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THE FALL OF THE IRON CURTAIN AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GREEK MACEDONIAN RELATIONS

Abstract

The aim of our research is not to present the development of the Macedonian – Greek relations and the disagreement about the Constitutional name of our country, but to point out that the conflict existed even before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Main Greek thesis up to a day for their stance towards Macedonia, is based on the "irredentism" on our part, on stealing history and on nonexistent Macedonian minority in Greece, because, according to the Greeks, the Macedonian nation does not exist. However, we will point out several occasions which will paint a different picture concerning the one we know today. That's why we will focus at several critical moments in the Greek – Yugoslav relations caused by the Macedonian question, the problem of the irredentism in the relation between Belgrade, Skopje and Athens, which even to date, after the signing of the Prespa agreement, occasionally drifts as an argument on the side of Greek officials the question of ancient Macedonia, an argument that was not visible in the period between 1944 and the proclamation of the Macedonian independence.

Keywords: Macedonia, Greece, Yugoslavia, Minority, Karamanlis, Prespa agreement.

The proclamation of Macedonian independence at 8th of September 1991, as a result of a successful referendum for secession from the already dissolute Yugoslav federation, provoked fierce reactions from Greece. Because of the Greek opposing to the naming of our state Republic of Macedonia, and to any use of the name Macedonia, lead to a long-lasting dispute which is solved with the signing of the Prespa agreement on June 17, 2018.

Certainly, the problem with the Greek-Macedonian dispute about the constitutional name of our country became extremely visible in the last decade of the XX Century. All the archive materials and documents, only point out to the deep Greek dissatisfaction to Macedonian independence. Adamantios Skordos, building upon the statement of Evangelos Kofos who said that only on September 17, 1991, the Greek became aware of the existence of an independent state with a name Macedonia, wrote, "We need to precisely acknowledge that only after the proclamation of independence, majority of the Greeks became aware of an existence of a Macedonian state."¹ This we can say for the Greek public, but we consider it a fact that Greek politicians were aware of the existence of a Macedonian state as a part of a Yugoslav Federation. A few years ago in Thessaloniki, a book by Konstantinos Katsanos was published, in which the influence of the Macedonian question upon the Greek – Yugoslav relations are analyzed. The title of the book - "The nonexistent question. Greek – Yugoslav relations and the Macedonian question", says it all. Katsanos noted that the theme was not of interest to the historians, mainly because of the

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¹ Адамантиос Скодрос, *Грчко-македонското прашање. Граѓанската војна и политичката историја на Југоисточна Европа 1945 – 1992*, Арс студио, Скопје, 2016, с. 351.

impossibility of the use of archive materials.² Reading this book, we can understand that the Greek politicians knew the problem existed since they were the part of it. An example: The president of the Greek Republic, Konstantinos Karamanlis, was a prime minister of Greece in several mandates in the past and was involved in radical confrontations with the Yugoslav authorities regarding the Macedonian question. We consider a statement given by the Greek minister of foreign affair Andonis Samaras that summarizes the core of the Greek – Macedonian dispute and conflict. Namely, he states: “For 50 years, Skopje undermines the Greek sovereignty in Greek Macedonia. The Macedonian regions in Greece and Bulgaria are presented as yet unliberated while “Peoples Republic of Macedonia” was presenting itself as the only liberated part of Macedonia, presenting itself as Piedmont for the unification of all Macedonian regions.³ This statement only shows that the conflict between Macedonia and Greece existed even before the fall of the Berlin wall when Macedonia was part of the Yugoslav Federation, and the Macedonian question was a cause to the strained diplomatic relations between Belgrade and Athens. The genesis of the relations between Athens and Skopje to the day is located in the past, exactly in the year 1944 when Macedonian national state was created. That's why the fall of the communism and dissolution of some of the states in the Eastern bloc, specifically in this case the Yugoslav Federation, brought to the light certain conflicts that were invisible due to the overall constellation of the international relations.

Before we venture into the examples, we will point out that, Greece was, to the last moment, all for keeping the Yugoslavian federation, and when that became an impossibility, they took an adequate set of activities to preserve their interests. We need to underline the fact that in the Greek political circles and those who shaped the public opinion in the neighbouring country, thoughts about the destiny of Yugoslavia after Josip Broz Tito's death and how will that influence the Macedonian question, were present. Thus, the journalist Nicholas Mertzos, one of the public figures most involved in the Macedonian matters, in a conversation with the Bulgarian consul to Thessaloniki, expressed his concerns about the Belgrade and Skopje positions about the Macedonian question after the departure of the Yugoslav leader.⁴ The former Bulgarian ambassador to Athens, Nikolay Todorov, in his diary uncovers interesting details about Greek fears about the destiny of Yugoslavia after Josip Broz Tito's death. At a meeting with Todorov, an influential Greek politician Konstantinos Tsatsos, was keen to hear his thoughts what will become with Yugoslavia after Tito's death, considering the considerable differences between the north and the south of the country.⁵ In core, the question that Tsatsos asked was not a simple coincidence. As Todorov noted, there was a great concern in Greece about the faith of Yugoslavia after the departure of its long-ruling leader.⁶ We can note that Greek politicians were analyzing the future and faith of its northern neighbour and that will be not pretentious on our side to claim that the Greek state was prepared for the Macedonian independence. The Greek reactions to it, let be more precise, strong opposition to it was not an accident or an unplanned move.

Greece consistently blamed Macedonia for antiquation and appropriation of the Greek ancient history. But, history points out to something else. Namely, after the creation of the Greek

² Κωνσταντίνος Κατσανός, *Το «ανυπράκτο» ζήτημα. Οι ελληνογιουγκοσλαβικές σχέσεις και το μακεδονικό 1950-1967*, Επικεντρο, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2013, σ. 9.

³ Киро Глигоров, *Македонија е се што имаме*, Култура, Скопје, 2002, с. 82.

⁴ Георги Даскалов, *Гърция и македонския въпрос. Българо-македонския комплекс на гръцкия национализъм*. Тангра, София, 2014, с 316.

⁵ Николай Тодоров, *Дневник (1966-1998)*, Изток Запад, София, 2007, с. 247.

⁶ *Ibid.*, с. 248.

national state in 1830, ancient Macedonia was not considered a part of Greek history. The need for territorial expansion towards Ottoman Macedonia imposed the urge to incorporate ancient Macedonian history into Greek history. It is of great interest to us and our subject of research, the process of "Macedonisation" of northern Greece that took part after the civil war in the neighbouring country. Underlining the connection of the natives in those parts with the Macedonian antique heritage and history after the end of the civil conflict in Greece was imposed as a need to fortify the Greek identity in the northern parts of the state, but considering the former ethnic situation of that region, and the improbability to impose those actions by the state upon the refugees from Asia Minor that were settled thereafter 1923. Finally, the Greek state saw an opening for solving that problem, and it was used to its full potential, mainly in the relations with neighbouring Yugoslavia where a Macedonian state already existed in the Federation. There are many examples on this claim, but we will point to one of them that we think gives a clearer picture about the relations with Yugoslavia, mainly when Yugoslavia insisted upon the protection of the Macedonian national minority in Greece. In the period 1960 – 1962, the relations between Yugoslavia and Greece were strained, as above mentioned, because of Yugoslav demands upon the position of the Macedonian national minority in the neighbouring country. The Greek prime minister in that period, Konstantinos Karamanlis, in October 1962 visited Thessaloniki and had a meeting with the local government, intellectuals and scientists. During that visit, he ordered Dionisios Manensis, the minister of Northern Greece, and Alexandros Theodosiadis, state secretary in the Ministry of public relations, to erect a statue or a monument of Alexander the Great in Thessaloniki.⁷ The monument was erected even 12 years later, near Beas Kule, one of the Thessaloniki's landmarks. A logical question arises, why this monument was not erected earlier in Thessaloniki, taking into consideration the fact that this city became part of the Greek state in 1912. The answer to this is more than clear. The need to present that Macedonia and its ancient history are Greek.

We have the same problem with the interpretation of the past relating to the territorial claims. It is known that Greece was blaming Macedonia for territorial claims over the Greek part of the Macedonian region. But history shows us something very interesting facts. At the end of WWII in Greece, there were thoughts for claiming territories from neighbouring Yugoslavia, more precisely, from its integral part – the new Macedonian state. Two eminent Greek politicians and intellectuals, Philipos Dragoumis and Georgios Modis, asked for expansion of Greek territories towards the north into the parts of Peoples Republic of Macedonia, with an argument that that will ease the defence of Thessaloniki, pointing out to the German attack on Greece in April 1941. It is worth noting that Dragoumis was a Greek diplomat, and Modis was a governor of the region Macedonia. The first post-war mayor of Lerin, today's Florina, A. Mavridis, in a letter to the Greek ministry of foreign affairs, noted that the Greeks in Bitola were ready to fight to incorporate the town in the boundaries of the Greek state. A far more interesting fact is that Georgios Papandreou, prime minister of the royal government, father to another prime minister, Andreas, and a grandfather of the last prime minister of the Papandreou dynasty, Yorgos, in December 1944, when the outcome of the WWII was certain, ordered to the Greek diplomatic officials to carefully analyze the possibility of the changing the Greek - Yugoslav border in Greek favour. Papandreou didn't only ask his diplomats to do so but also discussed this matter

⁷ А. Скордос, *Грчко – македонското прашање*, с. 252.

with the Yugoslav deputy minister for foreign affairs, Stojan Gavrilović.⁸ The Yugoslav reaction to that was furious, causing the Greek government further on to subdue the significance of the Papandreou's idea.

Papandreou's, Dragumis's and Modis's ideas were not a result of an accident neither were they uncalculated, which further examples support that claim. Books and brochures were published in Greece in that period, where the annexation of southern parts of the territory of the Peoples Republic of Macedonia was openly exposed.

Indeed, there were some moderate ideas in the Greek diplomatic circles considering the Greek – Yugoslav border. The politician, diplomat and intellectual, Periklis Argiropulos, considered Yugoslavia an ally country and his thoughts were that the Greek territorial demands on behalf of Yugoslavia, i.e. Peoples Republic of Macedonia, would cause the neighbouring country to get close to defeated Bulgaria. Nevertheless, even he considered that it should be closely observed in which direction will Yugoslavian events take, and only after that to demand the change of the border.

The demands of border changing and incorporating of Bitola, Gevgelija and Strumica into Greece, were not only thoughts of certain Greek politicians and diplomats. The same demands can be observed in the Greek press. In the FOS newspaper, on March 18, 1945, an article was printed in which an open demand for the change of Greek – Yugoslav border, with an argument that Yugoslavia will gain new territories, alluding to Istria, Trieste and several islands in the Adriatic.⁹ On the front page of Thessaloniki's daily MAKEDONIA, a map was printed which illustrated the Greek demands towards Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania.¹⁰ Almost in the same time, there were several pamphlets and brochures in which Greek territorial demands towards Yugoslavia, were repeated.¹¹

Yugoslav answer to those articles and demands was unexpectedly fierce. Radio Belgrade even asked for a ban on the MAKEDONIA newspaper.¹² However, the Yugoslav reaction did not stop only in the demands to pacify those above-mentioned tendencies in Greece. The internal crisis in Greece, caused Skopje and Belgrade authorities to show interest about the question of the Macedonian national minority in Greece, which in turn, did not recognize it as it didn't recognize the particularity of Macedonian nation. Yugoslav authorities, using the unstable political situation in Greece, have started to raise the question about the position of the Macedonian minority in Greece, declaring that there are not any territorial aspirations towards Northern Greece by Yugoslavia. But in his interview for new York Times, the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito said that though his country had no territorial claims on Greece, there was nothing to prevent the wish of Macedonians to unite.¹³ That was a trigger for further Yugoslav statements following with declarations made by Macedonian officials. Thus, in his speech to the Constituent Assembly of Yugoslavia, On 26 January 1946, a Macedonian representative emphasized that

⁸ Λουκιανος Χασιωτης, Προσφυγικες ομαδες και εξωτερικη πολιτικη-η περιπτωση των Βορειμακεδονων (1913-1920, 1941-1950), *Προσφυγες στα Βαλκανια. Μνημη και ενσωματωση*, ΙΜΜΑ, Θεσσαλονικη, 2004, σ. 135.

⁹ Αδαμαντιος Σκοδρος, *Грчко-макеонското прашање*, с. 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, с. 69.

¹¹ *Οι εθνικες μας διεκδικησεις*, Αθηνα, 1944, Κ. Η. Δροσοπουλου, *Τα Βορεια συνορα της Ελλαδος*, Αθηνα, 1944, Γ. Χουβαρδα, *Εδαφικες διεκδικησεις και αριστερισμος*, Αθηνα, 1945, Δ. Βακα, *Αι εδαφικαι διεκδικησεις της Ελλαδος*, Αθηνα, 1945.

¹² Αδαμαντιος Σκοδρος, *Грчко-макеонското прашање*, с. 69-70.

¹³ Iakovos Michailidis, *Irredentism and policy. FYROM official state papers 1944-2006*, in Iakovos Michailidis (ed.), *Macedonianism. FYROM expansionist design against Greece 1944-2006*, EMS, Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 20.

Greek authorities terrorized Macedonians who should proceed with their fight for freedom.¹⁴ But the most provocative statement from Macedonian and Yugoslav officials for Greece came from Dimitar Vlachov, a Macedonian revolutionary and politician, native from Kukush (nowadays Kilkis, Greece). During his speech, at the ceremony for the transfer of remnants of Goce Delchev, Vlachov stated that Greece had no ethnic, political and economical rights over Aegean Macedonia.¹⁵ The beginning of the Greek civil war was a chance for the Yugoslav leader to play on the card of united Macedonia to achieve his dreams for creation of the Balkan communist federation under Yugoslav dominance. Yugoslav state was deeply involved in the support of the Greek democratic army. The relations between Belgrade and Athens were seriously damaged. Macedonians from the People's Republic of Macedonia supported their compatriots in Greece. But, as a result of Cominform resolution in 1948 and breaking of the relations amongst Yugoslavia and the other East European Communist states the whole situation was changed. Yugoslav authorities, as a consequence of the Greek communist support to Stalin, closed the border with Greece, thus deprived the Greek democratic army of serious support and background. The Yugoslav closing of the border was decisive for the outcome of the Greek civil war and the defeat of Greek communist guerilla. During his meeting with the US president Ford, in Helsinki on 25 June 1975, the Greek Prime minister Constantine Karamanlis admitted that Tito's decision to close the border, alongside with Truman doctrine, was a decisive factor for the ending of Greek civil war.¹⁶

In the late forties and early fifties of the last century, Yugoslavia made a huge turnabout in its foreign policy.¹⁷ Severing the relations of Tito's Yugoslavia with the USSR and its East European allies forced the Government in Belgrade to change its foreign policy orientation. Greece became a desirable partner for new foreign politic orientation of Yugoslavia. After the end of the Greek Civil war and Yugoslav breaking with the Cominform, both Governments came under American pressure to normalize their relations. US Government perceived Yugoslavia as a strategically important buffet state vis-à-vis USSSR and their communist ally states. Yugoslav Government, on the other hand, had strong interest from support by the Western countries despite ideological distrust. Greece, after the end of the Civil war, was ruined and economically exhausted. On the Greek eastern border aroused tensions with Turkey over the Aegean region and Cyprus. Therefore, for the Governments in Athens, it was from great importance to secure the northern borders of the country in the order to cope with the problems on the East. British diplomacy took initiative for bringing closer Yugoslavia and Greece. Despite differences over the Macedonian issue and the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece, the diplomacy of both countries, with British mediation started to negotiate to reestablish diplomatic relations on ambassador level. The Yugoslav leader in his interview for New York Times emphasized that his country did not have any territorial pretensions to Greece.¹⁸ This positively echoed in Athens. In late November 1950, both countries exchanged the Ambassadors. This put an end to the process of normalization of the Yugoslav and Greek relations.¹⁹ The period that followed was more than

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.23.

¹⁶ *Foreign relations of the United States, 1969 – 1979*, Vol. XXX, US Government printing office, Washington, 2007, p. 170.

¹⁷ Драган Богетић, Југославија у хладном рату, *Историја XX века*, 2, Београд, 2008, с. 317.

¹⁸ Κωνσταντίνος Κατσάνος, Το Μακεδονικό ζήτημα (1950-1967) – Η γιουγκο-σλαβική οπτική, in I. Κολιοπούλος-Ι. Μιχαηλίδης (επ.), *Το μακεδονικό στα ζένα αρχεία*, ΕΜΣ, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2008, σ. 32.

¹⁹ Dalibor Jovanovski, Katerina Todoroska, *Yugoslav – Greek relations through Agreements 1951-1967*, Menora, Skopje, 2013, p. 5.

interesting and controversial. The process of normalization of the bilateral relations between Belgrade and Athens was crowned with the signing of Balkan pact between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey with various agreements in 1953 and 1954. We could accept Ristović's view that Yugoslav – Greek after their full restoration in 1950, they reached a level of closeness unimaginable several years before, crowned by the signing of the Balkan Pact.²⁰ Macedonian question has been temporally moved to the margins in the mutual relationships, but it appeared from time to time producing problems in the relations between two neighbour countries.

The relations between Yugoslavia and Greece, which, by concluding the Balkan pact in 1954, we can name allies, however, we're burdened with the Macedonian issue which was occasionally coming to light. The Greek side, even during the period of the best interstate relations, consistently reacted to the history and geography textbooks, which were printed in the People's Republic of Macedonia, to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising, to the articles in *Nova Makedonija*, to the publication of Lazar Mojsov's book "About the issue of the Macedonian minority in Greece" etc.²¹ The Yugoslav side, in response to that, calmed the nervous Greek reactions with the claim that Greeks were too sensitive to certain issues. The favourable development of the relations between the two neighbouring countries, in this period, was not threatened because of the Macedonian issue. A perfect example of the Yugoslav behaviour was the abovementioned visit of Tito to Greece in June 1954. The Yugoslav delegation avoided raising the issue of the Macedonian minority. The Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, regarding the remark about the articles in the newspaper *The Voice of the Aegeans*, distanced himself from them and even noticed that such articles had a negative influence on the Yugoslav-Greek relations.²² Even more, Yugoslav federal authorities exerted a strong pressure over the Macedonian republican officials to stop with publishing materials in order not to disrupt the relations with Athens.

Within the framework of good neighborhood relations between Belgrade and Athens the Greek Prime minister Constantine Karamanlis, in early December 1956 has visited Yugoslavia. His host was Yugoslav Vice-PriceMinister Edvard Kardelj. As a result of the meeting, a common official statement was issued proclaiming that there are no territorial claims between the two countries.²³ It was not surprising that both sides agreed on such statement taking into account that Yugoslavia has not been willing to raise Macedonian question at that time.

Despite flourishing of the bilateral relations between Belgrade and Athens, some cases show us that Macedonian issue presented a possible source for misunderstandings between two neighbour countries. The negotiations for signing several interstate agreements between Yugoslavia and Greece brought to light a problem, which was smouldering in the previous period, and which, unfortunately, is still present today in the relations between the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia, as one of the successor states of the former Yugoslav federation.²⁴ Towards the end of 1958, both countries were already finalizing the negotiations for signing a larger number of interstate agreements. Then, the issue which appeared to be insoluble in the

²⁰ Milan Ristović, *Distrustful Neighborhood. Yugoslavia and Greek colonels 1967-1974*, *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 2018, p. 521-522.

²¹ Konstantinos Katsanos, Nada Pantelić, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-grčkim odnosima. Poverljivi document 1949-1967*, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, 2012, s. 19.

²² D. Jovanovski, K. Todoroska, *The Yugoslav – Greek relations*, p. 10.

²³ Dušan T. Bataković, K. Karamanlis and Yugoslavia: Four visits to Tito's Yugoslavia, In *Karamanlis in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2, eds. C. Svoloopoulos, C. E. Botsiou & E. Hatzivassiliou, Athens: Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, 2008, p. 454.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

relations between the two neighbouring countries came into light. The problem regarding the use of the Macedonian language in the documents for local border traffic was mentioned in the conversation of the mixed Yugoslav-Greek commission. The Greek side did not even want to hear of using the Macedonian language when signing the agreements or in the forms for local border traffic.²⁵ The Greeks suggested using the Greek and Serbo-Croatian languages in the documents and the Yugoslav side proposed that the documents, i.e. the passes, be issued in Greek and Macedonian language, according to the usual international practice.²⁶ The Greeks rejected this proposal. Both sides exchanged and rejected several ideas on how to overcome that problem. In the end, to continue the conversation, and to enable the signing of several interstate agreements, the Yugoslav side agreed with the Greek proposal that in the agreement it should be written that the border pass will be in the official languages of both countries, without mentioning them. The Greek reactions regarding the mentioning of the Macedonian language when composing the interstate agreements in 1959 were not unexpected. Greece did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language.

On 18th June 1959, a total of 12 agreements were signed in Athens on the cooperation between the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) and the Kingdom of Greece.²⁷ The agreements were signed and a solution was found regarding the passes, but that was not of the own free will of certain, especially the opposition, politicians in Athens. The printing of the passes in the Macedonian language was used by the opposition politicians in Greece to blame Karamanlis of recognizing that language, which was further from the truth. On 17th September 1959, the agreements were put on the table at the session of the Greek parliament to be ratified. Apart from the language, the question which persons would freely cross the border in the border area 49 was also problematic for the opposition members of parliament. Despite the fears of the opposition, the agreements were ratified and could be applied. Were these reactions unexpected? - If the reactions in Athens to some Yugoslav proposals are analyzed, in the period when the relations between the two countries were the closest and the friendliest, the matters become clearer.²⁸

The Greek side, despite concluding a great number of agreements in 1959, refused any cooperation with Yugoslavia when it came to the People's Republic of Macedonia. Thus, in March 1960, Greece rejected the Yugoslav proposal for a free trade zone between the People's Republic of Macedonia and the Greek region Macedonia.²⁹ Greece also rejected the new Yugoslav proposal for a free trade zone on the territory that was included in the Agreement on Local Border Traffic dated in 1959. This episode, from the relations between Yugoslavia and Greece, demonstrates how much the Macedonian issue burdened the relations between the two neighbouring countries which in the middle of 1959 signed several agreements on cooperation and tried to develop a friendship. Therefore, the straining of the relations between Athens and Belgrade in the early 1960s was not at all surprising. Almost simultaneously with the signing of the agreements between the two neighbouring countries, in three villages in the western parts of the Greek part of Macedonia, the local Macedonian population, which the Greeks considered to be slavophone, was giving oaths that it would no longer use its language, but the Greek

²⁵ Κωνσταντίνος Κατσανός, *Το Μακεδονικό και η Γιουγκοσλαβία*, Αδελφών Κυριακίδη, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2009, σ. 146-158.

²⁶ K. Katsanos, N. Pantelić, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-grčkim odnosima*, s.84.

²⁷ Spyridon Sfetas, In the shadow of the Macedonian issue, *Balkanica*, XXXIX, SANU, Belgrade, 2008, p. 191.

²⁸ D. Jovanovski, K. Todoroska, *The Yugoslav – Greek relations*, p. 14.

²⁹ Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, *Greece and the Cold War. Frontline state, 1952-1967*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 109.

language. When the Greek media covered the information about these events, the Yugoslav Government had to react. The Greek side justified itself that the Government in Athens was not behind these events.³⁰ The trial of the Greek communists in Athens in 1960 additionally fanned the flames. The relations between the two, until then, close neighbouring countries started to go aggravate.

The leadership of the People's Republic of Macedonia, due to the above-mentioned events, demanded that a meeting be held with the highest bodies of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia where the relations with neighbouring Greece would be discussed. On 18th May 1960 in Belgrade, a meeting of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was held where they discussed the Macedonian minority in Greece.³¹ Very soon, Averoff, the Greek minister of Foreign affairs came to Yugoslavia in an attempt to solve the problem that appeared. He met with the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, Koča Popović. At their meeting, held on 1st July 1960, on the Brijuni Islands, they discussed the Macedonian issue as well. The Greek guest claimed that the Government in Athens was surprised by the attitude of Yugoslavia regarding the Macedonian issue, which was the only open issue in the relations between the two countries. Popović responded that the Yugoslav side was very careful regarding that issue and tried not to call into question the good relations with Athens. He expressed his hope that things could be fixed with mutual effort.³²

The meeting on the Brijuni Islands was supposed to ease the mutual relations, but the aggravation was yet to come. In September 1960, the Greek Government handed a memorandum to the Yugoslav ambassador in Athens, where it mentioned the Greek remarks about how the Agreement on Local Border Traffic was implemented by the Yugoslav side, the collection of materials for writing the History of the Macedonian people, where refugees from Greece also participated, as well as the usage of the term Aegean Macedonia.³³ The relations between the two countries were additionally strained after the speech of Lazar Koliševski, at the Congress of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of the People's Republic of Macedonia. Then, Koliševski, inter alia, blamed the neighbouring countries that they demanded, due to the good neighbouring relations, Yugoslavia to state that the Macedonian issue did not exist.³⁴ The reactions from Athens to this speech of the Macedonian politician were fierce. The newspapers in Greece published parts of this speech and in the comments, it was emphasized that Yugoslavia openly put the Macedonian issue on the table. It was evaluated as direct aggression against the integrity of Greece.³⁵ The reactions of the government in Athens were also fierce. On 7th October 1960, the Yugoslav ambassador in Athens was summoned in the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he was told, in a curt voice, the discontent of the Athenian Government.³⁶ Thus, the crisis started to seriously affect the mutual relations. The Greek Government was not satisfied with the Yugoslav explanations of the events. That was expected. A country which did not recognize minorities could not accept that there was a Macedonian minority on its territory. Bilateral relations between Yugoslavia and Greece were continuing to deteriorate. Every statement which was made by Yugoslav and Macedonian officials caused severe Greek reactions. The statement made by the President of the Government of the People's Republic of

³⁰ K. Katsanos, *Το Μακεδονικό και η Γιουγκοσλαβία*, σ. 159-164.

³¹ K. Katsanos, N. Pantelić, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-grčkim odnosima*, s.24.

³² Σπυριδόν Σφετας, *Στη σκία του Μακεδονικού*, Επικεντρο, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2007, σ. 247.

³³ D. Jovanovski, K. Todoroska, *The Yugoslav – Greek relations*, p. 16.

³⁴ K. Katsanos, N. Pantelić, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-grčkim odnosima*, s. 27.

³⁵ D. Jovanovski, K. Todoroska, *The Yugoslav – Greek relations*, p. 16.

³⁶ Σ. Σφετας, *Στη σκία του Μακεδονικού*, σ. 87.

Macedonia, Aleksandar Grličkov, in November 1961, in an interview with foreign journalists caused reactions from Greece again. Grličkov mentioned that there was a Macedonian minority in Greece and deplored the politics of the local government towards him.³⁷ Due to the Grličkov statement, Yugoslav ambassador in Athens was summoned by the Greek foreign minister Averoff. He assured the Greek minister that this statement was not espoused by the Federal government in Belgrade.³⁸ But, despite such assurance, the Yugoslav high officials were continuing to mention the problem of the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece. The Yugoslav minister of foreign affairs, Koča Popović, in an interview for the Athens daily ACROPOLIS, January 23, 1962, openly addressed the interest of his state for the rights of the Macedonian national minority in Greece.³⁹ In his interview for Acropolis, Popović reiterated Yugoslav desire for continuity of friendship with Greece, noting that it was not the first time that Yugoslavia raised the question about Macedonian minority in Greece.⁴⁰ Two months later, the Yugoslav ambassador in Athens, in a discussion with his Bulgarian peer, openly stated that Greece has worsened the relations with all its neighbours, lastly with Yugoslavia, when it showed interest in the situation of the Macedonian national minority.⁴¹ Regardless of the Yugoslav activities, the government in Athens expected that its relations with Yugoslavia are going to be set fair despite the Yugoslav revival of the Macedonian minority problem.⁴² The Greek expectation very soon came true.

Then, the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, Koča Popović, took the initiative to overcome the dispute. Initially, he contacted the Macedonian leadership to coordinate the views of the Macedonian Republic with the Yugoslav Federal Government.⁴³ In other words, to put pressure on Skopje. The pressure produced a result and the path to normalization of the relations was open. In early December 1962, Koča Popović went to Athens. In the Greek capital, he met with his colleague and friend, Averoff. At the meeting, the host began the discussion about the Macedonian issue. According to him, that was the only issue which burdened the relations between the two neighbouring countries.⁴⁴ Both of them discussed the writing in the media in both countries about mutual relations. The head of the Greek Diplomatic Service told his Yugoslav colleague that he understood the sensitivity of the Yugoslav side regarding the widely spread opinion in Greece that the Macedonian nation did not exist, but that was not stated by the Greek Government. Popović presented the Yugoslav arguments for the crisis in the relations between the two countries. At the same time, he didn't miss to mention the oaths given in 1959. Averoff asked his guest, due to Greek internal needs, a formula for consent regarding the conducted conversation to be written down. Popović agreed to mention that the Yugoslav side could also use that formula for its own needs. In the formulation, which was approved by both of them, it was emphasized that both sides agreed, due to the desire for the development of the interstate relations, to avoid activities and manifestations, which could jeopardize their relations again.⁴⁵ This conclusion was called gentlemen's agreement Averoff-Popović. It was supposed to ease the relations between the two neighbouring countries. That happened later.

³⁷ K. Katsanos, N. Pantelić, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-grčkim odnosima*, s. 29.

³⁸ Iakovos Michailidis, *Irredentism and policy. FYROM official state papers 1944-2006*, p. 44.

³⁹ Георги Даскалов, *Гърция и македонския въпрос.*, с. 136.

⁴⁰ *Daily report, 23 January 1962*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, p.222-223.

⁴¹ Георги Даскалов, *Гърция и македонския въпрос.*, с. 136.

⁴² A.G. Anghelatos, *New-found political stability in Greece*, *The world today*, Vol. 18/3, (March 1962), p.111.

⁴³ K. Katsanos, N. Pantelić, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-grčkim odnosima*, s.230.

⁴⁴ Σ. Σφετας, *Στη σκία του Μακεδονικού*, σ. 256.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 263.

After reaching this agreement, the relations between the two countries were stable without any more serious oscillations. Macedonian issue and the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece were put in oblivion. However, Greece was sinking in a bigger and bigger political instability. Some officers in the Greek army used that and on 21st April 1967 conducted coup d'état. Few weeks before the Army Coup in Greece, Yugoslav ambassador in Athens sent analysis for the political situation in the country with the special interest in the situation in the Greek army. A part of the analysis dealt with the problems between two countries regarding the Macedonian question. According to the report, some of the Greek generals were convinced that if the name of SR Macedonia were to be changed there would be no problem left to resolve.⁴⁶ These opinions of the Senior Greek military officers reflected the common position of the Greek society concerning the existence of a Macedonian nation and state at all.

The coup in 1967 in Greece, organized by the rightwing officers, introduced seven years of military dictatorship. The new situation in Greece produced the radicalization of the differences between Belgrade and Athens regarding the Macedonian question.⁴⁷ The military junta in Greece has started with the cooling of the diplomatic with Yugoslavia. The treaty of border exchange was suspended, Yugoslav citizens were exiled and faced with difficulties in obtaining Greek visas and Yugoslavia was accused of aspiration on Thessaloniki and was described as the main enemy of the regime.⁴⁸ As a result of the new policy from Athens, Yugoslav government had distanced itself from direct political relations with the new military government in Athens, starting with the support of Greek opposition abroad, assessing that it was impossible to open any discussion with the military leaders in Athens about the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece.⁴⁹

In 1974, Greek military junta was toppled. Its collapse was triggered by a series of events and military defeat in Cyprus which was invaded by Turkish armed force to prevent island unification with Greece and to protect the Turkish Cypriot minority. Greece was proclaimed for the republic because of the Referendum. The former democratic institutions were reestablished. The ousting of Greek military junta was greeted by Yugoslav public opinion, while high Federal officials saw it as a beginning of the restoration of friendly relations of the two Balkan countries.⁵⁰

Karamanlis became the first elected prime minister of the Hellenic Republic. Some of his foreign policy objects were to reduce the threat from North, to resolve bilateral disputes or issues peacefully through continuously expanding diplomatic and economic ties.⁵¹ Karamanlis counted on Yugoslav support on Cypriot issue, simultaneously he was not willing to make any change on the Macedonian question. He preserved his opinions about Macedonia and Macedonians.

After the reestablishing of the democratic regime in Greece, Karamanlis twice time visited Yugoslavia as a Greek Prime minister. Although the main object of his visits to Yugoslavia in 1975 and 1979 was receiving Yugoslav support on the Cypriot problem, Karamanlis confronted

⁴⁶ Ljubodrag Dimić, Yugoslav diplomacy and the Greek Coup d'Etat of 1967, *Balkanica L*, 2019, p. 407.

⁴⁷ On the Yugoslav – Greek relations during the time of Military junta in Greece see Milan Ristović, *Distrustful Neighborhood. Yugoslavia and Greek colonels 1967-1974*, p. 521-542.

⁴⁸ Ljubodrag Dimić, Yugoslav diplomacy and the Greek Coup d'Etat of 1967, p. 420.

⁴⁹ Milan Ristović, *Distrustful Neighborhood. Yugoslavia and Greek colonels 1967-1974*, p. 542.

⁵⁰ Milan Ristović, *Yugoslavia and Greek political emigration during Military dictatorship 1967 – 1974*, in: *Konstantinos Karamanlis in the Twentieth Century*. Vol. I, Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, Athens, 2007, p. 277.

⁵¹ John Maines, *Party Politics and Greek security policy from 1974 to 1984: Change and Continuity*, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 1984, p 77.

with his hosts, Prime ministers Bijedić and Đuranović on the question of the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece. He rejected staunchly to discuss on this issue stating that there is no such minority in his country.⁵² He reaffirmed his position on the existence of Macedonian minority in Greece, claiming that such minority does not exist because there is no Macedonian nation. Commenting the position of the Greek government in regard of the question of Macedonian minority, Spyridon Sfetas concludes that Greece was reluctant to compensate Yugoslavia's support on the Cypriot problem by making concessions over the Macedonian question.⁵³

During his last visit to Greece, which lasted from May 10 to May 13, 1976, Josip Broz Tito in the talks with the Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis, they knew each other very well and the respect between them was mutual, asked a question about the state of the Macedonian minority in the neighbouring country. That subject was unacceptable to Karamanlis because according to him, it was impossible to maintain good relations between two countries if Yugoslavia keeps on asking about the nonexistent Macedonian question.⁵⁴ To Karamanlis, Macedonia was a geographical region, which in most part belonged to Greece. He claimed that there is no such thing as the Macedonian nation, therefore there was no Macedonian national minority.⁵⁵ The Yugoslav president dropped the subject, stating that he only asked that question because of the continuous pressure from the local authorities in Skopje upon him.⁵⁶ It should be noted that Blagoj Popov, the president of the state government in Skopje, was a part of the Yugoslav delegation. His inclusion and presence in the official delegation was a subject of an official communique between Belgrade and Athens. The Greek part was very unhappy with his presence, especially because he was introduced as a president of the Macedonian state government.⁵⁷ His presence leads to a conclusion that Yugoslav president did not ask about Macedonian minority in Greece by chance, because Greece needed the Yugoslav support in the Cyprus question.

Karamanlis was seriously concerned about the situation in Yugoslavia after Tito's death. In his conversation with the US president Ford, he expressed his concern that there was a possibility for Yugoslavia to be put under Soviet influence after Tito's death. In such circumstances, Yugoslavia would cooperate with Bulgaria.⁵⁸ Although he did not mention Macedonian issue we can suppose that it was one of the reasons for his concerns on Yugoslav fate.

Tito's death, on 4 May 1980, marked a new stadium in Yugoslav – Greek relations concerning Macedonian question and the position of the Macedonian minority in Greece. Step by step the relations between two Balkan countries has started to deteriorate, as a result of their different positions on the Macedonian issue. Despite the democratic transition in Greece and the improvement of mutual relations, Greek politicians did not stop to express their fears from the North. Thus, the Armed Forces day continued to be celebrated on the anniversary of the battle of Grammos, which ended the Civil war in 1949. In his speech on this occasion in august 1980, not only explicitly linked victory in 1949 with the post – 1974 democratic regime, but also resurrected old fears adding that without it the boundaries of Greece might have ceased at lamia

⁵² Dušan T. Bataković, K. Karamanlis and Yugoslavia: Four visits to Tito's Yugoslavia, p. 460-463.

⁵³ Spyridon Sfetas, The Bulgarian – Yugoslav dispute over Macedonian question as a reflection of the Soviet – Yugoslav controversy (1968-1980), *Balkanica XLIII*, 2012, p. 268.

⁵⁴ Георги Даскалов, *Гърция и македонския въпрос*, с. 310.

⁵⁵ Γιώργος Καλπαδακης, *Το Μακεδονικό ζήτημα 1962-1995. Από τη σιωπή στη λαϊκή διπλωματία*, Καστανιώτη, Αθήνα, 2012, σ. 130.

⁵⁶ Георги Даскалов, *Гърция и македонския въпрос*, с. 310.

⁵⁷ Γιώργος Καλπαδακης, *Το Μακεδονικό ζήτημα 1962-1995*, σ. 126-127.

⁵⁸ *Foreign relations of the United States, 1969 – 1979*, p. 170.

or Larisa thus implying that the remainder might have become an independent Macedonian state or part of Yugoslavia.⁵⁹

At the October 1981 elections in Greece, left-wing socialist party PASOK won a landslide victory. Yugoslav authorities hoped for the new and modest approach of the left-wing government in Athens on the Macedonian issue. There was some ground for such hopes. As a leader of the Greek opposition, Papandreou nourished great sympathies for the late Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito and his policy of neutrality was highly appreciated by the Greek socialist leader.⁶⁰ However, some decisions of the Greek leftist government produced a great disappointment in Yugoslavia. In 1982, Papandreou's Government decided to withdraw Greek students from Yugoslav universities. Also, with the Ministerial decree No 106841/29 December 1982, the Greek government permitted free repatriation and return to Greek citizenship of political refugees of the Greek Civil War of 1946-1949, but only for those who were Greeks by genus.⁶¹ In April 1985, the Greek parliament passed a Law n. 1540 which permitted to political refugees from the Civil war to reclaim their properties which were confiscated with the definition of the term political emigrants.⁶² Papandreou's government was the one that ordered the Greek students back from their studies in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, telling them that their diplomas issued in the Macedonian language will be not accepted in Greece, in other words, a language that official Athens does not recognize.⁶³

That's why the next example that we are pointing to in this paper, was not of a surprise, but the consequences are interesting and they can help us today to understand the Greek positions and naming suggestions about the name of our state, and even more, for the name of the nation and the language which presents a thorn in the eye for any Greek government. It can be taken as an example of how we should react to the negation of our existence as Macedonians.

In the Greek parliament, questions about Macedonia were frequent and they put a burden upon the Greek relations with Yugoslavia. At the Greek parliament session on April 23 1986, when the subjects were the Balkan countries where discussed, the opposition leader Konstantinos Mitsotakis asked the prime minister Andreas Papandreou, what were the steps that his government took to counter the "Slavo-Macedonian" propaganda abroad.

Papandreou answered that when his government is concerned, there is no such thing as "Macedonian question". That issue is coming from Belgrade and it can affect the course of the bilateral relations. According to him, there is not even a Macedonian minority. "There are Greeks, there are Serbs, Croats, there are Bulgarians, and "Macedonians" do not exist".⁶⁴

This statement by the Greek prime minister given in the Greek parliament provoked Belgrade's answer. The reaction of the Yugoslav government and the president of the presidium of SFRJ to that was fierce. The president of the presidium considered Papandreou's statement negated the

⁵⁹ Peter Siani Davies, Stefanos Katsikas, National reconciliation after Civil war: the case of Greece, *Journal of Peace Research*, v.46/4, July 2009, p. 567.

⁶⁰ John Maines, *Party Politics and Greek security policy from 1974 to 1984: Change and Continuity*, p. 142.

⁶¹ Vlassis Vlasidis, Veniamin Karakostanoglou, Recycling propaganda: Remarks on recent reports on Greece's "Slav-Macedonian minority", *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 36/1, 1995, p. 165; *Denying Ethnic identity. The Macedonians of Greece*, Human Rights Watch, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, London, 1994, p. 68.

⁶² According to this law as political emigrants shall be considered the Greeks by genus (*Denying Ethnic identity. The Macedonians of Greece*), p. 69.

⁶³ Viktor Meier, *Yugoslavia. A History of its demise*, Routledge, 2005, p. 184.

⁶⁴ Εβαγγελος Κωφορ, Ελληνικη κρατος και μακεδονικες ταυτοτητες (1950-2006), στο: Ιωαννης Στεφανιδης, Βλασης Βλασιδης, Εβαγγελος Κωφορ (επ.), *Μακεδονικες ταυτοτητες στο χρονο*, Πατακη, Θεσσαλονικη, 2008, σ. 389.

existence of Macedonian nation even within the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and it is considered as a rough foreign interference in the Yugoslav internal affairs. There is no doubt that this statement coming from Belgrade was caused under the influence of the local government in Skopje, which was often pointed out by Athens that with their actions pushed the Greek – Yugoslav relations in a negative direction.

The strong Yugoslav reaction beard fruits, Papandreou had to soften his statements. Firstly, Andreas did not want to put the relations with neighbouring Yugoslavia under strain in the period when his country had a taut period in the relations with Turkey. Thus, in his speech to the Greek officers in Alexandroupolis, Papandreou underlined that Greece does not interfere in the Yugoslav internal affairs and that they did not put pressure on the neighbouring country to use the word "Makedon" without mentioning the nationality naming. According to him, what Greece could not accept is the interference in its internal affairs and that is no possibility to discuss the existence of a Macedonian minority in his country.⁶⁵

We noted that the fierce Yugoslav reaction forced the Greek leftist prime minister to withdraw his original statement, but maintained that there is no Macedonian minority in his country and that is an issue that could not be discussed.

Macedonian question and the position of the Macedonian minority in Greece, at the end of 1980s became a cornerstone of the deterioration of Yugoslav – Greek relations. The Federal government in Belgrade, which was losing control over the internal situation in Yugoslavia, has been under great and permanent pressure of the Macedonian government in Skopje to raise the question of the position of Macedonian minorities in Greece and Bulgaria. As a consequence of this pressure in November 1989, the Yugoslav representative in UN accused Greece of oppressing the human rights of the Macedonian minority on Greece.⁶⁶ It was the first time since the ending of the Greek civil war that the Yugoslav state raised the question of the Macedonian minority in Greece. Yugoslav officials did not stop with their activities about the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece. They were supported by the various Macedonian Human right organizations from Greece, USA, Canada and Australia. The second meeting of OSCE for Human rights dimension held in Copenhagen during June 1990. During this Conference, on 21 June, Yugoslav delegation, supported by the Macedonian human rights activists, presented A Memorandum relating the Macedonian national minority, accusing the governments of Greece and Bulgaria for violation of human rights of the Macedonian minority in their countries.⁶⁷ The Greek response on the Yugoslav accusations was very harsh blaming its northern neighbour for manipulating of facts and for spreading of irredentism.⁶⁸ The issue of the rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece ceased to be a problem between Belgrade and Athens because of the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, but the legacy of this problem continued to encumber the relations between the new independent Macedonian state and Hellenic republic.

In the context of the impact of the Macedonian question on Greek-Yugoslav relations, there is an opinion by historians that it did not disrupt relations between the two countries. However, a Serbian historian Dimić thinks that the Macedonian question was one of the problems that constantly hampered Greek – Yugoslav relations.⁶⁹ If we take into account the impact of the

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 390.

⁶⁶ Loring Danfoth, Transnational influences on National conflict: *The Macedonian question, Political and Legal Anthropology Review, Vol. 18/1, May 1995, p. 25.*

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.28.

⁶⁹ Ljubodrag Dimić, Yugoslav diplomacy and the Greek Coup d'Etat of 1967, p. 409.

Macedonian problem on the Greek – Yugoslav relations in the period 1945-1991, then it is easy to conclude why Greece reacted so fiercely to Macedonian independence. Our research on this topic leads us to conclude that the emergence of the Macedonian - Greek conflict immediately after the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Macedonia was not sudden and not expected one. This conflict dated backs in the past and it has enhanced during the Cold war.

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