

---

**ETHNOCENTRISM AND PARTY POLITICS: ARE POLITICAL PARTIES DEVOTED TO THE PROJECT OF BUILDING MULTICULTURAL MACEDONIAN SOCIETY ON THE PATH TO THE EU?**

**Jasmina Trajkoska**

FON-University, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, [jasmina.trajkoska@fon.edu.mk](mailto:jasmina.trajkoska@fon.edu.mk)

**Josipa Rizankoska**

University of Siena, Italy, [josipa.rizankoska@cddd.org.mk](mailto:josipa.rizankoska@cddd.org.mk)

**Abstract:** Macedonia's strategic foreign policy goal has always been full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). The very 'Candidate Status' has been granted to Macedonia in 2005, mostly due to constitutional and legal changes made by the Macedonian authorities in order to comply with the EU criteria for human and minority rights respect. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), a peace agreement signed on 12 August 2001 by the two biggest Macedonian parties at the time (VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM), and the two biggest parties representing the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia (DPA and PDP), in the presence of the international community, was to put an end to the policies of discrimination and open the path for inclusiveness and multicultural spirit. The International Community have been constantly underlining how important it is for Macedonia to embrace the 'OFA's spirit'. The OFA has become the reference point for Macedonia's success in complying with the Copenhagen Criteria, and its closeness to the EU's invitation for the start of the negotiation process. Be that as it may, the ethnocentric rhetoric coming from both Macedonian and Albanian sides within the party competition field were not only exemptions in the post OFA period. The promotion of the European values of multiculturalism, inclusiveness and inter-ethnic cohesion have fallen in the shade of some ethnocentric actions by both sides, with the most divisive recent act the project 'Skopje 2014' that have fixed the line of ethnic division between Macedonians and Albanians in the city. The 2006 Parliamentary Elections has revived the ethnocentrism even more from both ethnic 'camps'.

We ask: are political parties in Macedonia willing and capable to answer the EU recommendations with regards to the multiculturalism and the respect of human and minority rights in Macedonia? Are they willing to go beyond the narrow ethnic lines in offering European perspective?

We base our inquiry on Jenne's (2007) ethnic bargaining theory, according to which, when a national minority is certain that lacks outside support, it is more likely to accommodate the majority, even if it knows that the majority is repressive. On the other hand, if the minority is reasonably confident of outside support, it is likely to radicalize, even if knows the majority is non-repressive.

We have concluded that the ethnocentrism has awakened once more in Macedonia. We argue that the EU's support for the ethnic minorities in Macedonia's integration process have empowered ethnic Albanian parties in the negotiation process. Moreover, this has been the case due to the ethno-centric and divisive policies of the coalition partners VMRO DPMNE and DUI, and then due to the deep political crisis (where the main protagonist were the two biggest Macedonian parties SDSM and VMRO DPMNE), and the economic issues and the corruptive scandals which were to be dissimulated under the ethnic narrative.

This article firstly introduces the section on the EU Progress Reports from 2006 to 2017. The second section elaborates the content of the parties' manifestos with regards to the multiculturalism. The thirds section adds some more content to the post-electoral period and the challenges for government formation, and the respective part the Albanian community had in the process. Finally, we give our concluding remarks.

**Keywords:** political parties, multiethnic coexistence, EU integration, ethnocentrism

## INTRODUCTION

Macedonia's strategic foreign policy goal has always been the full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO) and the European Union (EU). The very 'Candidate Status' has been granted to Macedonia in 2005, mostly due to constitutional and legal changes made by the Macedonian authorities in order to comply with the EU criteria for human and minority rights respect.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), a peace agreement signed on 12 August 2001 by the two biggest Macedonian parties at the time (VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM), and the two biggest parties representing the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia (DPA and PDP), in the presence of the international community, was to put an end to the

---

policies of discrimination and open the path for inclusiveness and multicultural spirit.<sup>1</sup> Namely, while OFA's immediate purpose was to put an end to the eight month armed conflict between the Albanian National Liberation Army and the Macedonia's Defense Forces, its long term perspective was to establish a general framework for integration of the national minorities and to provide legislative bases for functional multicultural cohabitation. The International Community have been constantly underlining how important it is for Macedonia to embrace the 'OFA's spirit'. (EU Commission Progress Reports 2006-2014, Plan 3-6-9) Moreover, the OFA has become the reference point for Macedonia's success to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria, and its closeness to the EU's invitation for the start of the negotiation process. Political parties have always have different standing points on the functionality and the way OFA has to be implemented (Rizankoska and Trajkoska 2016), but overall they are supportive to the OFA's goal and are mostly pro-EU.

Be that as it may, the ethnocentric<sup>2</sup> rhetoric coming from both Macedonian and Albanian sides within the party competition field were not exemptions in the post OFA period. The promotion of the European values of multiculturalism, inclusiveness and inter-ethnic cohesion have fallen in the shade of some ethnocentric actions by both sides. Putting aside those small inter-ethnic incidents such football fan clubs' occasional engagement in physical violence in order to secure that a particular city area "belongs" to their ethnic group (Stefkoska and Stojanov 2017), the mostdivisive recent action was the famous project 'Skopje 2014'. Stefkoska and Stojanov (2017) argued that the already existing sort of a "rivalry" in Skopje for a decade or two now, in which some ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians claim historical ownership of the city, was deepened by Gruevski's Government project with the central figure Aleksandar the Great. They argue that the project was not only answering the 'external' threat to Macedonian identity and the countries name, but as well was the internal 'other', mostly the Albanian minority. They see the project as mono-ethnic and gender exclusive, and claim it eventually led to two "ethno" squares which further strengthen the ethnic division in the city. Namely, the coalition partner DUI was given the opportunity to build a parallel square<sup>3</sup> on the other site of the river Vardar in Skopje with an Albanian ethno motifs. Mijalkovic and Urbanek (2011) point out that Skopje 2014 fixed the line of ethnic division between Macedonians and Albanians in the city.

While ethnocentric narratives have risen the flag on several occasions in the post OFA period, the main problem of Macedonia in the integration process has come from another angle. Namely, the deep political crisis has been initiated by the wire-tapping scandal (so called "Interception" or "Putsch") in the late 2014, has intensified with the opposition's "Bombs" in 2015 (Focus 2015). The allegations for unlawful actions, corruption and misuse of power by the governmental parties (Berendt2015), and the reaction of the then opposition led by SDSM has slowed down the integration processes of Macedonia. These notions have instigated mass protests, on occasions escalating with violence between the protesters and the police. This is when Kumanovo shooting on 9 May 2015 happened. It involved armed men (many of Albanian ethnic origins coming from Kosovo) and the Police forces of Macedonia. Eight policemen and ten of the armed men were killed. The reasons and the circumstances were not clearly unveiled, which has brought more inter-ethnic suspiciousness among the public. (CNN 2015) In 2015 the European Union took an active role in the negotiations between the government and the opposition leaders, which concluded with the Agreement of 2 July.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the political crisis did not end with the December 16 Parliamentary Elections either. Macedonia underwent turbulent post electoral government coalition bargaining process, with an intensified ethnocentric narrative coming from both Albanian (the Albanian Platform), and Macedonian side (the 'For a Shared Macedonia' Movement).

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the Constitution (2001), Republic of Macedonia is a national state of the Macedonian people, which ensures full civic equality and permanent coexistence of the Macedonian people with the Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and the other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnocentrism is defined as the belief that the values and attitudes held in one culture are superior to those held by people from other cultures (Wortzel 1985). The main perspective of ethnocentrism is ethnic identity as a fundamental core for human rights - "We versus them".

<sup>3</sup> The Skenderbeg Square has mural mosaics that tell the story of the Albanian idea of independence. Mother Teresa, the Albanian partisans, the struggle for the liberation of Kosovo, the Albanian rebels and the League of Legions, where Skenderbeg appears as a central figure, are some of the motifs of the square.

<sup>4</sup> This Agreement, among several other things, obliged the opposition to stop boycotting the Parliament's work, and the incumbent Government to submit its formal resignation and the new government to be led by another Prime Minister whose only program shall be the organization of the national elections on the 24 April 2016. Because of the political crises this date was too early, and the second date for early parliamentary election was planned on 5 July. Due to the then ongoing 'Colorful Revolution', this date was also changed to 16 December 2016.

---

We are therefore puzzled by the political parties' program stances on the multiculturalism issue as a response to the EU criteria and recommendations for future integration. We ask: are political parties in Macedonia willing and capable to answer the EU recommendations with regards to the multiculturalism and the respect of human and minority rights in Macedonia? Are they willing to go beyond the narrow ethnic lines in offering European perspective?

We base our inquiry on Jenne's (2007) ethnic bargaining theory. According to this theory, when a national minority is certain that lacks outside support, it is more likely to accommodate the majority, even if it knows that the majority is repressive. On the other hand, if the minority is reasonably confident of outside support, it is likely to radicalize, even if knows the majority is non-repressive. Having in mind that Macedonia is still an EU Candidate Country, we assume that in the pre-accession period the country is under more international pressure which could help national minorities achieve more of their claims.

We aim to describe the latest response from the political parties in Macedonia to the EU recommendation in the EU integration process by first describing the changes in the political discourse in Macedonia, the new non-ethnic issues that stood on the integrative path of Macedonia and the positioning of the ethnic parties in the very processes. We shall combine two separate content analyses for the purpose of explanation of the issues under analysis: one analysis of the EU recommendations for human and minority rights respect since 2006, and the other of the political parties' electoral manifestos' positions on the issue of multiculturalism in the latest 2016 Parliamentary Elections in Macedonia.

This article firstly introduces the section on the EU Progress Reports from 2006 to 2017. The second section elaborates the content of the parties' manifestos with regards to the multiculturalism. The thirds section adds some more content to the post-electoral period and the challenges for government formation, and the respective part the Albanian community had in the process. Finally, we give our concluding remarks.

### **2006-2017 EUPROGRESS REPORTS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MACEDONIAIN THE SECTION OF HUMAN AND MINORITY RIGHTS RESPECT**

Human and minority rights respect has regularly been included in the Progress Reports (Commission of the EU 2006-2017) as a special chapter. We hereby make a short revision on those assessments by pointing out at the general notes on the progress regarding minorities' protection, and offering a more specific analysis of the challenges for Macedonia regarding minorities' protection.

The EU acknowledgements of significant achievements are present just in the first 2006 report. The EU recognizes the progress that has been done by the Macedonian government in obtaining better representation of the non-majority communities in the public administration and public enterprises. Nevertheless, the progress was uneven across the various communities. The general level of participation grew from 20.5 % in July 2005 to 21.7 % in August (Albanians 16.5%; Serbs 1.6%; Turks 1.4%; Roma 0.6%; Vlachs 0.5%; Bosniaks 0.3%; other communities 0.9%). Ethnic Albanians have made significant gains, although they still remained under-represented in public life, but other groups have seen little or no advances. There were still insufficient opportunities for interaction between the different communities, particularly in the sphere of education (Commission of the EU 2006).

Critics are present in the next Reports. The 2007 Report states that the representation of the non-majority communities remained uneven among individual ministries. Another remark was that the Committees for Interethnic Relations have not been set up in all the municipalities concerned, and were often not effective. Sustained commitment to implementing the regulatory framework for the use of minority languages was required. (Commission of the EU 2007). Again in 2008 the EU Progress Report notes the importance of the enacted Law on the parliament's Committee on Inter-Community Relations, which clarifies the scope of application of the double majority mechanism (the 'Badinter' principle). Moreover, a Law on the advancement and protection of the rights of the smaller communities was adopted which, provided for a specialized agency to be set up. There was little progress in equitable representation of the ethnic Turkish and the Roma communities, which remain underrepresented within the civil service. The lack of enforcement mechanisms, such as sanctions, to ensure that institutions meet recruitment targets for non-majority communities remained a problem, as did the politicization of some recruitment. (Commission of the EU 2008).

In the Progress Report of 2009 EU claims that the capacity of the Secretariat for the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (SIOFA) needs to be strengthened so that it may coordinate effectively the implementation of policies such as equitable representation and the provisions on the Law on Languages. As it has been reported in the previous Progress Report, between 3,000 to 5,000 Roma, ethnic Albanians and ethnic Turks were still lacking personal documents, such as birth certificates and medical insurance or employment cards, which are necessary to benefit from social insurance, healthcare and other social services. (Commission of the EU 2009). In 2010 the

---

administrative capacity of SIOFA was slightly increased, but even nine years after the signature of the OFA, the Secretariat have not produced a report on its activities. Three years in a row the EU points out that planning to ensure gradual fulfillment of the recruitment targets for non-majority communities, and a single data collection system on fair representation for the entire public sector, are very much needed. (Commission of the EU 2010) The SIOFA budget for 2011 was significantly increased; nonetheless the Secretariat faced problems in recruiting sufficiently qualified senior staff. Some progress was made in the implementation of the Law on the use of Languages spoken by at least 20% of the citizens. The practice of separating pupils along ethnic lines or language shifts continued in a number of schools and cases of inter-ethnic violence in secondary schools persisted. Members of non-majority communities complained about the neglect of their respective historical and cultural monuments by the urban plan 'Skopje 2014'. The direct involvement of politicians of one of the parties of the government coalition in the violent confrontation between members of the two main ethnic communities inside the Kale fortress in Skopje caused concerns.

The majority of the Committees for relations among communities have continued to face lack of resources, unclear competencies and insufficient representation of ethnic communities living in the municipality. The overall number of civil servants from the non-majority ethnic communities reached 30%, which is broadly in line with the demographic structure. In 2010 there was a 46% increase of members of Roma and a 12% increase in the Turkish community. Nevertheless, a large number of newly recruited civil servants received salaries, even though they were not assigned any tasks or responsibilities. (Commission of the EU 2011) In 2012 a review of the implementation of the OFA has been launched by the SIOFA, and the government adopted a report for the first time since the signature of the Agreement. In the first half of 2012, there were a number of incidents and killings in the country (the case of "Monstrum"), which led to heightened tension between ethnic communities and public protests. It has also recommended that this approach needed to continue in order to avoid politicizing of the incidents. (Commission of the EU 2012)

Even if the OFA has been in force since 2001, in 2013 progress was still needed on systemic issues relating to decentralization, non-discrimination, equitable representation, use of languages and education. Roma, Turks and other smaller communities have continued to be underrepresented in the public administration, notably at senior level. At the same time, the merit principle needed to be strengthened in the recruitment of non-majority members in state institutions (Commission of the EU 2013). In 2014 EU recommends a more proactive approach from the political actors to guarantee the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities of all communities. The court verdict on the so-called "Monster" (Monstrum) case relating to murders carried out in 2012, and the murder of a teenager in the Skopje municipality of Gjorče Petrov in May, while not ethnically motivated, triggered protests and increased inter-ethnic tension. The coalition partners made joint efforts to calm the protests, but some political leaders from both communities continued to use ethno-centric and divisive language, particularly during local election campaigns. (Commission of the EU 2014)

In 2015 and in 2016, the EU addresses the same recommendations. It alarms that the legal framework for protection of the human rights is broadly in line with European standards, and more focus needs to be placed on its implementation. The various bodies involved in protecting and promoting human rights lacked sufficient staff and financial resources and sometimes coordinated poorly. General weaknesses in the implementation of human rights standards are detected in the treatment of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society, including children and juveniles, disabled persons, the Roma and the LGBTI community. (Commission of the EU 2015, 2016)

Because of the deep political crises in 2015 and 2016, in 2017 EU prepared "Assessment and recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues in which it has made a clear conclusion that trust needs to be rebuilt. The EU alarms on the widespread perception in the country that in recent years, decisions were politicized, that the parties had taken ownership of the state, that office holders had conflicts of interest and confused their official mandate with their party/personal agenda. The EU assesses as crucial that the public regains confidence in all state institutions and public bodies and feels that they work in the public interest, within their mandates, respecting the law and complying with high ethical and other professional standards. No particular section was devoted to the inter-ethnic issues, as the biggest concerns for the Macedonia's EU integration originated from other perspective.

The early Parliamentary Elections in 2016 were one chance for the political parties to offer reform programs that can bring the country closer to the European Union, and mitigate any unresolved inter-ethnic issue in the country.

---

**2016 EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION'S PARTIES' PROGRAMS REGARDING THE EU MEMBERSHIP AND INTER-ETHNIC COEXISTENCE**

The excessively large political program (of 516 pages) of the one of the biggest political parties in Macedonia VMRO-DPMNE<sup>5</sup>, from a position of government, was titled as “Real-work, reliability, progress”. The program promotes EU and NATO integration as a strategic priority, and promotes appeals for maintaining good interethnic relations on the basis of tolerance and respectfulness and the equal treatment for all ethnic groups in the political system. This program includes claims for inter-ethnic-coexistence and cohesion in the program’s ‘Culture’ section. It stands for projects such Reconstruction of the Albanian Theater or Building of the New Centre of Culture in the predominantly Roma populated Municipality of ShutoOrizari. The program contains references for the importance of the care of the rights of its citizens of Macedonia as a future EU Member State, and ‘the integration of the Roma community and building multicultural society’ as the strategic principal according to the European standards for the party. Yet, this program has more salient emphasis on ethno-Macedonian issues such as protection of the Macedonian culture, the national cultural heritage, the Macedonian identity, the Macedonian language and its promotion across the world.

From a position of the largest opposition party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)<sup>6</sup> presented political program titled as “Plan for Life”, whose strategic priorities are full membership of Macedonia in NATO and the EU. In the part of “We built common society” the party presents its political ideas about a civic society, not an ethno-centrist society, like the Macedonian ones as at the time of elections. SDSM plans to concentrate on building a multicultural society with a developed inter-cultural communication, respectfulness and cultural plurality. Its primary goal is to build tolerant society through different measures such as: projects for multiculturalism in the kindergartens, protection of other languages and intercultural communication, and multilingual practices. The high officials from the government shall be ethnically mixed and shall come from different ethnic parts of Macedonia, sharing the idea of tolerance and multiculturalism. SDSM aspired for affirmation and improvement of the culture of the minority groups, and emphasized the need of revision of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The program contains appeals for upgrading of the local Committees for the Relation between the Communities, the debates on the national TV program about multiculturalism etc. Finally, the program illustrates party’s dedication for integrative society based on a civic nationalism.

Coming to the other opposition Macedonian/mainstream parties, ‘VMRO for Macedonia’ coalition, a coalition between VMRO-People’s party, Dignity and United for Macedonia, is a new coalition from old parties. They don’t have common program, Dignity has a short one which does not include the issue of multiculturalism and inter-ethnic coexistence, but it is dedicated to the mission for EU and NATO membership. United for Macedonia’s program includes promotion of Macedonian culture in the EU diversity spectrum, inter-cultural dialogue with respectfulness among the different cultures in Macedonia. The Liberal party in its program pointed out that coexistence in Macedonian society doesn’t mean parallel living for communities, its interaction on the individual and collective level. They are recognizing the need for reaffirmation of the inclusiveness of Macedonian society. The Left party (LEVICA) in its program is claiming for equal society and aspires to see Macedonia overcoming the ethnic identity, builds anti-nationalistic society in which ‘we will prevail over the multicultural barrier and we will work on de-ethnicization. Levica does not accept the consociational mechanisms of democracy.

Given that none of the smaller ethnic communities presented separate party program, we shall address the so called Albanian Blok of parties.

The governing party Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), has always been the mildest ethno-Albanian party in terms of ethnocentrism. The 2006 Program mentions OFA in the first part of the program that deals with political system and inter-ethnic coexistence, and state that ‘OFA is an optimal solution for the conflict in 2001’. The EU perspective is related with the success or the failure of the inter-ethnic coexistence which originates from the OFA, according to DUI. DUI stressed out that the ideals of the Albanians are not counter to the interests of the other ethnic

---

<sup>5</sup> In VMRO DPMNE coalition are the following parties: Socialist Party of Macedonia, Civic Option for Macedonia, Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia, Union of Roma from Macedonia, Association for the Cultural Unification of Bosnians, and Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia.

<sup>6</sup> SDSM coalition includes thirteen parties: New Social Democratic Union, Liberal Democratic Party, United for Macedonia, Party for movement of Turks, Party for full emancipation of Roma people, Democratic Union of Vlachos in Macedonia, Sandzak League, Serbian Party in Macedonia, New Alternative, Party for European Future, Movement for National Unity of Turks in Macedonia, Party of United Pensioners and Citizens and Citizens' Liberal Party.

communities, on the contrary, DUI is prepared to build common European future together with the all ethnic groups in Macedonia. DUI appeals for multicultural society and a civic state, but prefers consensual democracy in all state levels (in the Governmental, in the Parliament, and at Presidential level). In the part for ethnic symbols, education and culture, the DUI points out that OFA promotes equality for the two major ethnic groups in Macedonia. The official use of Albanian language is claimed within the 'Ethnic and cultural equality' section. DUI stands for the use of the Albanian language as official language and for the use of the national symbols' of the Albanians. According to DUI, bilingualism is a mechanism for overcoming the ethno-centric politics and that it is good for the state.

The opposition Albanian parties, offered somewhat more radical ethno-centric programs in 2016. The Alliance for Albanians (AA) priority was the equality among citizens, non-discrimination on ethnic, race, cultural or religion basis, according to the European standards. AA promoted ideas for binational Macedonia (Macedonian and Albanian), respecting the rights of all minorities according to the European Convention for Protection of the Minorities. The program includes ideas for Albanian vice-functions in all country institutions. Constitutional changes which will guarantee full national equality among Macedonians and Albanians, fullbilingualism (Albanian and Macedonian language) were appealed. All those political ideas were in the name of bringing Macedonia closer to the EU and NATO.

The introduction of the political program of BESA Movement emphasizes party's aim for affirmation of Albanian identity in Republic of Macedonia as a special ethnic group in the Balkan; BESA stands for promotion of the autochthon Albanians which should have all rights respected. They advocate for consensual democracy, because they claim Macedonia is not a monoethnic society. They ask for equal opportunities for everybody, and propose redefinition of the state, where every citizen should have the same human rights.

To sum up, one thing all programs have in common is their appeals for EU and NATO membership of Republic of Macedonia. The integration of Macedonia in these alliances has been used in each program as a justification for the rights and the freedoms they promote. From the composition of the party coalitions we could, clearly see that the smaller minority groups are represented within the big coalition platforms by the biggest "Macedonians parties", albeit their party names contain the name of the ethnic group they claim to advocate. The Albanians, on the other hand, were organized separately in "Albanian political parties", concentrated to promote better society for all citizens and the Albanians. SDSM, the Liberal party and LEVICA have offered programs for interethnic cohesion throughout building a stronger civic instead of ethnic sentiment of national belonging, they have also offered ethnically-inclusive party lists, while the rest of the parties stayed largely ethnically exclusive.

The program of VMRO-DPMNE, albeit in favor of better inter-ethnic coexistence, favors the protection of the Macedonian culture. The parties from "Albanian block" stay ethno-nationalistic, and in a great deal radicalized. Their programs include civic policies, but they are mainly concentrated on the protection of the Albanians, as the "most important minority" in the country. The political parties' platforms were mostly issues in the language of the community they represent; moreover, the Albanian parties only issue programs in Albanian language, thus indirectly determining its electorate.

#### **EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 2016, AND FORMING THE GOVERNMENT**

In the 2006 Early Parliamentary Election eleven political parties/coalitions competed, and six won at least one seat in the Assembly of Macedonia.<sup>7</sup> The new Macedonian so called "Reform Government" was formed with series of obstacles. In this turbulent period the Albanian ethnic parties were not just an observer. Due to the tight electoral results between the two biggest parties (VMRO DPMNE- 51 vs SDSM-49 seats) the coalition with the Albanian parties was essential for forming a government, unlike the past experiences of coalition between the Macedonian and Albanian parties on the 'gentlemen' principle of maintaining good inter-ethnic relations. Thus, the Albanian block found itself as a strategic player in the government coalition bargaining process and made a joint strategy for realization of their programmatic stances. Namely, soon after the 2016 Elections, the three Albanian parties DUI, AA and BESA, presented the "Common Platform of Albanian parties". This Platform was their basic instrument in the negotiation process. According to the political parties that signed the platform this document is written in the spirit of consensual democracy, the OFA, and it aims towards better inter-ethnic coexistence and sooner membership

<sup>7</sup>Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity -VMRO-DPMNE coalition, (which held 51 seats in the Parliament), Social Democratic Union of Macedonia -SDSM coalition, (49 seats), Democratic Union for Integration (10 seats), BESA movement (a new political party- 5 seats) Alliance for the Albanians (new political party- 3 seats) Democratic parties of Albanians (2 seats), VMRO for Macedonia coalition (new political party- 0 seats), The Left (new political party- 0 seats), "CCJ-Third Block" coalition (new political party 0- seats), Liberal Party (0 – seats) and Party for Democratic Prosperity (0-seats).

---

of Macedonia in EU and NATO.<sup>8</sup>The signatory parties of the Platform believe that the fulfillment of the stipulated claims of it shall unblock Macedonia's path towards full NATO integration and shall open the negotiation process for full membership in the European Union.

After first attempt of Gruevski to negotiate the government with DUI failed, the five months of negotiation process for government formation ended with the opposition leader Zaev finally proposing a government. On the 1 March 2017, the President Ivanov announced that he will not give the mandate to the leader of the opposition, or any other party that accepts the Platform which could destroy the integrity, the sovereignty and the independence of Republic of Macedonia. Just a month later, on 27 April 2017, the majority of the Members of the Macedonian Assembly organized the election of the Speaker of the Parliament in a period of public protest by the For a Shared Macedonia initiative against the so called 'Tirana Platform'. When the processes start by the SDSM and the parties from the new government coalition about two hundred Macedonian nationalists stormed the Macedonian Parliament in reaction to the election of TalatXhaferi, an ethnic Albanian, as speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia (Guardian 2018). People from the movement "For a Shared Macedonia" entered the Parliament and some violently attacked the Members of the Parliament and the leaders of the SDSM and the AA.

The new government (a coalition between SDSM, DUI and AA) was announced on the 31 May 2017. The arresting process of the protesters who entered in the Assembly on 27 April motivated the VMRO DPMNE to boycott the Parliament's sessions. On 5 July the new Macedonian Prime Minister presented the reform plan 3-6-9. This plan includes crucial reforms that are needed in the integration process of Macedonia for EU and NATO membership.

In the 'Plan 3-6-9' there is a part devoted to the interethnic-coexistence and the implementation of the OFA, in the spirit of cohesion. The Government has agreed for promotion of the implementation of legislative elements. In the Plan it is strictly stipulated that the draft-Law on the Use of Languages by the Government will be submitted for consultations to the Venice Commission before entering the procedure in the Assembly. The Law on the use of the Languages was passed in the Parliament after a shortened procedure, and approved by the majority of MPs, without the presence of the opposition. The President of Macedonia vetoed it, the opposition made the 35569 amendments, and hence slowed down the Parliamentary Procedures. The European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiation said that this Law is reasonable request but is not priority for the EU.

The above elaboration is to explain how the inter-ethnic issues came back on the political agenda once more, and how ethnocentrism has risen within both Macedonian and Albanian blocks.

The EU support that has been offered to the national minorities in the process of fulfilling the accession criteria has been used as a bargaining tool by the Albanian parties, and the parties have profited in votes, office and policy claims. This has ignited the Macedonian-ethno nationalism, especially in times of strong foreign pressures for the change of the country's name, and fears of losing the unitary status of the state. Yet, there is one more aspect that we shall address in the end, and that is the mainstream parties' positions as a strategic challenger of the ethnic parties. Namely, the ethnically-inclusive platform and electoral ballot list from the side of a large 'Macedonian/mainstream' party – the SDSM, along with two other smaller parties that aim towards building a civic vs. ethnic national identity, could be seen as a trigger of radicalism coming from the ethnic parties. This could be expected as SDSM, Levica and the Liberal Party threatened the 'ownership' of the central-periphery issue for the Albanian parties. Having in mid the significant gain of votes from the Albanian community for SDSM, and especially the loss of votes for DUI, due to corruption scandals in the previous government, the Albanian parties found themselves in a tight note. Thus, as a natural reaction (Meguid's 2008), the Albanian parties tried to get back the 'ownership' over the ethnic cleavage and present themselves as the only true advocate of the needs of the Albanian community in Macedonia.

---

<sup>8</sup> In the part of better inter-ethnic coexistence the platform stipulates the following changes in the Macedonian society: the Albanian ethnic community to become a nation-building community; full bilingualism (the Macedonian and the Albanian language to be official languages); debate for changing of the country flag, change of the anthem and the national emblem which should reflect multiethnic reality in Macedonia and ethnic equality; adoption of a Resolution in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia condemning the genocide against the Albanian people in Macedonia in the period 1912-1956; Creation of a Ministry for Political System and Inter-Community Relations as a competent body for respecting the rights of communities and encouraging economic and social development in underdeveloped areas; Taking affirmative measures for securing financing of Albanian cultural institutions at central and local level; Creation of a central institution for the promotion of the languages of the communities, which will provide preparation of translators, editors and lecturers; Inclusion of Albanians in the working group for direct negotiations with Greece about the "name issue"; Complete clarification of issues and court procedures such as "Sopot", "Brodec", "Monstrum" and "Kumanovo" through an inquiry committee or an international independent body.

## CONCLUSION

This article has offered a descriptive elaboration of the Macedonia's EU integration path and the conditions for full membership that address the inter-ethnic stability and peace, the respect of the human and minority rights and equal representation of national minorities in public institutions. We have initially offered an introduction to the integrative pillar of the Macedonian inter-ethnic cohabitation, the OFA, as well as the project that served as a divisive factor in the post OFA Macedonia – the Project Skopje 2014.

We have concluded that the ethnocentrism has awakened once more in Macedonia. We argue that the EU's support for the ethnic minorities in Macedonia's integration process have empowered ethnic Albanian parties in the negotiation process. Moreover, this has been the case due to the ethno-centric and divisive policies of the coalition partners VMRO DPMNE and DUI, and then due to the deep political crisis (where the main protagonist were the two biggest Macedonian parties SDSM and VMRO DPMNE), and the economic issues and the corruptive scandals which were supposed to be dissimulated under the ethnic narrative.

We have elaborated EU's recommendations for improvement of Macedonia's institutions in terms of ethnic inclusion and multiculturalism, and analyzed the responses of the political parties in the latest 2006 Elections. We found all political parties to be claiming endeavors for building a civic country, while at the same time they remain vague and superficial in offering real measures for building a multicultural society based on civic rather than ethnic values. The political program of VMRO-DPMNE for instance, has a hybrid content, declaring promotion of inter-ethnic coexistence, while at the same time prioritizing the ethno-Macedonian culture and cultural heritage. The social democrats have made the first step into creating such atmosphere of inclusion in the last Elections by opening the lists for different ethnic groups, and offering a more civic political platform. The boomerang effect we noticed was in the way the Albanian parties got radicalized in the center-periphery issue and have once more put the ethnic issues on the political agenda.

Bottom line, the recommendation by the EU for strengthening of the merit principle in the recruitment of non-majority members in state institutions is not fulfilled, but parties seem to neglect this in their endeavors for good inter-ethnic relations. The new Law on Languages is passed without respect of the Regulatory Assessment Instrument, while the regulation is promoted under the EU Flag. Just as the OFA's implementation was lost in the internal coalition bargaining processes in the decade long governing period by VMRO DPMNE and DUI, the Law on the use of Languages is under the threat to become just another ill-implemented policy by the SDSM-DUI government if more care is not taken in the rule of law and the political support for the policies that are to be negotiated between the coalition partners.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Berendt Joanna. 2015. Macedonia Government Is Blamed for Wiretapping Scandal. New York Times, 21 June 2015 Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/world/europe/macedonia-government-is-blamed-for-wiretapping-scandal.html? r=0>
- [2] Commission of the European Union. 2005a. 561 final Communication from the Commission. 2005 enlargement strategy paper. Brussels, 9.11.2005.
- [3] 2006. 1387 Commission Staff Working Document. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2006 Progress Report. Brussels, 08.11.2006.
- [4] 2007. 1432 Commission Staff Working Document the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. 2007 Progress Report accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2007-2008. 2008-2009; 2009-2010, 2010-2011; 2011-2012; 2012-2013; 2013-2014; 2014; 2015; 2015-2016 Brussels 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016.
- [5] European Commission. 2015. European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia/index_en.htm)
- [6] Jenne E.K (2007) Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London
- [7] Meguid B. (2008) Party competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- [8] Risteska Marija. 2015. Nations in Transit. Freedom House. Available at: [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT\\_2015\\_Macedonia.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT_2015_Macedonia.pdf)



- [9] Rizankoska Josipa, and TrajkoskaJasmina. 2015. The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, a true party commitment towards better inter-ethnic cohabitation in Macedonia or just a party competition strategic tool? Paper presented at the ASEN Conference in London, April 21-23.
- [10]Schneckener, Ulrich. 2002. Developing and Appluing EU Crisis Management- Test Case Macedonia. ECMI Working Paper # 14 European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). Available at: [http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2009/1894/pdf/working\\_paper\\_14.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2009/1894/pdf/working_paper_14.pdf)
- [11]Szöcsik, Edina. 2013.The EU Accession Criteria in the Field of Minority Protection and the Demands of Ethnic Minority Parties. Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe Vol. 11, No. 2, 104-127.
- [12]Transparency International. 2014. Corruption Perceptions Index 2014. Berlin: TI International Secretariat. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/Josipa%20Rizankoska/Downloads/2014\\_CPIBrochure\\_EN.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Josipa%20Rizankoska/Downloads/2014_CPIBrochure_EN.pdf)
- [13]United Nations Rule of Law. 1992. An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping. Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992. Available at: [http://www.unrol.org/files/A\\_47\\_277.pdf](http://www.unrol.org/files/A_47_277.pdf)
- [14]Stefkovska, D.Stojanov“, (2017) A tale in stone and bronze: old/new strategies for political mobilization in the Republic of Macedonia” The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity, published 31 May 2017