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## **NEGOTIATING A POTHOLED ROAD: THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA ON ITS JOURNEY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*“For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.”*

Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Holy Bible, 7:5

The name ‘Macedonia’ has historically been associated with tension. Territories carrying that name have been characterised by dispute and controversy since biblical times, yet the true potency of this relatively small land mass in South-Eastern Europe only became apparent at the beginning of the twentieth century. The one hundred years since the emergence of the ‘Macedonian Question’ have seen bloody conflicts, overlapping maps and complex and contradicting interpretations, all of which have most recently become embroiled in the only modern state bearing (or at least wishing to bear) that name. The Republic of Macedonia gained full independence in 1991, and its history since then has loyally adhered to all of the principal features that accompany its name: fear, instability and uncertainty. It is a country perplexed by its past, unsure of its future and uncomfortable in its present; attempting, thus far unsuccessfully, to construct a story that will ease the frictions generated by its mere existence.

The Republic of Macedonia is a country typified by tension, both within its borders and without. Like most Eastern European countries that are seeking membership of the European Union at present, the most recent tension has surfaced between its default (Balkan) mind-set and the so-called ‘European values’ that are currently being imposed/ learnt. It is similar to the tension inherent in human beings (in that frequent internal struggle between the id and the super-ego), but it is also part of the contemporary worldwide tension between the global and the local, embodied in the recently coined phrase ‘glocalisation’<sup>1</sup>. This tension is having an adverse effect on the country’s view of, and response to, the major internal and external problems (potholes) it is facing. At present, its metaphorical vehicle is negotiating a road to the ‘promised land’ of the European Union, but the road is ascending a mountain and is riddled with potholes; some big, some small; some avoidable, some not. Reaching the mountain’s summit

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<sup>1</sup> The problem, as I see it, is that Macedonia is trying to act globally while thinking locally, rather than vice versa, as instructed by the famous catchphrase “Think globally, act locally”.

guarantees a European future, while breaking down or becoming stuck in a pothole will most likely lead to the disintegration of the country. It is these potholes, and the manner in which they will need to be addressed and overcome, that will be the objective of analysis for this paper.

I believe this work to be important not only because the number and variety of potholes that the Republic of Macedonia is having to negotiate are so great, but also because it is essential that those potholes are overcome, not just for the country and the region, but for Europe as a whole. This is because Macedonia has the “enormous potential to create a fireball through South Eastern Europe, one which might pull in parts of Central and Eastern Europe.”<sup>2</sup> A serious armed conflict there would be explosive (as opposed to the implosive nature of the Bosnian war), because its neighbours, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, would find it almost impossible to avoid involvement, for various reasons and to varying degrees. As the historian John Shea points out, “Macedonia is seen as a potential flash point for a war of major international proportions. Its affairs have a much greater potential to draw nations into conflict than any other part of the Balkans... because so many nations believe that their national interests are at stake there.”<sup>3</sup> In addition to this ‘ticking time bomb’ evaluation, the country has been in a constant state of crisis and turmoil for over 17 years. The prospect of European Union membership is what is holding it together, yet, despite being granted candidate status in 2005, its EU accession appears to be as distant as ever. The prolonged entry into NATO and the EU is stimulating nationalist fervour among the Macedonian majority and leading to increasingly strong separatist calls from the sizeable ethnic Albanian minority.

The title, “Negotiating a Potholed Road”, was chosen because I feel that it accurately portrays Macedonia’s current situation. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the word ‘negotiate’ as to “1. confer with others in order to reach a compromise or agreement... 3. find a way over, through, etc. (an obstacle, difficulty).”<sup>4</sup> These explanations correspond almost exactly to the aforementioned

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<sup>2</sup> James Pettifer and James Gow, quoted in Stefan TROEBST, *Der makedonische Jahrhundert*, (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, München, 2007), p. 340

<sup>3</sup> John SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece: the Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation*, (McFarland, North Carolina, 1997), p.1

<sup>4</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Ninth Edition, (Oxford University Press 1995), p. 912

attitudes prevalent at this moment in time in the Republic of Macedonia; the former clearly conveying European ideals and the latter articulating the country's intrinsic response to problem solving. Thus, I have divided the work into two (plus one) sections: "Potholes that can be driven over or around", which ought not to present major obstacles to EU accession; "Potholes that must be repaired", which cannot be avoided because of their size and importance to the accession process, and "The Barrier at the End of the Road", which will only be opened once the EU has its own house in order and is assured that all of the potholes leading up to it have been successfully negotiated. This final stage is the only one which the Republic of Macedonia will be unable to influence, since it will have to "transfer to another for consideration"<sup>5</sup>, another meaning of the word 'negotiate'. In this context, while Macedonia may in reality be able to simply drive over or around the smaller potholes on its road to the EU, the bigger ones will require it to employ the European approach that it is currently being taught, but that is still severely lacking in the country. Although I will primarily be interested in analysing the various potholes in detail, I will also show that the Republic of Macedonia will only be able to reach its goal when it truly learns to apply the 'European' ideal of compromise, something which it, like all other countries in the region, is extremely reluctant to undertake.

However, before doing so, I feel it is important to raise a few points. Firstly, the problem with certain parts of this thesis is that they may become out of date shortly after the work is completed. Things are changing at such a rapid pace in the Republic of Macedonia, and on so many different levels, that any comprehensive overview of the situation is outdated almost before it has been printed. Secondly, since I will be dealing with sensitive issues, it is worthwhile noting that "*il n'y a pas une Vérité, mais autant de vérités que de consciences*" (There is no one Truth, but as many truths as there are *sensitivities*).<sup>6</sup> Thus, I will not pretend that my own personal experiences have not shaped the 'truths' presented here. Finally, despite the fact that I will try to be as impartial as possible, the mere fact that I was born in the Republic of Macedonia and have

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Claude Delmas, *Histoire de la Civilisation Européenne*, (Paris 1969), p. 127, quoted in Norman DAVIES, *Europe – A History*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 4

now returned to live there suggests that there will undoubtedly be a certain degree of bias. I will, however, do my best to avoid it and, though I am clearly positioned on the Macedonian side of the fence, will try to be as objective as possible. Nevertheless, one must not forget that “distortion is a necessary characteristic of all sources of information. Absolute objectivity is absolutely unattainable.”<sup>7</sup>

## **2. PLACING THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA IN CONTEXT**

*“To most Western diplomats, academics and the media, the news that this ‘perennial apple of discord’ and ‘powder keg of the Balkans’ had, in the wake of the break-up of Yugoslavia, mutated into an independent state, the Republic of Macedonia, meant war – inter-state war, civil war and inter-ethnic war.”<sup>8</sup>*

Emerging from the wreckage of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was far from easy. The country had been firmly at the bottom of the federal pile in every way during the era of the SFRY, from wages and output levels to literacy and social provisions.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it became independent from Yugoslavia almost by default (“everyone else is leaving, so we should too!”), but despite the fact that over 95%<sup>10</sup> of the Macedonian population voted in favour of independence in September 1991, the political cadre had neither wanted it, nor was prepared for it. As Elizabeth Pond notes, “the default mode of the residue of the Communist bureaucracy was not only everyday corruption, but also an aversion to making any decisions”<sup>11</sup>, a trend which, as I will demonstrate, has essentially remained unchanged to the present day. *Summa summarum*, the Republic of Macedonia was totally unprepared to deal with the sudden process of political and economic transition to democracy and free market capitalism, having had no historical tradition or culture of democracy, and absolutely no experience of a free market economy.

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<sup>7</sup> Norman DAVIES, *Europe – A History*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 5

<sup>8</sup> Stefan TROEBST, *Der makedonische Jahrhundert*, (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, München, 2007), p. 340

<sup>9</sup> James PETTIFER, “The New Macedonian Question”, in *The New Macedonian Question*, James Pettifer (ed.), (Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1999), p. 20

<sup>10</sup> The ethnic Albanian minority boycotted the referendum, for reasons that will be explained later.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth POND, *Endgame in the Balkans: Regime Change, European Style*, (Brookings Institute Press, Washington D.C., 2006), p. 169

Although it managed to formally establish itself to some degree during the Nineties, it did so in a climate of serious political difficulties and economic hardship. The economy would have collapsed had it not been for the sizeable and continual financial assistance from international sources such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund<sup>12</sup>, while the political problems were multiple and wide-ranging. Internally, as one would imagine, the difficulties presented by the systemic change affected every level of society in the newly independent state, but it was in the sphere of external relations that the greatest challenges to its statehood would appear. These covered virtually every possible aspect of a country's existence, encompassing issues relating to national minorities and education (with Albania), border delineation and religion (with Serbia), language and nationality (with Bulgaria) and the now infamous dispute over even the name of the country (with Greece). Not only have these problems hindered good neighbourly relations and the progress of the Republic of Macedonia, but they are also hitherto unresolved.

Yet, despite being the clear bookmaker's favourite to instigate a war in the aftermath of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia was able to avoid the slippery slope to military conflict. This was not so much due to some sort of skilful diplomacy as it was a result of the country's geo-strategic importance in the region. As Annex 1 shows, its territory is crossed by, or lies in close proximity to, three major East-West fault lines in Europe and, as Michael Sahlin, former EU Special Representative to the Republic of Macedonia, observed, it is generally accepted that "inter-ethnic relations in the region, Kosovo, Southern Serbia and elsewhere, depend on Macedonia – with its inter-ethnic composition, geographic location and history – manifesting a credible case of inter-ethnic stability and harmony."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the international community was fully aware that Macedonia was strategically too important to be allowed to follow Bosnia's example. This opinion is highlighted by the fact that the United Nations placed troops inside the country in December 1992 for its first-ever "preventive

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<sup>12</sup> PETTIFER, Introduction to *The New Macedonian Question*, p. xxx

<sup>13</sup> Michael SAHLIN, "The Role of Macedonia in the Emergence of EU Crisis Management", in CROSSROADS – The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal, Issue 02/2007, p. 104

deployment” operation<sup>14</sup>, intended to deter aggression from its neighbours, namely Serbia. Interestingly, troops from the United States, which was unwilling to send a peacekeeping force into Bosnia, comprised half of the UN contingent<sup>15</sup>. Additional, and more recent, proof of the importance that Macedonia has in the eyes of the international community is provided by the fact that the United States is on the verge of completing its largest embassy in the Balkans, and possibly the world, on a hill overlooking the capital, Skopje. Indeed, the Republic of Macedonia is only the second country in the world, after Israel, to have signed a ‘Strategic Partnership’ with the United States<sup>16</sup>, effectively guaranteeing its security.

The long-term strategic goal of the Republic of Macedonia since its independence has been integration into the European Union. This started unofficially in October 1992, when it appointed a representative in Brussels, and officially on 22 December 1995, when it established diplomatic relations with the EU. It became a partner in the PHARE Programme in March 1996 and signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 9 April 2001, which, within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), aids countries on their journey towards EU accession.<sup>17</sup> The country applied for membership on 1 October 2004 and was granted candidate status on 17 December 2005, essentially in recognition of its painful implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), which was brokered primarily by the EU and stipulated significant constitutional changes following an armed conflict in 2001. In light of these facts, the Republic of Macedonia is generally regarded by the EU as a ‘success story’. So, what is the problem? Does the logic of EU integration not suggest that the accession of Macedonia is something of a foregone conclusion?

Not quite, for two reasons. Firstly, upon granting candidate status and issuing the usual warning that the country would have to continue to show significant progress in order to become a member, the European Council,

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick H. FLEITZ, *Peacekeeping Fiascos of the 1990s*, (Praeger Publishers, Westport, 2002), p. 138

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 143

<sup>16</sup> “Macedonia and USA to form Strategic Partnership”, <http://macedoniaonline.eu/content/view/619/2>

<sup>17</sup> Biljana GABER, “The Republic of Macedonia's Way to the EU”, in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the EU Enlargement towards South-East Europe, 15 December 2005, Istanbul* (Foundation for Middle East and Balkans Studies, OBIV, 2005), p. 104



crucially, made it clear that “further steps will have to be considered in the light of the debate on the [Commission’s] enlargement strategy [paper]” and that “the absorption capacity of the Union also has to be taken into account.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, in keeping with the misfortune that has historically been attached to its name, Macedonia’s entry was specifically tied to the much broader and more heated debate on the future of the European Union, and will therefore most likely depend on events such as the upcoming Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, rather than on merit.

Secondly, as I will show later, the three and a half years since candidacy was obtained have largely been wasted by Macedonia and have shown that it might not be ready to be a member of the EU. Rather than moving a step forward, the country may have in fact taken a few steps back, mostly as a result of the incumbent centre-right party which came to power in 2006. This has led the Commission to re-evaluate its opinion of Macedonia. As Mr Erwan Fouéré, the current EU Special Representative to the country, told me in an interview, “when I arrived in November 2005, and the decision to grant candidate status, we really were very enthusiastic; we saw a country that was moving forward, a success story, maybe we overestimated. The elections in 2006 changed everything. Many issues that we had thought resolved by the OFA resurfaced – tensions, boycotts, all of these things put into question this success story.”<sup>19</sup> There now appears to be an overriding feeling that the EU is perhaps regretting its decision to grant candidate status.

In reality, the Republic of Macedonia is as close to failure as it is to success. In general, it is not an easy subject matter for the EU, since it does not have the appeal of the states that joined in 2004 or that are to join in the near future. It is both less ready for membership and brings fewer advantages to the EU than any of the previous candidates.<sup>20</sup> How then, did it succeed in obtaining candidate status? This had more to do with EU charity than anything else.

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<sup>18</sup> Brussels European Council - 15/16 December 2005, *Presidency Conclusions*, (Brussels, 30 January 2006), p.8, at [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/87642.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/87642.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mr Erwan FOUÉRÉ, EU Special Representative to the Republic of Macedonia, 20 April 2009

<sup>20</sup> “End of a Long Transition?: Macedonia's readiness for EU Candidacy”, [www.analyticamk.org](http://www.analyticamk.org)

Macedonia was the first country in the Western Balkans<sup>21</sup> to sign the SAA, one of the first steps on the ladder to the EU, but it did so as compensation for its role in the Kosovo crisis of 1999, during which it accepted more than 300,000 refugees (15% of its population)<sup>22</sup> and allowed NATO troops to use it as a logistical base. As Harald Schenker observes, “the gesture was clearly seen as a political act of good will, meant to help the stabilisation of the country”<sup>23</sup>, rather than being the conclusion of a process for which Macedonia deserved to be rewarded. Similarly, as mentioned above, the EU granted candidate status in acknowledgment of the implementation of the OFA, but also in the hope that it would inspire the country to vigorously undertake the reforms necessary prior to the opening of the next and final step: the accession negotiations. This has not happened, which practically means that the Republic of Macedonia now finds itself at the penultimate step to European integration without having necessarily warranted that position. Meanwhile, it seems the EU has realised this, and its generosity is spent.

It is time for the EU to substantially revise its “conventional assessment that Macedonia is the foremost political 'success story' in the Balkans. It is instead an under-performing post-conflict country still very much at risk, unable to tackle – operationally or politically – its security challenges without upsetting an uncertain ethnic balance.”<sup>24</sup> However, in revising its assessment, the EU must be very careful not to decelerate the dynamics of Macedonia’s integration excessively, since doing so would not only seriously damage the credibility of the EU, but could also threaten the very stability of the country, and the region. Continuing the integration process remains vital. Although there is indeed much work to be done by the Macedonian side before the dream of Europe becomes a reality, it is undeniable that the EU has continuously raised Macedonia's expectations by granting it a premature SAA<sup>25</sup>, followed by candidate status. The EU has brought the country to the doorstep of Europe; slamming the door in its

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<sup>21</sup> This region is generally considered to be the countries of the former Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia, plus Albania.

<sup>22</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 168

<sup>23</sup> Harald SCHENKER, “Macedonia – The Imperative of Success” in *Human Rights in Europe: A Fragmented Regime?*, Malte Brosig (ed.), (Peter Lang Inc., Frankfurt Am Main, 2006), p. 249

<sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group, “Macedonia: No Room for Complacency” at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2329>

<sup>25</sup> SCHENKER, “Macedonia – The Imperative of Success”, p. 255

face now will most certainly produce grave consequences. Whether or not that door will be shut depends on how the Republic of Macedonia negotiates the following potholes.

### **3. POTHOLES THAT CAN BE DRIVEN OVER OR AROUND**

#### **3.1. The Societal Pothole - Transition**

*“The seemingly continual surprise and disappointment that Western political analysts express over the very frequent falling short of democracy in ‘transitional countries’ should be replaced with realistic expectations about the likely patterns of political life in these countries.”<sup>26</sup>*

As with much of the rest of Eastern Europe, in the early Nineties the Republic of Macedonia was faced with rapid, simultaneous and interacting changes that had no precedent in history. It had no clear vision of the future, since no theories on that particular type of transition existed at the time. There was no so-called 'normative vision' to follow, and while the eyes of its decision makers filled up with \$ signs, the country and its people, truly sovereign for the first time in history, were left to wallow in confusion and uncertainty. 18 years on, the spectre of transition still hangs heavy. The notion has become accepted by the society, normalised, like having a cigarette with one's coffee. In the meantime, politicians use it as an explanation and a justification to vindicate all political wrongdoing.

The problem for the country is that even though it followed the traditional road of nation-building (referendum, Declaration of Independence, Constitution), it was a top-down process, meaning that there was no grassroots movement. Unlike the Central and East European countries (CEEC), where the people 'fought' for democracy and sought to overthrow a regime that had been imposed upon them, for the countries of the former Yugoslavia, and especially for Macedonia, the issue was more of an undesired systemic change.<sup>27</sup> The transition did not come as a result of a powerful opposition that had gained popular support,

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas CAROTHERS, “The End of Transition Paradigm”, (Journal of Democracy, Volume 13, 2002), p. 18

<sup>27</sup> Dorian JANO, “From 'Balkanisation' to 'Europeanisation': The Stages of Western Balkans Complex Transformations”, in *L'Europe en Formation*, no. 349-350, CIFE, 2008, p. 64

or as a result of reforms within the regime. For Macedonia, it seemed to simply happen. The people were, and arguably still are, traumatised by the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia and the overnight transition from socialism to capitalism. The fact that it neither wanted nor was equipped for independence is the reason why the country is yet to emerge from its long transition.

But what is transition? During the Nineties, most of the academic literature on the subject, epitomised by Samuel Huntington's 'Third Wave' of democratisation, focused on the theoretical approaches of the 'transition to democracy': the core assumption being that with the end of communism, all 'transition countries' were, and could only be, moving along a specific path towards the Western example of democracy and market economy. For Macedonia, transition has meant a strange mix of tragedy and surreal tragicomedy. The tragedy is in the statistics: unemployment currently stands at 34.5%<sup>28</sup>, the highest in Europe, according to a recent BBC article<sup>29</sup>; GDP growth is consistently the worst in the region (bettered only by Kosovo)<sup>30</sup>; the judiciary has a backlog of over one million cases (in a country of only two million)<sup>31</sup>; and corruption, in the eyes of its citizens, is more widespread than anywhere else in the Balkans, with a recent poll showing that 73% believe it to be rife in government and 86% regard it as commonplace in business. The tragicomedy is in the stories: a lawyer at the High Court in Skopje, who, upon asking to receive a copy of the minutes, is told by the judge to bring A4 paper and an ink cartridge for the privilege<sup>32</sup>; or the mystery surrounding the placement of a 30 metre high flag pole in the middle of Skopje's main square (see Annex 2).

These are all, to a greater or lesser extent, serious issues which demand equally serious attention, and it would be natural to assume that the European Union would require Macedonia's 'transition' to be completed before entry. However, the country's current societal situation should not present a major pothole on its road to the EU. This is because the conventional view of 'transition'

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<sup>28</sup> CIA World Factbook, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/MK.html>

<sup>29</sup> "Macedonia Unemployment Record Holder", [http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/06/090618\\_nevrabotenost.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/06/090618_nevrabotenost.shtml)

<sup>30</sup> European Central Bank, Occasional Paper No. 86, June 2008, p. 9

<sup>31</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 186

<sup>32</sup> *Nova Makedonija* daily newspaper, "Comment and Debate", Monday, 13 April 2009, p. 14

(a journey along a set sequence of stages) is changing, and with it so is the attitude of the EU towards it. In his essay “The End of Transition Paradigm”, Thomas Carothers suggests that countries in transition are not following a set path, but have in fact created their own paths, in either one of the patterns he calls 'feckless pluralism' and 'dominant-power politics'. I believe that his notion of 'feckless pluralism' describes perfectly the current situation in Macedonia and therefore deserves a lengthy quotation. It states that countries marked by 'feckless pluralism':

“...tend to have significant amounts of political freedom, regular elections, and alternation of power between genuinely different political groupings. Despite these positive features, however, democracy remains shallow and troubled. Political participation, though broad at election time, extends little beyond voting. The alternation of power seems only to trade the country's problems back and forth from one hapless side to the other. Political elites from all the major parties are widely perceived as corrupt, self-interested, dishonest, and not serious about working for their country. The public is seriously disaffected from politics, and while it may still cling to a belief in the ideal of democracy, it is extremely unhappy about the political life of the country. Overall, politics is widely seen as a stale, corrupt, elite-dominated domain that delivers little good to the country and commands equally little respect. And the state remains persistently weak. Economic policy is often poorly conceived and executed, and economic performance is frequently bad or even calamitous. Social and political reforms are similarly tenuous, and successive governments are unable to make headway on most of the major problems facing the country, from crime and corruption to health, education, and public welfare generally.”<sup>33</sup>

This analysis is important not only because it is a very concise and true representation of Macedonia's current state, but also because it highlights the fact that the country has not become *stuck* somewhere along the road towards liberal democracy; instead, it is *consciously residing* in what Carothers calls the ‘grey zone’, which may or may not be on that road. Perhaps, then, transition is not something that must be overcome; perhaps it is a state of being. This, arguably, is one of the reasons why the more recent, and more politically correct, term of ‘transformation’ (indicating a prolonged process of system change, rather than a move from one system to another) is the accepted new standard.

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<sup>33</sup> CAROTHERS, “The End of Transition Paradigm”, pp. 10/11

In addition, another reason Macedonia's 'transformation' will not seriously hinder its progress is because there is no general agreement on when a country is deemed to have 'transformed'. In 2008, one of the authorities on transformation, the German-based Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)<sup>34</sup>, comprehensively analysed and ranked 125 'transformation countries', including the 10+2 new additions to the European Union, which joined in the so-called 'big bang' enlargement of 2004/2007. Their inclusion in the BTI indicates not only that the EU has transformation countries within its ranks, but also, and more importantly, that it does not regard the end of a country's transformation as a prerequisite for membership. Besides, the fact that the BTI covers over 60% of the total number of states in the world demonstrates that 'transformation' is actually the global norm, rather than the exception, and thus cannot be cited as grounds for denying Macedonia's membership.

Therefore, Macedonia should be able to find a way over or around this particular pothole. However, even if I have underestimated the size of the pothole presented by transformation, it is important to note that the EU, of course, is and will continue to be the principal actor involved in aiding the 'transformation countries' in its neighbourhood, just as it was with the CEEC prior to their accession. As Dorian Jano points out, "the EU played an important role in reducing the uncertainty of transition, albeit not in an equal way, since it gave much greater political attention and financial assistance to the CEEC. As a consequence, the CEEC progressed confident towards institution building and reforms, while the European perspective of the Western Balkans remained far and uncertain."<sup>35</sup> While some of the reasons why the EU did not treat the Western Balkans equally will be outlined in the next chapter, the important point here is that with the CEEC already in, the Union can now concentrate almost exclusively on accelerating the progress of the countries in the region.

### **3.2. The Geopolitical Pothole – *The Balkans***

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/11.0.html?&L=1>

<sup>35</sup> JANO, "From 'Balkanisation' to 'Europeanisation'", p.64

*“The Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and the ‘West’ has been constructed.”<sup>36</sup>*

The Balkans is the Balkans; we all have our preconceptions about it. It is commonly regarded as the id of Europe (with the EU as the ego, and the super-ego represented by non-EU members Iceland, Norway and Switzerland), for it is replete with “inherited instinctive impulses”<sup>37</sup>, to use the dictionary definition of the concept. True, the Balkan story is full of immoral dealings, barbarity and bloodshed, but it is ultimately the story of, and the result of, the redrawing of borders by powers that had little interest in the history of the region or the situation on the ground. The Balkans is '*The Balkans*' because of Europe; because of agreements signed in sophisticated Western European palaces by statesmen that have always looked down on the region, and yet deemed it necessary to irrevocably alter its history. “For just as Europe gave the Balkans the categories with which its peoples defined themselves, so it gave them also the ideological weapons – in the shape of modern romantic nationalism – with which to destroy themselves.”<sup>38</sup>

Hence, in 1991, the countries of the former Yugoslavia set off on their journey towards independence, and in the process employed the inherited European state-building practices of war and ethnic cleansing. “They could reasonably argue that by tradition this was part and parcel of ‘Europeanisation’ – everyone else had their own nation states, so why couldn't the peoples of the former Yugoslavia?”<sup>39</sup>, but in the eyes of the soon to be European Union, such practices were, of course, now detestable and a manifestation of a very un-European ‘Balkanisation’. It is precisely the EU’s view of the Balkans, in addition to the considerable and multi-faceted difficulties faced by the region, which form a pothole for Macedonia. In other words, even its geographical location is a problem.

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<sup>36</sup> Maria TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans*, (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 188

<sup>37</sup> The Concise Oxford English Dictionary

<sup>38</sup> Mark MAZOWER, *The Balkans*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2000), p. 16

<sup>39</sup> Report of the International Commission on the Balkans, “The Balkans in Europe's Future”, p. 29, available at <http://kbs-frb.com/publication.aspx?id=178236&LangType=1033>

With reference to Maria Todorova's seminal work *Imagining the Balkans*, I use the term 'Balkans' to signify a geographical space that is physically located within Europe, yet is considered (and, more importantly, considers itself) outside of Europe. Indeed, “one would not be greatly mistaken if one defines the Balkans as a separate universe whose dynamics are governed by laws different from the ones ruling the universe of Europe or, more concretely, the EU”<sup>40</sup>, where everything, even the size of agricultural products, is stipulated and enforced by treaties, regulations, directives and decisions. It has all been arranged in order to guarantee the greatest possible level of stability. Now let us compare this to the Balkans, where the end of the Cold War initiated a process of severe disintegration that saw a return to 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas on the function of borders and states. Here too, stability, or more precisely the lack thereof, is, and has traditionally been, the principal issue. The number of states in the region appears to be growing year by year and, if pessimistic (or realistic?) predictions are to be believed, that number will continue to rise in the short to medium term (with the addition of Republika Srpska, the possible secession of Western Macedonia and Vojvodina?).

Needless to say, such instability has always been of concern to the European Union, but it only genuinely began to express itself as a result of the internal crisis of the EU, following the failures of the Constitutional (2005) and Lisbon (2008) Treaties. Prior to 2005, the picture for the Western Balkans seemed much more promising. In 2000, the Feira European Council extended the prospect of EU membership to the region<sup>41</sup>; a prospect that was reiterated more concretely at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, which said that the Western Balkans' “future integration into European structures and ultimate membership into the Union is a high priority for the EU.”<sup>42</sup> However, a growing reluctance towards the accession of the Western Balkans, both in Brussels and in Member States, has become palpable. The 2006 EU-Balkan meeting in Salzburg pushed the possible accession

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<sup>40</sup> Dr. Ozan ERÖZDEN, “EU Enlargement Towards the Balkans as a Problem of Physics: Quantum Mechanics vs. Newtonian Mechanics” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the EU Enlargement towards South-East Europe, 15 December 2005, Istanbul* (Foundation for Middle East and Balkans Studies, OBIV, 2005), p. 23

<sup>41</sup> See Feira European Council Conclusions at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/fei1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/fei1_en.htm)

<sup>42</sup> European Commission, Thessaloniki Agenda, at [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accesion\\_process/how\\_does\\_a\\_country\\_join\\_the\\_eu/sap/thessaloniki\\_agenda\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/thessaloniki_agenda_en.htm)



dates for the Western Balkans into the unforeseeable future. The countries in the region were offered never-ending accession talks, while the prospect of travel for their citizens switched from the 'smart-visa' policy to the less attractive 'visa facilitation' programme.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the Commission's Enlargement Strategy papers of 2005, 2006 and 2007 established and reiterated new methods for the conduct of the accession procedure, such as the completion of 'benchmarks' prior to the start of accession negotiations, and introduced a new rhetoric on enlargement.<sup>44</sup> Suddenly, the notions of 'enlargement fatigue', 'absorption capacity' and 'rigorous conditionality' became key factors. Finally, countries such as France have even hinted that future memberships (once Croatia is in), should be dependent on obligatory EU-wide referendums.<sup>45</sup> Judging by the fact that the most recent EUROBAROMETER survey on the subject showed that an average of 38% of the EU public supports the entry of the Western Balkans (40% for Macedonia)<sup>46</sup>, it is extremely unlikely that any of them would be able to attract a majority of 'yes' votes for years to come.

Unsurprisingly, all countries in the region are concerned that the goal posts have been moved during the match, since it seems that their eventual membership will depend on more than just the famous trio of criteria introduced at Copenhagen in 1993. These 'Copenhagen Criteria' outline the political, economic and administrative conditions that must be met prior to accession, but additional criteria were added for the Western Balkans at the Thessaloniki Summit, including regional cooperation, reforms in justice and home affairs, and post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, while I fully agree that the Balkans, judging by their political and economic situation, must do more than previous candidates in order to be eligible for EU membership, I am much less in favour of the new and indeterminate notions of 'absorption capacity' and 'enlargement fatigue'. These ambiguous concepts have left countries such as Macedonia

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<sup>43</sup> "EU-Balkan Salzburg Meeting 2006", at <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=166>

<sup>44</sup> EU Commission, "Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007", Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2006/Nov/com\\_649\\_strategy\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/Nov/com_649_strategy_paper_en.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Jovan TEOKAREVIĆ, "Balkan Countries and Euro-Atlantic Integration: Is the pace of rapprochement from 2005 sustainable", in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the EU Enlargement towards South-East Europe, 15 December 2005, Istanbul* (Foundation for Middle East and Balkans Studies, OBIV, 2005), p. 74

<sup>46</sup> Eurobarometer, Spring 2008, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69\\_fyrom\\_exe.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_fyrom_exe.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> "End of a Long Transition?", at [www.analyticamk.org](http://www.analyticamk.org)

wondering whether they are truly neutral additions to the accession criteria or simply an alibi aimed at stalling or even halting further enlargement. Did the EU not realise that it would be fatigued after deciding to stretch to within 150 kilometres of Syria and Lebanon by incorporating Cyprus?

However, perhaps it is unfair to blame the EU for needing time to digest the ‘big bang’. Accepting twelve new members into a club of only fifteen has unquestionably taken its toll, meaning that it must now consolidate in order to make sure that it is absolutely ready before admitting any more. Yet, there is another issue for which I believe there is no justification and which highlights the injustice of the EU’s treatment of the Balkans. I am referring to the Union’s sudden need to meticulously ensure the *full* implementation of every single criteria, since it was far less strict before the ‘big bang’. While one can perhaps understand that the Union would be fatigued and full to capacity after admitting 10+2 new members, the third concept of “rigorous conditionality”, mentioned above, seems a little out of place, since it leads one to question what kind of conditionality was in place before. Was it not rigorous? Did the EU previously not ensure that candidates were absolutely ready to be members?

It is undeniable that the criteria for accession were much more subjective for the CEEC than they are for the Western Balkans, illustrated by the “EU’s simultaneous admittance in 2004 of ten heterogeneous candidates who could not conceivably all be equally prepared.”<sup>48</sup> The criteria also appeared to be much more flexible; thus, with the admittance of Cyprus, for the first time in its history the EU does not have control over a part of its own territory (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). This quite clearly sidesteps the criteria related to the rule of law and the functioning of state institutions.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the standards regarding the rights of minorities in countries such as Estonia and Latvia (where the 25-30% Russian minority does not even have the right to citizenship, and therefore the right to vote), were far removed from those that are being demanded of Macedonia (which I will mention in the next chapter), and yet did not represent an obstacle to their accession. The previous rounds of enlargement unquestionably

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<sup>48</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 6

<sup>49</sup> Vasko NAUMOVSKI, “The Absorption Capacity of the EU”, in *Political Thought*, Journal no. 16, (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Skopje, 2006), p. 88

imposed significantly lower standards on candidates, of which perhaps the most famous example is the case of Greece, which, having essentially failed to fully satisfy the criteria, was accepted in 1981 because European leaders were “following their hearts, not their minds.”<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, the experience of the ‘big bang’ enlargement, and especially Brussels’ current problems with Bulgaria and Romania, have made the EU reinforce its principle of conditionality. But has the bar been placed too high? Was it intentional? As I mentioned above, I do not want to argue here that the Western Balkans deserve to be treated in the same way as the CEEC; they evidently have much more work to do. What I do want to point out, however, is the injustice of ensuring that Macedonia, as well as other countries in the region, will not even be considered for membership until it implements the exact same standards that were overlooked for previously successful candidates, and which have not been resolved even within the borders of the EU. Rules are rules and criteria should be criteria. The fact that the criteria have been increased is logical, but the change in the nature of the assessment is unscrupulous. Had the EU applied the same ‘rigorous conditionality’ to all the previous rounds of accession, the current diligence would have been understood. At the moment it feels, at least from the Western Balkan perspective, somewhat unjust.

What is needed in relations between the European Union and the Western Balkans is more mutual understanding. The EU must understand that countries in the region simply want to be treated fairly and that they are “rushing through the political, economic and social revolutions that it took Britain, France and the United States 200 years to get through – and this in one generation.”<sup>51</sup> It must also stop pretending that the interaction between itself and the Balkans is a one-way street, because even though the EU is profoundly changing the face of the region, it is also clear that the Balkans have significantly influenced the nature and scope of the EU. One need look no further than the fiasco caused by the EU's fumbling attempts to deal with the Bosnian war, in order to be able to understand the growth and development of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. In

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<sup>50</sup> M. Cowles and D. Dinan, *Developments in the European Union 2*, quoted in NAUMOVSKI, “Absorption Capacity of the EU”, in *Political Thought*, p. 88

<sup>51</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 284

other words, the Balkans have played an important role in bringing about the internal debate within the Union.

On the other hand, the countries of the Western Balkans must understand that the shock to the EU's system of the 'big bang' has been profound and that a certain period of recuperation and re-assessment is necessary. They cannot continue to grumble at any delays in, or additions to, the accession process, because after all they are the ones asking to join the club, and therefore need to do as they are told. Lastly, the Western Balkans must realise that part of the reasoning for the EU's in-house reform is precisely the streamlining of future enlargements, and hence it need not fear that it will become collateral damage to the internal disputes of the Union. Besides, it is almost unimaginable that Europe will become Europe without one of its constituent elements. Thus, the incorporation of all of the Balkans is the destiny of a Union claiming to be European. This is the reason why the Republic of Macedonia will not be considerably impeded by its geographical pothole; for the question of the absorption of the Western Balkans must surely be a matter of *when*, not *if*. As Jano notes, "despite all the uncertainties and difficulties regarding future EU integration processes, what is probably most important here is that these processes are now irreversible... changes are likely to influence only the speed, but not the general course".<sup>52</sup>

As serious and problematic as these potholes are to the Republic of Macedonia, they ought not to critically impede its journey towards the European Union. However, the same cannot be said for the potholes to follow.

## **4. POTHOLES THAT MUST BE REPAIRED**

### **4.1. Potholes the Republic of Macedonia has created**

#### **4.1.1. The Political Climate**

*"Each party in power installed young and inexperienced people in top positions, training politicians on the job, enforcing party strength and nurturing nepotism as a system of*

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<sup>52</sup> JANO, "From 'Balkanisation' to 'Europeanisation'", p. 66

*selection and judgment. Through this process, Macedonian leaders of every stripe sidestepped the rule of law to initiate the worst process of transition to a market economy, refashioned corruption as a life-style choice and destroyed the moral and economic fabric of the country...In that context, Macedonian politicians pose the most serious obstacle to the country on the road to the EU and NATO.”<sup>53</sup>*

In a country like the Republic of Macedonia, with such a plethora of interconnected internal and external problems, it is very difficult to determine what the ‘biggest problem’ facing the country actually is. Nevertheless, as with all countries in the world, the principal blame for its present situation must surely lie at the door of its politicians. And they are not just any politicians. Shortly after the conflict of 2001, which will be covered in the next section, the usually reserved British historian Timothy Garton Ash described them as more “pig-headed” and “short-sighted” than any other elite he had ever met.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, in the ‘Balkan Universe’, the politicians he was referring to would probably regard those statements as a compliment.

These politicians fall by and large into one of the three main ideologically, culturally and ethnically hostile political groupings that emerged in the wake of the death of Yugoslavia: the current government of the nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (IMRO-DPMNU); the new-old communists of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDUM); and the Albanian community, which rallied around the Albanian national cause as represented by the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI).<sup>55</sup> Rather than providing an arena in which to discuss the inter- and intra-ethnic tensions in the country, the inexperience, immaturity and astonishing self-interest of this political elite has done nothing more than provide a stage on which those tensions have been publicly displayed, rather than resolved. Inter-party accusations are abundant, usually justified and almost always meaningless, especially for the country and its people, since they mostly constitute personal attacks, rather than disagreements over policy. This has led to parliamentary boycotts, elections

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<sup>53</sup> Naum PANOVSKI, “Macedonia and its Hurdles on the Road to the EU”, p. 3, available at [www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/MR344Panovski.doc](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/MR344Panovski.doc)

<sup>54</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, quoted in POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 174

<sup>55</sup> PANOVSKI, “Macedonia and its Hurdles on the Road to the EU”, p. 1

marred by violence and MPs fighting inside the Parliament building – all in the last few years. Not exactly what is expected of a candidate country for the European Union. Then again, perhaps political maturity is too much to expect of parties that are, as the International Crisis Group declared, “more mechanisms for distribution of patronage and running election campaigns than real engines of democratic inclusion.”<sup>56</sup>

The political cleavages, especially between the ‘uneducated peasants’ of the IMRO and the ‘communist swine’ of the SDUM, are the principal reason for Macedonia’s domestic paralysis since independence, as well as for its failure to move out of Carothers’ state of ‘feckless pluralism’, mentioned previously. Such is the degree of enmity between the two major political parties that, until recently, Prime Minister Gruevski (IMRO) refused to meet President Crvenkovski (SDUM) unless both the EU Special Representative and the US Ambassador to Macedonia were present to mediate.<sup>57</sup> This embarrassingly inept situation finally came to an end in April of this year with the victory of IMRO-backed presidential candidate Gjorgji Ivanovski. However, Macedonia’s murky political waters aside, this is the time to examine why the country, instead of moving towards the EU since becoming a candidate, appears to have taken a step back.

The granting of candidate status in November 2005 produced an air of optimism within the Macedonian Sector for European Integration and the Office of the European Commission Delegation in Skopje. That optimism faded shortly after the victory of the centre-right IMRO-DPMNU in the parliamentary elections of July 2006. Olli Rehn, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, who had visited Macedonia in late 2005 to celebrate the candidacy, wrote after another visit in early 2007 that “the situation was less encouraging this time. Many reforms were bogged down... key reforms remained unimplemented.”<sup>58</sup> This view was echoed more than two years later in my interview with Mr Erwan Fouéré, current EU Special Representative to the Republic of Macedonia, who said that “if you look at the record of legislation, a lot of legislation has been passed that was on the list,

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<sup>56</sup> International Crisis Group, “Macedonia: Make or Break”, August 2004, p.1 at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2897&l=1>

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mr Erwan FOUÉRE, EU Special Representative to Macedonia

<sup>58</sup> Olli REHN, “The EU Keeps Its Door Open to South-East Europe”, in *CROSSROADS - The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal*, Issue 02/2007, p. 159

but it's just been a case of ticking off the boxes; they're not being implemented, and it's a big problem.”<sup>59</sup> Of course, this is partly due to the extremely weak capacity of the public administration to implement the EU’s *acquis*, which is a result of the long-established politicisation of virtually every aspect of Macedonia’s domestic life. For example, an acquaintance at the Sector for European Integration, who did not want to be named, informed me that 80% of employees there were removed and replaced with unqualified party affiliates following the elections of 2006. This, however, cannot be blamed solely on the IMRO, for it is a practice employed by all sides (it is well known that if a government changes, so do heads of schools and theatres!). Nevertheless, the issue is a key concern for the European Commission, whose 2008 Progress Report noted that the political criteria were yet to be met, that corruption was still rife, and that “measures need to be taken to ensure that recruitments into the civil service are free from undue political interference.”<sup>60</sup>

Commissioner Rehn also pointed out that the challenges of the journey towards the EU could only be met if “the political representatives stand united, 'together’”<sup>61</sup>, clearly referring to IMRO’s disturbing lack of interest in political dialogue since assuming power. Again, this was reiterated by Mr Fouéré, who said that “the main problem is a lack of awareness of this particular government on the need for political dialogue, spirit of consensus between all parties, of using their reinforced power more wisely, and not believing that, because they have an absolute majority, they can shove through whatever they want.”<sup>62</sup> In fact, the entire approach since 2006 has significantly reduced Macedonia’s EU perspective. A former Minister of Finance, Prime Minister Gruevski’s almost exclusive concentration on economic reform, though very encouraging, has been undertaken at the expense of the political dimension. This is why every single one of the three Commission Progress Reports since candidate status was granted have emphasised the failure to fulfil the political criteria as the main reason for not recommending the start of accession negotiations.<sup>63</sup> In view of the fact that the

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Mr Erwan FOUÉRE, EU Special Representative to Macedonia

<sup>60</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press\\_corner/key-documents/reports\\_nov\\_2008\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2008_en.htm)

<sup>61</sup> REHN, “The EU Keeps Its Door Open to South-East Europe”, p. 159

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Mr Erwan FOUÉRE

<sup>63</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press\\_corner/key-documents/reports\\_nov\\_2008\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2008_en.htm)

political aspect of the Copenhagen Criteria is arguably the most essential, or at least the most easily scrutinised, this failure of IMRO is distressing. As former EU Special Representative Michael Sahlin pointed out, the decision to grant the Republic of Macedonia candidate status in 2005, as well as recognising Macedonia's achievements and estimating the ability of its political system to fulfil its commitments as a partner (regardless of government), also, and perhaps more importantly, showed “an element of confidence in Macedonia's willingness and ability to respond constructively to the EU's enlargement pledge.”<sup>64</sup> That confidence has diminished substantially under the IMRO government, whose willingness and ability to take Macedonia into the European Union have been brought into question, not only by the opposition SDUM, but also by citizens' groups, something almost unprecedented in the country.

The most active and vocal of these groups is the Citizens for a European Macedonia (CEM), established in early 2009 by leading intellectuals and journalists, which has been holding regular conferences around the country in an attempt to initiate a grassroots debate on Macedonia's present state. Its European Macedonia Manifesto<sup>65</sup>, made public on 1 February 2009, invited those “who want to live in a European Macedonia – not in a neolithic, biblical, nor ancient Macedonia<sup>66</sup> – [to] join us in our struggle against the occupiers of our mind and spirit!”, saying that its struggle is “against the politicians who talk about ‘Europeanisation’ and the fight against corruption, but in fact enforce ‘Bucephalisation’<sup>67</sup> and corrupt the media, judges, academics and rectors.” It also laments the fact that “the budget of the secret police is bigger than the budget for fighting poverty and unemployment.” The CEM paints a dark and depressing picture of democracy and freedom of speech in the country, claiming that citizens are being subjected to daily political abuse by a jingoistic government that is ruling through fear, intimidation and the public derision of those who oppose it. It may have a point. On 28 March 2009, a peaceful student protest against the

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<sup>64</sup> SAHLIN, “The Role of Macedonia in the Emergence of EU Crisis Management”, p. 106

<sup>65</sup> Available at <http://www.gem.org.mk/component/content/article/46>

<sup>66</sup> Referring to IMRO's current drive to convince Macedonia's citizens that their roots stretch back to Alexander the Great.

<sup>67</sup> Referring to the number of statues of Alexander the Great, on his horse Bucephalus, that have been placed in town squares throughout Macedonia.



IMRO-sponsored construction of a church in Skopje's main square was suppressed when thugs verbally and physically abused the protesters, in full view of the police. It was claimed that the arrival of the thugs, who arrived on three buses, had been orchestrated by the government.<sup>68</sup> Following the incident, which shook the very foundations of Macedonia's European perspective, Nikola Gelevski, a founder member of CEM and a columnist for one of the broadsheet newspapers, attacked PM Gruevski directly, saying that he "has divided us into believers and non-believers, traitors and hyper-Macedonians, urbanites and villagers... every day of Gruevski's rule represents a serious and irreversible historical regression for Macedonia."<sup>69</sup>

From my own personal experience as a visitor and resident in the country over the last 17 years, I can say that the domestic atmosphere, just at the moment when the Republic of Macedonia is supposed to be awaiting its European dawn, feels more 'Balkan' than ever. Positions are polarised, the mood is one of 'you're with us or you're against us' and the citizens, in a country renowned for its 'grey economy',<sup>70</sup> and generally 'grey' state of affairs, are being convinced that all situations are either black or white. Thus, Macedonia is arguably its own worst obstacle at the present time. IMRO must work on finding common ground on the major issues facing the country, rather than aggressively pushing through its own initiatives without the consensus that is so crucial in order to guarantee legitimacy. The EU has been championing this approach for years, saying that "an effective and continuous dialogue between all political forces in order to attain broad consensus on crucial reforms is the condition *sine qua non* for the country to succeed on the reform path... There can be no excuse for rejecting dialogue. Nor can there be any excuse for any party to boycott Parliament, a practice which sadly this country has seen too much of in recent years. Such a practice undermines the very institution to which parties were elected, and reflects badly on the image of the country abroad and on its political maturity."<sup>71</sup> Macedonia's

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<sup>68</sup> Vladimir MILČIN, "Organised Repression in the Square", in *Utrinski Vesnik*, 31 March 2009

<sup>69</sup> Nikola GELEVSKI, "The Führer's Megaphones", article in *Utrinski Vesnik*, 31 March 2009

<sup>70</sup> CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/MK.html>

<sup>71</sup> Erwan FOUÉRE, "Meeting the Expectations and Fulfilling the Obligations – Macedonia and the EU Enlargement Strategy", in *CROSSROADS - The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal*, Issue: 02/2007, p. 201

political elite, however, are yet to listen, and yet to realise that at this juncture in the country's history, consensus and compromise are the only guarantee for success. Thus, if politicians in the Republic of Macedonia truly intend to 'get Macedonia into Europe', they will first need to learn the meaning of compromise. Unfortunately, any kind of compromise is traditionally regarded as a sign of weakness throughout the Balkans.

#### **4.1.2. The Ethnic Albanian Minority**

*"The problem is that the current government regards Macedonia's multi-ethnic composition as a curse, not an opportunity. They don't understand their own country. They shake the bridges between the communities that have been so laboriously built."*<sup>72</sup>

The above statement by Ljubomir Frčkoski, one of Macedonia's leading intellectuals and recent SDUM-supported presidential candidate, is true not only of the current IMRO government, but, I would argue, of all the governments that have been in power since Macedonia's independence. The sizeable ethnic Albanian minority resides primarily in the western part of the country, on the borders with Albania and Kosovo, and constitutes anywhere between 25% and 35% of the population, depending on whose statistics one reads. The official figure, according to the 2002 census, is 25.1%, or 509,083 of the 2,022,547 people living in the country.<sup>73</sup> Tension between the ethnic Albanian minority and the 'titular nation'<sup>74</sup>, as Stefan Troebst calls the majority Macedonians, has existed for decades, and was especially strong following the Kosovo riots of 1981, when the Yugoslav and Macedonian authorities openly repressed Macedonian Albanians. In the winter of 1991/1992, with the uncertainties surrounding the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, Albanian political parties appeared to be in favour of secession, while Albanian radicals in the west even organised a referendum on the creation of 'Ilirida', thus resurrecting images of the 'Greater Albania' that is so feared by the non-Albanian populations of Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia.<sup>75</sup> The horrific events in Bosnia, however, served to calm the calls for secession.

<sup>72</sup> Sam Vaknin interview with Ljubomir Frčkoski, at <http://samvak.tripod.com/frckoski.html>

<sup>73</sup> 2002 Census, available at [http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/kniga\\_13.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/kniga_13.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> TROEBST, *Der makedonische Jahrhundert*, p. 340

<sup>75</sup> The independence of Kosovo in February 2008 is regarded by many in the region as a step towards the realisation of this long-standing Albanian aspiration.

One of the main reasons for the heightened friction at the naissance of the new Macedonian state was its Constitution. Adopted in November 1991, it described the country as the “state of the Macedonian people, whereas the Albanians – who hoped to be treated on an equal footing with the Macedonians as one of the constitutive peoples of Macedonia – were mere ‘nationalities.’”<sup>76</sup> The Constitution also eliminated the former Yugoslav principle that minorities should be proportionally represented in public bodies, as well as the clause in the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution that permitted minorities to use their own language in units of government where they were the majority.<sup>77</sup> Thus, from the very beginning, “the state definition was that of a nation state, hence a referendum for a new constitution was boycotted by large parts of the ethnic Albanian minority, which also refused to participate politically in the first government and elections.”<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, due to the fact that large-scale armed conflict was avoided, the international community idealised the condition of ethnic relations in the country during the Nineties, and presented Macedonia as an example to other Balkan nations of a successful and functioning multi-cultural society. In reality, while the West interpreted the relative peace in Macedonia as a sign of social harmony, “the calm reflected only an unstable truce of parallel lives.”<sup>79</sup> There was a mutual understanding whereby police would not enter certain Albanian sections of western Macedonia, while the Albanians knew not to go to eastern parts of the country.

In 2001, this ‘unstable truce’ turned into an armed conflict which almost pushed the country into the abyss of a full-scale civil war. What began as a series of isolated terrorist attacks on Macedonian police stations by remnants of the disbanded ‘Kosovo Liberation Army’ (KLA), mutated into demands for greater rights for the ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia, under the banner of the so-called ‘National Liberation Army’ (NLA). Fortunately, open hostilities – despite lasting for most of the year – were generally isolated, and the conflict claimed no more than 150 lives, although an exact number of casualties, especially among the

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<sup>76</sup> Nadège RAGARU, “Macedonia: between Ohrid and Brussels”, (Sciences Po, CERI/CNRS – Centre d’études et de recherches internationales, 2007), p. 6

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> SCHENKER, “Macedonia – The Imperative of Success”, p. 246

<sup>79</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 172

insurgents, remained uncertain.<sup>80</sup> While the government branded the conflict as nothing more than a relocation of the KLA's terrorist activities onto the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, the NLA had in fact ultimately managed to attract support from disenfranchised local Albanians, who increasingly joined "their mixed bag of KLA veterans, pan-Albanian romantics, opportunists and criminals."<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, whether or not the reason for the conflict was truly to champion the rights of the ethnic Albanian is of little importance; Macedonians need to come to terms with the fact that there were indeed legitimate grievances on the Albanian side, which were addressed in the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), signed in August 2001.

Having learnt from its failure to provide any kind of meaningful response to the Bosnian war, the EU was quick to intervene in the crisis and was instrumental in brokering the OFA ceasefire, which was the first tangible success of its Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Agreement set the groundwork for improving the rights of the ethnic Albanian population by including provisions for amendments to the Constitution of 1991 to reflect the role of the Albanians as a constituent ethnicity, introducing affirmative action quotas in higher education and state employment (especially in the security forces), and altering the official languages of the country in order to include Albanian.<sup>82</sup> It essentially transformed the state from a nation state in the making into a multi-national structure, and the changes made to the Constitution, even though they should have been part of the original document ten years earlier, represented a new beginning for the country. Of course, Macedonians on the street still regard the OFA as a loss in a zero-sum game, and fail to understand that the path to membership of the European Union would have required virtually the exact same changes. They are arguably angrier over the manner in which the changes were enforced, than the changes themselves. Nonetheless, the OFA "is the only state-reaffirming, functional compact ever signed in the Balkans. All other agreements dealt with post-traumatic outcomes of state dissolution and the ensuing confusion."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> One publicised figure cited 63 deaths among the Macedonian security forces and 64 among the 'NLA'. See <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/trae/archive/data/200112/11230-003-trae-sko.htm>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> RAGARU, "Macedonia: between Ohrid and Brussels", p. 9

<sup>83</sup> Frčkoski interview, at <http://samvak.tripod.com/frckoski.html>

However, while the OFA was successful in ending a conflict which had the potential to slide into civil war, it was unable to transform inter-ethnic relations *au fond*, since ethnicity remains a force in the country's political debates. Ethnicity continues to matter, even though all citizens agree that unemployment is the most serious issue facing the country.<sup>84</sup> Hence, despite the fact that the Agreement has been relatively successfully implemented, ethnic tensions and distrust are still high, mainly due to the churlish and immature manoeuvres of the dominant political parties on both sides. Politically, while there is indeed co-existence, “the mere co-existence between the political communities does not allow for the internalisation of shared norms”<sup>85</sup>, since they are co-acting rather than interacting. The same is true of the social sphere. Macedonia truly is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, in the sense that those cultures and ethnicities simply do not mix. Interaction is kept to the bare minimum, and mingling between ethnic groups, outside of business hours, is practically unheard of, almost taboo. The divide is accentuated further because the cleavage is not only ethnic, but also religious, cultural and linguistic, and is in no small measure due to the fact that the “overwhelming majority of Albanians in Macedonia form a highly traditional community isolated from almost all other sections of society. There are thus very few lines of communication between Albanians and Macedonians in the country.”<sup>86</sup> This I can confirm from my own experience of living there. True inter-ethnic friendships are rare, particularly among the younger generation, which is warned against going to the Albanian parts of town, let alone having an Albanian friend.

Furthermore, the real difficulty for Macedonia may lie not in what the OFA resolved, but in the potential problems that it has created. This is because it is “widely perceived by many Macedonians as being the ceiling for the accommodation of [the] Albanians in the state, whereas many Albanians consider the agreement as the floor for building future relations.”<sup>87</sup> It is highly likely that this

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<sup>84</sup> See UNDP Early Warning Report, June 2007, pp. 48-49 available at <http://www.ewr.org.mk/reports/EWR%20June%202007%20-%20ENG.pdf>

<sup>85</sup> Alexander KLEIBRINK, “Federalism in the Balkans: Doomed to Fail?”, in *L'Europe en Formation*, no. 349-350 (CIFE, automne-hiver 2008), p. 78/79

<sup>86</sup> TROEBST, *Der makedonische Jahrhundert*, p. 350

<sup>87</sup> Florian BIEBER, “The OFA After Seven Years”, in *Power Sharing and the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement*, (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - Macedonia Office, 2008), p. 208

difference in perception will lead to renewed and perhaps more acute tension in the future. One area which may provide the spark is decentralisation, one of the key aspects of the OFA. Although it is also a necessary requirement for EU membership, Macedonia's decentralisation process has proven to be extremely problematic, since it has involved a redefinition of municipal boundaries, which has inevitably been conducted along ethnic lines. As Schenker points out, "by drawing ethnic municipalities, the danger of a further segregation of the population has become imminent. The international community did nothing to prevent this trend, leaving the decision fully in the hands of politicians, whose short-term interest in political and financial profit is obvious, but whose capacity of a larger political vision combined with the capacity of imposing this vision is clearly lacking."<sup>88</sup> Similar disturbing aspects, such as the recent decision by a high school in Struga, south-western Macedonia, to establish segregated teaching as a solution to the frequent inter-ethnic fighting among pupils, show that the OFA is far from being the all-encompassing answer to the country's inter-ethnic problems, as it is usually presented. On the contrary, consisting of a mere four pages, it only addressed basic legal and institutional issues, but did not "provide for mechanisms and tools to build inter-communal trust and support for the institutions [that it] created or transformed."<sup>89</sup>

Nevertheless, the most worrying aspect of the 2001 conflict is that some Macedonians, seemingly having forgotten the horrors of Bosnia, believe that a full scale war would have been a good thing, because it would have 'cleared the air'. Despite the signing of the OFA, the vast majority of citizens in Macedonia feel that the crisis is yet to run its course, as highlighted by a survey conducted by the International Commission on the Balkans in 2005, in which a staggering 76% said that they expected new military conflicts.<sup>90</sup> Such surveys indicate that Macedonia's citizens themselves regard their country as the most vulnerable place in the Balkans, thus underscoring the omnipresent fear of the future that exists there. In addition, Ljubčo Georgievski, the eccentric, pro-Bulgarian former Prime Minister who signed the OFA and later said that he was coerced into doing so,

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<sup>88</sup> Harald SCHENKER, "Macedonia – The Imperative of Success", p. 252

<sup>89</sup> BIEBER, "The OFA After Seven Years", p. 210

<sup>90</sup> Report of the International Commission on the Balkans, "The Balkans in Europe's Future", p. 46

now proclaims that the only salvation for Macedonia lies in its partition, i.e. the secession of its western part. This is why the issue of security is so important to the Republic of Macedonia, and makes it all the more frustrating that the country failed to become a member of NATO at its 2008 Bucharest Summit as a result of the Greek veto, the reasons for which will be examined in detail in the next section. Entry into the world's foremost security organisation would have secured Macedonia's borders and meant a much calmer and more predictable Albanian section. Instead, Greece's veto has turned the country into a sitting duck, vulnerable to internal and external attack, and liable at any moment to create the tremendous 'fireball' that it is capable of.

However, as Walter Andrusyszyn, the deputy representative of the United States in NATO, pointed out in a recent interview for BBC World Service - Macedonian Section, the commonly held assertions that delaying Macedonia's EU and NATO entry will only endanger the stability of the country, may in fact be having the opposite effect to the one intended. "By saying that non-entry in the EU and NATO will lead to civil unrest, you are only scaring the majority of Member States, instead of convincing them to accept you."<sup>91</sup> This is a valid point. No organisation, let alone the EU or NATO, is likely to admit a speculative member as a result of some kind of emotional or moral blackmail. Therefore, in order to repair its domestic potholes, the Republic of Macedonia must find its own solutions to its own problems. It is time for it to recall the words of Gotse Delchev, the hero of the Macedonian cause against the Ottoman Empire, who said that "the liberation of Macedonia lies in internal revolution, without any assistance from abroad". The country is in desperate need of a social revolution for a uniting cause, but while it is obvious that EU membership is that cause, the country-wide consensus necessary to achieve it is still lacking.

Domestic potholes such as these are simply too large for Macedonia to avoid; they must be repaired. While it has heard the EU say on many occasions that compromise and consensus are the keys to successfully negotiating the road to the European Union, it is now time for the country to actually listen.

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<sup>91</sup> Available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/05/090505\\_andrusizin.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/05/090505_andrusizin.shtml)

## **4.2. Potholes its neighbours have created**

*“Despite all their differences, one feature is common for all Balkan interpretations of the Macedonian identity – be they Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian or Macedonian: none of them recognises the importance of historical change, in either the past or the present, or both are evaluated exclusively in ‘moral’ terms.”<sup>92</sup>*

The Republic of Macedonia has been under attack since the very first day of its independence. In what seemed to be a re-emergence of the century-old ‘Macedonian Question’, its appearance on the international scene as a sovereign state was greeted by its neighbours with impartiality (Albania; which welcomed it as “a counterweight to Serbia and an irritant to Greece”<sup>93</sup>), dissatisfaction (Serbia and Bulgaria) and open hostility (Greece). After all, as “the bloodiest venue of the very bloody Balkan wars that presaged World War I”<sup>94</sup>, the territory on which it stood had been the reason for fierce conflict between Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece earlier in the century. These same three countries, to varying degrees, created, and continue to create, serious potholes to the true consolidation of a Macedonian state.

Serbia, despite having strong historical and familial links to the country, did not fully recognise the Republic of Macedonia until April 1996, four and a half years after its independence. Nevertheless, it has been closer to a friend than an enemy, and the only remaining problem is the bitter feud between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox Churches, with the former viewing the latter as a renegade and not recognising the autocephaly that it declared in 1967.

Bulgaria, which has historically had the most direct designs on Macedonia – as shown by the fact that in both World Wars it joined the side that offered it the biggest share of the region – generally accepts the name ‘Macedonia’ as the name of the state, but unanimously rejects that a separate Macedonian nation and language existed before 1944 (i.e. its incorporation into Yugoslavia). Despite having been the first country to recognise the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, “Bulgarians either deny the contemporary reality of a Macedonian

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<sup>92</sup> Kyril DREZOV, “Macedonian identity: an overview of the major claims”, in *The New Macedonian Question*, p. 55

<sup>93</sup> PETTIFER, “The New Macedonian Question”, p. 21

<sup>94</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 169



nation and language, or – when they do acknowledge it – ascribe it entirely to Serbian, Comintern and Titoist propaganda.”<sup>95</sup> Most recently, Bulgaria has even threatened that it may use its power of veto in NATO and the EU, following Greece’s example, if Macedonia does not take into account certain “historical, cultural and other realities connected to the geographical area of Macedonia”.<sup>96</sup>

However, it is unquestionably Greece, whose reaction to the independence of the Republic of Macedonia was, and continues to be, nothing short of hysterical, that has created the most serious problems. Though most European countries were willing to aid the new state, Greece resolutely refused to recognise the country, claiming that the Republic of Macedonia represented a threat to Greek national security. Greece justified its objection on three grounds: firstly, that the name ‘Macedonia’ was a ‘usurpation’, since it was also the name of Greece’s northern province and was “part of Greece’s national and historical heritage”<sup>97</sup>; secondly, that the flag of the new country, which depicted the ‘Sun of Vergina’ (a symbol associated with the ancient kingdom of Macedonia), was also a ‘usurpation’ of Greek national symbols; and thirdly, that the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia contained articles that indicated territorial claims against Greece’s northern province of Macedonia.<sup>98</sup> It was clear that Greece, faced with the prospect of becoming the sole dominant power in the Balkans following Yugoslavia’s dissolution, chose the path of escalating tension in the region rather than encouraging stability and good-neighbourly relations. “Instead of drawing the ‘fragile and non-threatening’ Macedonians into a close alliance, [Greece] provoked nationalist feeling by aggravating fears over alleged Macedonian expansionism.”<sup>99</sup> Analysts argued that the Greek government was doing so in order to acquire domestic political support from the increased national fervour<sup>100</sup>, and while the majority of EU Member States proceeded to recognise the Republic

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 51

<sup>96</sup> “A Bulgarian kick for Macedonia?”, *Nova Makedonija* daily newspaper, 19/12/2008, front page

<sup>97</sup> See official position on the name issue on the website of the Greek Foreign Ministry, at <http://www2.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/en-US/Policy/Geographic+Regions/SouthEastern+Europe/Balkans/Bilateral+Relations/FYROM/FYROM+-+THE+NAME+ISSUE.htm>

<sup>98</sup> Constantin STEFANOU and Helen XANTHAKI, *A Legal and Political Interpretation of Article 224 and 225 of the Treaty of Rome: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Cases* (Ashgate, Dartmouth, 1997), p. 33

<sup>99</sup> SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 281

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

of Macedonia, Greece prevented the country from entering the United Nations and then imposed a full trade embargo on the fledgling state, in “an attempt to stop the situation from escalating to war”.<sup>101</sup>

The economic embargo began on 16 February 1994, as a last attempt by Greece to deal with the issue of Macedonia. Unconvinced of Greece’s reasoning, the embargo was condemned by the EU, and the Commission took Greece to the European Court of Justice for allowing national measures to affect trade within the EU Common Market.<sup>102</sup> Greece justified the move by saying that Article 49 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia made irredentist claims on Greek territory and gave its northern neighbour the right to interfere in the internal affairs of Greece. A quick look at the article in question shows that its claims were unfounded. Article 49 stated that:

- (1) The Republic cares for<sup>103</sup> the status and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighbouring countries, as well as Macedonian expatriates, assists their cultural development and promotes links with them. *In the exercise of this concern the Republic will not interfere in the sovereign rights of other states or in their internal affairs.* (emphasis added)
- (2) The Republic cares for<sup>104</sup> the cultural, economic and social rights of the citizens of the Republic abroad.<sup>105</sup>

It is clear that the Article that Greece claimed provided Macedonia with a blank irredentist cheque in fact specifically affirmed that the country would **not** interfere in the affairs of other states. In his essay “Macedonia: Europe's Finger in the Dike”, William Dunn, a US political analyst, pointed out not only that the Macedonian Constitution had been amended in 1992 as a result of the

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<sup>101</sup> STEFANOUE and XANTHAKI, *Legal and Political Interpretation*, p. 2

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39

<sup>103</sup> The English translation of the Macedonian original is considered unsatisfactory by Patricia Marsh-Stefanovska, the translation editor of the Constitution. A better phrase might be “has concern for”.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia,  
[http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/mk00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/mk00000_.html)

recommendations of the then European Community's Badinter Commission (which concluded that the country had fulfilled all the necessary criteria for recognition), but also that parts of Article 49 were almost identical to Article 108 of the Greek constitution!<sup>106</sup>

In any case, the Article was amended under the UN-brokered Interim Accord of 13 September 1995, signed by the countries without reference to their names<sup>107</sup>, which ended the Greek embargo and persuaded the European Commission to drop its case against Greece. This bilateral agreement obliged Macedonia to change its flag and declare that no parts of its constitution could be interpreted as providing the basis for territorial claims, while Greece undertook to recognise its northern neighbour's independence and statehood (but not its constitutional name), and vowed not to obstruct its future entry into international organisations, as long as it used the name "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", its title in the UN.<sup>108</sup> Shortly after the signing of the Accord, Greece became the single biggest investor in Macedonia.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, while the Interim Accord went a long way to stabilising bilateral relations between the two neighbours, it did not address the issue of Macedonia's name – the problem that still haunts the country and is now undoubtedly the single biggest and deepest pothole that Macedonia must negotiate.

#### **4.2.1. The Name Dispute**

*"When I arrived in 2005, the positions were not so entrenched, there was a general feeling that yes, it will need to be resolved, but there seemed to be a certain amount of flexibility in the mind set of both sides. Now the situation has become so deeply polarised that it's much more difficult."*<sup>110</sup>

Erwan Fouéré, EU Special Representative to the Republic of Macedonia

The controversy over the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia has taken on the characteristics of a David Lynch film in the international community; nobody really seems to understand it, but everybody is talking about it. Greece's frenzied opposition to Macedonia's name forced the

<sup>106</sup> SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 297

<sup>107</sup> Instead, the Interim Accord only refers to the 'First Party' and the 'Second Party'.

<sup>108</sup> STEFANO and XANTHAKI, *Legal and Political Interpretation*, p. 36

<sup>109</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 170

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Mr Erwan Fouéré, EU Special Representative to the Republic of Macedonia

country to agree to the reference ‘Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ in order to gain UN membership in 1993. Though intended to be provisional, and only for use within the UN, Greece has ensured that all international organisations use this reference, or official Greece’s preferred acronym ‘FYROM’. Neutral commentators, such as historian Norman Davies, have commented that equally useful would have been the mnemonic “‘FOPITGROBBSOSY’ – ‘Former Province of Illyria, Thrace, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Bulgaria, Serbia, the Ottoman Empire, Serbia and Yugoslavia’”.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, in 2003, David Cameron, prior to becoming the leader of the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom, saw the farce for what it was and vowed to refer to the EU partner country as FOPOG, or “the former Ottoman possession of Greece”<sup>112</sup>. It will indeed be interesting to see if he publicly reiterates the same view if the Conservatives win the UK general election next year as expected, and Cameron becomes Prime Minister. However, while it may be fun for neutral observers to de-construct and poke fun at the name issue, for the Republic of Macedonia, and its citizens, it is now anything but a laughing matter.

In 2008, this political and bilateral dispute was the only reason why Macedonia was denied entry into NATO, despite having fulfilled all of the necessary criteria and having expected to enter under the reference that Greece had chosen for her in 1993. Curiously, Greece did not object to the fact that for years Macedonian soldiers had been fighting as part of NATO operations in Afghanistan (carrying the name ‘Macedonia’ on their uniforms), nor to the fact that Macedonia was proportionally involved approximately thirty times more in NATO operations than Greece.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, Greece’s veto at the Bucharest Summit, which it should be noted was a clear violation of the 1995 Interim Accord that stipulated that Greece would not obstruct Macedonia’s entry into international organisations, signalled a new chapter in its desperation to enforce its will on its neighbour, considering that over 120 countries in the world had recognised the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name by the time

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<sup>111</sup> DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 135

<sup>112</sup> David CAMERON, “The Macedonian Job”, *The Guardian*, 10 September 2003

<sup>113</sup> Antonio MILOŠOSKI, “Macedonian Perspectives and Challenges”, in *Political Thought*, Journal no. 22, (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Skopje, June 2008), p. 58

of the Summit.<sup>114</sup> The veto left Macedonia out in the cold and frustrated, since NATO membership is seen as a vital precursor for accession to the EU, where Greece also threatens to use its veto unless Macedonia changes its name. The dispute, therefore, is the largest pothole on Macedonia's road, as stated by Bernard Kouchner, the Foreign Minister of France, who said that "the problem of Macedonia, it's the name... Frankly, you can ask me about visas and about progress [towards the EU]; as long as the name issue is not solved, you are knocking on the wrong door. This problem must be solved."<sup>115</sup>

In order to attempt to better understand the problem, it is necessary to delve into history and geography for a moment. As Annex 3 shows, geographical Macedonia, over which the 'Macedonian Question' was disputed, stretches far beyond the borders of the Republic of Macedonia. This is because, following numerous treaties, two Balkan wars and World War I, it was divided into three regions: 'Pirin Macedonia', which became a part of Bulgaria, 'Vardar Macedonia', which went to Yugoslavia and is now the Republic of Macedonia, and 'Aegean Macedonia', the lion's share (with 52% of the original area), which became a part of Greece.<sup>116</sup> Thus, one of Greece's main objections to the new Macedonian state was that it might, simply because of its name, somehow attempt to incorporate all of geographical Macedonia into one state, under its leadership. The mere use of the name, Greece asserted, represented a threat of war. However, military analysts found it impossible to corroborate Greece's fear, judging by the fact that at the time of its independence, the new Army of the Republic of Macedonia had 10,000 soldiers, 75% of whom were conscripts, and four Second World War T34 tanks.<sup>117</sup> As Shea points out, "it is unrealistic to think that a tiny nation of little more than two million people, with no heavy arms, no air force and no navy, could be a threat to the Greeks, who have been supplied and supported in their armed forces by NATO and the United States to the tune of billions of

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<sup>114</sup> [http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=311&film\\_ID=4&slide\\_ID=26](http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=311&film_ID=4&slide_ID=26)

<sup>115</sup> "Macedonia Name Dispute 'Holds Hostage' EU Credibility", *EU Observer*, 9/12/2008, available at <http://euobserver.com/9/27255>

<sup>116</sup> Elisabeth BARKER, *Macedonia: Its Place in Balkan Power Politics*, (Broadwater Press, London, 1950), p. 20

<sup>117</sup> TROEBST, *Der makedonische Jahrhundert*, p. 340

dollars.”<sup>118</sup> Besides, in 1992, the Badinter Commission, entrusted by the European Community to examine every aspect of Macedonia’s independence, in recommending Macedonia’s recognition specifically declared that “the use of the name ‘Macedonia’ cannot... imply any territorial claim against another State”<sup>119</sup>; a statement which Greece clearly chose to ignore.

Greece’s fears really did, and still do, appear illogical; justifying the English phrase “It’s all Greek to me!”, when faced with something that is not understandable. The fears are therefore full of contradictions. For example, Greece excuses its blocking tactics over Macedonia’s EU and NATO accession by stating that it is an unstable state, but how can an internally unstable country possibly be an external threat? In addition, even if the Republic of Macedonia did represent a threat, it is generally agreed that there is no better way to guarantee one’s own security than to have one’s neighbour in NATO. Finally, in a 2008 interview for Greek television ERT, Minister of Culture Antonis Samaras, an extreme hardliner on the name dispute and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, while wrongly stating that the Macedonian Constitution contained articles that allowed Parliament to extend the country’s borders, said that Macedonia was clearly irredentist and that he believed that “soon Skopje<sup>120</sup> will not exist as a single entity, which means that time is on our side”. Upon being asked by the journalist whether such an outcome would in fact be beneficial for Greece, since it would lead to further unrest, border changes and a greater Albania and Bulgaria, Samaras replied that “it will not change anything... We are much more numerous, much more powerful and much more developed, and there is absolutely no reason to be afraid.”<sup>121</sup> The contradiction is more than obvious, in view of the fact that the Greek position revolves around imagined irredentist aggression from the north.

Greece’s other main objection is that the use of the name ‘Macedonia’ “constitutes a ‘felony’, an act of ‘plagiarism’ against the Greek people. By calling themselves ‘Macedonians’ these ‘Slavs of Skopje’ are ‘stealing’ or ‘hijacking’ a

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<sup>118</sup> SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 12

<sup>119</sup> Thomas D. GRANT, *The Recognition of States*, (Praeger Publishers, Westport, 1999), p. 162

<sup>120</sup> Another favoured way for official Greece to refer to its northern neighbour.

<sup>121</sup> Samaras, ERT interview, 15 March 2008 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dioYMAxQQuo>

Greek name; they are 'embezzling' or 'appropriating' Greek culture and heritage; they are 'falsifying' Greek history."<sup>122</sup> This is because, as the website of Greece's Ministry of Foreign Affairs states, the 2.5 million Greek citizens that live in the Greek part of Macedonia "have called and considered themselves Macedonians since time immemorial."<sup>123</sup> At this juncture, it is extremely important to point out that the Greek claims concerning Macedonia's name are a very new political development, since prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, Greece preferred not to use the name at all. As Peter Hill, Professor of Slavonic Studies at the University of Hamburg pointed out for an Australian newspaper in 1992, "funnily enough, northern Greece was for many years called just that, "Northern Greece"... and the name Macedonia was considered somehow suspect... But three years ago that all changed."<sup>124</sup> Shortly after the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, Greece began using the catchphrase "Macedonia – 4,000 years of Greek civilisation" as a domestic rallying cry against 'Skopjans' and as a foreign propaganda tool, in order to cover up the fact that the presence of Greeks as a majority in Aegean Macedonia only goes back to the third decade of the twentieth century.<sup>125</sup> Greece now claims that the region "has one of the most homogeneous populations in the world (98.5% Greek)."<sup>126</sup> While rightly pointing out that the percentage is an exaggeration, Shea nevertheless asks the more important question of just how northern Greece became so 'ethnically pure'. "There is no dispute that this happened through a process of exiling tens of thousands of Slavic-speaking Macedonians, both Christian and Muslim, and resettling hundreds of thousands of Greek speakers from Asia Minor and Armenia... Today, we would call this ethnic cleansing."<sup>127</sup> Could it be this skeleton in Greece's closet that is driving its aggressive foreign policy towards the Republic of Macedonia, knowing that its

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<sup>122</sup> Loring DANFORTH, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World*, (Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 34

<sup>123</sup> <http://www2.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/en-US/Policy/Geographic+Regions/South-Eastern+Europe/Balkans/Bilateral+Relations/FYROM/FYROM+-+THE+NAME+ISSUE.htm>

<sup>124</sup> Peter Hill quoted in the *Canberra Times* in 1992, in SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 8

<sup>125</sup> According to statistics in Elisabeth Barker's *Macedonia: Its Place in Balkan Power Politics* (p. 12), the Greek population increased from 300,000 in 1912, at the time of the Balkan Wars, to 1,237,000 in the 1928 Greek census.

<sup>126</sup> SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 6

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15/16

neighbour's accession to the European Union could lead to thousands of claims for property in northern Greece by people exiled nearly a century ago?

Indeed, Greece's own attempts at nation building are the key to understanding its policy towards Macedonia, since it has gone to great lengths to establish an identity separate from its Balkan neighbours; one which stresses ethnic and linguistic purity and underlines the links with the glory of ancient Greece. Any threats to this model are swiftly condemned and ignored. For example, in May 2009, Greece once again avoided recognising a distinct Turkish minority on its territory by refusing to register the NGO "Turkish Union of Xanthi", in spite of the final ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. The Greek position is that the Union cannot have the word 'Turkish' in its title, because Greece has only a 'Muslim', not 'Turkish' minority.<sup>128</sup> The case is very similar to that of the NGO "Home of Macedonian Culture", which was established in 1990, but is yet to be registered by the Greek courts even though the ECHR has ruled against Greece on two occasions.<sup>129</sup> The reason, of course, is the Greek government's vehement denial that a Slavic-speaking Macedonian community even exists in Greece. This is because "Greeks, like many other Balkan peoples, tend to view themselves only as innocent victims (of Turks, Bulgarians, 'Skopejans'), and find it difficult to accept the idea that a sizeable part of present-day Northern Greece was not 'liberated'..., but was, rather, conquered by the Greeks against the will of the local population, most of which was either slaughtered or expelled."<sup>130</sup>

The issue of minorities is undoubtedly Greece's Achilles heel. In 1994, Anastasia Karakasidou, a Greek scholar, even received death threats following her work "Politicising Culture: Negating Ethnic Identity in Greek Macedonia", in which she revealed the existence of a Slavic-speaking minority in Northern Greece.<sup>131</sup> This Slavic-speaking minority in 'Aegean Macedonia' is unquestionably the real reason for Greece's hostility towards Macedonia over the

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<sup>128</sup> "Greece defies ECHR ruling and refuses to register Turkish organization", 29 May 2009, [www.eurolang.net](http://www.eurolang.net)

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> DREZOV, "Macedonian identity", p. 49

<sup>131</sup> SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 127, see also <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letter-free-speech-and-human-rights-for-all-macedonians-in-greece-1436418.html>



name, and was confirmed in 1995 by Constantine Mitsotakis, the Greek Prime Minister at the time, who said that “what concerned me from the very first moment was not the name of the state. The problem for me was that [we should not allow] the creation of a second minority problem in the area of [Greek] Macedonia [the first minority being the Turkish-speaking Greeks of western Thrace]. My main aim was to convince the Republic to declare that there is no Slavo-Macedonian minority in Greece. This was the real key of our difference with Skopje.”<sup>132</sup> Therefore, Greece perceives the name ‘Macedonia’ as a threat because recognising a neighbouring state with that name would mean the de facto admission of the existence of a “Slavic minority in Greece, with a possible flow-on to the issue of property ownership”<sup>133</sup> by the people that it expelled at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Clearly, then, the name dispute is about much more than just the name. In fact, Greek demands are without precedent, both in history and international law, since no similar disputes arose over the name of the Belgian province of ‘Luxembourg’, or the Mexican state of ‘California’, or the Romanian region named ‘Moldova’, among many other examples. However, an increased awareness in the international community that Greece’s position is based on illogicality, the need to represent an image of cultural purity and the denial of the human rights of its minorities, has not helped to resolve the issue. On the contrary, it has made Greece more fanatical, as shown by the veto at the NATO Summit.

Nevertheless, the Republic of Macedonia cannot avoid all responsibility for the fact that the name dispute has become so critical to its security and its future, since it has fallen into the trap of responding to Greece’s irrationally aggressive behaviour. Since taking power in 2006, the IMRO government has conducted a domestic campaign that has been nothing short of embarrassing, and an easy source of ridicule for critics of Macedonia. The country’s tiny and dilapidated airport was renamed ‘Alexander the Great’, as was the major motorway to Greece, while Skopje’s City Stadium is now called ‘National Arena Phillip II’. Marble statues, excavated during archaeological digs, have been placed

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<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Tom GALLAGHER, *The Balkans In The New Millennium: in the shadow of war and peace*, (Routledge, London, 2005), p. 6

<sup>133</sup> SHEA, *Macedonia and Greece*, p. 133

outside the steel and glass government building, and badly designed statues of Alexander the Great on his horse, Bucephalus, have been popping up in every town. Serious political miscalculations such as these have only served to create more animosity and have given more arguments to the Greek side, leading intellectuals within Macedonia, frustrated at the lack of progress, to state that “the unquestionably racist and extremely nationalistic policy of Greece has found its ideal accomplice in PM Gruevski. There is no partner more suitable than Gruevski to maintain the high national temperature in Greece.”<sup>134</sup> In a similar vein, Bruce Jackson, the alleged brain behind NATO policy in the Balkans, called Greek PM Karamanlis and PM Gruevski a “historical incident”<sup>135</sup>, illustrating the fact that the enmity between the two countries has reached new heights since their centre-right parties came to power in 2004 and 2006 respectively. Perhaps the fact that Karamanlis originates from Aegean Macedonia and that Gruevski’s grandfather lived and died in the region<sup>136</sup> serves to explain the escalation in animosity.

Whatever the reasons, the dispute has reached an impasse, and is consequently holding Macedonia’s Euro-Transatlantic progress hostage. Resolution of the issue is now problematic for two reasons: Greece’s lack of motivation to find a solution and Macedonia’s lack of willingness to actually confront the problem. Firstly, it has become apparent that Greece has very little interest in resolving the issue, as shown by its recent refusal to accept Macedonia’s proposal of the name ‘Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)’, despite the fact that it accepted it in 2005.<sup>137</sup> This refusal was made on the grounds of Greece’s new requirement that Macedonia’s future name must also be used to refer to its language and nationality; something which it knows is not only impracticable, but also unacceptable for the Republic of Macedonia. As Antonio Milošoski, the Macedonian Foreign Minister, told me in an interview, “it would help immensely if Greece stopped asking for any agreed name to include

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<sup>134</sup> Nikola GELEVSKI, “The Führer's Megaphones”, in *Utrinski Vesnik*, 31 March 2009

<sup>135</sup> The European Right is of no Use to Macedonia”, *Utrinski Vesnik*, Macedonian daily newspaper, 9 June 2009

<sup>136</sup> Walter MAYR, “Macedonia's Identity Crisis”, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,614268-2,00.html>

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Antonio Milošoski, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, 16 April 2009

references to the Macedonian language and nationality”<sup>138</sup>, which is exactly why Greece now demands it. Nevertheless, its desire to keep the dispute open is due to three reasons: firstly, to prevent Macedonia’s EU and NATO accession in order to maintain its current position of strength in the negotiations, knowing full well that it will be unable to blackmail Macedonia in the same way if it is an equal member of the organisations; secondly, to avoid dealing with the minority issue in Greece, which will come hot on the heels of a resolution on the name; and thirdly, as Greek sociologist Michael Kelpanides has said, because the dispute is a “convenient tool for politicians in Athens to attract voters and divert attention away from the country's real problems. Twenty-eight years after joining the EU, Greece is still the union's biggest net recipient of cash, and its national debt as a percentage of GDP is second only to Italy's. The average wage in Greece corresponds to the average wage in Poland, and when it comes to corruption and illiteracy, the Greeks are near the bottom of the heap of EU countries.”<sup>139</sup> Therefore, why would Greece want to resolve the issue when there are so many good reasons not to?

Secondly, Macedonia’s lack of willingness to face the issue head on is evident in the manner in which the IMRO government has acted ever since Greece used its veto in Bucharest. Instead of initiating a cross-party and nationwide discussion on the dispute in order to find a consensus immediately after the Summit, the government decided to dissolve Parliament and call an early general election; effectively putting the most pressing issue for the country on the back burner, at the precise moment that it became clear that it *had to* be resolved. The government also decided to take Greece before the International Court of Justice in The Hague for violating the Interim Accord of 1995 by vetoing Macedonia’s NATO membership, which, although fully justified, only concerns the violation, not the name. PM Gruevski has said that he is willing to wait three to five years for a judgement in the ICJ case before taking any further steps in the negotiations on the name.<sup>140</sup> This is clearly too much time to waste at such a crucial point in Macedonia’s history.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Kelpanides, quoted in Walter MAYR, “Macedonia's Identity Crisis”

<sup>140</sup> *XO Political Show*, interview with PM Gruevski, A1 Macedonian Television, 29 December

Furthermore, the issue of the name is simply too big for any Macedonian government to want to tackle, since it knows that it must compromise and is aware that doing so will guarantee defeat at the next elections. This is why the IMRO government is insisting that any resolution of the name issue will need to be confirmed by a referendum, even though it has virtually no chance of being approved. For example, according to reliable surveys, 69.9% refuse to change the name for membership in NATO, despite the fact that 85.2% support Macedonia's accession into the organisation.<sup>141</sup> Macedonian citizens must learn quickly that one cannot always have one's cake and eat it, especially in the murky world of international politics. Unfortunately, there is little hope that they will learn this before it is too late, and a change is forced upon them.

As Sam Vaknin, an American political analyst living in Skopje, writes, Macedonia's reaction to the problem is natural, because "faced with an unprecedented choice between their identity and their future, Macedonians resort to a classic psychological defence mechanism: denial."<sup>142</sup> However, it is clear that this pothole is too big to avoid or drive over. It can only be negotiated through compromise, despite the fact that Greece's continual change of position makes this all the more difficult. In fact, Greece's ability to increase its demands and move position is another major problem in the dispute. As Foreign Minister Milošoski pointed out, "the name dispute is an asymmetric problem. For them it's political, for us it's national."<sup>143</sup> Indeed, even if geographical Macedonia were truly an important part of Greece's history, Greece does not depend on the name 'Macedonia' as the sole identifier of Greek nationality. The Republic of Macedonia does. As Frčkoski put it, the country is "going through a process that other nations have traversed in the past: trawling through history to construct [its] identity. Whatever being Macedonian means, [it] cannot be anything but."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Dr. Natasha GABER-DAMJANOVSKA and Dr. Aneta JOVEVSKA, "BAROMETER: Current Events and Political Party Development in the Republic of Macedonia", Issue 19, (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, December 2008), p. 43

<sup>142</sup> Sam VAKNIN, "Macedonians in Denial about the Name Dispute with Greece", available at <http://www.globalpolitician.com/25673-macedonia-greece-nato-european-union>

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Antonio Milošoski, 16 April 2009

<sup>144</sup> Ljubomir Frčkovski interviewed by Sam Vaknin, at <http://samvak.tripod.com/frckoski.html>

Needless to say, this issue has drained an excessive amount of diplomatic and political energy from the Republic of Macedonia, especially since Greece elevated it from its bilateral dimension into a criterion for membership of NATO and the EU. A new round of negotiations is scheduled for the beginning of July 2009, and Matthew Nimetz, the UN mediator, has said that he feels that “this is the right time to resolve the dispute”<sup>145</sup>, because it is in the interest of both countries and because there are no distractions, such as the recent European Parliament elections in Greece. Nevertheless, whilst Mr Nimetz’s confidence is commendable, particularly in light of the fact that this is his tenth year as mediator, it is difficult to share his optimism. The two sides are still diametrically opposed and, for the aforementioned reasons, seem unlikely to reach an agreement. Although there appears to be a growing acceptance among Macedonia’s political elite that a geographical determinant, such as ‘North’ or ‘Upper’, will soon form a part of the name of the state, there is absolutely no question of Macedonia agreeing to such a determinant to be used for identifying the Macedonian nation and language, as Greece insists. Besides, as PM Gruevski stated recently, “it would be absurd if the price for EU entry is something that is contrary to European values and a renouncement of one’s own identity.”<sup>146</sup>

The above potholes, due to their size and significance to the EU accession process, simply cannot be driven over or avoided and thus must be repaired. They have to be negotiated using the ‘European value’ of compromise, which, regrettably, has traditionally been lacking in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the wider region. Nonetheless, while Macedonia is the only one that can negotiate its domestic potholes, it will be unable to negotiate the externally created potholes without compromise and cooperation from its neighbours, who are still engaged in academic and political squabbling over virtually every aspect of the Republic of Macedonia’s existence. So, although “everyone in the Balkans talks about looking to the future, no one is taking the first step to get out from

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<sup>145</sup> BBC News, “Nimetz: ‘Time to Solve the Dispute’”, 22 June 2009, available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/06/090622\\_nimetz.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/06/090622_nimetz.shtml)

<sup>146</sup> PM Gruevski at the opening of the 11th International Conference of the Balkan Political Club, Ohrid, 21 February 2009. *Utrinski Vesnik*, 22 February 2009

their entrapment in the past.”<sup>147</sup> It is high time that Macedonia’s neighbours respected the self-identification of the Macedonian people, and recognised the fact that they consider themselves to be part of a Macedonian nation that speaks the Macedonian language, regardless of whether their intuitive feeling is historically ‘accurate’ or not. Besides, “every undergraduate student of nationalism knows that one cannot simply transpose modern national identities back onto ancient historical figures and lands; still less can ancient history be allowed to determine modern geopolitics.”<sup>148</sup>

## **5. NOT SO MUCH A POTHOLE AS A BARRIER AT THE END OF THE ROAD - THE EU**

*“The EU is finding itself in a deadlock position, since on the one hand it is putting hard conditions on the Western Balkan countries, and on the other hand it cannot offer much to the region because the EU itself faces challenges of consolidation”*<sup>149</sup>

Ironically, even if the Republic of Macedonia successfully negotiates all of the aforementioned potholes on its road to the European Union, its ultimate accession will not be automatic. This is because the barrier at the end of its EU road is currently closed with regard to Macedonia’s membership, and will only be opened when, and if, its keepers decide to do so. Thus, the barrier represents the third and final part of the process of ‘negotiation’: “the transfer to another for consideration”, in which Macedonia’s own actions will be unable to influence the outcome.

### **5.1. Enlargement fatigue**

*“The European Union cannot take a sabbatical from [its] invaluable work for peace and progress that serves the fundamental interest of all Europeans.”*<sup>150</sup>

Olli Rehn, Commissioner for Enlargement

<sup>147</sup> PANOVSKI, “Macedonia and its Hurdles”, p. 5

<sup>148</sup> Marko Attila HOARE, “The Hellenic Tail Must not Wag the European Dog”, available at <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/stories.asp?id=473>

<sup>149</sup> JANO, “From 'Balkanisation' to 'Europeanisation'”, p.68

<sup>150</sup> Olli Rehn speech at the Prague International Conference, 1 May 2009, at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/210&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

The EU's enlargement has come at a price. Member states are now suffering both 'enlargement blues', as a result of the last round of accession, and 'enlargement fears' over the future expansion of the Union<sup>151</sup>, primarily with regards to Turkey. This so-called 'enlargement fatigue', both among the governments of the Member States and the general population, was already prevalent before the current economic crisis, but is now increasing due to rising concerns in many EU states over the next round of incorporation, as highlighted by the convincing election victory of the centre-right in the European Parliament elections on 7 June 2009. While the countries of South Eastern Europe do not have any alternative to EU integration, it appears this prospect is becoming progressively more distant; and this at a time of financial crisis when the need for a 'light at the end of the tunnel' is more essential than ever in order to ensure that the reform processes in each country continue.

Nevertheless, although the 'enlargement fatigue' of EU governments and politicians is perhaps understandable in light of the slow progress of the Western Balkan countries, it cannot be denied that, as Wolfgang Petritsch, former EU Special Envoy to Kosovo, points out, "the EU's work with the Balkan states to prepare for accession has been piecemeal."<sup>152</sup> Yes, the European Union has indeed undertaken a huge and admirable commitment in the region, having spent approximately €33 billion in aid between 2001 and 2006<sup>153</sup>, but this pales in significance when compared to the \$683 billion<sup>154</sup> spent since 2003 by the United States alone on the war in Iraq. Besides, it is rather unjust to criticise the slow 'Europeanisation' process of countries that are both lacking properly functioning institutions and are simultaneously traversing their own domestic triple (economic, political and social) transformations. It is time for the EU to confirm its commitment to fully implementing the promises made at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, because in doing so it will "demonstrate its trustworthiness by

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<sup>151</sup> Steven BLOCKMANS, "Consolidating the Enlargement Agenda for South Eastern Europe", in *Reconciling the Deepening and Widening of the European Union*, S. Blockmans and S. Prechal (eds.), (T.M.C. Asser Press, The Hague, 2007), p. 59

<sup>152</sup> Wolfgang PETRITSCH, "The EU must speed up its Western Balkans enlargement", in *Europe's World*, Spring 2008, p. 83

<sup>153</sup> POND, *Endgame in the Balkans*, p. 278

<sup>154</sup> <http://costofwar.com/>

not renouncing its own words for the sake of internal politics in some Member States.”<sup>155</sup>

Moreover, the indefinable term ‘enlargement fatigue’ appears to be an excuse for something much deeper and more inherent. It is the continuation of the long-standing view that ‘European History’ equates merely to so-called ‘Western Civilisation’, since ‘Western’ means civilised, while ‘Eastern’ or ‘Oriental’ is considered to be inferior on various levels (as analysed in Edward W. Said’s seminal work *Orientalism*). The idea is that Western and Eastern Europe have practically nothing in common, that the ‘West’ is superior and that it alone deserves to be called ‘European’. The custodians of this ‘Western Civilisation’ guard it with a strange kind of narcissistic and xenophobic fear that it will be appropriated by ‘non-deservers’, and so it is generally accepted that it does not cover the whole of Europe. Of course, it is Eastern Europe, and especially the Balkans, which pose the biggest imagined threat to this ‘Europeanness’. However, as Hugh Seton-Watson, a British historian who waved the flag of European unity long before it was even considered a possibility, noted in 1985, “nowhere in the world is there so widespread a belief in the reality, and the importance, of a European cultural community, as in the countries lying between the EEC and the Soviet Union.”<sup>156</sup> This view is shared by Davies, who points out that “although the West may well be rich and powerful, the East is free from moral and ideological corruption... communist oppression strengthened their attachment to Europe's traditional culture... In many ways, thanks to its deprivations, it has become more European, more attached to the values which affluent Westerners take for granted.”<sup>157</sup> Therefore, the ‘enlargement fatigue’ on the basis of xenophobia is misplaced. The European Union at large must understand that countries like the Republic of Macedonia do not intend to endanger the idea of ‘Europeanness’, but instead seek the opportunity to constructively add to it.

However, the ‘enlargement fatigue’ of the EU’s institutions is another matter, and will only be resolved, either positively or negatively, by the Irish

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<sup>155</sup> ERÖZDEN, “EU Enlargement Towards the Balkans as a Problem of Physics”, p. 27

<sup>156</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, “What is Europe, Where is Europe? From Mystique to Politique”, 1985, quoted in DAVIS, *Europe*, p.14

<sup>157</sup> DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 28



referendum on the Lisbon Treaty scheduled for October 2009. Nonetheless, even the undesired 'No' vote must not be allowed to signal a significant deceleration in the integration processes of the countries of the Western Balkans. The members of the EU must not forget that they pledged to promote "peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world."<sup>158</sup> They must also not forget that the political decisions to grant membership to Greece, Portugal and Spain, which had emerged from dictatorships and internal unrest, were "far more risky than those at hand in the Balkans...the Greek and Iberian success stories demonstrate the wisdom of the courageous decisions taken at that time."<sup>159</sup> Therefore, rather than regretting its decision to admit Bulgaria and Romania, and fearing that the Western Balkans will only bring more trouble, the EU should learn from the experience and create a special accession strategy for this unique region. This could be achieved, for example, by developing "alternative concepts of accession... which consist of incremental integration in the form of joint decision-making powers for already integrated areas."<sup>160</sup> So, while full incorporation may not be possible in the short to medium-term, the EU's 'enlargement fatigue' cannot be allowed to justify a complete cessation in all aspects of integration. Turning its back on the Republic of Macedonia, for example, would be disastrous, not only for the country and the entire region, but for the credibility of the European Union as a whole.

## **5.2. The Internal Crisis of the European Union**

*"The accession of the United Kingdom, the collapse of the Iron Curtain, plans for closer political and monetary union, and the prospect of a membership spreading eastwards all combined to cause a profound crisis both of identity and of intent."*<sup>161</sup>

The EU is going through a period of serious self-examination and introspection. The 'No' votes in France and the Netherlands on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 triggered a much larger and very heated debate between Member States on the ultimate objectives of the Union, as well as on its final borders. Not

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<sup>158</sup> Preamble of the Treaty on European Union, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11992M/htm/11992M.html>

<sup>159</sup> PETRITSCH, "The EU must speed up its Western Balkans enlargement", p. 83

<sup>160</sup> Andrea OTT, "A Flexible Future for the European Union", in *Reconciling the Deepening and Widening of the European Union*, p. 155

<sup>161</sup> DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 25

only did the 'No' votes prevent the adoption of certain simplifications to the internal workings of the EU, they also washed away much of the enthusiasm for the project as a whole. This major road block showed all Member State governments that it may be many years before a unanimously acceptable agreement is reached, and also encouraged those governments that feel “that the European Union has gone too far, that it is too expensive, that the too great integration is irritating the general public at a national level and that it is time to start loosening the reins.”<sup>162</sup>

One of the main reasons for the EU's need to readjust is the fact that the rules that governed the European Community of only six members have remained virtually unchanged for the European Union of 27 members.<sup>163</sup> The defeat of the Draft Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty highlighted the fact that the Union is far less stable internally than appearances may suggest. “This blow to a more unified and better functioning organisation is again a victory for national particularism over the supra-nationalism embodied in the idea of a Union equipped with a constitution.”<sup>164</sup> It is precisely this struggle over competences between the EU and its Member States that has meant that the Union's external policies have rarely been clearly defined, since the national interests of each government are still able to prevent the formation of a joint foreign policy. Indeed, the fact that any Member State can push its own agenda whenever it likes is highly problematic for the functioning of the EU, and was clearly shown by Greece's threat to veto the 'big bang' accession if Cyprus was not also included, Slovenia's recent threat to veto Croatia's EU entry at the last moment over an issue that has nothing to do with the Copenhagen Criteria, and France's threat to veto Macedonia's candidate status in 2005 if a deal could not be reached on the EU Budget for 2007-2013.<sup>165</sup>

This is a problem which the EU is desperate to resolve, especially in its dealings with non-member states, because by allowing national governments to pursue policies that clearly ignore the interests of the Union as a whole, the EU has “made a strategic error by securing a privileged position for its members that

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<sup>162</sup> Michel ROCARD, “Où va l'Europe?”, *CROSSROADS - The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal*, Issue: 02/2007, p. 17

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>164</sup> ERÖZDEN, “EU Enlargement Towards the Balkans as a Problem of Physics”, p. 26

<sup>165</sup> A. Rettman, “Macedonia should not be held hostage”, <http://euobserver.com/9/20561>

allows them in effect to play the role of a regional policeman. Its seemingly neutral, yet in reality partisan, behaviour thus stimulates the escalation of 'local' crises."<sup>166</sup> Clearly, if the EU were able, and willing, to become impartially involved in disputes such as those between Slovenia and Croatia, on the one hand, and Greece and Macedonia, on the other, the lifespan of such absurd disputes would be cut significantly.

Unsurprisingly, the EU's internal bickering has made the states of the Western Balkans wonder if they will ultimately join the club. This is because there appears to be a significant lack of communication between the two sides, as well as a lack of knowledge. While the EU seems unaware of the negative impact that the deceleration of enlargement is having in the Western Balkans, the region itself does not appear to grasp, or want to grasp, the extent and seriousness of the internal difficulties of the EU. However, "the European Union and its Member States cannot hold the (potential) candidate countries hostage to a discussion on Europe's future status."<sup>167</sup> The best way for the EU to move forward is to simultaneously accommodate its 'deepening' and 'widening', without letting one be a victim of the other. Thus, the key to the EU crisis lies not in making it less European, but in increasing its numbers, so that it is truly a union of all European countries. EU heads of state need not fear that the Western Balkans will bring problems, because Europe's ultimate solutions lie within the resolution of those problems. Is it possible that they have already forgotten that the European Coal and Steel Community was established in an attempt to resolve the most serious problem the continent had ever faced? As Jean Monnet, 'the Father of Europe' said, "Europe has never existed; one has genuinely to create Europe."<sup>168</sup> Hence, 'Europe' is not simply a geographical area, it is an idea. Let the founding Member States not forget that they too had to be 'Europeanised'.

Therefore, the European Union must "not underrate the need for a positive common cause, for something more exciting than the price of butter, more constructive than the allocation of defence contracts – a need for a European

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<sup>166</sup> Ivan TOROV, "The role of the EU in destabilising South Eastern Europe", available at <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/stories.asp?pageid=49&id=934>

<sup>167</sup> BLOCKMANS, "Consolidating the Enlargement Agenda for South Eastern Europe", p. 60

<sup>168</sup> Jean Monnet, quoted in DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 10

*mystique.*”<sup>169</sup> This common cause is crucial for the future of the EU and of Europe as a whole, but it will only be found once a new and credible picture of Europe's past has been painted. Such a picture can only begin to be sketched from within the borders of a united Europe; from within an EU that incorporates all countries deemed to be on European soil. Only then will the European Union be at peace.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

*“If the fire of prejudice could be doused with a potion of tolerance, the Balkans would be the most wonderful region in the world.”*<sup>170</sup>

As I have demonstrated, the quantity and variety of potholes that the Republic of Macedonia is having to negotiate on its road to the European Union is great, and, I would argue, has made its journey unique in its intricacy when contrasted with previous journeys made by current Member States, or being made by other candidate countries. It is currently attempting to use its default (Balkan) mind-set, which tells it to simply avoid its problems, in order to drive over or around all of the potholes, but it is clear that such a driving style will result both in the breakdown of its vehicle and in a failure to reach its desired destination. This is because the largest and deepest potholes on its road – its national and international disputes – cannot be circumvented, due to their size and significance to the EU accession process, and therefore *must* be repaired. The materials necessary to repair those potholes are located in the country's secondary, as yet insufficiently developed European mind-set, which encourages tolerance, compromise and consensus.

At the present time, the Republic of Macedonia is struggling to accommodate these two conflicting ways of thinking, as misplaced nationalism collides with a much needed European future. The resolution of this internal struggle between its two mind-sets is critical, and lies not in an outright victory for one over the other, but in becoming accustomed to the fact that both are part of its identity; that one can strengthen the other, and vice versa. Unfortunately,

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<sup>169</sup> Seton-Watson, quoted in DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 14

<sup>170</sup> Misha GLENNY, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, (Penguin Books, London, 1992), p. 74

‘European Macedonia’ is currently being silenced by ‘Balkan Macedonia’, meaning that the country would not be ready to become a member of the EU even if the Union were willing and able to accept it today. This lack of readiness is partly due to a lack of awareness of what being European actually entails, as shown by Annex 4, which I photographed following my third unsuccessful attempt to enter the government’s Secretariat for European Integration – EU Information Centre in Skopje. This need for ‘Europeanness’ is also evident in the daily social affairs of the country. For example, few people seem aware of the most obvious irony of the name dispute: Greece calls Macedonia by a title that it finds insulting and offensive, meanwhile the vast majority of Macedonians do not think twice about referring to the ethnic Albanian minority using an extremely derogatory term. Perhaps if the majority Macedonians employed some more tolerance at home, they might receive some from abroad; echoing Mahatma Gandhi’s famous aphorism that “we must be the change we wish to see in the world”.

However, it would be a mistake to present Macedonia as a land that has traditionally been devoid of such principles and is now having to learn them for the first time in order to prove that it understands ‘European values’. On the contrary, the territory of geographical Macedonia was historically considered the most tolerant and considerate province of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, as Mazower writes, “nationalism could only offer a basis for rule over such a land with the aid of a good deal of wishful thinking.”<sup>171</sup> It should come as no surprise that the term *macédoine* was coined around that time to denote a fruit salad, since many different ethnic groups, despite the obvious complications, were still able to live together in the same bowl. That trend continued into the days of Yugoslavia, where former Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov fondly remembers how Turks would greet Macedonians in the street using Macedonian phrases, while the Macedonians would respond with pleasantries in Turkish.<sup>172</sup> More recently, Elizabeta Koneska and Glenn Bowman’s 2007 documentary *Peace for All*, highlighted a level of tolerance and compromise in the Republic of Macedonia

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<sup>171</sup> MAZOWER, *The Balkans*, p. 93

<sup>172</sup> “Zen Buddhist in the Balkan Tavern”, Kiro Gligorov interviewed by Goran Stefanovski, in *Forum Magazine* (Issue 9, 24 April 1998), p. 33

found rarely in other countries around the world. The film is centred around the small temple of St. Nicolas/ H'd'r Baba Tekke in the backwater of Makedonski Brod, where every year, on St George's Day (6 May), the shrine is used for prayer by both Orthodox Christians and Muslims (Bektashi orders, Halveti orders and Sunni), with all sides acknowledging the fact that it belongs to all of them and that they can use it equally.<sup>173</sup>

Thus, the 'European values' of tolerance and compromise are still (barely) alive in Macedonia, but are being suppressed by the heavy nationalism that emerged in the aftermath of the death of Yugoslavia. This nationalism, which is clearly hindering the country's progress towards the EU, has been amplified as a result of the fact that Macedonia is so isolated from Europe; not just psychologically, as mentioned in section 3.2 (Geopolitical Pothole), but also physically. The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia have essentially been prisoners in their own country since 1991, requiring visas to go virtually anywhere outside the borders of their land. As such, the more that it has been closed-off from the world, the more closed-minded it has become. Nevertheless, there is a solution which may not only remind Macedonia of its tolerant past and make it more aware of what 'Europeanness' means, but may also reconcile the differences between its Balkan and European mind-sets: visa liberalisation.

The importance of visa-free travel to the European Union is obvious and clearly revealed by surveys, such as the one conducted by the Macedonian Institute for Democracy in December 2008, in which 45% of people said that when it comes to the EU, an end to the visa regime for Macedonian citizens was of highest importance to them personally, compared to 30% who saw the start of accession negotiations as more important.<sup>174</sup> This has even led some to seek Bulgarian passports simply in order to by-pass these travel restrictions. The country is in desperate need of a breath of fresh air, because the narrow-minded atmosphere of intolerance appears to be pushing it away from the EU at the

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<sup>173</sup> See also Glenn Bowman's "Orthodox-Muslim Interactions at 'Mixed Shrines' in Macedonia", in *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective* (ed. Chris Hann and Hermann Goltz). (Berkeley: University of California Press. forthcoming 2009), pp. 163-183

<sup>174</sup> Telephone survey conducted by IDSCS in December 2008, available from [www.idscs.org.mk](http://www.idscs.org.mk)

precise moment that it stands on the threshold of joining it. In addition, the fact that, according to a recent BBC article, 70% of Macedonian youths have not visited an EU Member State<sup>175</sup>, perhaps serves to explain why they are so unsure of what is now being expected of them on the road to the Union.

And for once, contrary to its history and tradition, the signs are in Macedonia's favour. The assessment made by the European Commission on 18 May 2009 concluded that the Republic of Macedonia is the only country in the Western Balkans to have successfully met the conditions for the granting of visa liberalisation,<sup>176</sup> which could mean that its citizens will be free to visit the EU from the beginning of 2010, depending on the speed of the EU's complicated decision making process. The Commission is due to hand over its recommendation to the Council of Ministers on 14 July 2009, where it will undoubtedly be hotly debated, considering Greece's hostile attitude towards Macedonia and its threat to veto its membership. Fortunately, a decision on this particular matter requires only a majority in the Council, as opposed to unanimity, meaning that Greece will this time be unable to block the rights of Macedonians. If, however, the Council disregards the recommendations of the Commission and finds an excuse not to lift the visa restrictions, the gloom that will hang over the country will be tangible.

In the eyes of Macedonian citizens, the lifting of the visa regime would confirm that the EU is willing and able to improve their lives. The country is in need of this carrot, and the EU must give it, not as an unmerited reward for unrelated good behaviour, such as, arguably, the granting of candidate status, but because it actually deserves it this time. The Republic of Macedonia seems to have successfully negotiated the road to visa liberalisation. If it is granted, it will have learnt that the negotiation of potholes is crucial, and will be inspired to employ the same process in order to become a member of the European Union; reassured in the knowledge that in international politics, as in life, "you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate."

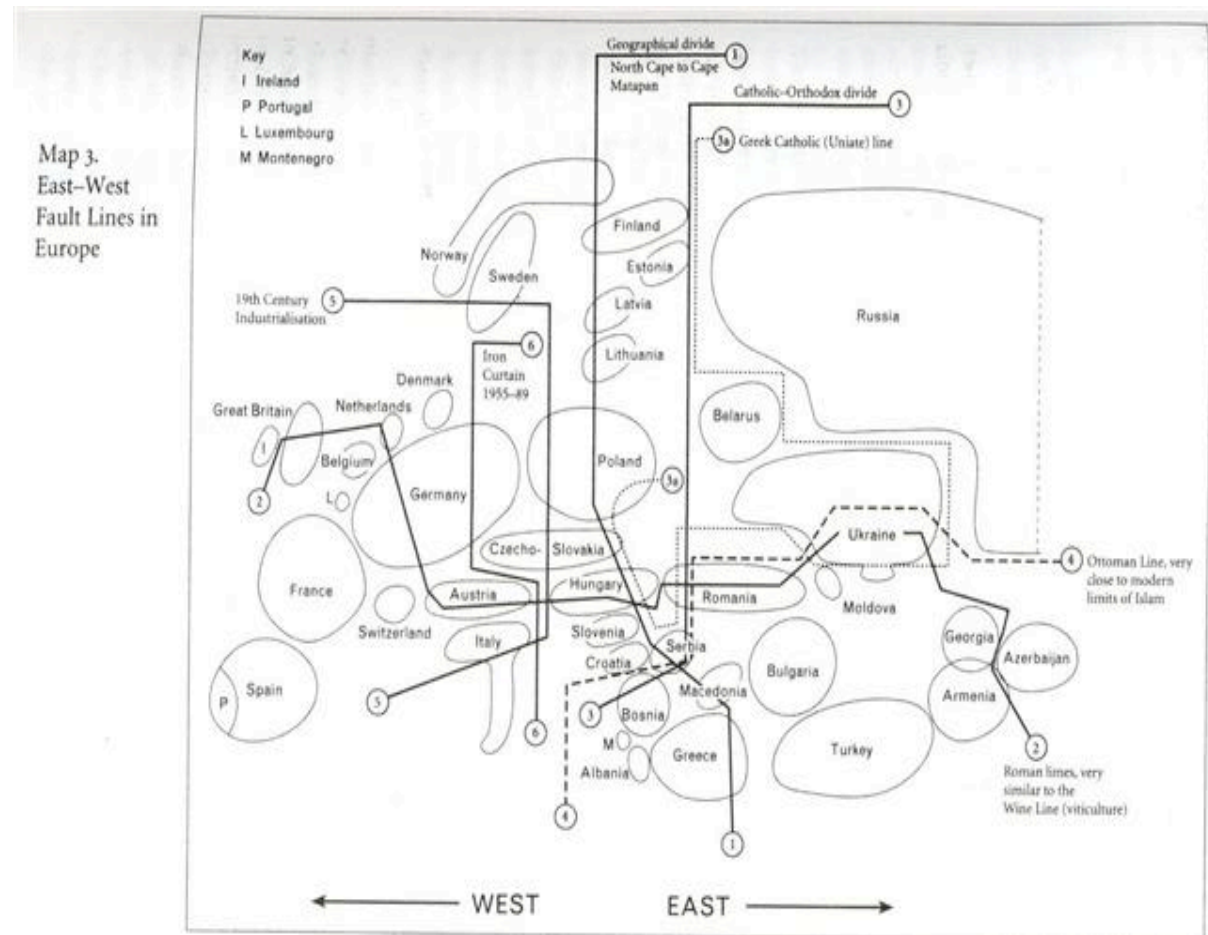
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<sup>175</sup> BBC News, "Visa Liberalisation Must Be Explained", 16 June 2009, available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/06/090616\\_maja\\_visi.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/06/090616_maja_visi.shtml)

<sup>176</sup> Reports on all the countries can be found at <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=353>

## 7. ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1



Source: Norman Davies' *Europe: A History*, (Oxford University Press, 1996)



## ANNEX 2



The text reads:

“A flagpole with the Macedonian flag was yesterday placed in ‘Macedonia’ square, immediately next to the Stone Bridge. Neither the City Authorities, nor the government were able to say who had placed the mysterious flagpole on the bank of the river.”

Source: *Utrinski Vesnik*, Macedonian Daily Newspaper, 28 December 2008

### ANNEX 3

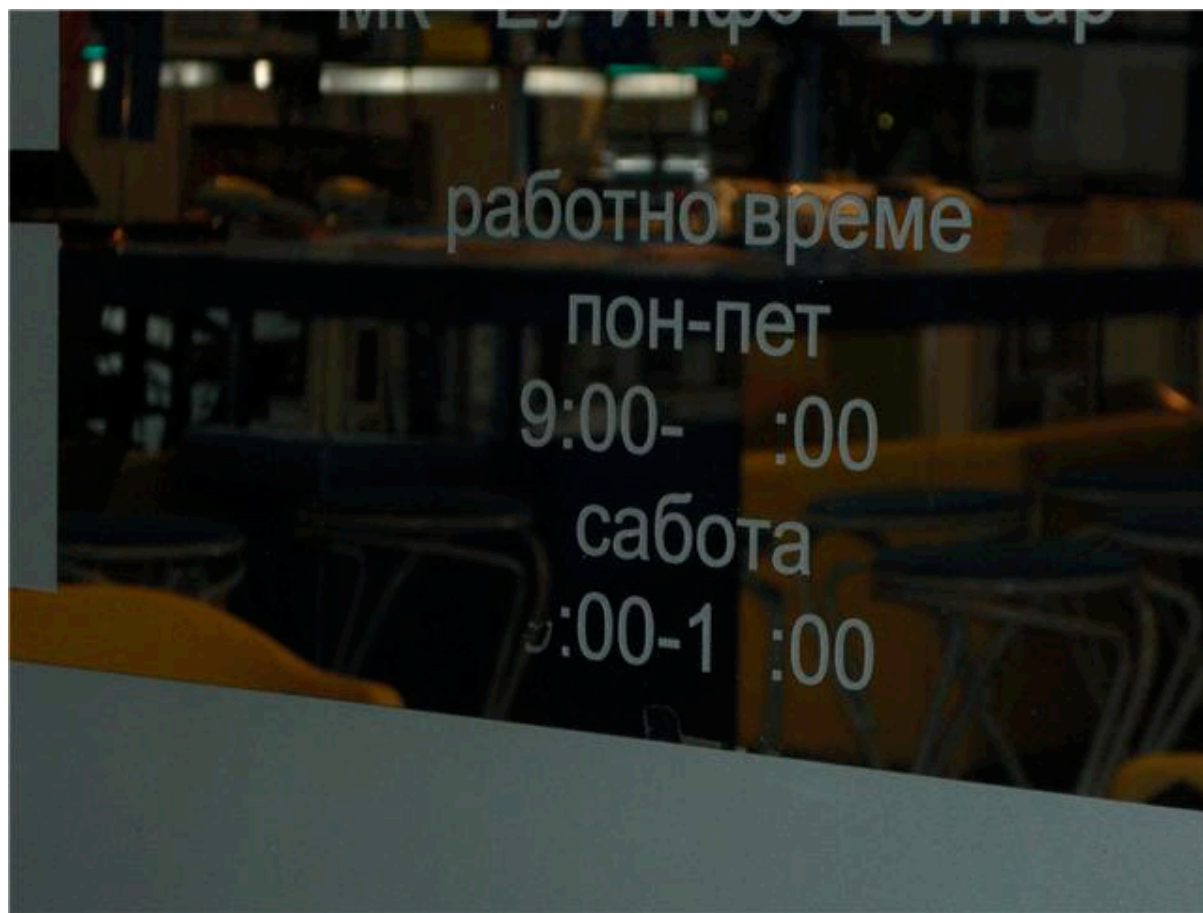
Maps are always problematic, especially in the Balkans. I am using this one only to show the rough area of geographical Macedonia in relation to the present day Republic of Macedonia. Therefore, the red line of the 'Ancient Macedonian Kingdom' should be ignored.



The source is [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia\\_naming\\_dispute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia_naming_dispute), which, although not an academic source, has the clearest and most easily understandable map of all the ones I have found.

#### ANNEX 4

The working hours of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia's Secretariat for European Integration – EU Information Centre, on the main square in Skopje.



I took the photograph in the early afternoon of 6 December 2008, having tried to enter the EU Information Centre on both of the two previous days, at 2pm and 3pm, but found it closed on all three occasions.

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