

**The potential political consequences of the Bulgarian scholarly
claims to the Macedonian ethnic origin, history and language for
the present and future of the interstate relations between
Macedonia and Bulgaria**

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Introduction

The present work is a study of the potential political consequences, which the present day claims to the Macedonian ethnic origin, history and language have for the present and future of the interstate relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria. The still ongoing disputes between the Macedonian and Bulgarian scholarly circles are important for the current shape and direction of the intergovernmental relations between the two countries. The Macedonian and Bulgarian nationalist and conservative minded scholars argue about which side has the historical right to claim the Macedonian history, language and symbols. Is this dispute posing a potential risk for a future escalation in a negative direction of the relations between the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria? Despite the amount of research that has been carried out in the field of the dispute, the issue remains insufficiently addressed. Below, I have listed several questions, which are indicative of the dispute.

What is “Macedonian”, and what is not? “Are the Macedonians ethnic Bulgarians or not?” Have Macedonians “stolen” parts of the Bulgarian history? The opposite set is: Have the Bulgarians “stolen” parts of the Macedonian history or not? What is “Bulgarian”, and what is not? These questions point to the heated discussions, which have been going on for over twenty years, over some segments of the historical past, the Macedonian ethnic origin and language. Many scholars have completed works about the arguments between most nations in Southeast Europe related to the historical past. One of these scholars is Ulf

Brunnbauer, who talks about history, historiography and the historical disputes in Southeast Europe in the book titled *(Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*. He begins with the sentence: “History is often contested in Southeast Europe.”¹. Most historians, from both the Macedonian and Bulgarian sides, treat the subject of history exclusively – some of them even treat it as something that can be stolen. In addition to that, the subordination of history and historiography to political guidelines and orders from top governmental levels has almost always been present in the nation-states of Southeast Europe. According to John Georgeoff, an author who published the article *Nationalism in the History Textbooks of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria*, history teaching, and consequently research always suffer one and the same fate: “History is also frequently employed to justify a government’s action and to sanction its present conduct.”². Before that, Georgeoff states that: “Modern nations generally attach great importance to the teaching of history in their schools, for such instruction often serves a means to perpetuate and transmit the ideals and values inherent in their political forms of government.”³. Consequently, the crucial role, which the historians and the rest of the intellectuals have in the political and socio-cultural developments of their respective nations, becomes evident. After all, the prominent academics from Macedonia and Bulgaria, plus the media, are still the main and most of the time the only participants in the disputes that are mentioned in the beginning. The media in both states has played a crucial role in the public and scholarly discourses of the last two decades. The debates about the historical past of Macedonia and Bulgaria and the related disputes intensified, especially after the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991. There were several major reasons, which served as a catalyst for the further complication of these debates and arguments. These are described and

¹ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism* (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 6.

² John Georgeoff, “Nationalism in the History Textbooks of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria,” *Comparative Education Review* 10 (October 1966): 442.

³ John Georgeoff, “Nationalism in the History Textbooks of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria,” *Comparative Education Review* 10 (October 1966): 442.

included in the collective term “The New Macedonian Question”, present in the book *The New Macedonian Question*, edited by Prof. James Pettifer. The book covers not only the past, but also the most recent history of Macedonia – the post-Yugoslav period. Most Balkan and non-Balkan historians would not probably deny the fact that the newly established Macedonian state, and the society, went through very hard times. The political, economic and social instability, through which the Macedonian people and state went during the first years of independence, brought even more tension around the questions related to the Macedonian ethno-national identity, ethnic origin, history and language.

During the early 1990's, before and after the official recognition of the Republic of Macedonia by the EC and the International Community, the Macedonian government, political parties and people were extremely concerned about the survival of their newly independent state. In that critical period, the subjects of history, language, religion and ethnicity proved their high value. At that time, most historians and intellectuals assumed the duty of guardians of the new order. Ulf Brunnbauer describes this occurrence, in his personal contribution *Historiography, Myths and the Nation in the Republic of Macedonia*, with the statement that: “Especially in the process of “discovering” and “awakening” the nation, intellectuals play an eminent role.”⁴. The intellectuals' class in Macedonia had to reassert its respected position. Essentially, the position of the intellectual in Macedonia was, and still is, in congruence with Antony D. Smith's theoretical description of the intellectual's role and activity: “By tracing a distinguished pedigree for his nation, he also enhances the position of his circle and activity; he is no longer an ambiguous ‘marginal’ on the fringes of society, but a leader of the advancing column of the reawakened nation, the leaven in the movement of

⁴ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 165.

national regeneration.”⁵. Above all, the future of the Macedonian nation and state seemed to be at stake. A renewed or reinforced intervention by the history-writing community was thought to be necessary, maybe even of an urgent need. The disputes with Bulgaria and Greece were the fields, which badly needed energizing on the part of the Macedonian historians. In relation to the re-emerging importance of the national history Brunnbauer writes that: “The so-called “international community”, which was increasingly engaged in the Balkans in the 1990’s, recognized that the contested nature of history must be addressed in order to support democracy, peace and civil society in the region.”⁶ Instead of this objective re-consideration of the past happening in a large scale throughout Southeast Europe, historians from each “new” or “old” nation-state in the region began to discover or rediscover key historical facts. Historians, journalists, writers, teachers and university professors all played an important part in sustaining the Macedonian nation and its cultural, linguistic and historic pillars during the early period of post-Yugoslav existence. They are, of course, still involved and have an influential say in relation to the cultural and social life of Macedonia. Major political, economic and social changes occurred in the country during the early years of sovereignty. Some would even say that the state and the nation are still going through a rough transitional period and that some desired political, economic and social achievements have not been accomplished yet.

The developments in the cultural and educational spheres of Bulgaria were well connected with the basic political, economic and socio-cultural changes, which took place in Macedonia after 1991. The post-1989 processes of change in Bulgaria had their unique characteristics. In this sense, it will be interesting for a scholar to explore the trends and

⁵ Antony D. Smith: *Myths and Memoirs of the Nation*. Oxford University Press 1999, page 84.

⁶ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism* (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 6.

sentiments, which occurred among the Bulgarian society and academic circles. One of these trends is the public interest in the historical Macedonian question and in Macedonia as a present day nation-state. This interest reappeared with an increased significance after the fall of Communism in Bulgaria. In this regard, some scholars, such as Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov, historians who are among those who present alternative and more progressive views (Ivan Elenkov is an Associate Professor at the Department of History and the Theory of Culture, Kliment Ohridski University, Sofia; Daniela Koleva is Associate Professor at the Department of History and the Theory of Culture, Kliment Ohridski University, Sofia), state that the importance of the ethno-national factor and national history has never really disappeared: "...from the nineteen-sixties on, Bulgarian ethnicity, the Bulgarian nation, and other aspects of "Bulgarianness" began to gradually reappear in historiography, reviving a national focus and its nationalist bias (if they had ever disappeared)."⁷ In respect to that, a certain share of the Bulgarian academic establishment has made a substantial contribution. The names of Bozhidar Dimitrov and Plamen Pavlov are just two of the several names that come to the mind of the informed reader. Most of the professional historians in Bulgaria, as well the majority of their colleagues in Macedonia, continue to treat the subjects of history and history-writing exclusively and sometimes closed-mindedly. In order to underline the negative quality of this approach, Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov describe the post-1989 developments in Bulgarian historiography in the following manner: "It is obvious that questions of theory and method do not preoccupy the attention of contemporary Bulgarian historians."⁸ The case in the Republic of Macedonia is the same. Most of the Macedonian and Bulgarian academics are rather conservative, when it comes to covering or discussing

⁷ Daniela Koleva, Ivan Elenkov, "Did "the Change" Happen? Post-socialist Historiography in Bulgaria," in (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer (Munster: LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 94.

⁸ Daniela Koleva, Ivan Elenkov, "Did "the Change" Happen? Post-socialist Historiography in Bulgaria," in (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer (Munster: LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 95.

historical disputes. Contrary to the strong conservative stance of most Bulgarian historians, the politicians and statesmen of Bulgaria, who governed the country between 1999 and 2009, had a weaker role in these developments. For the most part, the Bulgarian governments, which came to power after 1997, were cautious when approaching the highly sensitive issue of the history and language related disputes. There were, however, several occasions on which Bulgarian statesmen and politicians made individual statements. These statements were not part of any solid foreign policy doctrine, directed towards the Macedonian state. Neither were these episodes intended as a prelude to the achievement of any future geopolitical goals. These individual proclamations were simple warnings, without the attachment of any real intention for conflict or aggressive political action. In one of these situations, the ex-foreign minister of Bulgaria Ivailo Kalfin made a more significant oral statement. By sending the message, he set a condition before a future Bulgarian support for the membership of Macedonia in the EU and NATO was to be provided. According to this statement, Macedonia will have to refrain from future encroachments on Bulgarian history and on any other related subjects. This was a noticeable change of an otherwise positive tone of the Bulgarian government towards its southwestern neighbour. What actually happened was that the main governing institution of the former decided to issue a short and clear warning towards the latter. Very few warnings of that kind were made during the last two decades. Almost nothing else has happened in the sphere of the interstate relations that can possibly be described as crucial, apart from this and a few other situations. An important fact, which should be underlined here, is that the current arguments between the Bulgarian and the Macedonian side are not on an interstate level. It was the opposite during the 1990's, with the Bulgarian government's official denial to recognize a separate Macedonian language. This refusal on the Bulgarian side functioned as a break to the further development of close relations, not only between the governments, but also between the nations. The strong Macedonian opposition to

the Bulgarian claims towards the Macedonian language and ethnic descent served as an equally inhibiting factor. The contents of the opposing stances that were expressed by the two governments are the reasons because of which a careful examination of the Bulgarian governmental policies and of the public thinking should be done. The analysis should be based on the works of prominent Bulgarian historians and on the material that is taught in the history textbooks.

Some Bulgarian historians, such as the previously mentioned names of Bozhidar Dimitrov and Plamen Pavlov, took a more outspoken and assertive position in comparison with the reasonable and cautious governmental behaviour of the last decade. The substance of this position is well known – it states that the today’s Slavic speaking population is of Bulgarian origin and that the group of dialects that is spoken in Macedonia is an inseparable part of the Bulgarian language.⁹ This stance, labeled by some experts and historians as “nationalistic”, influenced the rethinking of national history. Certain painful and problematic issues were reexamined and elevated to a level of renewed importance among the history writing community. Such types of issues were the occasions of population and territory losses, which the Bulgarian state experienced at several points in the past. Logically, most of these topics can still be found in Bulgarian history textbooks for secondary and high school students. These central topics are, of course, described with a mixture of emotional sentiments and scholarly arguments. One of these major issues is the territory and population loss, which Bulgaria was forced to accept after the official signing of the Berlin Treaty of July, 1878. The Treaty of Berlin was preceded by the Treaty of San Stefano of early March, 1878, which formalized the establishment of a huge Bulgarian state, also known as San Stefano Bulgaria. The San Stefano event acquired a symbolic importance for the future political and socio-

⁹ For more information see: Bozhidar Dimitrov, *Ten Lies of Macedonism* (Sofia), 2003.

cultural elites. The subsequent territory losses and border shifting assumed an equally symbolic value for the Bulgarian government and nation. According to the provisions of San Stefano, Bulgaria acquired majority shares of the geographic regions of Thrace and Macedonia. In the following years, however, most of Macedonia and the Aegean part of Thrace were lost, while Upper Thrace and Pirin Macedonia were retained. One of the key questions, mostly in regard to the population character of Vardar Macedonia, was (and to a considerable extent still is) the issue about the ethnic identity and origin of the Slavic speaking majority in the Republic of Macedonia. The claims of many Bulgarian scholars to the territory of Macedonia are grounded on the theoretical perception that the Macedonian ethnicity is a regional variation of the Bulgarian ethnicity.

In Bulgarian history textbooks it is taught that the Macedonians are of Bulgarian descent and that the language, which they speak, is actually a dialect of Bulgarian. This is the dominant theory, which is accepted not only by a large share of the academic community but also by the public. Most of the professional historians (in Bulgaria) do not deviate from the prevailing theory, especially when it comes to the dispute/discourse, regarding the ethnic descent of the Macedonians. There are, however, some newly emerging trends, which serve as an alternative to the well established conservatism among a number of Bulgarian historians. At present, some Bulgarian scholars approach the extremely delicate matter in a more careful way. Vital to that are the names of Maria Todorova and also of the previously mentioned scholars – Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov. The number of these scholars is still relatively low. Whenever public or scholarly discourses about the position of the conservative academic circles of Bulgaria resurface in the Republic of Macedonia, the general tone amongst the media is known to become mostly negative. As a logical addition to that, the Macedonian scholars publish textbooks and works, according to which the Macedonians are a separate

ethno-national group with a history, culture and language of their own. A good example in this case is the book *Makedonija Vchera i Denes* (Macedonia Yesterday and Today), published by the journalists and writers from Macedonia Jovan Pavlovski and Mishel Pavlovski.¹⁰ Alternatively, the study of other major groups of sources can help for a broader understanding of the scholarly and media disputes between the two sides. Here, the talk is about works and research done by non-Bulgarian and non-Macedonian historians. Such a major source route is the set of Western literature, dedicated to the topics of the Bulgarian, Macedonian and Balkan studies. One of the themes, which the Western sources cover in a relatively neutral and objective manner, is the origin of the Slavic Macedonian ethnicity, culture and language.

The predominant view in the West on the subjects of the Macedonian ethnic origin, history and language is equally distant and different from both official accounts - the widely accepted versions in Macedonia and Bulgaria. Most Western scholars question the outright Bulgarian claim to the Macedonian ethnicity and language, and stress upon problems related to the process of nation-building in the Bulgarian lands and in other main parts of the Balkans. The phase of nation formation in the case of Macedonia is covered by a number of Western and non-Western historians. The processes of nation-building, which took place in the Balkans, followed a unique path according to many academics. Some experts use the word “unique” while others use “problematic” in order to underline the differences between the modern day states of Southeastern Europe and countries such as France and Britain. The differences appear, especially when everything comes down to the discussion about how the modern nations of Western and Southeastern Europe were formed. One of the typical Western arguments is that the Western European state formations from the Middle Ages and the Early

¹⁰ Pavlovski, Jovan Pavlovski and Mishel, *Macedonia Yesterday and Today* (Skopje: Nova Makedonija, 1996).

Modern Period had more time and enjoyed the necessary conditions and resources, which helped them to gradually build nations and facilitate the development of national high cultures. The development of the Western nations is most commonly contrasted to the cases from Southeastern Europe. It is accepted by a certain segment of the Western academic establishment that the nations in the Southeast evolved much later and in a different way, contrary to the manner in which national, linguistic and religious identities were formed in the Western European countries. According to the above mentioned school of history, the ‘late coming’ to the world of the modern nations proved to be crucial for the national developments of Macedonia and Bulgaria. The main “Western” theory about the nation-building processes, which passed in the Balkans, states that these started very late and were prematurely and artificially forced through by the emerging political and cultural elites of the respective nations. This perception provides a good connection to the first part of the title and the introduction: What is “Macedonian” and what is not? What is “Bulgarian” and what is not?

It is tremendously difficult for historians to answer these questions in a truly objective and neutral manner, without leaning very much towards one or the other side of the dispute. It is probably obvious that the questions are not formulated as a typical example of a scholarly inquiry. In fact, they are too straightforward. It is actually very difficult for anybody to provide an answer, which can satisfy the two conflicting sides to an equal extent – the majorities of the Bulgarian and Macedonian professional historians (plus the media from the two states). In a few words – it is very likely that such an attempt would reach a dead end.

Prelude to the Thesis Statement

As a part of the main objective of my research, I would like to present an account of the potential political consequences of the present day disputes, between the academic establishments of Macedonia and Bulgaria, regarding the ethnic origin, history and language of the Macedonians. The consequences of these disputes can be of great importance for the current and future status of the intergovernmental relations between the two states. The content of the claims, which the Bulgarian scholarly establishment raises towards the ethnic descent, history and language of the (Slavic) Macedonian people, is of a significant importance for most people in Bulgaria. As noted earlier in the introduction, the Bulgarian government has used the emotional attachment, which the Bulgarians feel towards the issues of the Old and New Macedonian Question, several times before. The Bulgarian government has hinted once or twice that it might ground its future approach to the eventual Macedonian membership in the EU on the points of sharp argument. If there is an advantage in relying on the views and sentiments of people and historians, then a given national government will undoubtedly take these views and feelings into account and apply them with a purpose. One can witness the consequences for the political realm when a government makes the decision to use the theories and claims established by national historians for the achievement of foreign policy goals. The opinion of the public can serve the same purpose.

Thesis Statement

In the light of the theoretical situation that is described above, I intend to argue that, if the sharp academic disputes about the ethnic origin, history and language of the contemporary Macedonians are not to be addressed properly in the relatively near future, then the relations between the two governments will almost certainly deteriorate. The level of deterioration may reach a full blockade of the Macedonian membership in the EU and NATO, plus significantly heightened degree of political and cultural animosity. In order to prevent this from happening, the academics from both the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria should address the historical arguments in a more critical fashion.

Prelude to Chapter 1

Depending on what direction the scholarly dispute might take from this point onwards, the relations between the two governments can either improve in the long run, or deteriorate to an even worse level than they have ever been till today. It has been proven so far, that the two national historiographies had and still do have influence over the foreign policy approaches, which the two states direct towards each other. This is the main reason why one should perform a close examination of what the Bulgarian and Macedonian historians write in their works and question it as critically as possible. The objective approach is necessary because, both history-writing schools are imprecise to some extent in their presentation of historical periods, events and figures, which in its turn leads to tension between the scholarly circles of the two countries. Historians and politicians have most of the time been connected to each other in a type of symbiosis, which allows for a transfer of knowledge and socio-political energy from the academic to the political sphere. The ethno-national and historical

factors were of significant importance for the former political elites in Southeastern Europe. In support to that, Ulf Brunnbauer states that: “Historiography had certainly been one of the most highly ideologised disciplines because of its special usefulness for the legitimisation of communist rule.”¹¹ The reality continues to be almost the same. The present day political and state elites in Southeast Europe still rely on historical narratives and maintain the mutual influence between history-writing and politics. In this instance, the careful observer is able to notice the continuation: “...,after the end of socialism, some observers expected radical changes in historical writing due to the lifting of the ideological screen, the end of censorship and political intervention,...”¹² Brunnbauer continues with the observation, expressed by the historian Maria Todorova in 1992, according to which: “the expected revolution in the profession [of history-writing] is not taking place.”¹³ Brunnbauer adds the following to the previous statement: “On the contrary, strong continuities with the socialist period in terms of methodology and approach characterised post-socialist historical writing.”¹⁴ Moreover, statesmen and politicians express and underline the importance of historical factors through the means of mass communication. The politicians’ willingness and ambition to control national media and influence international broadcasting channels, if added, can form a dangerous combination. As a consequence, this combination can lead to greater levels of extreme nationalism. The active propagation of historical claims in front of domestic and foreign audiences – conducted at the right time and in the right manner, can cause significant political and social disturbances, no matter if they are well grounded or not. Historical claims, on which many types of nationalism are still based today, will always be ambiguous and

¹¹ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 9.

¹² Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 9.

¹³ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 9.

¹⁴ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 9.

imperfect. This is valid for both the Macedonian and Bulgarian scholarly claims. These claims can be analyzed with the usage of relevant theories on nationalism and nation-building, by Rogers Brubaker, Ernst Gellner, Antony D. Smith and others. It seems logical that a more objective approach to such claims should be used, in addition to the possible application of the above mentioned theories. More light can be thrown this way on the topic of the Macedonian-Bulgarian academic disputes. Therefore, these theories will be used for support of the main thesis statement. If the Macedonian and Bulgarian history-writing communities are not ready to adopt a more reasonable and precise approach to the main disputes, then they will most certainly facilitate a gradual, but still quick and dangerous politicization through the media channels. The next phase will most probably be a deterioration of the inter-state relations. This deterioration has the potential to inflict significant damage on the internal political and socio-cultural status quo in the two countries. The statesmen's behaviour and foreign policy initiatives are typically influenced by the development of such type of disputes. This is one possible direction. There exists, however, an opposite one. What if it appears, in some cases, that the disputes are actually a reflection of the interstate relationship? What if the influence goes mostly in this way – contrary to what is described first? I will certainly discuss both ways, although I will put stress on and defend the first one. It is obvious that the ethno-national, history and language related disputes are deeply rooted in the past and have a considerable emotional value for the ordinary people. It has been proven several times that in the case of present day Republic of Macedonia the sentiments and emotions of the Macedonians matter a lot. A simple example, that proves the importance of strong public opinion, is the Greek-Macedonian dispute over the official name of the Macedonian state. The majority share of the Macedonians is not ready to accept a compromise, considering the fact that according to them the name should remain as it is listed in the constitution – The Republic of Macedonia. The solid position of Macedonia's people and government is highly

influenced by certain segments of the academic circles in the country. The Macedonians, of course, are subjected to their own theories and positions in regard to the national history. These theories have been drafted and published by the professional historians of Macedonia – more precisely by that part of the academic establishment, which is relied upon to maintain the “true” and therefore acceptable version of the national history. The same is valid for the Bulgarian case. Most Bulgarians look at the past of their own nation in a romantic way, while they talk about the ethno-national and language identity disputes with the Macedonian side. As it is mentioned earlier in this text, the dominant position in Bulgaria, regarding the dispute, states that the Macedonians are of Bulgarian origin and that they speak a Bulgarian dialect. This is the position, which has been continuously expressed and distributed by the part of the Bulgarian scholarly establishment responsible for the validation and assertion of the “right” view. In addition to that, some politicians and statesmen declared positions, which were close to the mainstream Bulgarian views on the subject of the “New Macedonian Question”. These positions were influenced by the mainstream history accounts in regard to the old and new Macedonian question. Hence, the argument, that there is a ‘holy’ triangle comprised of three major elements – people, statesmen and historians, seems as a logical inference. Whenever there is an emergency of a political or socio-political nature, many statesmen and politicians resort to the historical past and to nationalism. This happens mostly in cases in which they have to struggle to preserve their ruling status, to divert attention from severe internal problems, to blame somebody or something else for a certain set of problems, or simply to defend the true national interest. In any of the above listed situations, the assertion of the national self and the claims to the ethnic origin, language and history of the other can influence the behaviour of governments on the domestic and on the international level. In this regard, I would like to make several important references to the historical roots of the Bulgarian-Macedonian disputes and also to the emergence and development of the so called

“New Macedonian Question”. Here, I would like to mention a major source, which contains the works of several specialists in Balkan history. The book titled “The New Macedonian Question”, edited by James Pettifer and several other prominent researchers, contains different topics and subtopics, which are related to the contemporary disputes about the history, ethnic descent and language of the (Slavic) Macedonian people.

By relying on academic literature (mostly secondary sources), which covers the same subjects as the previously mentioned book, I wish to establish a more detailed and precise interpretation of the current disagreement, regarding the historical past, language and ethnic origin of the contemporary Macedonians. One of my additional purposes is to show that both history schools try to project the present into the past in their representation of previous historical periods. This projection deserves a special attention. It would probably do some good, if the ongoing discourses and scholarly discussions, surrounding the historical and ethnic origin disputes, go into a more cooperative direction. Any kind of reconciliation is, of course, not possible at this point. In spite of that, the approaches, which the two sides direct towards each other’s main theories and positions, might possibly take a more objective form. Along with that, a closer look at the processes of nation-building in the cases of Bulgaria and Macedonia can add valuable information to the analysis of the disputes.

I would like to add, here, that I do not intend to question or deny the right of any large group of people to nationhood and a state of their own. No matter if a nation has emerged in an “artificial” or a “natural” way, it is still a nation. Because of that, the process of nation-building deserves a focus. The obvious fact is that, at present, there are separate Macedonian and Bulgarian nations, with their respective official state languages, symbols and national cultures.

Chapter 1: Relevant theories on nationalism

I would like to discuss not only the process of nation-building, but also the subjects such as the modern day nation and nationalism itself. All three areas of knowledge and study are interconnected, because the process of creating the nation eventually leads to the emergence of the nation and of its “protector” – nationalism. Many historians and sociologists would most probably say that this is one of history’s major lessons. Due to that reason, the study of the nation and of nationalism seems to have a particular importance. A theoretical framework, such as the one described above, can be applied to the specific cases of the Macedonian and Bulgarian nation-building processes and also to the scholarly disputes between the two conflicting sides. The argument between the hard-line historians from Macedonia and Bulgaria is both a precondition for and reflection of the parallel media and public disputes. These, in turn, facilitate the development of some types of “defensive” nationalism. Claims that are raised by one group (nation) towards the ethnic origin and linguistic identity of another are something that has to be explored in a thorough manner. A straightforward denial, or any other kind of extreme objection towards such claims, cannot be very helpful to an analyst who pretends to be studying the subject in a professional way. A strong defense of any such claims, on the other hand, is very likely to turn into an equally inadequate approach. The second can be induced by a high degree of “defensive” nationalism, as Rogers Brubaker calls one of the four major types of nationalism.¹⁵ Brubaker describes several major types of nationalism in his work titled *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism*.

¹⁵ Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

The simple and well known fact, that nationalism can influence historians as well as large groups of people, seems as a logical derivative of all major theories of nationalism and many real cases. If nationalism can be explained through a combination of theoretical schemes and down-to-earth accounts, then it might lead to a more elaborate and correct assessment of what happened or is happening on the ground, in real time situations. What is happening in reality, in Bulgaria and Macedonia, is that the conservative branches of the national academic circles are throwing all efforts in confirming the past, present and future of the two nations: “Among the intellectuals who propagate national identity, historians have the particularly important function of constructing the nation’s past and presenting the nation as the inevitable outcome of the historical process.”¹⁶ The protection of the national myths and national history accounts, which most Macedonian and Bulgarian historians ensure with great eagerness, is in most cases based on “defensive” nationalism. In this regard, the definition of the term coined by Brubaker appears to be one of the most adequate: “The fourth form is a defensive, protective, national-populist nationalism that seeks to protect the national economy, language, mores or cultural patrimony against alleged threats from outside.”¹⁷ In addition to the previous statement, Brubaker points out that: “The bearers of such putative threats are diverse but can include...powerful foreign cultural influence.”¹⁸ If one connects what is on the ground with certain elements of Brubaker’s theory, the Bulgarian claims towards the Macedonian ethnicity and language would seem to present a real, or at least a potential threat. The opposite can also be considered. The claims, that are raised by the Macedonian historians, political scientists, journalists and others towards certain segments of the Bulgarian national history and territory, can also be viewed as a possible threat from the

¹⁶ Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., (Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism (LIT VERLAG Munster, 2004), 165.

¹⁷ Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

¹⁸ Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

outside. In fact, the two arguing sides do their best in order to prevent or at least hinder the advancement of the opposite stance. This is the apparent goal of preventive nationalism. This brings the scholar to the point where he or she can realize that the historical or interethnic disputes cannot be solved at all. In relation to that, Brubaker writes: “...,I want to argue that nationalist conflicts are in principle, by their very nature, irresolvable, and that the search for an overall “architectural” resolution of national conflicts is misguided.”¹⁹ Together with the presence of strong nationalist tendencies and feelings, on one or on both sides, the search for a right solution becomes an impossible task. This is equally true for armed interethnic conflicts and for intensive scholarly, media and public disputes. In contradiction to the previous citation Brubaker adds that: “...,I want to assert that ethno-national violence is neither as prevalent, nor as likely to occur, as is often assumed; and that national feeling is less strong, national identity less salient, and nationalist politics less central than is often assumed.”²⁰ As it is stated on other pages of this thesis – there is no absolute guarantee that the disputes between the historians are going to affect the intergovernmental relations. In fact, Brubaker manages to warn the reader that too much reliance on “gloom-and-doom” theories about the future of any type of interethnic or international dispute/conflict is equally detrimental for the understanding of such disputes as too much reliance on optimistic theories and positions. The set of mutually contrasting statements and observations is very long. Nevertheless, both types of theories have been proven by to be credible and correct. More examples from the set are necessary for a richer understanding of the forces of historiography and nationalism. In connection to that, another prominent scholar of nationalism, Antony D. Smith, makes the following statement: “The late twentieth century has witnessed an unexpected resurgence of ethnic conflict, and nationalism has once again become the central fact of contemporary

¹⁹ Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁰ Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

politics.”²¹ Smith also asks a few very important questions, which are focused not only on the “resurgence of ethnic conflict”, but also on the increased importance and rise of nationalism: “Why is that so many people remain so deeply attached to their ethnic communities and nations at the close of the second millennium? Why do myths, memoirs, and symbols of the nation command such widespread loyalty and devotion?”²² These crucial questions, as well as several others of the same kind, cause historians and experts to rethink the past and the present of all Southeast European nations. The Macedonian and Bulgarian histories fall, without any doubt, into this category. The examination of the national history, and not the least of the contemporary developments, can certainly provide clearer answers to almost any set of difficult questions.

²¹ Antony D. Smith, *Myths and Memoirs of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

²² Antony D. Smith, *Myths and Memoirs of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

Chapter 2: Historical background and the “New Macedonian Question”

The terms – Old and New Macedonian Question²³ are mentioned at several points in previous parts of the Thesis. The precise dates, duration and various comprising aspects of the Old Macedonian Question can be disputed, but it is generally known that it encompasses the period between 1890 and the end of the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. This period describes the times of the Macedonian revolutionary struggle against the authorities of the Ottoman Empire. Following the Treaty of Bucharest, signed after the end of Second Balkan War in 1913, the region of Vardar Macedonia (one of the three major components of the geographic region of Macedonia) became known as South Serbia and its Slavic speaking majority as southern Serbs. A new Macedonian case emerged after this in Vardar Macedonia. The later events did not introduce any improvements - nothing changed in connection to the status of the Slavic speaking population after the composition of Royal Yugoslavia in December, 1918. As a result, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (the IMRO), resumed its armed struggle – this time against the royal government of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The reasons for the emergence of the issue were the attempts by the central authorities in Belgrade to centralize and dominate the rest of the country. The major peak of the struggle occurred in 1934, when King Alexander was assassinated by Vlado Chernozemski who was a member of the IMRO. The history of armed resistance of the IMRO against the Ottoman and later against the Royal Yugoslav government is, however, not the focus of this paper. Therefore, only the major events, figures and periods that belong to the historic (the Old) Macedonian Question will be touched upon – as far as they are or appear to

²³ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

be points of sharp disagreement between most Bulgarian and Macedonian historians. The relatively brief account of the major events and developments from the period between 1913 and 1945, together with the history of the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, are essential for the better understanding of the contemporary Bulgarian-Macedonian scholarly disputes. Further on, when the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (the SFRY) was established at the end of the Second World War under the leadership of Tito's partisans, Macedonia became known as the Socialist Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – a constituent unit of the federation. The Yugoslav communists and Tito in particular, pretended that they had solved the Macedonian issue with the official recognition of a distinct Macedonian ethno-national identity, national history, culture and language. With this, throughout the existence of the SFRY, the Old Macedonian question became 'solved' and 'closed'. The next time when the issue of the Macedonian Question re-emerged, was when the Macedonian people voted for independence in the September, 1991 referendum. It was defined then as a topic of interest for all neighbours of the country. Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania and Greece all had their concerns and positions in regard to different aspects of the New Macedonian Question: "International attitudes to FYROM and its government has varied..., with many outstanding difficulties in relation to the country's name (with Greece), border delineation, religion and cross-border trade during the UN sanctions (with Serbia), national minority issues and education (with Albania), and language and national minority difficulties (with Bulgaria)."²⁴ To address the newly triggered debates around the New Macedonian question (with the Macedonian-Bulgarian scholarly disputes about the ethnic origin and language of the Macedonians being a part of it), Pettifer stresses the fact that there is an insufficient amount of research in address to the debate around the New Macedonian Question: "Debate about the new Macedonian

²⁴ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), page xxxviii.

Question has been largely seen through Anglo-American perceptions, post-Dayton, and this has inhibited some analysis.”²⁵ Because of that reason, Pettifer has included important contributions from several different authors in order to enrich the reader’s perception of the Bulgarian-Macedonian disputes. Not only Pettifer, but many other experts in the field of Southeast European studies consider the intense arguments between the historians from Macedonia and Bulgaria as probably the most interesting and important part of the New Macedonian Question: “In some countries with a direct interest in the Macedonian Question, notably Bulgaria, it was difficult to publish much academic research on ‘Macedonian’ issues under communism, and thus Bulgarian contributions form an important section of the book.”²⁶ This way, by inviting Bulgarian and other Balkan and Western scholars, Pettifer offers a more diversified view on the subject of the old and new Macedonian history and also on the debates and arguments that surround it. The purpose of the book is “...to contribute to an informed debate about the Macedonian Question, and to illustrate current international attitudes towards the FYROM.”²⁷ Both the old and recent national history of Macedonia are of extreme importance to the contemporary Macedonian society, forming of course the core of the present day Macedonian ethno-national identity: “There is also historical material, as recent history forms a very critical element in the current Macedonian consciousness and has been subject to intense ideological debate.”²⁸ As noted previously, history and ethnicity are crucial factors for the formation of the contemporary Macedonian national identity. These are central factors that determine how the ethnic Macedonians look at their past and present, at their most important social, economic and political problems. It comes as a logical

²⁵ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), page xxxviii.

²⁶ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), page xxxviii.

²⁷ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), page xxxviii.

²⁸ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), page xxxviii.

assumption that the political past and present of the nation and of its elite will continue to play a major role in the development of the interstate relations with the neighbours, especially in the case of the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations. Generally, history and ethnicity have always been an essential part of Balkan affairs. Historical disputes and the claims that originate from them have already led to significant political consequences for the intergovernmental relations on other occasions in the past. It is certainly possible for this development to continue to occur. In this respect, one of the key questions is whether the Bulgarian-Macedonian scholarly disputes have the potential to spill over from the sphere of the intellectual and educational into the realm of the political. Generally, historical disputes have the hidden potential to turn into arguments between national governments. One should keep in mind, however, that such a development does not always take place. First of all, a given situation must be 'suitable' for the implementation of strategies that involve the utilization of historical arguments and claims. Otherwise, it wouldn't be easy for a politician or a statesman to call upon nationalist sentiments – hidden or on the surface, mild or extreme. Secondly, there should be a strong and an almost unbreakable connection between the intellectuals of a nation and its government. When this is so, it should not really matter which party is in power. One might consider, for instance, a theoretical situation in which the ethnic, language and historical factors are extremely strong, not just present on the scene. In this situation, the persons who hold the authority might resort to manipulation of nationalist or patriotic moods and exploit the concerns of the dominant ethnic group. This model is given earlier in the Thesis. The purpose of the model is to explain how a scholarly dispute, with public and media discourses attached to it, can actually transform and grow into a problem of interstate relations. There is some potential in the Bulgarian-Macedonian case for deterioration of the relations due to old dated and unsolved issues between the two nations. This set of issues, as it is illustrated several times in the text, is comprised of disputes about history, ethnic origin and

language. According to Yavor Mihaylov, the author of a short summary published in the *Global Voices* website, in which he presents a brief sketch of the main Bulgarian-Macedonian contradictions, the relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia “...are no less complex and incomprehensible than those between Greece and Macedonia...”²⁹ But it should be duly noted, however, that apart from Bulgaria’s denial to recognize officially the existence of a separate Macedonian language during the 1990’s (this way facing the question whether a separate Macedonian ethno-national identity should also be recognized), and the few brief declarations by Bulgarian statesmen and politicians, nothing of the magnitude of the Greek-Macedonian intergovernmental dispute has ever occurred between Bulgaria and Macedonia in the last twelve years. On the contrary, despite the sometimes highly negative tone of the Macedonian government towards Bulgaria during most of the 1990’s, the Bulgarian government avoided responses carrying strong, negative messages. Prior to Bulgaria’s membership in the European Union, the government did not issue any exceptionally strong political warning towards the Republic of Macedonia. Furthermore, the Bulgarian government at present does not even have an established, solid and long lasting foreign policy doctrine in order to “deal properly” with the ‘opponent’. For these reasons, it will be inadequate to describe the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute as an interstate dispute, especially with reference to the Greek-Macedonian instance. In their current form, however, the disputes between most Bulgarian and Macedonian scholars still present a foundation, on which the two nation-states may build unfriendly or even damaging future relations. Coinciding with the target of Pettifer and other authors, the present work will explore further the origins of the disputes and their contemporary shape and direction.

²⁹ Global Voices Website, stable URL: <<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/10/bulgaria-macedonia-blog-wars-over-history/>>, short article published on April 10th, 2008, by Yavor Mihaylov, title: “Bulgaria, Macedonia: Blog Wars Over History”.

As it is indicated earlier, the Bulgarian side was not the only neighbour which had, and still has, claims towards certain elements of the old and new Macedonian question. The first of several prominent contributors to the book, Elizabeth Barker, describes the Old Macedonian question as a "...three sided contest for Macedonia, waged first by priests and teachers, later by armed bands, and later still by armies, which has lasted with occasional lulls until today."³⁰. The expression "three-sided" stands for the collective naming of Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. These were the main rivals for hegemony over the geographic region of Macedonia and its population, which was of a mixed composition. Each side wanted to increase its linguistic, cultural and political influence, and later if possible, a safeguarded administrative presence. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, and also First and Second World Wars the aim for presence was actually substituted with formal possession. One should trace though, the political, cultural and religious developments that in one way or another affected the geographic area of Macedonia. Elisabeth Barker traces the origins of the Macedonian question and of the disputes that surround it back to the second half of the nineteenth century: "The Macedonian question came into being when in 1870 Russia successfully pressed Ottoman Turkey to allow the formation of a separate Bulgarian Orthodox Church, or Exarchate, with authority extending over parts of the Turkish province of Macedonia."³¹. The event was immediately contested by Serbia and Greece, who saw a potential threat to their interests in Macedonia. "This step quickly involved Bulgaria in strife both with Greece and with Serbia."³². Both nation-states did as much as they could to fight against the spreading of Bulgarian influence into the region. Interestingly enough, this process began even before the establishment of the two autonomous Bulgarian units in 1878 - the Principality of Bulgaria

³⁰ Elisabeth Barker, "The origin of the Macedonian dispute," in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 3.

³¹ Elisabeth Barker, "The origin of the Macedonian dispute," in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 3.

³² Elisabeth Barker, "The origin of the Macedonian dispute," in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 3.

and Eastern Rumelia. “The Serbian government complained of Turkey’s decision through ecclesiastical as well as diplomatic channels, and, after an interruption caused by Serbia’s war with Turkey in 1876, also tried to fight Bulgarian influence in Macedonia.”³³ The Greek Patriarch in Constantinople also protested against the creation of the Exarchate, declaring it to be schismatic. This occurred as a major blow to the Orthodox Church in Constantinople, which pretended to be officially responsible for and to rule over religious matters for all Orthodox Christians in Southeast Europe. Because Greek culture and language were also being propagated through the local networks of the Greek Patriarchate “...the Greeks sharply contested the spread of Bulgarian ecclesiastical, cultural, and national influence in Macedonia.”³⁴ This conflict between the three interested parties lasted until the Balkan Wars, when it reached culmination, although according to other historians, the culminating point was during the Second World War. As it would seem, it has not faded away completely since then, and even today some aspects of the conflict still have a certain value for Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. In connection to that, the former Bulgarian ambassador to Macedonia Angel Dimitrov made a statement in 2008, which confirmed the still strong interest in the Macedonian question and in the disputes between the two nations.³⁵ Dimitrov said that “the name Macedonian, used by the Bulgarians from Macedonia, is a part of the Bulgarian historical heritage, a certain part of the geographic region of Macedonia falls within the borders of the contemporary Bulgarian state, in which many people, descending from refugees who escaped from the other parts of the region [of Macedonia], live, and thirdly, Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonia officially under that name [The Republic of Macedonia] and opened the way for the positioning of the country within the

³³ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 3.

³⁴ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 3.

³⁵ A1 com.mk website, an interview with Angel Dimitrov cited, translated from Macedonian, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=101500>, former BG ambassador to Macedonia, 1992-2001.

international context.”³⁶. Dimitrov was a Bulgarian ambassador to Macedonia between 1992 and 2001. Most of his time in office was marked by bad relations between the two countries. The difficulties were caused, in part, by Bulgaria’s refusal to recognize a distinct “Macedonian” language, and hence a separate “Macedonian” ethnicity. What is more, the Social Democratic Party of Macedonia, which was in power for the most part of the 1990’s, contributed significantly towards poisoning the atmosphere between the two nation-states. These developments demonstrated that purely historical, language and cultural disputes, waged predominantly between historians, could actually have significant political consequences for the interstate connections. Therefore, in order to understand more thoroughly and objectively the present and potential future of Bulgarian-Macedonian relations it is necessary to analyse further the historical roots and present of the Macedonian question. As it is discussed earlier, the context of the old Serbian-Greek-Bulgarian rivalry over Macedonia may provide more clarity on the problem and so, should also be reflected on.

One of the major topics of concern for the Macedonian historians, although most of them find ways to go around it, is the fact that there has not been a state called Macedonia between the fourth century (4th) B.C. and 1943-45. This is also one of the main tools in possession of the Bulgarian historians in their fight against the “ideology of Macedonism”, as they call the modern day national doctrine established by their Macedonian colleagues. In fact, many Bulgarian, Balkan and non-Balkan, particularly Western scholars – including Elisabeth Barker, agree that: “There has been no Macedonian State since the Kings of Macedon in the fourth century B.C. Between that time and 1912, Macedonia belonged successively to the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the medieval Bulgarian and

³⁶ A1 com.mk website, an interview with Angel Dimitrov cited, translated from Macedonian, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=101500>, former BG ambassador to Macedonia, 1992-2001.

Serbian Empires, and the Ottoman Empire.”³⁷ Later, in 1913, the region was declared to be South Serbia and existed in this shape until in the spring of 1941 Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy invaded and destroyed the first Yugoslavia. The claim, which some Serbian historians have raised, is that the area around Skopje - the capital of Vardar Macedonia (also known as Yugoslav Macedonia), is actually part of Old Serbia.³⁸ Serbian historians and statesmen had previously, before and after the Balkan Wars, used similar claims. This was how the declaration that stated that the Slav Macedonians were in reality southern Serbs, was justified.

One of the main reasons, for this three-sided rivalry for the control and eventual possession of Macedonia was its strategic location and economic importance. The geographic area of Macedonia controls all main routes passing along the north-south direction, connecting Central and Eastern Europe with the Aegean Sea and the port of Salonika – the richest city in the region and an important trading center. The main routes pass along the Vardar and Struma river valleys. In spite of that, in the past Macedonia was a relatively poor region – mostly rural, with small towns functioning as local trading centers. The second largest and somewhat prosperous town was Skopje, which still lags far behind Salonika in terms of wealth and economic prosperity. This is the brief summary of the economic and geostrategic value of Macedonia as a location and as a territory. The next important element in the description of the past and present of the area are the changes in the ethnic map, which occurred through time. Up until 1923 most of geographic Macedonia was populated by a Slav speaking majority, when a huge influx of Greek settlers came into Aegean Macedonia. This happened after Greece and Turkey signed an agreement to exchange populations after the end

³⁷ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 4.

³⁸ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 4.

of the war between the two states in 1923. After this event the population balance in Aegean Macedonia tipped very much in favor of the newly created Greek majority, and this is still the situation as of today. However, the current status in the other parts of geographic Macedonia is different. If Vardar (ex-Yugoslav) and Bulgarian (Pirin) Macedonia are taken together, they would form a region where the Slav speaking population would still form a majority over three-quarters. In relation to that, Barker states that: “It is the national identity of these Slav Macedonians that has been the most violently contested aspect of the whole Macedonian dispute, and is still being contested today.”³⁹. Consequently, the Macedonian media and historians continue to raise the issue about a supposedly existing “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria. In an opposition to such claims, many Bulgarian and some non-Bulgarian historians and journalists write and talk about the existence of people in Macedonia who “declare themselves to be Bulgarian or at least of remote Bulgarian origin”, or about people who “do not hide or reject their Bulgarian roots”. To explain this, Barker offers the statement that: “There is no doubt that they are southern Slavs; they have a language, or a group of varying dialects, that is grammatically akin to Bulgarian but phonetically in some respects akin to Serbian, and which has certain quite distinctive features of its own.”⁴⁰ The more nationalist minded Bulgarian historians and media would most probably go much further by saying that the contemporary Macedonian language (or a set of dialects) is actually a dialect of Bulgarian. The more nationalist minded Macedonian historians and intellectuals, on the other hand, would certainly protest against the declaration of any similarities or sameness with the Bulgarian language. Together with the analysis of these contrasting positions one should take into account how the ordinary people in Vardar and Pirin Macedonia really feel about their ethno-national identity – be it a Bulgarian or a separate Macedonian one. In connection to

³⁹ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 5.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 5.

this, Barker writes that: “In regard to their own national feelings, all that can be safely said is that during the last eighty years many more Slav Macedonians seem to have considered themselves Bulgarian, or closely linked with Bulgaria, than have considered themselves Serbian, or closely linked with Serbia (or Yugoslavia).”⁴¹ To many Macedonian historians this statement would definitely sound even more controversial or wrong. For many Bulgarian scholars it would appear to be very close to their theories and positions. A notion such as the following: “The feeling of being Macedonians, and nothing but Macedonians, seems to be a sentiment of fairly recent growth, and even today is not very deep-rooted”⁴², is being continuously circulated, not only among a large number of scholars, but also among the media and the public in Bulgaria. This was not always the case, however. The Bulgarian historiography of the Socialist years went through several phases of change and development. During the period between 1944 and 1989 history-writing in Bulgaria was completely subordinated to the directions and policies set by the Communist party. The approach, which the Bulgarian communists had towards the Macedonian question and to the related disputes, was in exact line with the guidelines set by the Soviet Union, especially during the last years of Stalin’s rule. In relevance to that, Elisabeth Barker makes the simple observation, according to which: “The Bulgarians have fluctuated between saying that all Slav Macedonians were Bulgarians and declaring that there was a separate Macedonian people, according to the needs or convenience of the moment.”⁴³ The needs and convenience of the moment were, as it is stated above, determined by the Soviets and directly imposed through the relevant channels. The Bulgarian Communist Party was more than ready to comply to a full extent with Stalin’s visions and projects. Before the end of Stalin’s rule, the Bulgarian

⁴¹ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 5.

⁴² Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 5.

⁴³ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 5.

communists had begun a process of imposing a separate “Macedonian” identity on the local Slav speaking population in Pirin Macedonia, with the final aim of unifying Pirin and Vardar Macedonia within the framework of a large Balkan federation. In regard to this particular case, the professor in anthropology at Bates College Loring M. Danforth states that: “With the exception of a brief period following World War Two, the Bulgarian government has officially denied the existence of a Macedonian nation, arguing instead that all the Slavs of Macedonia are Bulgarians.”⁴⁴ After Stalin’s death in 1953 and with the beginning of the de-Stalinization process, the activity of imposing a distinct “Macedonian” identity and the relevant policies that were attached to it, were ended and then reversed. The initial idea of establishing, or as some would call it recognizing, a separate “Macedonian” ethnicity was welcomed by Tito and the Yugoslav communists. Barker links the roots of Tito’s decision and policies in favor of a distinct Macedonian ethno-national identity back to “...certain [Interwar] opposition politicians of Yugoslavia, such as Svetozar Pribicevic, [who] declared that the Macedonians were a separate people; and this theory is the basis of Marshal Tito’s policy.”⁴⁵ In addition to that, Barker mentions a few interesting moments, dating back to the Interwar period when: “...in September 1924, by the Kalfov-Politis Protocol, Greece prepared to recognize her Slav Macedonians as a ‘Bulgarian’ minority, she met with a strong protest from the Yugoslav government and abandoned the idea.”⁴⁶ Barker also adds that “the Greeks, in common speech, call their Slav Macedonian minority ‘Bulgarians’, but in official language ‘Slavophone Greeks’.”⁴⁷ This last report adds more to the already complicated picture of the old and new Macedonian questions and of the related disputes between scholarly circles,

⁴⁴ Loring M. Danforth, “Claims to Macedonian Identity. The Macedonian Question and the breakup of Yugoslavia,” *Anthropology Today* 9 (August 1993): 4.

⁴⁵ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 6.

⁴⁶ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 6.

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 6.

media and states. Another narrative that can also be added to the account about the origins of the historic Macedonian question is the following brief summary of the anti-Ottoman revolutionary struggle, which began in the early 1890's when the Supreme Macedonian Committee (SMC) and the IMRO were found. The former was established by Macedonian refugees and political escapees who were living in Sofia at the time. The latter was found by prominent intellectuals from Macedonia, namely the "nationalist-minded" school teachers Damian Gruev and Gotse Delchev.⁴⁸ From the early days of IMRO's existence, the movement divided itself into two distinct wings. The first one tended to be pro-Bulgarian and to collaborate closely with the Supreme Macedonian Committee in Sofia and with the Bulgarian War office and other authorities. According to the members of this wing the autonomy, and eventual independence of Macedonia, was planned as a simple pre-condition for its successive and much desired annexation to Bulgaria. This wing developed at a later stage into the nationalist right wing of IMRO, which became a rival of the Royal Yugoslav government, the Yugoslav communists (of the Interwar period), and the Bulgarian Agrarian movement. The other wing within the movement's structure advocated a different policy – again autonomy, and, independence, but this time a genuine independence for Macedonia, defined as something different from the aim of the first wing.⁴⁹ However, even though the second wing tried to maintain its independence from the Supreme Macedonian Committee (SMC) as much as possible, it continued to receive arms and financial support from the Bulgarian state. According to many sources and history accounts the second wing preached brotherhood and solidarity for all peoples of Macedonia, regardless of language or religion. This later turned into the so called left wing of the organization. Many scholars, among who was Elisabeth Barker, consider the left wing of the IMRO, or at least a certain number of its

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Barker, "The origin of the Macedonian dispute," in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 10.

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Barker, "The origin of the Macedonian dispute," in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 10.

members, to be the predecessor to the Macedonian branch of the Yugoslav communists. Tito relied on this last group and also on the so called “federalists” (members of the second, left wing who were propagating the establishment of Macedonia as a constituent unit of a large South Slav federation) when he and his followers delineated the structure of post-1945 Yugoslavia.

The history of the IMRO is a separate topic, a huge one indeed, which deserves a separate focus. Since, the main focus of this thesis is the set of potential political consequences of the Bulgarian scholarly claims to the Macedonian ethnic origin and language, the topic of the IMRO and other historical events will be only touched upon, for as long as such can serve as a timeline showing the evolutionary path towards the contemporary disputes between Bulgaria and Macedonia. The account of the roots of the Bulgarian-Macedonian historical arguments and the analysis of its present form (Chapter 2) will be followed by a chapter (Chapter 3), dedicated to the issue of the “Macedonian” minority in Southwestern Bulgaria. This subtopic will be analyzed from both Macedonian and the Bulgarian perspectives. The potential political consequences for the present, and most importantly for the future of the intergovernmental relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria will be discussed in the final, conclusive Chapter 4.

In order to understand the present of these relations and draw a vision about the future, one should analyze the past and present disputes about history, ethnic descent, language and territory. As James Pettifer states in chapter 2 of the book (the chapter, which is his personal contribution to the multi-author volume): “All Balkan territorial disputes have their mythologies; that of the Macedonian question is that of the most bloody, complex and

intractable of all, in a small peninsula already burdened.”⁵⁰ Even though the Balkan Peninsula is referred to as a “small” size territory, its history can even be described as more complex than it seems to be from a first glance. Of course, though, one should also be careful not to reach the extremes of inflating the situation to levels where it would appear to be more entangled and problematic than it actually is. On the other hand, the oversimplification of the historical past is another equally dangerous path. With regard to this, Pettifer says that “the purpose of this chapter is not to try to put forward any blueprint for ‘solution’ of the issue; that would be wholly inappropriate, as the outlines of the new ‘Macedonian’ state are only becoming apparent,...”⁵¹ This statement is very similar to one of Brubaker’s core arguments in relation to topics such as armed conflicts, interethnic/nationalist rivalries and multinational state dissolutions. According to Brubaker such a thing as an adequate blueprint for preventing and/or solving interethnic conflicts or managing armed fighting cannot be devised.⁵² A change in the political and administrative structure might exacerbate rivalries rather than solve them. Changes in the “architectural” structure of a political unit – be it a nation-state with minorities or a no majority, multinational state, cannot serve as a guarantee for stable and secure future. There is a logical explanation for that: the past is sometimes, not to say in many cases, difficult to be analyzed without any inaccuracies, while the present may be described from a variety of viewpoints. This can make it difficult for an analyst to draft a clear and understandable overview of a given situation. The future, in its turn, cannot be predicted with an absolute certainty and in this respect, the present, and especially the future of the Macedonian political and socio-cultural development seems not to be clear enough. With reference to the case of the newly independent state of Macedonia, Pettifer continues by

⁵⁰ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

⁵¹ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

⁵² Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

saying that "...it is very far from clear what shape many aspects of its political and military orientation will take."⁵³ This uncertainty, also about the economic future, and this dimness were present, especially during the 1990's and, obviously, during the 2001 conflict with the paramilitary bands representing the Albanian minority. Even today, this dimness continues to be a decisive factor that determines the shape and direction of the internal and external politics of the Republic of Macedonia. With the more recent Greek veto against the Macedonian membership in NATO, (and possibly against the future membership in the EU) the so called New Macedonian question acquired an even greater regional, and probably a European-wide relevance. About the possible future of the contemporary Macedonian question and nation-state, Pettifer suggests that: "All that is possible is to try to indicate what the basis of the old Question was, and to suggest some comparisons with the past and present; and in that light to try to see what the problems for the international community may be."⁵⁴ There is something, though, which should be noted here. The year in which the chapter was first published, 1992, was right after the September 1991 referendum for Macedonian independence. Nevertheless, the arguments that are cited above have always been valid for the overall political, economic and social developments in Macedonia since 1991, and also for the present and future of its relations with the neighbours – particularly with Bulgaria. In relation to this, Pettifer writes that: "There is every indication that the process of remaking the Balkans is spreading southwards; and the center of gravity of events may soon focus on Macedonia, as it has done in the past..."⁵⁵ To be made in 1992, this was a realistic observation to be done in 1992. It also fits right in, if one decides to look closely at the beginning of the present decade. From the end of the previous citation, Pettifer continues as

⁵³ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

⁵⁴ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

⁵⁵ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

following: “..., and it will be disturbing if international attention is distracted from this process...”⁵⁶ By using the words “this process”, Pettifer directs the reader’s attention to the important internal developments in the spheres of politics, security and stability, economics and nationalism, which are still matters of direct concern for the Macedonian government. The emergence of this “New” Macedonian question is traced by most scholars back to the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991. It is the following recognition of Slovenia and Croatia however, that is considered to have opened or reopened the Macedonian issue and the disputes between Macedonia and its neighbours. Many Macedonians look back to the Yugoslav socialist times with a certain degree of nostalgia. These were the ‘secure’ times, the times of general ‘prosperity’ and a lack, at least an apparent one, of any interethnic or other types of conflict: “so what gave rise to some of the most acute political turmoil of the inter-war period, particularly the recurrent Macedonian assassinations and bombings, seemed to have been ‘solved’ by Tito’s creation.”⁵⁷ This sense of true stability during socialism, both within and alongside the present day borders of the Republic of Macedonia, turned out though to be a deceiving image. The internal political reality in Macedonia is still a matter of some concern. The positioning of the country on the regional and European political scenes is viewed with even more uneasiness. The issue of the “Macedonian” minority in Southwestern Bulgaria contains the possibility of adding great levels of tension, maybe even of open animosity, to the scenery of the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations.

⁵⁶ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

⁵⁷ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15.

Chapter 3: The “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the opposite views of most Macedonian and Bulgarians historians about the existence of a “Macedonian” minority in Southwestern Bulgaria. The mutually antagonistic positions of media and peoples from the two countries will also be discussed. One of the determining factors in the discourse concerning the “Macedonian” minority topic is the number of individuals or groups who discuss the topic. Almost nobody in Bulgaria, scholars or politicians, would recognize, or even initiate a talk about a supposed existence of a “Macedonian” minority group. Their Macedonian colleagues, on the other hand, insist that there truly is such a minority in Pirin Macedonia. The question whether there is such a minority in Bulgaria or not, will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. Before that, a brief summary on the population changes in Macedonia is necessary. The section will present several different moments from the past. In each of these moments the political border lines of Macedonia were different. “In one sense, Macedonia throughout the nineteenth century was no different from its four immediate neighbours, Serbia, Greece, Albania and Bulgaria, in that all these peoples were struggling to throw off rule from Constantinople and the declining power of the Sublime Porte.”⁵⁸ All these major groups were on the same path, having such an important aim in common. A very important detail has to be noted here: in each separate case the process of nation-building developed with a different speed and in a slightly different manner and direction. The four nation-states did not develop simultaneously. In the cases of Serbia and Greece, for example, the necessary conditions for

⁵⁸ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

the creation of a nation were present at a much earlier point in time than in the cases of Bulgaria and Albania. Serbia and Greece became autonomous in the beginning of the nineteenth century and had the opportunity to start the process of building their own institutions and national ideologies earlier. They could enjoy the existence of state bureaucracies. Bulgaria and Albania, in contrast, achieved their autonomy and eventual independence from the Ottoman Empire at a later moment. The processes of nation-building in Bulgaria and Albania entered into a phase of acceleration a little bit later than those in Serbia and Greece. In Albania, the process was delayed further. The struggles of all ethno-national groups for autonomy and consecutive independence from the Ottoman government were closely connected to the processes of nation-building. These struggles were dependent on external factors: “In the different phases of the Eastern Question the standing of the different candidate nation-states waxed and waned, generally linked to the power of their larger non-Balkan backers and different diplomatic imperatives...”⁵⁹ In that time, the national and political developments of the future nation-states affected their populations in very significant ways. Another factor, which proved to be of some partial relevance to the national developments of the Balkan peoples, was the so called *millet* system. According to this system the subjects of the Ottoman Empire were divided into distinct major groups on the basis of religion – not on the ground of language, ethnicity or race. In relation to this Pettifer reminds the reader that “..., existing Ottoman governmental divisions often bore little relation to the aspirations of the majority of the inhabitants living within them.”⁶⁰ This historical feature had profound consequences, not only for the nation-building within each of the three major parts of Macedonia, or within geographic Macedonia as a whole, but also for every other large size Ottoman possession in the Balkans. For instance: “...unlike Serbia or Greece,

⁵⁹ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

⁶⁰ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

in Macedonia there was no basically homogenous population that could form the basis of a new nation-state.”⁶¹ In addition to that, the Slavonic majority in Macedonia is “...itself subdivided into Serbian, Bulgarian and ‘Macedonian’ elements.”⁶² With the previous sentence, Pettifer describes the contemporary situation, not only in Vardar Macedonia, but in geographic Macedonia as a whole. What Pettifer and other non-Balkan scholars say about the ethnic map of Macedonia is that: “There was, however, and still is, a plainly dominant majority in the cultural sense, in that there are more people of Slavonic origin living there than of every other group – but only within a patchwork of extreme complexity...”⁶³ The composed by minorities part of the present day population of Vardar Macedonia, in particular, is comprised of Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Vlachs, Pomaks and Roma, living side by side with the Slavic speaking majority. The picture in contemporary Aegean Macedonia, in contrast, is very different from that of Vardar or Pirin Macedonia. As it is described earlier, the ethnic composition of the Greek part changed dramatically after the end of the Greek-Turkish War in 1923. As a consequence of the peace agreement between the two rivals, huge number of Greek settlers from Asia Minor came into Greek Macedonia. As a result, the population of the entire geographic area of Macedonia is now over fifty percent Greek, with the Greeks being an overwhelming majority in Aegean Macedonia. The bloody suppression of the Ilinden uprising of 1903, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and the two World Wars also caused changes of tremendous scale in the ethnic map of Macedonia. Prior to the First Balkan War of 1912, no detailed statistics were kept by the Ottoman administration about the population character of the land. There is some data, although Pettifer describes it as not completely precise, about the composition of Macedonia’s population in 1918: “...according to Foreign

⁶¹ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

⁶² James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

⁶³ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

Office papers from 1918 there were in the ethnic territory of Macedonia, before 1912, about 1,150,000 Slavs, 400,000 Turks, 120,000 Albanians, 300,000 Greeks, 200,000 Vlachs, 100,000 Jews and 10,000 Gypsies.”⁶⁴ Before and after 1918, substantial changes in the above cited numbers occurred. But a homogenous population structure in Vardar Macedonia was never achieved: “Although there have been substantial changes since [1918], they have not produced a more homogenous population, merely changed the mixture.”⁶⁵ The other censuses that have produced some results about Vardar and Bulgarian Macedonia are the few Bulgarian, and late Yugoslav population data collections (from the late 1970’s and early 1980’s). With respect to population records, the former M.A. student Kiril Nestorovski presents data from two censuses, which he states were conducted by the Bulgarian authorities in 1946 and 1956.⁶⁶ The first thing that is noticeable about the data records that are listed in the end of Nestorovski’s Thesis, titled *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece*, is that they are not copies of Bulgarian primary sources – meaning photocopies of Bulgarian state archives. The data records of the 1946 and 1956 censuses are copies of tables published by the *Pirinsko Delo* newspaper (Pirin Affairs newspaper). This fact is the first one of a few that questions the credibility of the two sources that are cited. In fact, Nestorovski describes the data record of 1946: “An unpublished census completed by the Bulgarian authorities...”⁶⁷ It is interesting how a writer can rely on “unpublished” or “unofficial” data in order to confirm any definite statement or general perception. According to the census of 1946 there were 252,908 “people from this region [Pirin Macedonia] who called themselves Macedonian”.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

⁶⁵ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

⁶⁶ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 43.

⁶⁷ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 43.

⁶⁸ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 43.

According to the second census of 1956 there were 187,789 “self-declared Macedonians” living in the area at the time.⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, the source of the *Pirinsko Delo* newspaper issue, in which the 1946 ‘census’ table was published, is actually the archives of Macedonia in the Open Society Institute, and not the state archives of Bulgaria or the Republic of Macedonia. There is something important that one should consider about any census data published about the past population compositions of Vardar Macedonia and of the entire geographic area. Since the data collected by different national authorities are often variable, it is very likely that it is the place from which the data are taken that determines what the final results will be. This is valid for all sources, containing data from population counting, whether it is Macedonian, Bulgarian or pre-1991 Yugoslav censuses. In the external political situations, in which the Bulgarian government was during the late 1940’s, early 1950’s and 1960’s, the number of the “Macedonians” and the ratio between them and the Bulgarians within Pirin Macedonia would change each time when counted. The Soviet Communist Party of the time, headed by Stalin, was famous with engineering ethno-national identities, shifting borders, changing of rule over territories both within and outside the borders of the Soviet Union. This fact serves as a plain reminder to any a scholar that he or she should always be careful when exploring the histories of the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. The analysis of the disputes between the two nations should also be a subject to maximum correctness and objectivity. The Bulgarian censuses were not the only ones that were influenced by external geopolitical or internal factors of the time. In the case of the Yugoslav censuses: “...boycotts for political reasons have been common...”⁷⁰ According to the 1981 Yugoslav census in Vardar Macedonia there were: “...1,281,195 Macedonians, 377,726 Albanians, 44,613 Serbs, 39,555 Pomaks, 47,223 Gypsies, 86,691 Turks, 7,190

⁶⁹ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 43.

⁷⁰ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 16.

Vlachs and 1,984 Bulgarians...”⁷¹ An interesting comparison can be made between the number of “Macedonians” and “Bulgarians” from Yugoslav Macedonia. According to the more patriotic and nationalist historians from Bulgaria these categories and numbers are the final product of the Yugoslav propaganda and historiography. Their Macedonian colleagues oppose this view, insisting that there was a separate Macedonian ethnicity long before Tito’s Yugoslavia was created. Some contemporary Macedonian historians even raise claims to the heritage of the ancient Macedonian state formation (and later an Empire) of Philip and Alexander the Great. Whatever the ‘truth’ about the history of the Macedonian ethno-national identity and language is, the claims raised by some Bulgarian scholars and media will continue to be a source of high tension between the two nations and their cultural and intellectual elites. There is a potential that the position of some Bulgarian and Macedonian historians, writers and analysts, will affect not just the present but also the future of the interstate relations through relevant media channels. A few signs have already appeared among the Bulgarian political elite and also among the representatives of the country in the European Parliament. An example is already given in the Introduction section of this Thesis – the official statement made by the ex-foreign minister of Bulgaria Ivaylo Kalfin in the...year. The fact that the ex-foreign minister declared the possible future support for the Macedonian membership in the EU to be subordinated to certain conditions set by Bulgaria is indicative of the potential consequences. The Bulgarian historians’ position in relation to the Macedonian ethno-national identity, origin, language and history can certainly reshape the past policy of governmental inactivity or positivity. It is quite certain that the future relations between the two states will be to be strongly affected by the main Bulgarian-Macedonian disputes. These extreme arguments are still outside the sphere of the intergovernmental dialogue and contacts.

⁷¹ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 17.

There is no guarantee, however, that the points of argument will remain there. The claims of most Macedonian historians, intellectuals and of some politicians that there really is a “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria, and the complete lack of any official intention of Bulgaria to recognize such a minority, will almost certainly facilitate a considerable deterioration of the relations. Moreover, the majority of the Bulgarian historians, political analysts and the public would definitely protest against any hint, not to mention an official intention, from the Bulgarian government to recognize a “Macedonian” minority group. As it can be seen from the presently ongoing intergovernmental dispute between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia, the opinion and will of the majority share of the Macedonian public will most probably be taken into account by the ruling politicians. Such a development is almost guaranteed if an official dispute is to arise with the Bulgarian government – especially if the wounds from the argument with Greece, and its 2008 veto of the Macedonian NATO membership, will still be fresh. The Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute, in comparison, is much deeper and more complex. There is much more to it than an argument about a name and a piece of remote ancient heritage. As it is indicated several times earlier, it is about the ethnic origin, language and the history of the Slavic speaking Macedonians. The extreme arguments between the two sides about the supposed existence of a “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria still exert substantial pressure on the public mindset in Macedonia. In connection to that, Nestorovski’s Thesis serves as a fine example. In regard to the focus of his own work, Nestorovski states that: “The specific focus of the thesis is the status and the rights of the Macedonian minorities living in Greece and Bulgaria.”⁷² It is worth making a note of the fact that Nestorovski has relied heavily upon Blaze Ristovski for academic advice and general guidance. Ristovski is one of the most prominent and respected historians in the Republic of

⁷² Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 1.

Macedonia and is also considered a patriot. His life's work, theories and positions in regard to the Macedonia history are greatly respected by many historians and intellectuals in the country. In order to enrich the description of the situation in which the "Macedonian" minorities in Bulgaria and Greece are, Nestorovski has also used works by Will Kymlica on citizenship, multiculturalism and nationalism. In addition to that, the author has relied upon theoretical works by Rogers Brubaker and Ernst Gellner on topics such as national minorities, nationalism, nations, nationalizing states and external homelands. The M.A. student has also taken information from works such as *Macedonia and the Macedonian People*⁷³, by Blaze Ristovski and *Macedonia, its People and History*, by Stoyan Pribichevich. In addition, Netsorovski has used a few other sources on the same topics. Furthermore, the author has worked with significant number of Macedonian online sources and post-1945 Macedonian census reports about the population character of Southwestern Bulgaria. The latter group of sources, however, can be judged as strongly biased, especially if one takes into account the fact that the Bulgarian government signed the Bled Agreement on August the 1st 1947 with Tito. According to this agreement, the Bulgarian side agreed to establish, or according to some to finally guarantee the recognition and rightful status of a separate "Macedonian" ethno-national group in Southwest Bulgaria. As a next step, Vardar and Pirin Macedonia were supposed to be joined together in a single administrative unit, and together with Bulgaria and the rest of Socialist Yugoslavia were supposed to form a large Balkan federation. Stalin ordered the Bulgarian Communist Party to collaborate with the project, which in fact it did. As it is described earlier in the text, after the major Tito-Stalin split of 1948 the whole idea was abandoned completely. This is not about arguing, whether there really is a separate Macedonian ethnicity and language or not. One of the major purposes of this chapter is to

⁷³ For more information, please see: Ristovski, Blaze – "Macedonia and the Macedonian People", SIMAG Holding, Vienna, Skopje 1999, pp. 17-18.

compare a typical Macedonian and typical Bulgarian account of the “Macedonian” minority issue in Bulgaria. Secondly, the core sources that Nestorovski has used for the preparation of his thesis will be judged accordingly, in view of the Bulgarian claims to the Macedonian ethnicity and language and of their Macedonian antipodes. The intention of the present work is to concentrate on his direct statements and reports regarding the “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria, and to reflect on the present day ethno-national reality in Southwestern Bulgaria. Furthermore, it will also be of relevance to analyse and discuss the general tone of his central sources in regard to the “New” Macedonian question and the topic of the “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria. At first, review of Nestorovski’s statements in relation to the existence, rights and non-recognition of the “Macedonian” minority in Bulgaria is necessary. In his thesis introduction, Nestorovski states that: “The general aim of this paper is to shed light on the conditions in which minorities in host countries can be more or less integrated.”⁷⁴ This general, but still guiding sentence, leads to the more specific focus of Nestorovski’s work – the non-recognition of “Macedonian” minorities in Bulgaria and Greece.⁷⁵ The majority of the Bulgarian population is so opposed to the claims, raised by the Macedonian scholars and media, that it is almost in vain for one to think or expect that a large “Macedonian” minority would be recognized – not only in the near, but in the very distant future. In addition to that, there is no official Bulgarian report that declares the existence of a really numerous “Macedonian” ethnic group in Southwestern Bulgaria. With regards to the feeling of ethno-national belonging in Vardar and Pirin Macedonia, Elisabeth Barker states that the feeling of being Macedonian and nothing else but Macedonian is a phenomenon of “fairly recent

⁷⁴ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 1.

⁷⁵ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 1.

growth...”⁷⁶ In parallel to that, James Pettifer refers to the Slav population of Southwestern Bulgaria as “Pirin Bulgarophile Macedonians”, obviously suggesting a fact of reality, regarding the ethnic self-determination of the local population⁷⁷. In relation to the belonging of the people from Pirin Macedonia to an ethnic category, Nestorovski says that: “They are not recognized as an ethnic minority in neither Greece nor Bulgaria.”⁷⁸ Because of that, he specifies that his study is important for two reasons: “First, it offers an insight to the problems the Macedonian minority is facing in two South-East European countries – one member of the European Union, the other due to get membership in 2007.”⁷⁹. To analyse the previous sentence, simply stating that there have never been any problems between the supposedly existing “Macedonian” minority and the Bulgarian majority would probably sound very biased. By problems, here it is meant the sort of tensions that typically occur between a minority and a majority in a given country when the minority’s rights are not protected or even recognized. With reference to such problems, it has never been reported, nationally or internationally, about any major confrontations, problems, tensions or issues of any other kind between the two “separate” groups – neither in state or foreign owned media, nor in privately owned means of communication. In general, public or mass feelings of negativism or discrimination towards the population of the Pirin area have never been observed amongst the population of Bulgaria, and within Pirin Macedonia. And finally, in the region of Pirin Macedonia there has never been an armed conflict of any magnitude, or even a potential danger for the emergence of such. No matter what legal or forceful measures the Bulgarian state took in the past vis-à-vis the “Macedonian” minority, the latter could have taken up arms

⁷⁶ Elisabeth Barker, “The origin of the Macedonian dispute,” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 4.

⁷⁷ James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 17.

⁷⁸ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 1.

⁷⁹ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 1.

en masse against the state authorities. Such a thing never happened in the distant or recent histories of Bulgaria. The population numbers that are quoted earlier in this chapter illustrate just a single part of the extensive and complicated disputes between the conservative historians from the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. As it is noted earlier, each population counting from Vardar and Pirin Macedonia is significantly different from the others according to the source from which it comes. Most Macedonian and Bulgarian historians, and also Western and other experts in the field of Southeast European studies, still argue about the validity or precision of certain ones of these numbers. The argument about the true number of the “Macedonians” in Bulgaria is simply one of the basic elements of the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute, which has the real potential to cause problems and inflict damage to the otherwise good relations between the two governments. Another such element of the dispute between the two sides and of the New Macedonian Question is the case of the UMO Ilinden Party. It emerged in 1990 as the Independent Macedonian Organization and later changed its name to the United Macedonian Organization (UMO) – Ilinden. Nestorovski describes UMO Ilinden as: “...an organization of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria and its main purpose is to fight for the granting of basic and special minority rights of the Macedonians in Bulgaria.”⁸⁰ The student describes further the organization as a body, which “...has fought with liberal and peaceful means...” for the recognition and protection of the “Macedonian” minority rights.⁸¹ He states that UMO-Ilinden organized rallies in Sofia, demanding special minority rights and territorial autonomy, without naming at the same time specific sources of this information.⁸² In Nestorovski’s thesis, he talks about brutal

⁸⁰ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 48.

⁸¹ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 48.

⁸² Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 48.

suppression of the organization and its supporters from the “minority” group.⁸³ The only significant events that happened were the early 1990’s decision of the Bulgarian government not to recognize UMO-Ilinden Pirin and the later ruling of the Constitutional Court of Bulgaria not to recognize the renamed UMO-Ilinden. The grounds for the ruling were that the organization had threatened the territorial sovereignty and internal security of the Republic of Bulgaria.⁸⁴ An analogical case, this time on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, is the existence and functioning of the organization named RADKO.⁸⁵ Some of the main goals of the organization are: to be an organization dedicated to the protection and development of the Bulgarian culture; to achieve an official recognition of the “Bulgarian” ethnic group as a constituent element, to be listed in the constitution of the Republic of Macedonia; and to achieve recognition of the Bulgarian language as an official language in the Republic of Macedonia. The aims of RADKO are extremely ambitious and would probably not be achieved in the foreseeable future. The same is valid for the case of UMO-Ilinden as, in whatever form, the organization fought for the achievement of the same type of goals. UMO-Ilinden was banned by the Bulgarian Constitutional Court in early 2000. Similarly, in 2001 RADKO was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia. Both organizations filed complaints to the European Court of Human Rights and in both legal cases the respective governments were found guilty of violating Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 11 of the Convention is dedicated to the freedom of assembly and association: “No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society

⁸³ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 49.

⁸⁴ Kiril Nestorovski, M.A. Thesis *Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece* (Budapest: Central European University, 2006), 50.

⁸⁵ For more information see: RADKO official website: <<http://www.radkomk.com>>

in the interests of national security or public safety...”⁸⁶ As for the statements about violence exercised by police and/or special forces in the Republic of Macedonia and in Bulgaria, Article 11 of the Convention states the following: “This article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.”⁸⁷ By “these rights” it is meant the rights that any branch of the State administration or the institutions has, responsible for the maintenance of peace and order, to actually maintain the necessary peace and order. Of course, this is not an excuse for exercising excessive violence over individuals or groups of people. But if the Macedonian and Bulgarian state authorities had serious reasons for a decisive intervention and could ground the respective measures on the law of the state – apparently they were in conformity with the Constitutions of the two countries and with other international legal frameworks. In both cases, the organizations – UMO-Ilinden Pirin and RADKO expressed ideas and goals, which demanded significant constitutional changes. These ideas and aims were at least directed towards changing certain elements of the basic structure of the nation-state, if not openly separatist. Therefore, it turns out that the strong and continuous circulations of certain historical accounts and claims, both within the history-writing and media communities can lead to several major consequences. The first consequence can be the emergence of organizations or movements such as UMO-Ilinden Pirin and RADKO. The second type of effect can certainly be the adoption and implementation of interventionist measures on the side of the State authorities. The third stage, if one decides to call it that, can be the sudden and deep deterioration of the relations between two governments, namely that of the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria.

⁸⁶ European Court of Human Rights, *European Convention on Human Rights*, website: <http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/EnglishAnglais.pdf>.

⁸⁷ European Court of Human Rights, *European Convention on Human Rights*, website: <http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/EnglishAnglais.pdf>.

Chapter 4 (Conclusion): The potential political consequences for the interstate relations

Many historians and experts in Southeast European affairs would confirm that bad relations between governments can lead to political and developmental instability in the region. This chapter will review the current and possible future status of the relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria. One of the main objectives of this section is to summarise the material in the Thesis and propose an answer – a support to the title and main thesis statement.

The Old and New Macedonian questions have always been a mark, according to which the political, state and intellectual elites of Macedonia have been shaping their internal and external policies till today. The ethnic factor has played a part in some events from the internal affairs of the country. It is an issue, which still leaves its own imprint on the intergovernmental relations. Nevertheless, some authors state that ethnicity has not been a determining factor all the time. One of the contributors to the book, edited by James Pettifer, called Dimitar Mircev says the following about the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia: “...despite the large proportion of ethnic groups within the population (33 percent) neither inter-ethnic, nor ethno-centric and ethno-political mobilization have prevailed in Macedonian politics and the electorate.”⁸⁸ This was the situation in the beginning of the 1990’s. As most historians and observers know, however, things began to change at the end of the decade. The 2001 armed conflict with the Albanian paramilitary bands in Western and North-western Macedonia happened as a bitter interruption of the relatively calm situation. In addition to that, the long-lasting argument with Greece about the name of the new state added further amounts of internal and external pressure on the Macedonian government. Greece still doesn’t

⁸⁸ Dimitar Mircev, “Engineering the foreign policy of a new independent State: the Case of Macedonia, 1990-6” in *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 201.

recognize Macedonia under its Constitutional name. The temporary agreement of 1995 between the Greek and the Macedonian governments, regarding the name of the new republic, opened the otherwise blocked path for the development of the basic level of inter-state relations. Despite that, the agreement did not solve the argument – it simply introduced a pause that was desperately needed. The 1990's disputes and controversial issues with Bulgaria are just another example of unstable relations. During most of the 1990's, the disputes about the language, history and ethnic belonging were not only between historians and media from both sides, but also between governments. Mircev contrasts the problems, which the Macedonian government had with Greece and Bulgaria with the observation that "..., there are no indications that the difficulties and threats that Macedonia was repeatedly exposed to from its neighbours since independence in 1991 have created animosity, hatred or ethnophobia among the population, at least not sufficient enough to cause any real dispute or conflict."⁸⁹ Prior to the spring of 2001, the accounts of Macedonia's political, social and cultural developments, express similarly positive observations. Such a positive sounding account is the following statement by Loring M. Danforth, who states that: "...relatively little attention has been paid to Macedonia; in large part, I suspect, because the situation there has, until now at least, remained so peaceful."⁹⁰ This and other similar observations sound very positively. They are suitable for drafting optimistic prognosis about the future. Nevertheless, the interethnic minority conflict of 2001 and the intensive and sometimes emotional dispute with Greece serve as warnings, which should be taken into account. In regard to suchlike potential and real dangers from the past and the present, Danforth reminds that: "Historically, however, Macedonia has often been a major source of conflict and instability in the

⁸⁹ Dimitar Mircev, "Engineering the foreign policy of a new independent State: the Case of Macedonia, 1990-6" in *The New Macedonian Question* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 202.

⁹⁰ Loring M. Danforth, "Claims to Macedonian Identity. The Macedonian Question and the breakup of Yugoslavia," *Anthropology Today* 9 (August 1993): 3.

Balkans.”⁹¹ In relation to the dispute between Macedonia and Greece, Danforth continues as follows: “Even now it [the Macedonian government] lies at the centre of a bitter dispute between Greeks and Macedonians over which group has the right to identify itself as Macedonians.”⁹² Both disputes, the one between Greece and Macedonia and the one between Macedonian and Bulgarian historians and media, have a long history: “Toward the end of the nineteenth century the population of Macedonia was increasingly being defined from various external nationalist perspectives in terms of national categories such as Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians and Turks.”⁹³ Nowadays, scholarly or interstate disputes become equally dramatic, when claims to the ethnic origin, language and culture of the “other” are involved.

⁹¹ Loring M. Danforth, “Claims to Macedonian Identity. The Macedonian Question and the breakup of Yugoslavia,” *Anthropology Today* 9 (August 1993): 3.

⁹² Loring M. Danforth, “Claims to Macedonian Identity. The Macedonian Question and the breakup of Yugoslavia,” *Anthropology Today* 9 (August 1993): 3.

⁹³ Loring M. Danforth, “Claims to Macedonian Identity. The Macedonian Question and the breakup of Yugoslavia,” *Anthropology Today* 9 (August 1993): 3.

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