitions that implied a much more static situation in the forming of these identities are obsolete. There is a new way in which these, ever more dynamic, categories are formed and developed; their mutual influence is exceptionally great, but also independent of some national stereotypes, regardless of some national frameworks in which attempts are made for developing some identities.

The definitions that the sovereignty of states, the established and only unique state systems, such as the ones on education and culture, can have an influence on the community and on the formation of common identities, thus the individual identities, are quite outdated concepts these days. Today's modern human is exposed to countless fragmentations of smaller and larger issues that are connected not only to people's life on a certain territory, and in a certain community, but they are in a permanent contact with practically limitless community that they communicate with daily, from where the modern human draws information on daily basis. This communication does not end on what is defined as someone's language, as one's official religion, as some official history from which someone originates, or the set of traditions from where one's value system originate, determinations, basic presumptions in the building of characters...

Today's generations are increasingly adopting two types of identities. One is the real identity, with which they recognise themselves, and it is quite fragmented, in their everyday life when they are socially awake, and in direct contact. However, they also live in a virtual identity, at the same time. That virtual identity becomes even more important for them, the one they

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foster for themselves and start to believe in, even more than in the real identities. It is all about how they look like on Facebook, Instagram, what they tweet, what their favorite Facebook pages are, what they post about themselves, for others to consider them as such, as they wish to be.

The topic about modern identities, about acquiring, about their loss..., is increasingly surpassing the debates about what a state as an organized system can offer, in the sense of some formal education, because today, the forming of identities depends less on the formal education, and more on the quality, diversity, the communicativeness of that education, in order to make people part of the world, and not just part of the national community to which they belong. At the same time, the influences that are informal and that cannot be controlled by some official systematic control, are very large and are practically out of the control of an official system. And they have an influence on the possibility in this globalized culture, in the infinite possibility to be able to communicate with the world. You cannot control the urges of building someone's identity.

The boundaries of privacy have also shifted, and privacy is an area in which a person is preoccupied with one's own identity, with the identity of the children, family, etc. In that invasion of privacy, it's not only the states that enter with their attempts to take up more space, to squeeze the space that should be considered as privacy, but also the readiness of people and individuals, to offer as much as possible information about themselves, sometimes unaware of the boundaries of what should be only their privacy...

Thus, there is sharing of contents that have always been considered as something that is someone's private life. Today, something that gets life on its own, is thrown on some public



scene, and which later returns to the individual characteristics of one's identity, in a way in which it cannot be controlled. In other words, to talk about losing and acquiring identity in these modern times, is to actually talk about an increasingly better education of people, which includes involvement in what is understood as a globalized world, to talk about awareness of where the limits of privacy are in what can and cannot be used and abused in that area. To be aware that there are no longer physical, geographical limitations, the small cultures such as the Macedonian culture and other cultures that exist here, such as the Albanian cultural model, are cultures that are exposed to such great influences that you cannot defend their identity components in a traditional way anymore. Today, practically, if someone does not speak English, it's no use if he knows Macedonian perfectly, because his placement in modern times increasingly depends on the possibility of communicating with the world that does not end in Tabanovce [border crossing], but extends on the entire globe.

Today's identities are identities of confusion, identities that are frequently in a state of crisis management, in an everyday challenge to take on disputes that are not conducted on a controlling, necessary national-ethnic base, but are conducted in the sense – are you capable or not, to enter higher tertiary structures in the life of both the individuals and the community, and that means, to be sufficiently equipped with all the qualities for communicating with the entire world... In that sense, the state has its own role, because still, it is an organized system in society that controls certain flows that are important for the forming of the identities. Primarily, what I mean is that the formal structures of education, the contents that are studied there, the treatment of the family, search for a

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better status, social conditions in which families develop, but also the social community, which not only in its political, but also social dimensions, has an influence on the forming and changing of one's identity. Hence, the state has those opportunities, because it has resources that can influence all that, but to a certain extent only, because even the formal interventions of the state systems are no longer in a situation, nor have the possibility, to determine the dynamics of the development of identities...

It is a fact that the new generations are already in a situation when they have a considerable need to overcome their ethnic, national, religious identities. A certain kickback is that, nevertheless, even in such openness of the world's global culture, people enter with prejudices, with stereotypes and with a certain search for confirmation of what they already have as a stereotype themselves, despite the fact that the information offered globally is so great that it is practically endless. Still, they enter into more narrow demands of what will confirm their character, their identity, their scope of values, their prejudices, which they carry. Despite the limitless possibilities to choose, they are often inclined to become static, to become conservative in their choices, even to radicalize, especially in the political sense... This, of course, comes back with an increased level of insecurity, fear for both the individuals and the communities, which leads to a contraction in the political sense, which makes them ever more conservative in the levels of tolerance towards others, in the levels of accepting others' experiences...

This competition that is currently taking place between the pressure of a globalized cultural scene, globalized political-social scene and the need for some kind of personal identity's security, leads to a high dose of friction within the individuals



themselves. These dozes of frictions reflect with a series of, not only social, but also other types of pathologies, mental, personal... There is an increasing prevalence of depression and phobias, which are the result of certain social circumstances in which we live in, which on the other hand, contributes to a social contraction in which, instead of offering and using the best we carry in us, we frequently are inclined to what is an unproductive way of looking at the reality of our own perspectives, of the perspectives of the community...

Hence, building, preserving, changing of modernity is something that opposes the traditional way; of how once the identity characterises and processes of formation were defined, that this type of conflict dynamics are increasingly depending on factors that are out of the control of the formal structures of the society and of the state.

We are facing a great influx of influences for which, in order to be able to process them in a constructive way, it is necessary, as early as at the beginning of one's adolescence and post adolescence years, to have personalities who will be able – because of their education, because of their social statuses and the roles they have in society – to be stable and to be resistant to the distortion and to any social – malignant destructive directions. It is a difficult challenge for any modern society, we see that individuals, personalities in much larger cultural, state communities than Macedonia, are going through huge challenges. However, I think that, at the end, there is no other choice, no other way, but to create generations that will be resistant, to oppose the challenges they will be faced with in the short and medium-term perspective.

In this sense, in order to be politically up to date, when I look at today's arguments about how the changing of the Mace-



donian constitution, or about how the consequences of the Prespa Agreement will eventually influence the identity issues of the Macedonians, I have to say that an irony prevails within me. Modern identities, regardless of how they are defined in constitutions, which are the main documents of some official cultural, state-social communities, have an influence on how identities actually develop in reality. Based on what will be written in the Constitution and whether the Macedonian language will be protected with some constitutional assumptions, such as, whether the license plates of the automobiles will have this or that mark, and whether certain codes will encode your existence, the reality that is as dynamic as I am describing it, certainly has less importance than – whether we will succeed to make a good education system! Whether we will succeed to treat culture as a process, and not just as a product that will be treated only at festivals! Whether we will succeed to make sufficiently creative and capable and well-educated young generations, which will be able to cross the Macedonian border and succeed in the world, so that they can come back here as such, with new experiences they will acquire. This means that after three-four days from the adoption of certain constitutional changes, it will be a forgotten content. What will be important is whether the reforms in society will succeed, with which we will create citizens who will be able to respond to the modern offers and demands of the world, since we are part of the world. We are not living in our own, some kind of national-claustrophobic boundaries, in which we argue about some trivial topics from history, about the figures from it, turned backwards, instead of forward...

In other words, it is necessary to enter that matter boldly, because the perspective does not imply to like something and

to stop and statically treat that something, but you have to be prepared for everything that means a dynamic international structure in which you develop competition with everyone else, with your own and others' identities.

**Mirjana NAJCEVSKA, PhD**



## **The ethnic identity “erased” all the others**

The Prespa Agreement not only does it not affect the identity of the Macedonians in Republic of Macedonia negatively, and not only could it not be used for losing this identity, but on the contrary, the way it is provided, with the provisions in it and what it offers as a legal framework for the future relations between Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece, perhaps we can recognize it as an agreement that opens a door for a new view of the identities.



**T**he identity in Macedonia in these past years is usually associated with what is called ethnic identity, somewhat less – religious identity, with the identity of belonging to the state, though, least of all, when speaking about identity, speaking about civic identity, about individual identity...that identity is not a homogeneous category. On the contrary, it is an identity that is composed of more types of identities that constitute what represents the identity of a certain individual.

Not only are there numerous identities, but we have to understand them also in their variability, in their flexibility. At a certain point, a person can have one identity, in another moment another identity, one identity may dominate at one point, and another identity in another moment. For example, at one point, I as a person can identify myself with my profession, I can identify myself as a lawyer...At another point, I can identify myself with an interest of mine, for instance, environmental protection or protection of human rights, which is also an identity determination. In a third moment, I can identify myself with something completely different. With something that represents a mother's identity, identity of a wife, and similar...

The homogenization that was carried out in recent years and setting the identity solely in correlation with ethnicity, has erased all of these other opportunities. And has actually instructed people – to have to recognize themselves only through that one, ethnic or national identity. Actually, it impoverished them, it prevented them from identifying themselves with other identities, it prevented them to go from one identity to another, it prevented them from socializing with other people with whom they share some of their different identities...

Why is the Prespa Agreement important in all of this? First,



because it destroys the unique and homogenous identification of people with ethnicity. Second, because it opens space for building new identities, something that at one point was stopped and even forbidden! Third, it opens a possibility for communication at another level, a cultural communication, educational, political and economic communication with people with whom, in some way, we've had barriers the entire time precisely because of that established one-unique homogenous, ethnically oriented identity.

The second element to which we should perhaps pay attention to is also the absurdity and anachronism of the existence of ethnicity, not only as a unique identity, but even also as one of the identities. Because people are accidentally born in a certain ethnic community ... They are very accidentally born in a certain cultural community. They are very randomly born in a given state. And what builds them as separate human beings who have a certain cultural background, human beings who have a certain connection with other people in the immediate and wider community and similar, is something that must not be bound. It is something that needs to be enriched. It is something that needs to add an element of diversity. It is something that should not separate them from other people, but rather connect them, because they have a certain particularity they can share, something they can add to what represents building the general human identity as a very heterogeneous category. What according to me the Prespa Agreement offers us, is precisely the opening of the door of a somewhat different perception exactly on this aspect of identities.

However, there is another element that is very important and which we may be able to realize with the revival of this



Agreement, and that is the fight with the building of false identities. The absence of what represents civil identity and individual identity, the absence of what represents building the present and the future, very often is compensated with building false connections, false constructs in history. In fact, I could not say even in history, but rather in an imagined past...The entire construction of what roots and origin represent, which touches many thousands of years ago, and is interesting from the aspect of building a general human culture, must not any way be associated with the building of an individual identity. That is the main problem that we may succeed to fight if in an appropriate manner we begin to practice and apply the Prespa Agreement...

Hence, this will enable us to oppose the entire fake glow of the past that is being built around us. To all the back drops of the past that in the past 11 years were set up and the building of everything that is an illusion in relation to a very distant past that does not have and cannot have any influence on what is today's position of the people in Republic of Macedonia, today's needs and interests, today's building of the future, not only of individuals, but also of the entire state.

The fourth element that I could imagine in what is a positive aspect, a positive input of the Prespa Agreement, is the entry into a wider community. Hence, building not only of the European, but also of the world identity. For people to start seeing themselves as part of a very wide family, as part of a community in which the diversities will overcome the ethnic, linguistic and religious differences, differences in the way of living, in the way of thinking, in building of views and in the opportunity to accept diversity...that is probably the greatest benefit that,



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according to me, we will have from the Prespa Agreement.

This does not at all mean that it is some ideal agreement. This does not at all mean that it is an agreement that can give an answer to all possible questions, and especially not that it is an agreement that will automatically be positively implemented. It is simply up to us to draw the most positive element of the Agreement, to draw the positive aspects of the agreement that will allow us to: first, get rid of the falsely built identity in the past years, second, to establish a relation of flexible identity building that will enable us understand the entire heterogeneity and diversity of the identities of each one of us as individuals, so that we can then understand that heterogeneity, diversity and flexibility of the identities that exist in the immediate and wider community. This, at a certain level, will allow us not only formal, but also actually treating people as equal, that is, treating people as equal in their overall diversity, despite their diversity, that is, having their diversity in consideration.



**Mirjana MALESKA, PhD**



## **The road to normalization of relations with Greece is opened!**

A moment of coinciding of the interests of the great powers to secure peace and stability on the Balkans, in which they previously invested much, and to secure their presence in the region, as opposed to the power of Russia, has happily coincided with the strategic interests of our country to become a member of NATO and the EU. As our old acquaintance from 2001, former NATO Secretary General, George Robertson said: "Stars align for Macedonia"



**D**uring preparations for this debate, I reread two conversations that I had published 10 years ago on the Macedonian-Greek dispute as an editor in “New Balkan Politics”. They are still on the website of this international magazine even today. I will briefly refer to them so that our public can understand, how far we were from a compromise back then, and what a big and important step we are making today.

One of the conversations is with the then president of the Helsinki Committee of Greece, who was accused of national treason, Panayote Dimitras, famous activist against nationalism and xenophobia, and the second one with one of the most prominent Greek writers, with liberal views, Nikos Dimou.

I asked Dimou for an interview after he had published on his blog the text entitled “Nationalism threatens democracy in Greece”, which, nonetheless, with slight changes, can also refer to the Macedonian nationalism.

“From my childhood onward, the Greek history resembled a (cheap) western movie, where the Greeks are always and inevitably the Good Guys. The bad guys always changed. There was a threat from the north, then from the east, then again from the North and back from the East. When I was a child, the word Bulgarian was a bigger curse than Turk. It was forbidden for the Greeks from northern Greece to call themselves Macedonians. The Albanian, back then, had a neutral tone, and today has become a threat”.

Panayote Dimitras, in terms of the question what is the dispute between the two countries all about, replied:

“Greece refuses to accept that there could be a Macedonian ethnic identity anywhere, but most important within the framework of its territory, where ethnic minorities are not recognized, regardless of whether they are Macedonians or Turks...The Greeks can accept Northern Macedonia as a name of the country, if both sides agree, but it will be very difficult to admit that



there is a Macedonian identity and language, hence it would not be likely to expect that reason would prevail”

These days I read that the organization of the Macedonians from Greece “Vinozito” (Rainbow), is requesting from the Government the introducing of the Macedonian language in state schools and recognizing the Macedonian minority. The Prespa Agreement has given another encouragement to their fight for minority rights, but that is their fight, it is not ours...

I have been following the name from its formal beginning, when Macedonia became independent in 1991, after the bloody fall of the Yugoslavian Federation and when it sought international recognition. We immediately had to face the reality of the international policy, that unions are formed in order to protect the interests of their members. The doors were closed for us where Greece was a member, and this being all the major and significant international organizations, such as the United Nations or the European Community. The greatest shock for the nation, in the first three years of its independence, came from Lisbon. In the Declaration from June 1992, the EC members, busy with their problems and without much knowledge about us, expressed preparedness to recognize us if our name did not contain the word Macedonia in it! We overcame this difficult blow to the national dignity, for later, through the mediation and support of the British diplomacy, to have the compromising proposal prepared, Republic of Macedonia (Skopje), which entered parliamentary procedure. Neither we, nor the Greeks endured in the process to the end, and after a certain confusion in the country’s foreign policy and the discord between its then creators, Macedonia was accepted in the UN under the temporary reference FYROM.

I was in New York at the time with tears of joy, while on the other hand, I had a lump in my throat because of the uncertainty: how will the bilateral relations between Macedonia and



Greece continue, because Greek nationalists fiercely protested in front of the UN building. In 1995, when the Interim Accord was being signed, I was still in New York and was content when, for the first time, representatives of Macedonia and Greece extended a hand. All of us who at that moment were there and were part of the event, photographed ourselves with the smiling UN Secretary General.

Hence, I know first-hand that the dispute was longstanding, complex and deeply emotional, but in those first years, it was still not an identity one, and probably if we had been consistent, the demand for a compromise would have been solved earlier. However, the politics at home went into another direction. Although formally it was being negotiated, not a single politician – absolutely no one – regardless of which party they belonged to, did have the intention of being accused of national treason and selling of national interests, because, this is how you surely lose elections, and maybe even your head. The entire atmosphere was brought to a boiling point, and letters of threats to those who led the country and the foreign policy, were not rare. In fact, the assassination of President Kiro Gligorov in October 1995 is a testimony to the political climate in the country.

The Interim Accord with Greece from September 13, 1995, brought some ease, but since we are already accusing the Greeks for not adhering to the accord, we should be virtuous and say that our side also did not stick to its obligations to seek a compromising solution, but rather through its diplomatic network, increased the number of countries that recognize us under the constitutional name, with the intention of pressuring the Greeks. This policy did not solve the problems, especially the country's EU and NATO membership., but only deepened the mutual distrust. The conflict with Greece escalated with VMRO-DPMNE coming to power and transformed



from a name issue into a sensitive identity dispute, because a new generation of young people grew up and committed to the myth that we are all direct descenders of Alexander the Great.

Why did we enter in a confrontation with Greece, while setting the foundations of our identity on, so to speak, foreign and hostile territory? Emphasising symbols, such as the flag of Vergina, the monuments of Alexander the Great, naming streets, schools, highways, sports halls and other buildings after ancient kings like Alexander, Philip and Aminta, for instance, for whom we had no idea existed, nor did we care, was made with the intention to show our Ancient-Hellenistic origin, and thus our claims over the territory of Aegean Macedonia, which for Greece was extremely unacceptable.

Behind this Greatmacedonian pretentious policy, all those who had personal motives gathered to support it. For example, one of the advisors of the president of the state and a colleague of mine said: "We will swap with the Greeks – we will give them back their antiquity, when the time comes, and they will give us back the name of the state". It didn't turn out that way. Another colleague, also an official in the previous government, laughed because with the antiquization we would attract tourists and would be making money out of that. He was prejudice towards the Albanians and believed that some kind of union between the Macedonians and Greeks would help to free ourselves from the Albanians, who according to him, had been "a milestone around our necks", and that, by the way, we the professors – which would be nice- would be teaching in Thessaloniki! Superficial and dangerous. A third colleague, close to the government, was convincing me that we need to escape the immediate historic past, in which we have much in common with the Bulgarians, and through appropriate social engineering – to unify as a nation around a powerful myth – Alexander! Wrong, because let me refer to the words of Dionys-



ios Solomos, a Greek poet from the 19 century, the nation must learn to consider as national everything true. And it is true that we are separate southern Slavic people that speak their own language that belongs to the group of Slavic languages!

Hence, none of the mentioned intellectuals and professors thought about the price that has to be paid for such a dangerous and superficial policy. They were with the government, the state treasury was at their disposal, they received ambassadorial positions and other privileges as a reward, why would they be thinking?

What are the consequences of this nationalistic policy?

We all know them, more or less. Therefore, very briefly: confusion was created in terms of the identity, what it means to be a Macedonia. Society was divided into patriots and – traitors. The Albanians were extremely dissatisfied with the government that used insulting rhetoric against them, and was not providing them a European future. Radical demands emerged from that discontent and the internal division, of the pro-Western forces that in the name of the future are prepared for a compromise with the Greeks for the name, and those who were fighting for a status-quo and have the support of Russia, became worse, to the point of conflict. The country was remained outside of NATO for too long, bringing its security in question, in moments when on the Balkans there still are policies contemplating border changes. We came to a situation to see ourselves, and to have others see us as a country without a future, on the verge of a conflict from which all those who can leave...

With a senior Greek diplomat, we spoke on this topic. He was our guest at home, and in a friendly atmosphere he said that Greece has no problem with moderate and reasonable people. “We want to disclose your extreme nationalism and irredentism”.



They didn't have to, they just needed to wait because it disclosed itself. Along with primitive-anti-communism, which brought into question our basic identity: that we are a young nation, having been formed in a process of liberation movements, led primarily by the historical VMRO, and then by the Communist Party, which together with the other anti-fascist forces in World War II, created the Macedonian state. I think that no one understands better the danger of anti-communism for the national identity, than the writer and our friend, Kole Čašule. I will quote his words from "Sick Tribe" (2000):

"In this anti-communism everything was mixed up: volunteerism in interpreting history, anti-euphoria, ignorance and, above all, enormous thirst for power channelized as an urge for revenge...A serious threat presented itself that the survival of the state would be questioned with the rejection of communism, and that the nation would be disputed again. Hence, the inevitable statement that the main enemy of the anti-Macedonian conspiracy, primarily and above all, are the uprising, the National Liberation War, the fighters for affirmation of the Macedonian nation, language and culture, and not their (good or bad) communism!"

Today, after 27 years, we are returning to what our friends from the US and the EU advised us from the very start, to reach a compromise with Greece. Now, the Prespa Agreement is here, and with great relief I watched it enter parliamentary procedure. As to the question of whether we are losing our identity with this agreement, with greatest conviction of a person with experience and professor, I say that we are not losing it, but rather strengthening it! It doesn't suit Greece for us to get too near to Bulgaria, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Kozias openly said that in front of his public. Tsipras and Syriza have extended us a hand, as much from conviction as from the international pressure.



“You are Macedonians, as you claim, with your own state that we have agreed to be called Northern Macedonia, you have your own history, culture and heritage, which are particularly different from the Hellenic civilization, history and culture of the region Macedonia in Greece from ancient times to now, and your official language is Macedonian, which belongs to the group of South Slavic languages and is not related, like the other features, with the Hellenic civilization, history, culture and heritage of the northern region of Greece. Under the terms Macedonia and Macedonian, you and we understand a different historical context – this we recognize and accept. From now on, we will be your friends, we shall help you in everything and we will support you...”

I deliberately tried to paraphrase the solution of the Agreement, regarding the identity, in the style of the Melian Dialogue of Thucydides, where the forces of the Athenians and the right of the Melians clash, because part of the public in our country considers that only we are disadvantaged and that only we were pressured to give in.

It's not even close like that. When bilateral disputes, like this one, threaten to destabilize the state and to produce conflict that later will not be able to be controlled and presents potential danger to the regional peace and security, the intervention of the great and powerful states like the US and others, should be looked at with understanding. Let's not forget the lessons from history that in Rwanda, for example, in 1995, in just several days 500.000 people were killed and no one came to help those people. UN diplomats came and went to work like every ordinary day. A second sobering example is NATO's intervention in the civil war in Bosnia, which was also late, especially for 7000 Muslims who were killed in Srebrenica.

When the great forces, as a third side, enter like mediators in a dispute between two countries, they, nevertheless,

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pressure both sides, but usually add their force to the weaker side in the dispute, in order to force the stronger one, in our case – Greece, to a compromise. That force was added to us, as a state, and it is no coincidence that the Greek opposition, and especially the Greek nationalists, are shouting loudly that national treason has been made by allowing us to keep the name – Macedonia, Macedonians – for the nation and the Macedonian language. This could not have been imagined until yesterday. A moment of coinciding of the interests of the great powers to secure peace and stability on the Balkans, in which they previously invested much, and to secure their presence in the region, as opposed to the power of Russia, has happily coincided with the strategic interests of our country to become a member of NATO and the EU. As our old acquaintance from 2001, former NATO Secretary General, George Robertson said: “Stars align for Macedonia”.

I am not idealizing the situation resulting from the agreement. With the debate opening for changes in the Constitution, there are always new justified, and more often unjustified demands, and even blackmail from internal political actors or from the neighbouring countries, which can further destabilize this fragile country. However, the Prespa Agreement does have strong sponsors, the US and the EU, therefore I hope that we will bring the process of constitutional changes to the end, while still standing on our feet. It would be easier, when there is a storm, for us to be united, and from the opposition, signals are not coming that it is ready for cooperation. The debate with the Greeks in relation to the pragmatic issue of the Agreement will probably be long and unpleasant, but the road to normalizing the relations between the two countries – not to look at each other as a threat – is opening.

I will finish my presentation with several words of Nikos Dimou from his essay “The agony and the ecstasy of being



Greek“, published in “The Guardian”, that may also apply to us.

“Greece is a small country with an immense ego. Its people are burdened with history and myths. Always at the top of the polls measuring national pride in Europe (97 per cent)... We view ourselves as the chosen people... This clash between our inflated, mythical ego and the harsh everyday reality is a constant source of depression. We feel that we should receive special recognition and treatment and when we don't get it, we feel disappointed... We start believing in conspiracy theories and feel threatened... Our national rights become a source of irritation... Foreign policy is approached in an entirely emotional manner (they love us - or no? Are they philhellenes? Antihellenes?). We thirst for recognition, acceptance and admiration... Those who maintain that it was simply the Greek soul that lay at the root of victory are unrealistic. The soul was always there in the past - but we had permanently devastating scores... Nothing happens as a result of soul alone. But if it is combined with rationalism, Greeks can go very far indeed”.

**Katerina KOLOZOVA, PhD**



# **The Agreement with Greece allows for political determi- nation of the identity**

The Prespa Agreement allows for the national identity to be determined in pure and unequivocal political terms without romantic nationalism atavisms, that is, to determine based on the principle of self-recognized determination



**W**hen it comes to the issue that the identity of the Macedonian people is somehow threatened with the Prespa Agreement, I have been publically claiming for months and explaining that not only is the identity not threatened, but on the contrary, that with this Agreement the identity of the Macedonia ethnic community in Republic of Macedonia is preserved. With this I do not refer to any of my private outbursts on Facebook or Twitter, but I am talking about my published texts, columns, both here and abroad, of which also part in Greece.

Whenever a debate was opened in the previous period in regards to this issue, the opponents of the Agreement refused to directly discuss the items pertaining to Article 7 of the Agreement, which quite clearly stipulates that both parties have the right to use the term in their own way. This implies assigning their own meaning for their own history, their own cultural heritage, their own language as part of something that profiles the identity.

In other words, Article 7 allows for the term to be used in completely different ways assigning its own meaning. This means that Article 7 relies on or is a materialization of the principle of identity self-determination. With this, for the first time, we receive from some of our neighbours, recognition of identity self-determination from Greece, even before Bulgaria. A historical step forward is being made from both sides in terms of some kind of national histories in the region. For the first time, instead of in historical folklore and romantic nationalism terms, the identity is being determined in purely political terms. This agreement allows for the national identity to be determined in purely unequivocal political terms without historical – romantic atavisms, that is, to be determined based on the principle of self-recognized determination.

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There was also a group of critics who did not refuse to discuss Article 7, but still managed to resent something in it. I consider that, from the identity aspect, the advantage of this agreement is Article 7, and only an advantage, not a shortcoming: the fact that the Macedonian side of the agreement can determine itself as Macedonian in the sense of people, language, ethnic group or nation; the term ethnic community in our country is constitutive for the concept and for the reality of the nation. We use the term people or nationality, which principally in our legislation is already translated into English as ethnic community. Article 7 in this sense as well, allows us to use the term Macedonian in unlimited ways.

The only limitation, in my opinion productive limitation (that is, it is not limitation, but delineation that allows us an identity advantage), is the crystallization of the use of the term “Macedonian” in a national and ethnic sense, as we use in a limited way on the territory of Vardar Macedonia, or what once used to be Socialist Republic of Macedonia. For me this is not a shortcoming, but rather an advantage, because on this territory, in this country, in that Yugoslav Federation we have formed that national identity. Here is where it received a definition, a standard language, literature, here is where it received a Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts...The opportunity to limit it on the history of this territory or nation/state gives us a crystallized identity image with which the minorities in the neighbouring countries will be able to identify themselves.

Let's not forget that there are appalling confusions because the Greeks have their own identification as Macedonians. In their country it is some kind of cultural-regional identity. It all comes down to an absurd situation where “Rainbow”, Slavophones that call themselves Macedonians, and the Hellenistic



nationalists are saying “I am Macedonian” and “I am Macedonian too”.

How to resolve that confusion? How not to have one swallow the other so as not to have any assimilation? How else, if not to allow “Rainbow”, to that Slavophone minority in Northern Greece to declare itself as Macedonian, in the sense Macedonians from Republic of Macedonia. Such a solution is patriotic, and not vice versa. Precisely because it is the referent that we identify ourselves by, the signifier “Macedonian” - refers to that referent, to that group of people, to that territory – it allows us identity crystallization.

I consider that these arguments in favour of the Agreement are patriotic, and not ones of compromise or “cosmopolitan”. Completely opposite of what I encountered as criticism in the past period.

**Ljubco GEORGIEVSKI**



## **The “Ancient” identity put us on bad terms with our neighbours and the international community!**

The Macedonian identity, in my opinion, is not endangered by the determinant “Northern” or “Upper” before the name of the country, but by the attitude of the ethnic Macedonians towards their own identity. Macedonians even under the Ottoman rule succeeded to save their identity by preserving their culture and tradition... They danced Macedonian folk dances, sang songs in Macedonian and spoke in Macedonian language...Let’s take a look at how much we ourselves nowadays in Macedonia care about our own Macedonian identity.



**T**he topic of the identity is an issue that is dear to me and I have spoken about it to the public many times and in many addresses. Perhaps this is a good moment for me to repeat some of those views of mine, which I hope will have some influence in overcoming this situation that we can call a crisis.

When we talk about the identity, especially the Macedonian identity, and about the main issue – whether there will still be a Macedonian identity, we have to reflect a little on the history of the issues of the Macedonian identity and its changing, let's say for the period of the last hundred years. The reason is precisely the fact that, unfortunately, in the last decade we are talking about the Macedonian identity in the period of several thousands of years ago, something to which I was very critical, and finally, I am pleased that as a propaganda idea it is not succeeding today.

So, will the Macedonian identity survive and will the Macedonian identity withstand following the agreement in Prespa? I am absolutely optimistic, but we have to approach the problem objectively.

In the last ten years in Macedonia, one of the most radical changes happened in the identity of the people in Europe, and even in the world, which we, as witnesses in modern history, can see. All of a sudden, from everything we know, and it was quite an established norm – that the Macedonian people are part of the Slavic group of people, we suddenly turned into ancient Macedonians! Into something special, something exclusive, into something that has nothing to do with anything in the world, and we made a story out of that, which unfortunately many started to believe. And those who were the carriers of that idea, I think abused it out of purely marketing reasons for winning elections.



More specifically, it is about the so-called ancient identity of the Macedonian people, for which I have many texts, we are not ancient Macedonians, we should not draw our source from there, and I hope that today, in a more normal discussion, we will manage to deny this thesis in a more argued manner. Otherwise, when we talk about that false identity, I must say that it caused us much harm in the political relations with our neighbours, it caused us damage in the relations with the international community, though, it caused the greatest damage to us.

At the psychological level, we rose above all the others, and started to imagine that we are the center of the world, that everything revolves around us, that they can't do anything without us, and this actually is not the case, the world does go on without us being present in it...And without any special discussion, without the quasi- scientists who were writing books and filming documentaries on that topic. All of that actually was quasi- science that simply bombarded us and caused permanent damage, which I believe will last for many years after these events.

The projection of the propaganda in these past 11 years spoke about some kind of identity of a Macedonian nation and an identity that we understand today, at least two or three thousand year back, and the period of 50 or 100 years is being skipped...it is very problematic and it really creates a problem in the consciousness of a Macedonian, when we project today's consciousness of ours about the Macedonian identity 2000 years back. When we take a look at the facts, things are quite different. Let's take Macedonia before the Ilinden uprising in 1903, and see what happened with that Macedonian identity. If we make an outline of the Macedonian identity then, that is, of the Slavic population, two-three years before the Ilinden upris-



ing, we will see an odd picture, for which we need to openly talk about and face. We will see that the vast mass of Macedonian Slavs living on the territory of the ethnic Macedonia declare themselves as everything else, but as Macedonians. There is a huge mass of Macedonians who have become Muslims and declare themselves as Turks, and we deal scientifically with that part of the Macedonian population very little, who first Islamised themselves and later took the name Turks. That is part of the Macedonian ethnic story.

Furthermore, we go to a layer of so-called Greek patriarchs, who are not to be underestimated, who at that time accounted for about 300-400 thousand Macedonians, who declared themselves as Greeks. Many of those who fought against the Macedonians, such as Greek patriarchs, were exactly Macedonians and we have such famous names.

The third group are Macedonians who under the influence of foreign propaganda and the Serbian Patriarchate declared themselves as Serbs, we have such enclaves in Struga, Porece, Skopska Crna Gora, Kumanovo... They too are Macedonians, but feel as and declare themselves as Serbs.

And finally, the greatest mass, which we want to admit very shyly, declare themselves as Macedonian Bulgarians. Practically, if we take a look at that VMRO revolutionary idea, if we want to be objective, we will see that, unfortunately, that historic VMRO, even in its documents at the start relied only on the Macedonians who declared themselves Bulgarians. And that is why in 1902 we have Krste Petkov Misirkov's book "On Macedonian Matters", in which he clearly and unequivocally says – what if there has not been a Macedonian nation until yesterday? His idea is precisely that, for all the Slavs in Macedonia, who at that moment declared themselves as Serbs, Greeks,

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Bulgarians or Turks, to call themselves Macedonians. That is the basis of the Macedonian ethnic story, of the national identity that we simply want to skip, whether politically or because we cannot face reality...

Anyone who had requested a millet during the Ottoman Empire, under "anyone" I refer to what was called ethnic community or entity in former Yugoslavia, received it. Misirkov himself says in that book: "I am sure that if tomorrow we were to ask for a Macedonian millet from the Ottoman Empire, the Turks would give it to us". However, that does not happen! VMRO, the Macedonian intelligence from that time, do not demand a Macedonian millet, there is no such thing in our history, there is no such letter, there is no such manifest...in 1905, 100 Vlach traders and intellectuals gather, send a letter to the Sultan and the Sultan gives them a Vlach millet. That is not the case with the Macedonian people.

The Macedonian identity, in my opinion, is not endangered by the determinant "Northern" or "Upper" before the name of the country, but from the attitude of the ethnic Macedonians towards their own identity. The Macedonians under the Ottoman slavery succeeded to save their identity by preserving their culture and tradition.

They danced Macedonian folk dances, sang songs in Macedonian and spoke in Macedonian language...Let's take a look at how much we ourselves in Macedonia care about our own Macedonian identity. To go to a Macedonian wedding, Macedonian celebration, I guarantee you that the Macedonian contemporary nation and the Macedonian contemporary state are the only ones on the Balkans, where their own national song is minor compared to the cultural influences! We are not doing anything, we talk about the Macedonian identity, and when we



celebrate at a wedding, birthday, we do not sing a Macedonian song, and then we say that someone else is endangering the Macedonian identity. No, we ourselves are endangering it.

For hundreds and hundreds of Macedonians, in the diaspora, when I used to go there when we were supposed to create the Macedonian state, the main question they asked me was – why should they pay 50 dollars for a Macedonian passport? Those are the people who are talking about Macedonia, who found it difficult to pay, and I think that even today that problem is present in many discussions of the Macedonian diaspora, when they are supposed to pay 50 euros or 50 dollars to get a Macedonian passport...

Let's continue, many of them should ask themselves why have they not returned to Macedonia for 15 years. They come to Macedonia when their father or mother dies and they need to bury them, and again, they will not come back in the next 15 years. What about not naming the children in the diaspora with Macedonian names? Finally, what about not learning in the Macedonian language? I guarantee you that at this moment, 50 percent of the children of the first generation of Macedonians who are in the diaspora do not know Macedonian, and not to mention the second generation...99 percent do not know Macedonian!

And finally, indeed about the arguments that the addition like – Northern, is damaging. There is no damage and there is no repercussion for the defence of the Macedonian identity and for the question – will there be a Macedonian identity. Simply, in my opinion, this is a not a question for discussion. I have spoken about this many times, I have said many times that the identity issue is something that we ourselves need to defend, and to carry it ourselves.

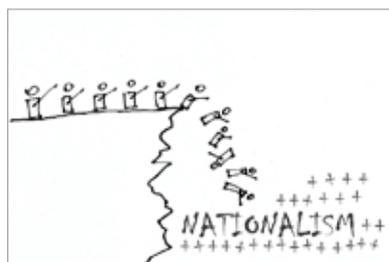
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Not to talk about the examples with the names I have mentioned so very often. The example of neighbouring Kosovo, the people are Albanian, partly Serbian, but let's look at the Albanian as the carrier, they do not think for a moment that the name Kosovo is a problem for their identity. I would also like to remind of our northern neighbour, Serbia, when all the republics fell apart and it was only them who remained Yugoslavia, I think the name was Yugoslavia for 6-7 months, the people were Serbian, and there was also a discussion for them to keep the name Yugoslavia.

The identity is something much more original, it is a feeling that no one can endanger if you have your own state. I too regret that the identity issue that in principle is a minor issue has become a problem for the Macedonians in Macedonia. Let's say in Turkey – the Kurds are fighting for rescuing or protecting their own identity, in Macedonia the question can be raised by all minorities – just not, the Macedonian people – is their identity protected, does the state care for that identity, is there a policy of assimilation..., these are the identity issues.

This issue puts us in a deep hole from which we cannot come out of. And we have been going around this question for 30 years. I see, there are still many political forces who are trying to keep this issue alive, again with the same topics and with the same stories...While basically, it is just one negation of one's own identity.



**Diana TAHIRI**



## **My identities are not just required percentages**

Most of all, it bothers me when my gender, ethnic and intellectual identity is used for some percentage representation in given occasions. Since the human being should be a composition of many identities, which in their interlinking within human, as a physicus, as an intellectual being, create a whole. When that whole is divided, that is, when one part is taken from that whole, for utilitarian needs, neglecting the other parts of that whole, then we attain only a partial image, response, movement, quality without the required excellence that the complete human being carries.



I often find myself thinking in the direction of the identities I possess. As a person, woman, mother, friend, colleague, worker, housewife, and about the several ethnic identities that intertwine in my being in this country.

My name is Diana, my last name is Tahiri. My maiden name is Jumerovic, derived from the last name Imeri, during World War I, for it to continue even after World War II, and later in the communist system. Somewhere towards the end of the communist system of then Yugoslavia, people began returning their authentic last names, from “ski” to “vic”, or “ov”, depending on the geographical location of where the ancestors whose last names had been changed, with assimilation intentions, had stayed. I did not get to changing my last name, since I got married, and without too much thought I accepted the last name of my husband. I did not change my last name even after his death, because I did not want to create additional confusion to my daughter, who was very young when she was left without one parent.

My last name with a Serbian “determinant” – “vic”, personally, did not represent any confusion or insecurity in the identity sense. My ethnic identity is Albanian from my mother’s and father’s side, spiced with several others from my father’s side. Every other ethnic identity in addition to this one, the official one, with which I present myself when it is required from me, and when I present myself in written word and in the language I communicate at home with my closest family, has never posed a threat to the second one, third one...

However, in the society in which I live in, it is not so simple. Throughout my life, my identity – Albanian, was often not accepted, because I had not looked like an Albanian. I also had non-acceptance of my identity from the Albanians, with whom



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I share my identity, for whom often I also did not look like an Albanian, and this being due to the stereotypes developed in all the communities in Macedonia. For example, when I enrolled in secondary school, I decided to study in Macedonian. On the first day of school, when I met my classmates, and after they found out that I was an Albanian, several classmates gathered around me and started asking me interesting and silly questions. Had I always been so dark-skinned, or had I been to the sea... “you don’t go to the sea, right?”. Or, did my mother work, and when I confirmed that she does work, they asked me how she dresses when she goes to work, to which I could not resist but joke with the following response: “She has special harem pants, a pair for each day”. Later I realized that most of the classmates had had no contact with Albanians during their life, and that is why they had a wrong conception of what an Albanian looks like, that is, they had no conception, rather their conception had been brought on by others. During the four-year study, we became very good friends, without exceptions. They were even guests of mine, out of pure curiosity, for later to see and realize that we live, behave, eat and do things similarly, except for the fact that we speak different languages. These things did not prevent me from developing into a mature and confident person, on the contrary, they even helped me.

Though, it does bother me when someone, in my country, calls me minority. Because in my opinion, there are no minorities anywhere in the world, when it comes to the human identity. I consider that the administrative number should not determine the status of people in a given state. Imagine Europe as one state, and for someone in it to be constantly calling you a minority, to be rubbing in your face certain rights it constantly gives you, because as a smaller community, by default



you should deserve it, and to be at someone's mercy. I chose Europe as an example for a country, because today's trend is entry in that big community, with many concessions from our country, fulfilments and deliverances of given tasks towards that determinant, with a final goal, equality on all grounds. Imagine how we feel, the others, in our mutual country...

When it comes to whether with the EU accession my fellow Macedonians would lose their identity, I will say for certain that they will not lose it. No matter how someone calls you, you will always be what you are. I always fought when someone attacked one of my identities, there is always someone who is bothered by that other identity, when it comes to the ethnic one, since at the moment it concerns precisely the ethnic one.

Most of all, it bothers me when my gender, ethnic and intellectual identity is used for some percentage representation in given occasions. Since the human being should be a composition of many identities, which in their interlinking within human, as a physicus, as an intellectual being, create a whole. When that whole is being divided, that is, when one part is taken from that whole, for utilitarian needs, neglecting the other parts of that whole, then we acquire only a partial image, response, movement, quality without the required excellence that the complete human being carries.

**Mersiha SMAILOVIC**

# **To build a society in which we will all be citizens of Europe!**



If I were to choose an identity, although my identity is already formed, I would, nevertheless, choose to have an identity that is also immortal. An identity that no one questions, the identity of humanity, to be a positive moment in society, to contribute in it...



**W**ithin the framework of everything that is happening to us in Republic of Macedonia, and that concerns the ordinary citizen, I think that at the moment I experience my identity as a citizen who pays taxes, who has no criminal offenses, maybe some ordinary, minor ones for wrong parking, a citizen who pays all possible taxes, and since I am owner of a company I also pay profit tax, and as a citizen who has no problem paying taxes as long as the state allocates funds for social assistance, a citizen who has no problem with the new pension for people over the age of 65. All those characteristics, as a citizen of the Republic of Macedonia, allow me to participate in making Macedonia a better environment, making Macedonia a better place for living, a place where there will be conditions for living for the young people, the elderly" ...

I think that for the identity it is crucial – not to violate, but to respect the laws in Macedonia. In terms of other debates, I have written for CIVIL how people understand the identity associated with the ethnicity they belong to. On the subject – what is my identity, I can say that I reflect a beautiful picture for Macedonia, as a country of different cultures, nations and people...We have Macedonian Muslims who identify themselves as Torbeshi (Muslim Macedonians) or Goranci (Muslim Macedonians from the Gora region), depending on where they are coming from, or as my former grandmothers and grandfathers who moved within Yugoslavia and came to live in Macedonia...

However, the debate in Macedonia in terms of the Prespa Agreement has indeed created a space – for people to take the right to say who has, and who does not have the right to negotiate, or who has the right to talk about the identity within the framework of this agreement...

A large part of my ethnic community, the Bosniak, were



labelled as not having the right to negotiate about the Macedonian identity. We come back again to the question: who has the right to negotiate, or is the identity something that can be negotiated, or is that some kind of feeling that we have inside of ourselves? I was born in Macedonia, but my identity as a member of the Bosniak community does not change, because I grew up with that identity, we speak Bosniak at home and I do not change that feeling, although we very rarely visit the place we are from in Serbia...

As to what Macedonian reflects, I have interesting things happen when I travel in countries where the population is predominantly Muslim. I was subject to particular profiling at the airport: probably because of my appearance, where my strong religious identity is obvious, I was detained and taken in a separate room to be questioned about who I am, what I am, what I am doing in that country...It was unfortunate that they did not know English, therefore the invitation I had for the conference did not help. Revolted, I asked: why are you keeping me, why did you bring me here? They did not answer, they did not know English, and all of this lasted 15 minutes...I experience similar things at European airports as well, where security is raised to a higher level. In those 15 minutes, one thought kept running in my head: "Too white to be a Muslim, and too Muslim to be a European citizen".

Definitely, that is something you constantly face in that need to belong somewhere, that identity to be the key thing that will define you and to have everyone look at you through the prism of that identity. Indeed, that just makes the functioning more difficult in a normal society, one that we all dream of becoming. If I were to choose an identity, although my identity is already formed, I would, nevertheless, choose to also have



an identity that is immortal. An identity that no one questions, the identity of humanity, to be a positive moment in a society, to contribute in it.

That is an identity that no one will disrupt or trample. With “dilemmas” – whether you are “too white to be a Muslim”, we are wasting too much productive time, wasting energy and entering debates on who has the right, and who does not, whether I should go to vote at the referendum, or who am I to call for people to vote at the referendum, who am I to bargain about the name and similar...All of these moments are a waste of time, instead of focusing on building a constructive society and building an identity that truly reflects Macedonia as such, such as a: multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious society...With all those “multi” in front of you, we are coming back to some root problems about who we are and what we are...

What was interesting in relation to the debate on the referendum is that in the opposition party we have also such who do not belong to the Macedonian ethnic group. One of those representatives is a member of my, Bosniak, ethnic group, who was glorified as a hero, who voted for constitutional changes. The comments were: “Well, how could he, traitor!”. The other ethnic communities are always traitors...And again the feeling that, if you are a member of a group and want to be part of that group, you have to have that mainstream thinking and attitude...Something that is different is not accepted, as a way of thinking, as an ethnicity or community

I think it is quite OK to have ethnically clean parties because the voters want that, the rhetoric before the elections is most intensified in terms of the ethnic moments. But I advocate an idea of a civic concept and an idea of identity where everyone will be allowed to choose and feel what they want. For every-



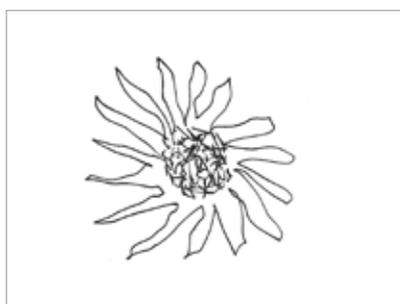
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one in Republic of Macedonia who contributes, who invests, who loves the country... for me, this is the key in this story.

Maybe when we criticize at public debates and conferences, wanting the system to be better, or for the state to be better, we want to talk about Macedonia before the international community – in a far better light. And when we talk about the identity, I hope that all the ethnic communities will rise to what our primary identity is. And that we will all build a society that will truly be a much better place for living, and that we will get an epithet that we are – citizens of Europe.

Regarding events around the world, it was interesting to hear the new representative in US Congress, who is from Somalia. She highlighted: I come with many “firsts”, I am the first refugee, the first Muslim with a scarf in Congress and the first woman with a different color of the skin, who will be representing her country...

While in the world many first and revolutionary things are taking place, unfortunately, we here are returning back to 1903, 1906, and all those nineties, whereas reality is happening now, the life we are living is now...I hope that the identity is just an opportunity and way for us to differentiate, to get to know each other, to socialize, to accept ourselves, and not to separate.



**Vojo MANEVSKI**

## **Identity “à la Stip”**

In regards to the identity,  
we are in a situation like  
the Jews were before  
Christ. We are constantly  
waiting for a Messiah,  
for a leader of a party to  
appear who will show us  
the way, a government  
that will create new jobs,  
Europe that will bring us  
loads of money, and for us  
not to work...





**M**acedonia has 4.000 university professors, I don't know how many doctors of science, and I think that even this scientific space is occupied, while we are rightfully expecting from them a solution to the social problems...I work at a local television station, I live and I was born in a place called Novo Selo. It is one part of Stip, to which the rest of the city had later merged. I don't know if St. Peter had written about it in letters, or Aminta the Third, or someone else had mentioned it, but it has been existing there for at least 100 or 1500 years...

Because of my age, I go to work early, and in these autumn and winter days the mornings can be gloomy. However, I will tell you what I see as the identity of my fellow citizens. For those who I encounter and sit with every day. (That is why I usually say I don't have a standpoint, but a sitting point, because what I see, I see it from a position of sitting in old cafes that don't have those transitional, bar stools, which I find it to be like alpine climbing, and it also doesn't suit me...)

The first thing I have a problem with in the morning is how to avoid the white stone of the house where Archbishop Mihail was born. It has a writing on it that says "falling-inclined house", which has been written for about twenty years, and the Archbishop is also probably part of some identity. At least on that street...I pass the bridge, and like through the shadows of the Balkans, I pass by houses on which it is written that they have been built in 1826, 1827, 1828..., and so on. When I became interested as to how these people managed to build houses that look like the "Korbiziev" ones from Krushevo, I found out that those people had been major traders of opium. Meaning, according to modern dictionary, their present identity would be – drug dealers, it's just that this was 200 years ago...But then again, they also built a Patriarch church.

When I pass by there, the restored house of the Mijalkov



family is unavoidable (a bit enlarged indeed, but this too is the identity of this period) or the house where the mother of the former prime minister was born. And right next to it, somehow overhanging, with just stones remaining, the house where Vanko Mihailov was born. And the house of Todor Aleksandrov, of which just some stones are remaining...Some 50 meters away, on the right side from them, is the birth place of the most famous Macedonian outside of Macedonia, although here he is not that well-known. And this being the ethics professor Todor Petrov, otherwise regent of the Bulgarian empire and one of Sartre's collaborators. A great figure, and his house is not "falling-inclined", it has actually almost fallen entirely. There is no one to mark it in some way. Some 10 meters further away is the house of Mihailo Apostolski. There is nothing there. No landmark. And this too is part of an identity for which today we want to say that we have inherited...And the house of Cuckov, the founder of the Economic Faculty and of "Tanec" (folklore musical ensemble) also has no landmark...And many others. It's interesting that my fellow citizens, my neighbours, 90 percent of them, have no idea about this, but they do know that the mother of the former prime minister was born there...We are talking about the identity, right... In a way in which we, in a provincial way, manage to understand.

Why do I say that I want to see my fellow citizens as part of that Macedonia identity? Stip has a very interesting identity, at least as heritage. German field marshal Lewinsky once having been to Stip, wrote "This oriental small town is comprised of Mohammedans, half Orthodox Christians and Jews". Today they are 95 Macedonian Christians. History has taken our former fellow citizens. And that is the hereditary identity.

How do I recognize my fellow citizens? Well, there is an old tavern, it's called "At uncle Zaki", it is not privatized, because it has been privately owned since the 60s, so it has not been af-



affected by the turbulences. The "MPS" are there. Why MPS? That is how they call themselves, because in the morning they get sent off from home, to take the grandchildren, children, to check if medicine on the positive list have arrived in the pharmacies... It's interesting that they only drink Turkish coffee and have Turkish delight and water, they read the newspaper. I notice that their shoes are always clean, nicely polished, they don't make much noise, although the democratic form is the tavern and everyone can be noisy, they are dressed decently, like a European middle class from the seventies, you can see on them blazers from Murska Sobota, perhaps a suit from Varazhdin, well maintained... What is interesting is that they are educated. I am comparing that education with the experience of one time, they have encyclopaedia education... You sit down to talk with them, and they talk about some other events, not the modern ones, because we are talking about people who were born mainly in the 50s. And all of them as a leitmotif say "Everything is upside down" they know all the conspiracies in the world. And, of course, everything is upside down because the time in which they reached their peak was not according to the rules that are set nowadays. And almost all of them have a piece of paper in front of them on which it is written "Buy three loaves of bread...". It is also interesting that there you can also meet the poet Samonikov, you can also run into university professors, who have been retired for a long time, who will immediately tell you "We are talking about the economic policy, and many of you have not read the previously mentioned Emanuel Cuckov". Or, "We are talking about the democratization in society and the parties, and one Aleksandar Grlickov has written one of the most famous works on the delegation system as the best expression of direct democracy" ...All these are people that are part of the identity. But I repeat, a small percentage of people talk about them.

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The second generation of my fellow citizens, get out somewhere around 11 -11.30 in the morning, and hang out in one of the pizza, café or coffee shops..., I don't know how it is called anymore. What is interesting among them is that they are all politically strong-minded, all members of political parties, because they have automatically continued from the Union of Communists to being members of SDSM, or the other ones who have become members of VMRO, for the most part, of course. What I noticed among them is that their political discussions are like the Monday ones, after the major sports events. They don't hate each other, they joke – we beat you, you didn't beat us – but they have a good dose of respect for one another. This is the rock and roll generation that is still wearing sneakers because of two reasons. The first one is because when they started going to the promenade it was cute to wear sneakers. And the second one? Because the young people mainly buy expensive sneakers, but don't play sports, so they are left wearing them, and their parents can also wear them. So when someone gets up to go to the bathroom, you can see some with phosphorus sneakers on them, the ones that glow. It may seem inappropriate, but that is the identity of that generation of my fellow citizens currently, most of them are about to retire, former self-managers, who drink Rakia and turn the first glass according to what they remember from the western movies...And that too is part of our identity! All of them have, when we look at their faces, a little bit of anger, not to mention that you can ask half of them what transition is and they will tell you – an elementary disaster in which they lost their jobs, in which their families had fallen apart...They have gotten used to these new phones, because if they want to hear their children and grandchildren, they have to use skype, that's just what it's like nowadays, and it's very difficult to sit with them, because they are – bitter. However, tolerant...



The third generation are children of the transition, born somewhere after 1975. For them I say that they have very little ideology, and for the morale and remaining things, let the critics speak. For them the view is: "Use every opportunity now!" Without any exception, they are members of political parties, they occupy positions in party headquarters and quite zealously as well. So that someone else does not occupy it, so that they can get a job, a promotion...They don't think of whether the boss is correct or not...Victims of transition. Whatever is done in society for them is justifiable, because they have a very pretty expression "I have to manage somehow!". It's interesting when you talk with them, they usually say that their experience, aged 35-40, tells them: "Show me someone like you, who has an expensive automobile". And they find it very difficult to respond, because they are witnesses both of the transition in which they grew up in and, unlike the previous rock and roll generations and the ones before them, in my opinion, they have narrow education. They don't have encyclopaedia knowledge, but they do have an incomparable wish to get rich. That's how they understand the liberal society, postmodern liberalism, that's how they understand Europe, in my taste with too much formalism. For them it's important to have master's degree and PhD...

With this last generation I don't socialize much, because of the number of my ID card. Those children are carrying television sets that they call telephones, they talk on them the entire day, they sit, come around 5-6 in the afternoon, they don't talk to each other, they probably communicate through the social networks, they drink macchiato, with a must have plastic spoon that they keep in their mouth...And all you can hear from them is "I just don't relate to this". They study just for the sake of it, they don't think about anything else, except for how a friend of theirs receives 2.500 euros working in Germany, and gets up at 11



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o'clock in the morning...It was around 11.30 when Pitu Guli had already lost his life..., but, let's not offend them.

Here we also have the university professors, in Stip there are about 400 of them, and I also have the opportunity to talk with them. I never like it when they usually say that their papers, if they were outside of the country, would cost 15.000 euros, and that they work for 350 euros here...

My impression, at the end of this fifth decade as a person, in regards to the identity is that we are in a situation like the Jews were before Christ. We are constantly waiting for a Messiah, for a leader of a party to appear who will show us the way, a government that will create new jobs, Europe that will bring us loads of money, and for us not to work...I don't know if the Messiah will come, but I am inviting you to see how we live in the province, how these fellow citizens of mine live, who I just tried to depict.



**Zvezdan GEORGIEVSKI**



## **Culture and tradition are more important for one's affiliation, than the name itself!**

Why would I want to share the values of the state of Macedonia. Those romantic nationalism views, the land where you were born is – your homeland. Why should I have an intimate relation towards Macedonia? And nonetheless, I declare myself Macedonian, I try to live decently in this country, which means that I am trying to provide decent conditions also for other people around me to live and create a decent place.



The identity issues are always confusing, especially the issue of losing identity, not only because of some rhetoric substance that contains the question itself. In any case, I am even more confused of the invitation to talk about this topic in a delicate and significant moment, that is, at a time of the death of a close friend of mine. That made me think a bit philosophically about this topic – when does a person really lose his identity? Is it when we bury a person at the cemeteries, or perhaps even during his illness when his physical and mental state change inevitably along with his character? Or, maybe, his identity survives even after his death, through tales, writings or records about him? And what connection does the state, the nation and ethnic affiliation have with our inevitable biological disappearance

I was present at an event called “Live Literature”, where several writers on a given subject were trying on the spot to make some kind of spoken literature or spoken fiction. The main star of the festival was the Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulic, and the given subject was “My former...”. The writer tried to speak about our former state of Yugoslavia. She touched on the identity issues, inevitably comparing her, relatively new state – Croatia, with her motherland or first country Yugoslavia, with the problems of freedom of speech, of movement, with the limited space, the territorial integrity...

I spoke about Yugoslavia, not about my former state, but about my former cigarettes, about filter “Yugoslavia”. I touched upon the identity issues through the example of these cigarettes. Filter “Yugoslavia” is the first filter cigarette in Yugoslavia and that is why it carries that name. It is the first synthetic name of cigarettes in Yugoslavia, because all the cigarettes until then were with generic names, that is, all those rivers – Morava, Vardar, Drava, Drim..., are, in fact, names of the types of tobacco the cigarettes were made from. Filter “Evropa”, the second synthetic

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name of cigarettes and the first hard pack in the tobacco industry in Yugoslavia appeared a little later, which was produced in Prilep.

In 1998, one of the first decisions of the government of Ljupco Georgievski was to cancel the production of filter "Yugoslavia". It was estimated that a relatively small number of smokers smoked these cigarettes and that the economic blow would not be serious, and filter "Macedonia" began being produced in their place, which means – some political benefits would be stronger than the economic loss that would be caused by cancelling the cigarettes. Exactly then, or a bit later, filter "Evropa" also stopped being produced. Of these geographic names, only filter "Macedonia" continued on the market. However, what happened? Filter "Macedonia" were cigarettes with another identity, both visually and in taste, completely different from "Yugoslavia" and the smokers of "Yugoslavia" refused to smoke these cigarettes.

I remember wandering, as if headless, trying to find from among the other cigarettes like "MT", "57", "Rodeo, something similar to "Yugoslavia"". On the other hand, "Macedonia" was just like Yugoslavia, made from black tobacco, a cheap cigarette that could not attract smokers who were already accustomed or had their own smoking identity with some other cigarettes, and could not at all attract new ones, because it was really cheap. Several months passed and someone in the Government came up with the idea and quite voicelessly cancelled "Macedonia", and it disappeared from the market, and they introduced "Oriental" instead.

Filter "Oriental" had the same visual integrity of filter "Yugoslavia", the same box, the same color, the same graphics and the same quality or lack of quality...I immediately switched to 'Oriental', and to be honest, I didn't like the name very much, it has some negative symbolic, returning to the Orient, and that is another topic, but I didn't mind the changed name. All the smokers that I knew that had smoked "Yugoslavia", and they are a small



numbered religious sect, returned to "Oriental".

"Oriental" was produced until last year, I smoked these cigarettes until the last box, and at home I have one more stack of "Yugoslavia" and "Oriental". It stopped being produced after "Philip Morris" took over the Prilep company, and instead of the old brands it introduced the global brands that dominate in the world. It did not cause a major earthquake, because the smokers that smoked "Yugoslavia" naturally and biologically had disappeared during the years, while the reviling of the tribe globally smoking is so great that there is nothing you can say anymore in favour of cigarettes.

Regardless of the name, I called the cigarettes filter 'Oriental' until the end filter 'Yugoslavia' and when I would go to buy them I asked for 'Yugoslavia' cigarettes and there never was any confusion between the seller and myself. He always gave me 'Oriental', or he would say – 'We received filter Yugoslavia' and would give me a stack of 'Oriental'.

For that smoker's identity another thing was much more important than the name, and I started thinking what was that other thing that made me belong to the filter 'Yugoslavia' cigarettes. It was probably that culture of smoking and that tradition to light precisely that cigarette and to have that smell. Translated into a national or collective identity, culture and tradition are probably much more important for one's affiliation, than the name itself.

Ultimately, even though it might sound like a heresy, I think that even the language is not that important for the identity as is the culture, the traditions...

The question is not how we will preserve our language, but how we will promote our own culture. I find the state identity quite problematic, that is, the state as a nation, and especially the ethnic identity, because the identity is a personal determination, a personal matter that later also compromise the collective identity.



More specifically, whether I feel like a member of a certain group or of something and want to share the values of that group or something...And why would I want, for instance, to share the values of the state of Macedonia. Those romantic nationalism views, the land where you were born is – your homeland. I was born in Slovenia, and apart from the fact that I was born in Slovenia, I have no intimate relation towards that country, that is, I have the same one like I do towards other countries. Why should I have an intimate relation towards Macedonia? And nevertheless, I declare myself Macedonian, I try to live decently in this country, which means that I am trying to provide decent conditions also for other people around me to live and to create a decent place

However, my identity or anyone's identity in the 21 century is linked to this globalism, I think because of completely other interests than the national or ethnic ones. We have a fresh example for this, the once prime minister Nikola Gruevski is in Hungary, what kind of identity will he have and what interests made him belong to another place, I guess they were not national or ethnic ones, but some other belonging or identity.

I think that we should deal more with the functional connection between people based on some completely other interests that will be material and spiritual and ones that will ensure a better life.



**Sinisa STANKOVIC**



# **I want to live in a country where we don't have to count our blood cells**

I simply didn't want anyone, in between their bites of musty cheese and sips of decades-old wine, to argue, or – God forbid – to fight about who helped the last survivor from Macedonia the most, whether it's the biblical or the ancient version, the world's navel or anus, however you want to call it



Sinisa Stankovic: I want to live in a country where we don't have to count our blood cells

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I was wondering whether to enter this debate because I consider everything that defines my identity as my personal right, an intimate part of me. On the other hand, following the catastrophic predictions that with the Prespa Agreement the ethnic Macedonians would irreversibly lose their identity despite their constitutional name being recognized by over 180 states, in an atmosphere of boiling emotions, it is very difficult to lead a rational debate... Nevertheless, in both public appearances and published texts, I have continuously advocated for finding a solution that will offer the new generations of Macedonians a future! And the current solution, although clearly not ideal, does offer some escape from a dead-end. Especially since not a single other serious and well-founded solution has been offered for decades...

Is the Prespa Agreement ideal? Clearly – it is not. But, could a better and more correct agreement have been reached after 27 wasted years, in this situation that political elites have pushed Macedonia into? At the moment, a better agreement is not possible, and I think that the chance to solve the open issues – burdened with history and with blood – had to be used to turn towards (let's hope) a more or less better future. Is Macedonia's sacrifice too big for entry into a military alliance, with vague promises that it may at some point become a member of the desired EU? In my opinion, still – no, although the compromises, simply, did have to hurt. Does history have to be touched up in agreements for future cooperation and friendship, so that currently the “stronger side” does not feel insulted by their own past? Of course not, it is precisely because of the new spirit of friendship and neighborly relations that the historical facts must be respected, and all sides must mature enough in order to face the past and move forward. The Balkans have, unfortunately, yet to mature, but Macedonia was not in a position to dictate the conditions. Macedonia used the chance and the momentum –

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because they weighed the international forces and the increased interest of the powerful in its geographic position and its status. The governing structure simply made a decision... and accepted to drink "a glass of wine and a glass of sourness".

But even when I laid out my arguments, the question remained: what exactly is my identity?

A human being, male, born more than five decades ago in post-earthquake Skopje in one country, though currently living in another. Born to parents belonging to – at least according to the definitions of their time – two distinct peoples, brought together by the Yugoslav union, but with plenty of blood intermixing in both parents' family histories. An unrealized theater director with 34 years of experience as a journalist, mostly freelance – a correspondent and editor of weeklies, a husband, father, uncle, great-uncle, an author of a couple of books, a long-time renter, a best man and a godfather, a grumpy neighbor, an acquaintance to thousands, a colleague to hundreds, a friend to tens, and a best friend to a handful. A lover of fine food and a good drink, and once, long ago, silver-tongued and nifty, though now reserved and more often cynical to the core, previously good-looking and young, now just good-looking, but this too is fading with the years...My identity is built in the family in which I grew up, with books, music and films, in the family in which my better half and I raised our son, on the streets, in primary school and in high school, at working actions, with scouts, with the YNA, at college, at smugglers tours in Italy and Austria, at the Cretan beaches, in the dozen editorial offices, on trips, interactions with all kinds of people...

And all this made me the way I am. Well, I think that as such I/we will not lose the identity, no matter how open-ended the "or" is in the title of the debate – "Building identity, or...?"

I will give two examples from the period of the beginning of



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the fight for the name, events that I've written about...

In the mid-nineties, when Bosnia was drowning in blood, in the castle where in 1965 "Sound of music" was recorded, one of the editions of the Salzburg Seminar titled "Is Europe losing its way?", featured an eminent professor – the future ambassador from Serbia – alongside two young diplomats from Croatia and Montenegro, also with experience from the YU embassies, and two journalists – one from the national TV service of Slovenia and myself, from the magazine "Pulse" from Macedonia...

Because of very justified reasons there was no representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Still we did have a Bosnian, a janitor and keeper of the courtyard, who beautifully played the guitar in the beer cellar, and all of us no-longer-compatriots, every night with songs of "our people and nationalities", tried to cover every bit of the YU-table with empty beer bottles...

During the day, on the topic of how Europe managed to wander precisely onto the Bosnian mountainous land, in front of the entire auditorium filled with diplomats from the then two Europes and the US, with a mix of colorful titles and black tuxedos, it was exactly us, the ex-Yugoslavians, who spoke...And we shocked those who were present with the harmonious views that emerged from the black and white picture created by the politics and the media for the country in which we were born...

With a bitter taste in our mouths from the dinners where I struggled with the silverware (but was comforted by one of the dozens of wines), at the "Bosnian" session, I (Zinisa Stankovic from FYR Macedonia) was retelling the Sarajevo TV-story, with the dark-humoured predictions, about the fight at the festive table between representatives of the international community, arguing which one of them had most helped the only surviving Bosnian who managed to get out of the high walls around Sara-



jevo...And I watched how part of the audience was trying to swallow my bitter morsel. And it didn't please me at all that I "scored" with them, nor did their applause meaning anything to me...

In Skopje, in 2017 / 2018, I simply didn't want anyone, in between their bites of musty cheese and sips of decades-old wine, to argue, or – God forbid – to fight about who helped the last survivor from Macedonia the most, whether it's Macedonia the biblical or the ancient, the world's navel or anus, however you want to call it. I didn't want that...

Again in the mid-nineties, about fifteen journalists from the third-world and from Northern and the Republic of Ireland, mainly from conflict regions, were being trained in journalism and democracy, several weeks in US media on both coasts, according to then-valid American definitions (which died in 1999...).

With my colleagues from Ireland, Oman and Papua New Guinea, we decided to joke around a little, so at two events we switched our nametags. The journalist from Papua New Guinea, with the darkest skin color that I have seen in my life, introduced himself as Tom from Ireland, the "Sultan" from Oman – as Ziki from Republic of Macedonia, no – FYROM, the Irishman Tom from Dublin – became Mohamed or something similar, and I, after exercising the accent for my replica for several hours, became Jonathan from Papua New Guinea...Dozens of proper ladies and gentlemen, who, in order to understand better, asked us to show them on a globe where each of us came from (I barely found Yugoslavia on the outdated globe – Macedonia was not even drawn yet), and led conversations with us about "our countries". And they smiled bitterly, when at the end, we returned the real nametags with our names and the names of the countries, and told them what it was all about. They never lost even a bit of the arrogance...

In Skopje 2017/2018, I simply didn't want anyone redrawing



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or erasing the country on some globe at some fancy tea party...

I wish for North Macedonia to become a real country in all aspects, one in which we will truly all be equal before our God and before the law, so that we'll never hear phrases like "someone among us is not one of us" again..., and for everyone, like respectable people to be able to live with the neighbours in their neighbourhoods, without counting their blood cells.

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