

Between the internal and external ‘Other’

Discourse study of Macedonian national identity

Cvete Koneska

Analytica, Skopje

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks beyond the various mainstream manifestations of national identity in politics, to the processes of construction and reconstruction of national identity, which the bulk of the literature rarely problematizes in its analysis assuming their historically rooted and relatively stable nature. In line with the major philosophical principles underlying discourse theory, as drawn from the works of Foucault, Derrida, Levinas, this paper aims to expose the mechanisms at work in the construction of national identity and point to their political and contingent nature. Drawing on works of E. Laclau, C. Mouffe, D. Howarth, and others who have operationalized the philosophical tenets of discourse theory into a coherent epistemological frame – poststructuralist discourse analysis, and applied it to political phenomena, this paper takes up the case of Macedonian national identity and examines it through discourse theory perspective.

The data analysis, conducted on textual data collected around major discursive challenges to hegemonic meaning of national identity in the past decade, reveals three major lines along which the meaning of Macedonian national identity is being re-constructed. The first line concerns the contents of ‘national identity’, which as a symbolic signifier, is filled with arbitrary meanings, based on various identity markers that are selected as more or less salient at various point in time. In the Macedonian case, those identity markers vary from: language, religion, to the state’s official name. The second frontier concerns the inclusiveness of ‘national identity’ and the struggles to re-define Macedonian national identity in a more inclusive, multi-ethnic, manner. The binary, us vs. them, logic of national identity has varied between internal division (excluding minorities) and inclusion triggered by external nationalist challenges. The final line of re-negotiation of national identity concerns its legitimacy and rooting the concept into historical narratives, to disguise its arbitrary and recent nature.

Introduction

Beyond the expectations of many who thought states and nations are on the verge of extinction in an age of economic, cultural and political globalization of the world¹, in many parts of the world, nations and national identity have not only survived but are playing an increasingly important role in politics. After the end of the Cold War, the Balkans has been one of those regions, where politics is heavily influenced by concerns about the nation and its wellbeing. Secessions, wars and ethno-political conflicts have become the trademark of this region as the last two decades witnessed some of the most atrocious war crimes in Europe committed in the name of the nation and preserving national identity.

Ethnic conflicts and violence are not the only occasions that merit analysis of national identity and its links to politics. In such extreme circumstance national identity can become the dominant identity of a population and cause people to see members of other groups not as individuals but only as members of the other group.² National identity is the only thing that matters under such circumstance. However, even in times when national identities are not the exclusive source of identification for the population, national identity is not relegated out of the political domain. On the contrary, the banality of daily politics reproduces practices that feed into the dynamics of national identity.³ National identity is also reinforced or restructured through the small and seemingly technical procedures and decisions of the political elites. Looking at those instances of constructing national identity reveals the political and discursive machinery behind the dynamics of national identity and helps us understand the how group identities evolve and develop through the political process.

This paper looks at the case of Macedonian national identity and investigates the effects that the name dispute with Greece has on its contents and development. In particular, this paper examines how discourses on Macedonian national identity changed and evolved after the Greek veto for NATO membership of Macedonia in April 2008, a diplomatic failure that led to questioning of Macedonia's strategic priorities in foreign policy. This foreign policy event has major ramifications for national identity too. As the name-dispute with neighbouring Greece intensified, discussions over the name, language and national identity re-surfaced and all but dominate the public arena. Macedonia's foreign policy is structured by a specific view of Macedonian national identity, which determines the policy options that decision-makers can legitimately choose from, which has serious consequences for the country's political and economic development. The current dominant view of Macedonian national identity also affects domestic policy towards minorities, thus linking national identity to security and democracy in Macedonia. Therefore, looking into how the boundaries and identity markers of Macedonian national identity are forged vis-à-vis the internal (minorities) and external (neighbours) 'Other' allows a rare insight into the laboratory where knowledge, discourse and political power intertwine.

¹ See, Francis Fukuyama, *End of History?* (NY: 1992) or Samuel Huntingdon , " The Clash of Civilizations" in *Foreign Affairs*, (1992) or even earlier writings of Marx and Lenin about proletarian international.

² Henry Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Inter-group Conflict" in *Organizational Identity: A Reader*. Eds. M.J. Hatch and M. Schultz. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*. (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

National identity

Why studying national identity matters today?

Identity, and national identity in particular, has been the object of analysis in many social science disciplines, from anthropology, to social psychology, history, ethnography and political science and international relations. Yet, despite abundant research on the subject, national identity remains a contested concept in social science, provoking ever more research and academic debate as researchers revise, update and contest existing theories. The main cleavages run between the primordialist vs. instrumentalist vs. constructivist views on the nature of nations and national identity, each of which offers a different view of how nations came about, the role they play in contemporary politics and their place in the lives of common people. Primordialists see national identity as rooted in history, kinship and blood, and thus also as the structure predisposing all modern nation-state projects and contemporary group identities to distinctive ethnic histories, myths and territorial associations stemming from deep-rooted pre-modern ethnicities.⁴

Modernist/Instrumentalist scholars of national identity argue that modern nations are the product of political elites who use the idea of the nation, often based on ethnic myths and symbols, for instrumental purposes – to command the loyalty of populations after the demise of traditional forms of collective identification– religions, empires and local/regional communities.⁵ Finally, constructivist views of identity refer to it as constructed and reproduced through the daily practices of human agents: concepts such as ethnicity, nation, gender, race, sexuality etc. are contested and fluid and so are pertaining identities.⁶ All group identities are built in opposition to the Other – the out-group which provides the external background against which the identity of the group – its features and boundaries – are constructed. This suggests that one of the ways that ethnic identity can change is through the changing environment and constellation of other groups perceived as constitutive for the group identity.⁷

Identity changes and reconstructions take place in the discursive field. Changing individuals' and groups' perceptions of themselves and others is related to changes in the dominant discourse in society. How people perceive the world around them, which is shaped by the dominant political discourse, determines how they see themselves and each other. The perceptions of self and the group (nation) further feed back into the political discourse by affecting how policies are designed and priorities set so that identities are reproduced and reinforced through practices and discourse. Analysing the political discourse in Macedonia will provide an insight into processes of identity politics and re-structuring of Macedonian national identity as well as the political outcomes of such an undertaking.

⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnic Origin of Nations*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

⁵ E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993)

⁶ R. Jenkins, *Re-thinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Crawford Young, 'The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality', in *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?* Crawford Young, Ed., (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press 1993). pp.3–35.

⁷ Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture" in *Social Problems*, vol. 41, no.4, (1994)

Discursive nature of national identity

How is national identity re-constructed?

Discourse Theory accepts the general constructivist claim that identities are not fixed but tend to change. Moreover, Discourse Theory focuses exactly on the process of social construction of identities - on the rules and meanings, or the language 'games', that allow the construction of identities. In addition to its constructed nature, identity is seen as relationalist and contextualist - shaped in relation to other identities in a particular historical context.⁸ Those historically specific relational systems that condition the mutual construction of identities are called discourses.⁹

Discourses, defined as relational systems of signification that provide the conditions of emergence of any meaning and identity, are not created by any subject, for subjects are also part of the discursive system. Rather, particular historical contexts and constellations give rise to *conditions of possibilities* for a certain discourse to emerge. Some, like Foucault, focus exactly on the rules governing the creation of specific historic discourses, their genealogies.¹⁰ Any discursive field spanned by a particular discourse is unified through *nodal points* - signifiers without any precise contents that create a knot of meaning which temporarily fixes the identities of subjects.

Just like the identities they produce, discourses themselves are not stable structures. Because, following Derrida, there is no essence, no determining centre to structure all meanings and identities, while itself avoiding structuration, no discourse can ever be closed.¹¹ On the contrary, the reproduction of discourses is a result of contingent, not structurally determined, political actions and decisions. Such political decisions are taken against a background of undecidability (no structural or other reason preferring one option over others) and the choices made are at the cost of other options that are henceforth excluded. Therefore, the realm of the political constitutes and subverts discourses, which in turn shape the social realm and associated meanings and identities. The politically constructed identities and social relations tend to sediment over time and appear as independent from the realm of everyday politics.¹² Identities, therefore, are partially fixed and relatively stable within a certain discursive order. However, at times of social upheaval, or discursive dislocation, social structure and identities are again subverted through political means, which ultimately reveals their political nature.

Discourse is a result of political decisions or *articulations* - practices that establish a relation among discursive elements and produce mutual change of their identities.¹³ Therefore the political arena witnesses hegemonic struggles - struggles for political and moral leadership and dominance - between various political projects aiming to establish discursive dominance. This dominance, or *hegemony*, which equals political power, unifies the discursive field around certain nodal points and

⁸ Jacob Torfing, "Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments and Challenges" in Howarth, D. and J. Torfing. *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁹ This is a version of Torfing's definition of discourse which is based on Laclau and Mouffe's definition of discourse as used in "Discourse Theory" in *Discourse Theory*, p.14.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. (London and NY: Routledge, 2001).

¹² Jacob Torfing, "Poststructuralist discourse theory: Foucault, Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek" (Unpublished paper).

¹³ E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Verso, 2nd Edition, 2001)

ultimately is the basis for any meaningful political action.¹⁴ It is through such hegemonic articulations - those that manage to present a credible reading of past, present and future - that *ideological totalisation* of discourse is attempted, though never quite achieved. Ideological totalisation here refers to the attempts to deny the contingent nature of social reality and identity and present them as permanent and structurally determined, thus attempting to achieve closure of the discourse.¹⁵ In practice, such attempts of totalisation result with the creation of myths, which allow political actors to interpret events in a particular fashion and call for corresponding solution (eg. Nationalist myths in the post-communist period).

Yet, articulations would not be possible without *social antagonisms* to draw the boundary between “us” and the threatening Other. As there is no inner essence on which to base identity, identity-creation must rely on a constitutive Other to account for its limits. Therefore, through social antagonisms a series of identities and meanings are excluded by being articulated through a *logic of equivalence*, which emphasises their sameness by the fact that they all present a threat to the present hegemonic discourse.¹⁶ Alternatively, a *logic of difference* would expand the identity shaped by the hegemonic discourse through including elements that used to be articulated as outside its boundaries.¹⁷ Both these logics are subject of political struggles for hegemony (eg. debates about national identity and its ethnic vs. civic nature, or European identity and its limits etc.).

While social antagonisms account for the limits of the discursive field and prevent its closure, they are not harmful to its existence. It is when faced with events that it can not explain, adopt or accommodate in any other way, that a hegemonic discourse is disrupted or dislocated. A *dislocation* leads to a partial or complete breakdown of the symbolic order accompanied by notable increase of *floating signifiers* that contending political actors immediately attempt to imbue with new meanings.¹⁸ A dislocation is always followed by political struggles for hegemony and as such is the basic condition for political action - without the possibility of disruption of the social structure no political action is possible.

Due to the inclination of discourses to be dislocated, the subject in Discourse Theory is always *split* - not being able to achieve full identity, but always striving to by identification with various political projects that promise to bring about such fullness of identity.¹⁹ Thus, identity is a result of identification with political discourses, it is not a feature that the subject possess through structure. This, however, is an illusory full identity, but nevertheless attractive, a fact that political actors use when articulating their projects promising to solve the problems of their intended audience.

By looking at the political discourse in Macedonian politics after the Greek veto for NATO membership, this paper aims to investigate how national identity, as a social fact and phenomenon, was re-created and re-structured through political means and processes. Following poststructuralist discourse theory this paper aims to reveal the political origins, the contingent nature, of social phenomena which then in turn shape the political process, until the underlying discourse is unsettled and dislocated. Macedonian national identity is forged in the political realm through

¹⁴ Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Zizek*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999)

¹⁵ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations*. (London: Verso, 1996)

¹⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

¹⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. (London: Verso, 1990)

¹⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections*.

discursive practices which reproduce and sediment national identity into a social fact which constrains the policy options of Macedonian policy-makers. Thus, ultimately, this paper also aims to flag the power mechanisms and relations that inform the political discourse that shapes national identity and its political consequences for Macedonian foreign policy and domestic politics.

The following sections present the analysis of political discourse of the most influential political actors in Macedonian politics during the after the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. The analysis is focused on the main governing politicians' discourse – the Prime Minister, the President and the leader of the governing Albanian political party. Thus the analysis spans the official government political discourse as the dominant political discourse throughout this period that shaped political identities and derived political priorities from them.

PART 2: Macedonian national Identity: Analysis

Contents of Macedonian national identity

Who is Macedonian? What does it mean to be Macedonian?

The name-dispute with Greece, although on-going for the last twenty years, has come to re-define the contents of Macedonian national identity after the Greek veto for Macedonian membership in NATO at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008. This event has shaken the official political discourse in Macedonia by revealing the clash between Euro-Atlantic integration as foreign policy strategic priority and defending the constitutional name of the country – Republic of Macedonia. Lack of mutually acceptable solution to the name dispute with Greece in the months leading to the April 2008 NATO Summit cost the country an invitation for NATO membership. This tension between Macedonian national identity and European identity, which up until then were presented as mutually compatible, opened space for re-designing Macedonian identity and introducing new identity markers in the structure provided by the 'Macedonian identity' signifier. As Europeanness and belonging to the European institutions and values lost their symbolic appeal after the failure at the NATO Summit, ethno-national markers became more prominent in the discourse of Macedonian politicians. For President Gjorge Ivanov:

*"The name is the most important symbol of our country; it is a point of unification, an identity that ties the citizens and the Macedonian nation to its history, language and culture."*²⁰

Because the negotiations about the name dispute involved questions regarding the name of the *language* and the *nation* in addition to the name of the state, these two identity markers also surfaced on the forefront of political discourse since 2008. The Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski clearly stated that:

*"Language is one of the basic elements that define one nation. It is a means of self-identification and distinction from other nations, through which national and cultural distinctiveness are expressed; a means that unites and personifies certain population."*²¹

²⁰ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM, Interview. 18 March 2009. *Nova Makedonija*. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=4364> (author's translation)

The name and language, used as they were by politicians to define national identity, produced a more exclusive ethno-national definition of Macedonian national identity. The language, in particular, is a marker that divides ethnic Macedonians from the ethnic Albanian population in Macedonia, which has Albanian as native language. Thus, to the extent that language *“unites and personifies certain population”* it is the ethnic Macedonian population only, not ethnic minorities.

‘Name, language and identity’ has become the triad that permeates the official political discourse about the name dispute, EU integration and Macedonian identity in general. Name, language and identity were spoken of as *“national interests”* and the *“red lines in negotiations with Greece”*²², and were elevated to the status of the single most important national priorities. The ethnic overtone in those efforts to re-define Macedonian national identity was often counter-balanced with statements about the multi-ethnic and civic nature of the Macedonian state. However, at times politicians slipped into using ethnic rhetoric. At his inauguration, President Ivanov talked about Macedonia as a:

*“[...] state that has realised the centuries-long dream of Macedonians and once again has reaffirmed our ethno-national, cultural and linguistic identity”.*²³

Such statements resonate with the tone of the initial Preamble of the 1991 Constitution, which was changed after the ethnic conflict in 2001 to refer to the Macedonian state as not only the homeland of ethnic Macedonians but of all citizens and ethnic communities on its territory. The tone and rhetoric of the Preamble were problematic for inter-ethnic relations and current references to ethnic distinctiveness and historical dreams of nations show that the ethno-nationalist discourse in Macedonia is not completely eradicated but at times resurfaces to challenge the dominance of civic, multi-ethnic ideas about Macedonian identity.

However, overtly ethno-nationalist references to Macedonian identity are much less frequent than discourse about the multi-ethnic nature of the Macedonian state and the efforts at bridging inter-ethnic differences. Among the Macedonian political elites, President Ivanov is the one who most often refers to ethnic and religious diversity in Macedonia as a distinct feature of Macedonian democracy and thus also of Macedonian political identity. He sees Macedonia as a:

*“[...] microcosm of tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation, [to be] accepted as an example for the other states in the region. Our model of integration without assimilation, respecting the cultural, religious and linguistic differences is a great contribution to the European treasury of nations and cultures.”*²⁴

On several occasions President Ivanov has brought up what he calls the ‘Macedonian model’ of building a functioning multi-ethnic state through ‘integration without assimilation’. This model he claims is unique to Macedonia, because it works and allows Macedonia to successfully manage ethnic diversity, something which many other, much richer and more developed democracies have

²¹ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Address at Year of Macedonian Language event. May 2008. Available at: <http://www.vlada.mk/?q=node/553> (author’s translation)

²² Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Elections 2008 Campaign Speech, 12 May 2008, Ohrid. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=2979>

²³ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. *Inaugural Address*. 12 May 2009. Skopje. Available at: www.president.gov.mk (author’s translation)

²⁴ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Annual Speech to Parliament. 21 December 2009. Available at: www.president.gov.mk

failed to accomplish. Conceptualising ethnic diversity in such manner, as an asset rather than liability to Macedonian democracy, reveals an effort to positively re-fashion Macedonian identity and Macedonians' views of their society. Although multi-ethnic and tolerant discourse is expected and required by political elites of all countries aiming to join the EU and NATO, such discursive move serves a greater purpose than just striking the right tone with the EU and NATO. It serves to improve the collective self-image of Macedonians and Macedonian society. While ethnic and religious diversity has created ethnic tensions in the past and resulted with ethnic conflict in 2001, the post-2001 institutional and political system has alleviated those tensions. Such political model is therefore presented by the politicians as something that is rare, valuable and desired by many others, which should make Macedonian citizens proud to have it and respect it.

Similar sentiments are echoed by other political actors, although by virtue of being above party politics the President is in a better position to use non-divisive and unifying rhetoric. The Prime Minister has also referred to ethnic diversity as a Macedonian strength, rather than weakness. In the especially difficult and complex circumstances:

“we have proven to have the capacity to build democratic, prosperous and civilizational mature society by cherishing our centuries-long tradition of inter-ethnic tolerance and thus demonstrated maturity in times of great distress.”²⁵

Such statements reaffirm the centrality of ethnic tolerance for Macedonian society and Macedonian identity by describing ethnic tolerance as a perennial feature of Macedonian society and omitting the fact that only in 2001 Macedonia underwent a bloody ethnic conflict. By referring to 'times of great distress' and 'difficult and complex circumstances' attention is diffused from the conflict and diverted to positive features, such as ethnic tolerance, which contribute to building a positive image of Macedonia and Macedonian citizens.

Albanian politicians in Macedonia also include ethnic diversity when they talk about Macedonia. However, they mostly take the multi-ethnic nature of the Macedonian state as a given, as a fact, not as a goal that needs to be achieved, or value to be treasured. Rather, that Macedonia is a multi-ethnic state is used as a premise from which conclusions about different policies are reached. Ali Ahmeti, the coalition partner in the current government and most popular Albanian politician since 2001, has spoken of:

“Macedonia [is] the country of Albanians too”²⁶ and “Macedonia [is] a multi-ethnic state in which every other person speaks Albanian”²⁷.

Such statements are justifications for demanding greater rights for Albanians and introducing different policies to promote those rights, such as greater usage of Albanian language, more employment of Albanians in the private sector. However ethnic diversity in Macedonia is given no inherent, symbolic value in addition to the pragmatic benefits that result from it for Albanians in Macedonia. Unlike their Macedonian counterparts who talk about ethnic tolerance as a unique value

²⁵ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Independence Day Speech, 8 September 2008. Available at: <http://www.vlada.mk/?q=node/908> (Author's translation)

²⁶ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI, Interview. *Shqip*. 2007. Available at: www.gazeta-shqip.com

²⁷ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI, Interview. *Alsati-M*. 8 January 2008. Available at: www.alsat-m.com.mk

for Macedonia, ethnic Albanian politicians approach ethnic diversity in Macedonia from a pragmatic perspective in their efforts to secure more rights for Albanians in Macedonia.

Another point where Albanian political discourse differs markedly from Macedonians is the treatment of the ethnic conflict from 2001. While Macedonian politicians often omit it from their speeches and never refer to it in positive light, Ali Ahmeti has talked about it in different terms:

*“We wouldn’t have been so numerous, so proud and so free on this important day, if it wasn’t for the noble and holy war of NLA...”*²⁸

In stark difference to ‘times of great distress’, the ethnic conflict is described as ‘noble and holy war’ and thus accorded positive value, something that Albanians in Macedonia should be proud of. Considering that Ali Ahmeti was the leader of the National Liberation Army (NLA) that led the war in 2001, such positive identification with the violent events from 2001 can be understood as a means to improve his own self-image as a legitimate leader of the Albanians in Macedonia as well as the person who led a just war in order to improve the situation of his ethnic group in the Macedonian state. On other occasions, Ahmeti has adopted a less ‘hawkish’ approach to the 2001 conflict:

*“We didn’t like the war, but we were fighting to be an equal nation in our country.”*²⁹

In his speech, ‘we’ refers to the Albanian community in Macedonia, not to Macedonian citizens. Albanian politicians in Macedonia rarely refer to all Macedonian citizens or Macedonian civic identity. Their main target group is the ethnic Albanian population, a stance from which one can not immediately deduce commitment to ethno-nationalist discourse. These statements are understandable considering the language barrier in Macedonia where most ethnic Macedonians do not understand or speak Albanian and the natural audience of Albanian politicians’ speeches is only the Albanian population.

Finally, despite the unsettling effect that the name-dispute and Greek veto for NATO membership had on the pro-European political discourse in Macedonia, references to European identity and belonging to European history, culture and values have not been entirely abandoned in Macedonian political discourse. On the contrary, Macedonian politicians tend to reaffirm the European nature of Macedonian identity by linking it to European values such as democracy, human rights and ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. President Ivanov claims:

*“Macedonia will join EU and NATO. It shares the same values and belongs to that family. Because Macedonia today is an example for the victory of peace and democracy. It is a European and democratic society at the heart of the Balkans.”*³⁰

Alternatively, through a chain of difference, by trying to single out and exclude Greece from the European mainstream, some try to reconcile Macedonian to European identity and explain the gap between Macedonia and the EU because of the un-European behaviour of Greece. Thus, for Prime Minister Gruevski:

²⁸ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI, Albanian Flag Day Speech. 28 November 2008. Skopje. Available at:

²⁹ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI. Hasan Beg Speech, 18 December 2007. Available at:

<http://www.bdi.org.mk/mepet.asp?nev=147&lajmiD=1252>

³⁰ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Interview. *Nova Makedonija*. 18 March 2009.

“It would be absurd if the price for entry in Europe is something directly opposite to European values – abandoning one’s own identity.”³¹

The absurd noted implies that Greek demands for changing the name of the state are actually directly opposed to European values, while Macedonian actions only confirm that Macedonians embrace European values, even though Macedonia is still outside the EU. Those efforts to break the chain of equivalence between the EU and Greece and differentiate between the European values and Greek practices in foreign policy have not been overly successful. Macedonian politicians have limited power, discursive or other, to impose their view of who is and who is not European on others in the EU and the responses from the EU have shown that the EU finds Greece well within the European mainstream. The mismatch between external discourses and the expectations of Macedonian politicians and the public in general is expressed through decreasing levels of support for EU integration. It is also sometimes acknowledged in the statements of political leaders. In an attempt to reverse the negative effects of the powerlessness of Macedonia to affect EU policy and discourse, President Ivanov has stated:

“... because of the traumatic past of Macedonia there is a deeply-rooted belief that we do not make any decisions, that we are never asked about anything important, that Macedonia is just a receiver of political decisions, even when they directly concern us... This is an old way of thinking. This way of thinking will not bring us closer to Europe.”³²

The dominance of the European discourse in Macedonia, which started from late 2001 and the signing of the Ohrid Peace Agreement and Stabilisation and Association Agreement, has been challenged with Greek veto for NATO membership and EU accession negotiations. The proponents of the European discourse struggle to accommodate these events within the structure and worldview of European discourse and reaffirm the European nature of Macedonian national identity. Simultaneously, alternative discourses have gained support and introduced competing images of Macedonian national identity, one based more on ethnic and national identity markers such as name, language and culture. Both views of national identity have featured in the discourse of political leaders as they attempt to reconcile the two political projects: Euro-Atlantic integration and preservation of the constitutional name of the state. More frequently these clashing priorities are framed in exclusionary terms and the two discourses’ boundaries harden as the population and political elites embrace one or the other view of national identity and corresponding political priority. This poses the questions of discursive boundaries and inclusiveness of national identity, which are the subject of the next section.

³¹ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Address at the 11th International Conference of the Balkan Political Club. 20 February 2009, Ohrid. Available at: <http://www.vlada.mk/?q=node/2377> (Author’s translation)

³² Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Annual Speech to Parliament. 21 December 2009.

Inclusiveness of Macedonian national identity

Who are we and who are the 'Others'?

By giving meaning to the world around us, discourses shape the ways we see ourselves and others, the ways we distinguish ourselves from others, and thus set the boundaries of group identities. Those boundaries, however, are never stable. Competing discourses challenge them and shift them to include or exclude others within them. The changes of identity boundaries go hand in hand with changes in the contents and markers that define group identities. The name dispute and subsequent discursive refashioning of Macedonian national identity triggered shifts in the boundaries of Macedonian national identity.

Because the name dispute, and especially the Greek veto in Bucharest in 2008, were failures in Macedonian foreign policy and blocked the efforts of Macedonian politicians to pursue the highest strategic goals of EU and NATO integration, there were plenty of calls to unite and abandon minor political or ethnic differences. In the face of the greater challenge that blocked EU and NATO integrations presented, the Prime Minister called:

*“Now there must be no differences between us. Some [others] can hardly wait for that. But there must be no discord between us. We must not let daily politics or personal careers to come before Macedonia. We must unite all of us, politicians and citizens, because there is more that unites us than divides us.”*³³

Such statements aim to de-legitimise political differences between the government and the opposition and unite all Macedonian citizens behind a single political project, that of the Prime Minister and the government. By emphasising the importance of ‘now’ as a time when there must be no differences, as opposed to other times when such differences are acceptable, the Prime Minister paints an image of times of crisis. In crisis regular politics is replaced with extraordinary measures and politics is framed in terms of ‘national interests’ not party political competition. Indeed, he has made that clear by stating that:

*“the name and the identity are not political party interests but high national interests.”*³⁴

Thus he attempts to define what ‘national interests’ should be and reject opposition to his stance by implying it contrary to national interests. Therefore, those who oppose the policies of the government and the PM’s stance on the name issue are not simply expressing disagreement with the political platform of the governing elites. They are acting against the ‘national interests’, they are putting ‘personal careers before Macedonia’ and thus are working against the interests of all Macedonian citizens. Such individuals can not therefore be legitimate political actors. They are the internal “Other” against which the unified Macedonian identity is to be built. In addition to the implicit references, on several occasions the Prime Minister has openly labelled the opposition and their supporters as pursuing ‘Others’ interests:

*“I hear various predictions by analysts who are working for others’ agendas. But all these analyses are missing one important thing – that Macedonia exists.”*³⁵

³³ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Independence Day Speech. 8 September 2008.

³⁴ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Political Panel. 14 December 2008. Prilep. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=3874> (Author’s translation)

“We hear from one former Prime Minister of a neighbouring state that there existed funds for paying individuals to publically agitate for position that would not pass in regular political dialogue. But there are things that neither money nor agitation can buy.”³⁶

These attempts to narrow down and close the discursive space available for challengers of the political discourse of the governing elites were replicated among other actors in the political establishment. Although the President is meant to be above political party divisions and politics, his calls for unity and cooperation echoed the sentiment from Prime Minister’s discourse by referring to difficult times that require responsible political behaviour. He attacked those politicians from the opposition who criticised government policies of building monuments and adopting symbols reminiscent of ancient Macedonian history and thus further irritated the Greek side in the name negotiations.

“I find that those politicians who are playing with artificial constructs such as ‘antiquisation’ and ‘slavisation’ because of daily politics are politically irresponsible to say the least, and possibly also with evil intentions.”³⁷

This attitude of the President testifies to the increasing dominance of the official political discourse of the government, accepting the name dispute and preserving the constitutional name as highest national interests. Such stance also aligns with his statements about the ‘name as the most important symbol’ of Macedonia, the threat to which is therefore a threat to national interests. However, the attempts to strengthen the dominance of this discourse and unite all political actors behind the policies of the government are not accepted by all with equal enthusiasm. The Albanian coalition partner in government, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) was not fully subscribed to such definition of ‘national interests’ and name dispute policy. DUI leader Ali Ahmeti, on the rare occasions when he spoke about the name dispute, addressed it as a matter of regular politics, an issue that required a compromise from both sides for the deadlock to be overcome. He too, however, made sure to stress that the eventual solution must not be to the detriment of the national identity of Macedonians.

“The name dispute should be resolved through compromise which will not infringe on the multi-ethnic character of the state, which will not question the identity of our fellow citizens and which will take into consideration the historical and cultural sensitivities of our southern neighbour.”³⁸

Ahmeti’s statement suggests that Albanians in principle understand the sensitivities of Macedonian leaders and population about the name dispute. Ahmeti seems to believe in a win-win-win solution, where all three sides, Albanians in Macedonia, Macedonians and Greeks can be happy with a compromise. This is markedly different from the official rhetoric about ‘times of crises’ and high ‘national interests’ which must not be sacrificed, which Macedonian politicians promote.

³⁵ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Independence Day Speech. 8 September 2008.

³⁶ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Speech the 12th Anniversary of the Women’s Union of VMRO-DPMNE. 20 December 2009. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=5539> (Author’s translation)

³⁷ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Interview. *Nova Makedonija*.

³⁸ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI, Interview. *Ta Nea*. June 2008.

Moreover, the name dispute and the discursive consolidation of the name as a 'national interest' did not draw a boundary between Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia. Macedonian politicians made visible efforts to stress that unity, both political and ethnic, was necessary for the country to cope with the challenges.

*"For those challenges that are in front of us we need to unite, regardless of the political party, ethic, religious, or any other background. ... Only together we can go through this. No one can manage alone. ... Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Serbs, Roma, Vlachs, no one can manage alone. But we can do it together."*³⁹

The Prime Minister made sure that every ethnic group is included within the boundary of the political discourse he was promoting. Ethnicity was not a marker of exclusion from political identity in this instance, but political opposition to government policy on the name issue, which allowed for ethnic relations to remain relatively relaxed.

An internal 'Other' is rarely sufficient for establishing a stable group identity without the existence of an external 'Other' against whom the meaning and boundaries of group identity would be constructed. For Macedonian political elites who were engaged in restructuring Macedonian national identity in the face of the challenge posed by the negative foreign policy effects of the name dispute with Greece, the external 'Other' that provided the necessary background for discursive interventions in Macedonian national identity was Greece. In Macedonian political discourse Greece was designated as the "mighty and difficult opponent" to Macedonia, who demands not only a change of Macedonia's name but also wants to "step over the will, identity and dignity of Macedonian people".⁴⁰

The political discourse on Greece was built around a series of binary oppositions meant to accentuate the differences between Macedonia and Greece, create a sentiment of threat among the Macedonian population and thus eventually lead to a unified Macedonian national identity and correspondingly unified support for the political project and policies of the political elites who promoted this discourse. One of the most frequently used adjectives about Greece and the Greek attitude to the name issue was: *irrational*. Both the Prime Minister and the President often resorted to labelling Greece as irrational about the name of Macedonia:

*"In Bucharest Macedonia had strong support [for membership]. However, Greece's irrationality and insistence to block us ... prevented us from reaching our goals."*⁴¹

*"Macedonia is on the right track to success and I have not doubts about it. However, the irrational dispute with the name, which slowed down our Euro-Atlantic integration ... delays visible success."*⁴²

³⁹ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Speech for National Uprising Day. 11 October 2008. Available at: <http://www.vlada.mk/?q=node/1275> (author's translation)

⁴⁰ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Interview. *Dnevnik*. 3 April 2009. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=4478> (author's translation)

⁴¹ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Interview. *Dnevnik*. 5 April 2008. Available at: <http://www.vlada.mk/?q=node/227> (author's translation)

⁴² Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Interview. *Utrinski Vesnik*. 18 March 2009. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=4362> (author's translation)

“Despite all, not getting a date to start [EU] accession negotiations revealed the true nature of the problem. [It is] the irrational resistance of the political elites from our southern neighbour to Macedonia’s accession to EU and NATO.”⁴³

By describing Greece and Greek political leadership as irrational, Macedonian politicians implied that they were the rational side in the dispute. However, being rational did not prove sufficient to win the dispute, or to even move negotiations forward, so talk about Greek irrationality was accompanied by talk about Greek power and might, which combined with its irrationality produced the unjust and unfavourable outcome of Macedonia’s bid to join NATO and EU. Greece’s greater weight in these organisations and Greek greater power in general in international politics was often resented by Macedonian politicians.

“Arguments for the name, identity and language are on our side, power is on the Greek side.”⁴⁴

“This problem will be solved when the use of the argument of might will stop and we will talk with arguments of reason.”⁴⁵

Thus, in Macedonian political discourse against the 'mighty but irrational' Greece stood the less powerful but rational and just Macedonia. Such binary constructions with clear indications of right vs. wrong and good vs. evil have significant mobilising potential for the population. Indeed, the great majority of Macedonians opposed any changes to the constitutional name of their country, and large percentage were even ready to give up European and NATO integration for it, which used to be the highest priorities for all in Macedonia.⁴⁶ The sense of injustice inflicted by a more powerful opponent created resistance towards making compromise to join the club which would not denounce the irrational behaviour of Macedonia’s opponent.

To prevent feelings of defeatism and to further fan popular support for government policy on the name issue, the discourse about the rationality and justness of Macedonia was complemented with talk about persistence, struggle and eventual victory. While narratives about injustice and mighty opponents raise desires to act and defeat the opponent, proper and lasting public mobilisation can only be secured if victory over the opponent is attainable. Otherwise resentment over injustice could give in to willingness to compromise and make concessions to an opponent that is too powerful to defeat. Therefore, official political discourse in Macedonia, especially the messages from the government, regularly included references to the continuing struggle to win the dispute and the inevitable eventual victory, despite the being the weaker side.

“In Bucharest we persisted on what we promised before. As long as I am the Prime Minister I will fight with all my force to preserve the identity and national interest of Republic of

⁴³ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Annual Speech to Parliament. 21 December 2009.

⁴⁴ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Open day for citizens. 12 May 2010. Available at: www.president.gov.mk (author’s translation)

⁴⁵ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Speech the 12th Anniversary of the Women’s Union of VMRO-DPMNE. 20 December 2009.

⁴⁶ Polls in Gallup Balkan Monitor for 2008, 2009, 2010. Decreasing support for EU integration over the years.

Macedonia. ... Macedonia will continue fighting for the truth, for its interests, for its identity.”⁴⁷

But not only will Macedonia, and its leaders, continue the struggle to win the name dispute against their more powerful opponent, the Prime Minister stated that victory was inevitable. Considering that justice and reason were on the Macedonian side, so would victory will eventually be achieved. In order to keep the morale of the population high, but also keep the levels of public support for government policy on the name issue, it was necessary to paint victory as imminent, otherwise persistence with the uncompromising stance would have given in to less patriotic but pragmatically more attractive prospects of making concessions in order to gain NATO and EU membership. The Prime Minister and his coalition partners talked of:

“Let the victory on 1 June be as great as the name of Macedonia, as great as our justice and truth, and as great as the soul of all citizens in this country.”⁴⁸

“Everyone who opposes our identity and our name will be defeated, and should therefore keep away from the Macedonian name and Macedonians.”⁴⁹

These statements given immediately before the 2008 elections were primarily addressed to the opposition, which was accused of trying to ‘sell’ and betray the name of the state. However, implicitly, those statements were also addressed at the other, greater opponent, Greece. Greece was the one who was denying Macedonia membership in international organisations over its name and only victory over Greece, not only against the domestic opposition, could lead to success. Although the Macedonian leadership was committed to persisting and winning the name dispute, it remained unclear how ‘victory as great as the name’ was going to be achieved. The President talked of “reasonable compromise” but failed to clarify what it would actually entail. He did however explain that:

“a compromise that is to the detriment of national interests, is not a compromise at all, but a failure.”⁵⁰

Thus, he hinted that a compromise might not be acceptable at all, because it could actually turn out to be a failure. While ‘compromise’ and ‘red lines’ below which the Macedonian position will not go, were among the most frequently used words in talks about the name dispute with Greece, surprisingly little was said about the nature of the compromise that would be desirable or acceptable for Macedonia. The Prime Minister on several occasions claimed that:

“we do not want to take anything which belongs to someone else, we do not want to take over anyone’s identity, but we also do not want to give away what is ours.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Addressing the nation after NATO Summit. 14 April 2008. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=2879> (author’s translation)

⁴⁸ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Elections Speech. 26 May 2008. Skopje. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=3084> (author’s translation)

⁴⁹ Ljubisav Ivanov – Dzingo, Leadr of SP. Elections Speech. 26 May 2008. Skopje.

⁵⁰ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Interview. Radio Free Europe. 18 March 2009. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=4363> (author’s translation)

⁵¹ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. VMRO-DPMNE Party Panel. 4 February 2010. Skopje. Available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=5699> (author’s translation)

Those statements suggest rather than making concessions and compromise Macedonian political leaders would rather not give anything away.

The dominant political discourse in Macedonia had thus drawn lines to unite all Macedonian citizens, regardless of ethnicity, within a common Macedonian identity needed because of the crisis provoked by the Greek veto over NATO membership. This overarching Macedonian identity was constructed in opposition to the internal and external others – domestic opposition and Greece, who through binary oppositions were depicted in derogatory terms, in order to boost the self-image of the Macedonian people. The population was further mobilised to actively support the government policy over the name by employing vocabulary about struggle and victory, to keep the public spirit and support high. While convincing in the short term, in order to make the discourse more permanent and legitimate, Macedonian politicians resorted to references to history and historical justifications for their actions.

Historical legitimization of Macedonian identity

Where do Macedonians come from? What are their historical goals and dreams?

Nationalist discourse and ethnically coloured discourses about national identity in general, are often built around a tripartite discursive structure aimed at legitimising the proposed national identity and political action on behalf of the thus constructed nation. Such discourses include: narratives about romantic past of the nation which lived according to its own organic values and principles; story about the troubled present, the times of crisis which resulted because the harmonious life of the nation was disturbed because of some external or internal threat or enemy; and finally, the third component relates to a call for action in order to overcome the difficult period and lead the nation towards a brighter future and fulfilment of its historical ideals and goals. Having established the major identity markers of Macedonian national identity and drawn the boundaries between Macedonians and the threatening 'Others', Macedonian politicians also used discursive tools to root Macedonian national identity in history, to give greater legitimacy to their actions by linking them to history and repeal attacks by those challenging the political logic of such actions and such design of national identity.

*"History is cyclical. History repeats itself. The battles of the past generations are repeated, and so are the challenges that our people have faced, their successes as well as their failure. But, the dreams are repeated, too! The dreams of our ancestors! Those are our dream and their battles are our battles too!"*⁵²

The Prime Minister addressed Parliament with those words on the occasion of Parliament dissolving itself after the failure at the NATO Summit in April 2008 to obtain an invitation for NATO membership. The Prime Minister framed the failure in a story about history repeating itself, so that the failures of today are repetitions of failures in the past and so the hardship that Macedonians are

⁵² Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Speech in Parliament. May 2008. Available at: <http://www.vlada.mk/?q=node/284> (author's translation)

facing today is much alike the hardship faced by their ancestors in the past, when they had to deal with failures. Such discursive device attempts to build unity not only among all Macedonians today, who regardless of political affiliation and ethnicity are all afflicted by present hardship, but also with past generations, with ancestors, who also at times had to suffer hardship and deal with failures, into one timeless community of Macedonians. Because both present and past generations of Macedonians have been through failures and successes, and because they have fought the same battles and dreamed the same dreams, it is a single national and historical community bound by the same ideals and goals. Thus the failure of the government to secure an invitation for NATO membership would not be seen as an aberration from the historical path of the nation, rather a normal element of the cyclical developments in the history of the nation. As long as the same dreams were embraced and battles fought success would soon replace failure. Such sentiments resonated in the discourse of the President too. At his inauguration he claimed that:

*“Let me share with you the feelings of gratitude for the confidence given to me, but also the feeling for the great challenges in front of us. For the obligation bestowed upon us by the great ideals and act by all ancestors and the unwavering commitment to the future of our successors.”*⁵³

The President acknowledged the ties between past and present generations, but he went a step further to claim that what present politicians can do is not entirely up to them, but is conditioned by past generations of Macedonians and their ideals, which create obligations for current political leaders to act upon their realisation. Even further, the President attempted to create a discursive unity not only between past and present generations but also the next generation of Macedonians thus extending the Macedonian community to include all past, present and future Macedonians, in a truly timeless community bound by mutual obligations and ideals. Therefore, what needs to be done at present, to address to problem with the name dispute and Euro-Atlantic integration, is not only an answer to a present crisis, but a solution that is constrained by the obligations stemming from past generations’ experiences and the dreams of future generations, and it is up to present leaders to make sure that those obligations and ideals are not betrayed.

*“We are for NATO and for the EU. But we can’t go any further than what history allows us and what the majority of our citizens allow.”*⁵⁴

As the Prime Minister clarified in his Independence Day speech in 2008, the limits to what he and his government could do about integration into the EU and NATO were set by the citizens and by history. There were historical limits to what was acceptable, and changing the constitutional name of the country would not be one of them. While the government was supporting EU and NATO integration, that was not an unconditional support, other greater historical priorities can take precedence over NATO and EU integration.

Those discursive attempts to link present-day politics to historical battles and dreams and paint the political debate in ethno-historical terms did not resonate well with the large ethnic Albanian population. In general, Albanian political leaders were sensitive to the needs of Macedonians to defend their name and reinforce their national identity and supported a solution to the name

⁵³ Gjorge Ivanov, President of RM. Inauguration Speech. 12 May 2009.

⁵⁴ Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of RM. Independence Day Speech. 8 September 2008.

dispute that would not be detrimental to Macedonian's national feeling. However, discourse about historical obligations and shared dreams with past generations offered little for ethnic Albanians to relate to. Rather, Albanians have their own historical narratives about their nation and its sufferings and successes that ties them in an ethno-historical community with past and future generations of Albanians. Indeed, as Ali Ahmeti has noted:

*"Today, we, the Albanians, are in times when we need full engagement in order to fulfil the ideals of those who throughout history have been killed and massacred for the freedom and dignity of their countries."*⁵⁵

Ahmeti uses a strikingly similar vocabulary to the one that Gruevski and Ivanov use, referring to times of crisis that require resolute action required by those in the past who shared the same ideals as present generations. But he is referring to a different community, the community of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and across the region, whose dreams and battles are not the same with those of Macedonians. Rather,

*"I believe that one day Albanians will unite. Not only Kosovo with Albania, but us too, Albanians from Macedonia, we will unite with our brothers by blood and language. ... One day, not too far away, all three our countries, Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia will be part of NATO and EU. I think this will be the fulfilment of the dream of all those who served the idea for unification."*⁵⁶

The dreams and ideals of Albanians are to unite, to have all Albanians in the region live together, which Ahmeti then links to the prospects of NATO and EU integration, rather than secession and conflict which caused much suffering to both Albanians and other nations in the Balkans in the previous decades. However, by linking the historical ideals and obligations of Albanians to successful NATO and EU integration of Macedonia, Ahmeti performs a discursive act which sets Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonia as the highest unconditional priority for the leadership, unlike the secondary role that Macedonian leaders assign to them, after the battle for preserving the constitutional name and national identity of Macedonians. Such discrepancy between the political leadership of different ethnic groups in Macedonia in relation to the highest strategic priorities of the government could be the source of potential coalition problems in future. This is especially pertinent in case the name dispute is not resolved in the short term and reconciling the goals of EU and NATO integration and preserving the constitutional name proves impossible. So far the coalition between the Macedonian and Albanian partners has successfully survived in government and ethnic tensions have been avoided.

By rooting Macedonian national identity in history and discursively establishing a single ethnic Macedonian community encompassing past, present and future generations of Macedonians bound by common goals and ideals, Macedonian political elites have attempted to draw legitimacy for their actions and policies from history. At the same time parallel process of discursive historical community was ongoing among Albanians politicians in Macedonia, who also resorted to historical sources for legitimisation of their political goals and projects. These two parallel discourses rely on

⁵⁵ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI. Speech. 5 November 2007. Available at:

<http://www.bdi.org.mk/mepet.asp?nev=147&lajmiID=1252>

⁵⁶ Ali Ahmeti, Leader of DUI. Interview. *Squip*. 2007.

the same symbolic structure but conclude with different goals and priorities for politicians to pursue. So far, the political discourses of ethnic Albanian and Macedonian politicians have not clashed, but the difficulty in reconciling struggles to preserve the constitutional name of Macedonia with EU and NATO integration may suggest future tensions between the leaders and populations of the two largest ethnic communities in Macedonia.

Conclusion

This paper looks at the discursive dynamics in Macedonian political arena since 2008. The purpose of the analysis is to trace how Macedonian national identity is being reconstructed in view of the contingent political circumstances in Macedonian foreign policy and further map the potential effects of those identity dynamics on internal political debates and inter-ethnic relations. The analysis starts at 2008, focusing on the discursive dislocations that the failure to obtain membership invitation at the NATO summit triggered in the domestic political realm.

The data analysis in the following sections, conducted on textual data collected around major discursive challenges to hegemonic meaning of national identity in the past decade, reveals three major lines along which the meaning of Macedonian national identity is being re-constructed. The first line concerns the contents of 'national identity', which as a symbolic signifier, is filled with arbitrary meanings, based on various identity markers that are selected as more or less salient at various point in time. In the Macedonian case, those identity markers vary from: language, religion, to the state's official name. The second frontier concerns the inclusiveness of 'national identity' and the struggles to re-define Macedonian national identity in a more inclusive, multi-ethnic, manner. The binary, us vs. them, logic of national identity has varied between internal division (excluding minorities) and inclusion triggered by external nationalist challenges. The final line of re-negotiation of national identity concerns its legitimacy and rooting the concept into historical narratives, to disguise its arbitrary and recent nature.

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